

Five Sermons

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—This text consists of the Preface and numbers 1, 2, 3, 11, 12 from Butler’s *Fifteen Sermons*.

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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**.

Preface

·OBSCURITY·

It is hardly possible to avoid making *some* judgment on almost everything that comes into one's mind; but there's one sort of judgment that many people—for different reasons—never make on things that come before them; I mean a judgment that would answer the question 'Is that argument conclusive?' or 'Does that opinion hold water?' These people are entertained by some things and not others; they like some things and dislike others; so they are capable of *some* kinds of discriminations. But when someone presents them with an •argument for some conclusion or with a •statement on some matter, they don't ask themselves 'Is that argument valid?' or 'Is that statement true?', apparently because they regard validity and truth as trivial matters that aren't worth thinking about. That attitude seems to be pretty general. Arguments are often wanted for some particular short-term purpose; but people in general don't want proof as something good for themselves—for their own satisfaction of mind, or for their conduct in life. Not to mention the multitudes who read merely for the sake of talking, or to equip themselves for social life, or for some such reason; and of the few who read for the satisfaction of reading, and have a real curiosity [see Glossary] to see •what is said, there are some who—astonishingly—have no sort of curiosity to see •what is true. I say 'curiosity', because of the extent to which the religious and sacred attention that is owed to truth and to the question 'What is the rule of life?' has disappeared from the human scene. [Why is that a reason for choosing the word 'curiosity'? Perhaps Butler thinks of 'curiosity' about something as the attitude of a researcher, a specialist inquirer, or the like; and the topic he is concerned with here looks like a specialism

because so few people engage in it these days. Or perhaps his point is that 'curiosity'—research—is needed because these are matters on which most people have given up, so that if you want results concerning them you'll have to dig for them.]. . . .

The great number of books and light magazines of various sorts that daily come to our attention have been one cause of. . . .this idle way of reading and considering things. It's a way in which even a solitary person can happily get rid of time without the trouble of focused thought. The most idle way of passing time—the least thoughtful way—is reading ·in the way that people read these days·.

Thus people get used to •letting things pass through their minds as distinct from •thinking about them; and this custom leads them to be satisfied with merely •seeing what is said, without •looking into it. They come to find it tiring to re-read and attend, and even to form a judgment; and to present them with anything that requires this is to interfere seriously with their way of life.

There are also people who take for granted—most of them wrongly—that they are acquainted with everything, and that any subject that is treated in the right way will be familiar and easy to them.

. . . .Nothing can be understood without the degree of attention that the very nature of the topic requires. Now morals, •considered as a discipline in which theoretical difficulties come up all the time, and •treated with regard to those difficulties, plainly require a very special ·intensity of· attention. That is because the ideas that are used in thinking about morals are not determinate in themselves; they become determinate through how they are used, especially in reasoning; because it's impossible for words always to stand

for the same ideas [= 'have the same meanings'], even within a single author let alone amongst several different authors. So an argument may be difficult to take in, which is different from its being mistaken; and sometimes a writer's care to avoid being mistaken makes his argument harder than ever to grasp. It's not acceptable for a work of imagination or entertainment to be hard to understand, but such difficulty may be unavoidable in a work of another kind, where the writer aims. . . .to state things as he finds them.

I accept that some of the following discourses are very abstruse [see Glossary] and difficult—call them 'obscure', if you like. But let me add that the question of whether •this 'obscurity' is a fault can only be answered by people who can judge whether or not, and to what extent, •it could have been avoided—i.e. ones who will take the trouble to understand what I say here and to see how far the things I am saying—*those* things, not some other things!—could have been expressed more plainly. I am not at all saying that they couldn't.

Regarding general complaints about •obscurity, regarded as distinct from •confusion and •tangles in thought: in some cases there may be a basis for them, but in other cases they may come down to nothing but the complaint that some things can't be understood as easily as some other things can. Confusion and tangles in writing are indeed inexcusable, because anyone can (if he chooses) know whether he understands and sees through what he is writing; and it is unforgivable for a man to put his thoughts before others when he's aware that he himself doesn't know where he is or where he is going with his exposition. Doing that is like walking in the street in a state of disarray that he oughtn't to be satisfied with even in his own home.

But obscurities are sometimes excusable; and I don't mean only the ones arising from the abstruseness of the

argument. For example, a subject may be treated in a way that assumes the reader to be already acquainted with what ancient and modern writers have said about it, and with the current state of opinion about it in the world. This will create a difficulty of a very special kind, and make the whole thing obscure, for those who are not thus informed; but those who *are* will be disposed to excuse this and similar ways of writing, as a way of saving their time.

[Butler says that the title 'Sermons' could lead readers to expect easy going, and he isn't going to provide it. But he won't spring to his own defence about this, and will simply say that he is offering this second edition of the Sermons because there was a demand for it. Rounding out this second-edition bit of the Preface, he adds:] The reader may think I have made amends to him by the following illustrations of what seemed most to require them, but whether he will is not something I can fairly judge.

•WHAT I PLAN TO DO IN THE FIRST THREE SERMONS•

There are two ways of treating the subject of morals. **(1)** One starts by inquiring into the abstract relations of things; **(2)** the other starts from a matter of fact, namely: what the particular nature of man is, its various parts, and how they are assembled and work together, from whence it proceeds to consider what course of life *corresponds* to this whole nature. In **(1)** the conclusion is expressed thus:

vice is contrary to the nature and reasons of things;

in **(2)** it is expressed as:

vice is a violation, or breaking in upon, our own nature.

Thus they both lead [see Glossary] us to the same thing, namely our obligation to behave virtuously; and thus they enormously strengthen and reinforce each other. **(1)** seems

to be the more direct formal proof, and in some ways the less open to nit-picking disputes; **(2)** is especially apt to satisfy a fair mind, and is more easily applicable to various concrete relations and circumstances.

The following discourses are •mainly done in the manner of **(2)**—the first three •wholly in that way. I wrote them intending to explain

what the phrase ‘the nature of man’ means in the assertion that virtue consists in following the nature of man, and vice [see Glossary] consists in deviating from it;

and by explaining this to show that the assertion is true. The works of the ancient moralists show that they had some sort of inward feeling that they chose to express by saying:

- man is born to virtue,
- virtue consists in following nature, and
- vice is more contrary to this nature than tortures or death.

Now, if you find no mystery in this way of speaking that the ancients had; if without being very explicit with yourself about what you were doing you kept to •your natural feelings, went along with •them, and found yourself fully convinced that what the ancients said was just and true; you’ll probably wonder what the point is, in the second and third sermons, in labouring away at something that you have never had any difficulty with. . . . But it needn’t be thought strange that this way of talking—though familiar with the ancients and not uncommon (though usually in milder forms) among ourselves—should need to be explained. Many things that we commonly feel and talk about in everyday life are not very easy to explain, isolate, and identify. All the books that have been written about the passions are a proof of this; the writers who have undertaken to •lay bare the many complexities of the passions and •trace them back

to their sources •in the human mind and body• wouldn’t have taken this trouble if they had thought that what they were trying to show was obvious to everyone who felt and talked about those passions. Thus, though there seems no ground to doubt that people in general *have* the inward perception that the ancient moralists so often expressed in that way (any more than to doubt that people *have* the passions •that books have been written about•), I thought it would be useful if I were to unfold that inward conviction •about nature• and lay it open more explicitly than I had seen done; especially given that some people have expressed themselves as dissatisfied with it •altogether•, clearly because they misunderstood it. [He cites William Wollaston, whose rejection of the virtue/nature way of talking as ‘loose’ and unacceptable was based. Butler says, on his taking ‘acting in accordance with your nature’ to mean something like ‘acting on whatever part of your nature happens to be pushing you at any given moment’.]

•THE IDEA OF SYSTEM•

Anyone who thinks it worthwhile to consider this matter thoroughly should begin by stating to himself exactly the idea of a •system, •economy [see Glossary], or •constitution of any particular nature (or any particular *anything*); and I think he will find this:

A system or economy or constitution is a whole made up of many parts; but those parts, even when considered as a whole, are not all there is to the idea of system etc. unless we take the notion of *a whole* to include the relations that the parts have to one another.

Each work of nature and each work of art is a system; and because every particular thing, whether natural or artificial, is for some use or purpose beyond itself, we could amplify the above account of the idea of *system* by adding the thing’s

being conducive to one or more ends or purposes. Take the example of a watch. If a watch is taken to pieces, and the pieces laid out in a row, someone who has a very exact notion of *these parts of the watch* still won't have anything like the idea of *the watch* unless he brings into his thought the parts' relations with one another. But if

he sees or thinks of those parts as put together, not in a jumble but in the right way for a watch;

and if also

he forms a notion of the relations those parts have to one other so that they all contribute to the purpose of telling the time;

then he has the idea of a watch. That's how it is with regard to the inward frame—the system or economy or constitution—of man. Appetites, passions, affections [see Glossary], and the principle [see Glossary] of reflection, considered merely as the various parts of our inner nature, don't give us any idea of the system or constitution of this nature, because the constitution also involves the relations that these different parts have to each other. The most important of these relations is that of •reflection or conscience to •everything else—the relation being that of '... has authority over...'. It's from considering the relations that the various appetites and passions in the inward frame have to each other, and above all from considering the supremacy of reflection or conscience, that we get the idea of the system or constitution of human nature. And this idea will make it clear to us that this nature of ours, i.e. our constitution, is **adapted to virtue**, just as the idea of a watch shows that its nature, i.e. constitution or system, is **adapted to the measuring of time**. A watch may go out of order and fail to tell the time accurately, but that's irrelevant to my present topic. Anything made by man is apt to go out of order; but when that happens it isn't an expression of the

thing's system; rather, it conflicts with the system and if it goes far enough it will totally destroy it. All I'm doing here is to explain what an economy, system, or constitution is. And up to here the watch and the man are perfectly parallel. There is indeed a difference further down the line; though irrelevant to my present topic, it's too important to be omitted: a machine is inanimate and •passive, but we are •active. We are in charge of our constitution, and are therefore accountable for any disorder or violation of it. Thus nothing can possibly be more contrary to nature than vice; meaning by 'nature' not only the various parts of our internal frame but also its constitution. Poverty and disgrace, torture and death, are not as contrary to our constitution as vice is. There are some parts of our nature which, taken singly, are in conflict with misery and injustice equally; but injustice is *also* contrary to the whole constitution of the nature.

You may ask: 'Is this *constitution* really what those philosophers meant who connected •virtue with •nature? Would they have explained themselves in this way?' My answer is the same as the one I would give if you asked 'Would someone who has often used the word "resentment", and often felt resentment, explain this passion in exactly the way you do in the eighth of these sermons?' Just as I am sure that what I have given is a true account of the passion which that person referred to and intended to express by the word 'resentment', so also I am sure that I have given the true account of the facts that led those philosophers to have the belief that they expressed by saying that vice is contrary to nature. Mightn't they have meant merely that vice is contrary to the higher and better part of our nature? Well, even this implies a constitution such as I have tried to explain. The very terms 'higher' and 'better' imply a relation of parts to each other; and these related parts of a single nature form a *constitution*. . . . The philosophers had a

perception **(i)** that injustice was contrary to their nature, and **(ii)** that pain was too. They saw that these two perceptions are totally different, not merely in degree but in kind. And by reflecting on each of them, as they thus stood in their nature, they came to a full intuitive conviction that more was due. . . .to **(i)** than to **(ii)**; that **(i)** demanded in all cases to govern such a creature as man. So what I have given is a fair and true account of the basis for their conviction, i.e. of what they intended to express when they said that virtue consists in following nature—this being a formulation that isn't loose and indeterminate, but clear and distinct, strictly just and true.

·THE AUTHORITY OF REFLECTION OR CONSCIENCE·

I'm convinced that the force of this conviction is felt by almost everyone; but considered as an argument and put into words it seems rather abstruse, and the connection of it is broken in the first three of the following sermons; so it may be worthwhile for me to give the reader the whole argument here in a single sweep.

Mankind has various instincts and principles of action, as have the lower animals; some leading directly and immediately to the good of the community, and some directly to private good.

Man has several that the lower animals don't—especially reflection or conscience, an approval of some principles or actions and disapproval of others.

The lower animals obey their instincts or principles of action, according to certain rules; suppose [=? 'taking for granted'] the constitution of their body, and the objects around them.

Most human beings also obey their instincts and principles, *all* of them, the propensities we call 'good' as well as the bad, in ways that are governed by the constitution of their body and their external circumstances ·at the time of

acting·. So it isn't true that mankind are wholly governed by •self-love, •the love of power and •sensual appetites. It's true that they are *often* driven by these, without any regard for right or wrong; but it's an obvious fact that those same persons—the general run of human beings—are frequently influenced by friendship, compassion, gratitude; and even their general hatred of what is base and liking for what is fair and just takes its turn among the other motives for action. This is the partial, inadequate notion of human nature that is discussed in the first sermon; and it is by this nature, so to speak, that the world is influenced and kept in tolerable order.

Lower animals, in acting according to their bodily constitution and circumstances, act suitably to their whole nature. Why do I say 'their *whole* nature'? Not simply because these animals act in ways that fit their nature, because that doesn't settle whether their ways of behaving correspond to their *whole* nature. Still, they clearly act in conformity with *something* in their nature, and we can't find empirical evidence for there being anything else in their nature that requires a different rule or course of action. That's why I said 'their whole nature'. . . .

But what I have presented is not a complete account of man's nature. Something further must be brought in to give us an adequate notion of it, namely this fact:

One of those principles of action, namely conscience or reflection, when set alongside the rest as they all stand together in the nature of man, clearly has on it marks of *authority* over all the rest; it claims the absolute direction of them all, to allow or forbid their gratification.

That is because a •disapproval of reflection is in itself a principle manifestly superior to a mere •propensity. And the conclusion is that *this* way of behaving—

Allow to this superior principle or part of our nature no more than we grant to other parts; let it like all the others govern and guide us only occasionally, when its turn happens to come around, from the mood and circumstances one happens to be in

—is *not* acting in conformity with the constitution of man. No human creature can be said to act in conformity with his constitution or nature unless he gives that superior principle the absolute authority that is due to it. This conclusion is abundantly confirmed by the following fact: One can determine what course of action the economy of man's nature requires, without so much as knowing how strongly the various principles prevail, or which of them actually have the greatest influence.

The practical reason for insisting so much upon this natural authority of the principle of reflection or conscience is that it seems to be largely overlooked by many people who are by no means the worst sort of men. They think that ·for virtue· it's sufficient to abstain from gross wickedness, and to be humane and kind to such people as happen to cross one's path. Whereas really the very constitution of our nature requires us to •bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty, ·this reflection or conscience·, to •wait for its decision, to •enforce its authority upon ourselves, and to •make it the business of our lives—as it is absolutely the whole business of a moral agent—to conform ourselves to it. This is the true meaning of the ancient precept *Reverence yourself*.

Lord Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue* has what seems to be a substantial defect or omission, namely: it doesn't take into consideration this authority that is implied in the idea of reflex approval or disapproval. He has shown conclusively that virtue is naturally the way to happiness, and vice [see Glossary] to misery, for a creature such as man

when placed in the circumstances that we have in this world. But suppose there's a particular state of affairs in which virtue doesn't lead to happiness; Shaftesbury was unwilling to consider such cases, but surely they ought to be considered. There's another ·awkward· case that he does discuss and give an answer to, namely the case of a sceptic who isn't convinced of this happy tendency of virtue. . . . Shaftesbury's reply to this is there would be no remedy for it! One may say more explicitly that such a sceptic, leaving out the authority of reflex approval or disapproval, would be under an obligation to act viciously; because one's own happiness is an obvious obligation, and there is supposed to be no other obligation in the case. ·You might say·: 'But does bringing in the natural authority of reflection help much? There would indeed be an obligation to virtue, but wouldn't the obligation from supposed interest on the side of vice still remain?' I reply that being under two contrary obligations—i.e. being under none—would not be exactly the same as being under a formal obligation to be vicious, or being in circumstances where the constitution of man's nature plainly requires that vice should be preferred. But the obligation on the side of interest really *doesn't* 'still remain'. Why not? Because the natural authority of the principle of reflection is a near and intimate obligation, the most certain and best known, whereas the contrary obligation can't seem more than probable, at most. No man can be sure in any circumstances that vice is his interest in the present world, much less can he be certain that it is in his interest in another world, ·the world of life after death·. So the certain obligation would entirely outrank and destroy the uncertain one, though the latter would otherwise have had real force.

Taking in this consideration totally changes the whole state of the case. It shows something that Shaftesbury doesn't seem to have been aware of, namely that the highest

degree of scepticism that he thought possible will still leave men—whatever their opinion may be—under the strictest moral obligation concerning the happiness of virtue. He rightly thought it to be a plain matter of fact that mankind, upon reflection, feels an approval of what is good and a disapproval of the contrary; no-one could deny this, except as an exercise in showing off. So if you take in the authority and obligation that is a constituent part of this reflex approval, you'll see that it undeniably follows that even if a man doubts everything else, he will still remain under the nearest and most certain obligation to act virtuously—an obligation implied in the very idea of virtue, in the very idea of reflex approval. [This is the first explicit mention in these sermons of the *idea of virtue*.]

[This paragraph expands what Butler wrote in ways that the small dots convention can't easily indicate. But the content is all his.] And however little influence this obligation alone can be expected to have on mankind, one can appeal merely to self-interest and self-love, and ask a question for which I must first set the scene. On the one hand we have

the fact that because of man's nature, his condition, and the brevity of his life, *very* little can possibly be gained by vice.

On the other we have

the fact that the call to virtue is the most intimate of all obligations—one that a man can't defy without condemning himself and, unless he has corrupted his nature, disliking himself.

The question: **Forgoing the tiny possible gain-from-vice so as to be on good terms with the call-to-virtue—is that such an enormous sacrifice?** This question would have a bite even if the prospect of a future life were ever so uncertain.

·PUNISHMENT·

Thus, man is by his very nature a law unto himself; and this thesis, pursued to its just consequences, is of the utmost importance. Something that follows from it is this:

Even if a man—through stupidity, or theoretical scepticism—doesn't know or doesn't believe that there is any authority in the universe to punish the violation of this law; if there actually *is* such an authority, he is as liable to punishment as he would have been if he had been convinced in advance that such punishment would follow.

Whatever we understand justice to be—even if we presumptuously claim that the purpose of divine punishment is just the same as that of civil punishment, namely to prevent future wrong behaviour—it would still be the case that an offender wouldn't be spared punishment if he didn't know or didn't believe that there would be punishment. Even on this system of justice, wrong behaviour wouldn't at all be exempt from punishment if the offender didn't know or didn't believe that he was risking punishment; because what makes us regard conduct as punishable is not the person's foreknowledge of the punishment, but merely his action's violating a known obligation.

This is the place to take up an obvious error, or mistake, by Shaftesbury (unless he expressed himself so carelessly as to be misunderstood). He writes that 'it is malice only, and not goodness, that can make us afraid'. Actually, goodness is the natural and proper object of the greatest fear to a man who has acted wrongly. Malice may be appeased or satisfied; mood may change; but goodness is a fixed, steady, immovable principle of action. If malice or mood holds the sword of justice, there's clearly a basis for the greatest of

crimes to hope for impunity. But if it is goodness, there can be no possible hope when the reason of things or the purposes of government call for punishment. Thus, everyone sees how much greater chance of impunity a bad man has in an administration where there is favouritism and corruption, than in a just and upright one. . . .

[Butler says nothing in this Preface about sermon 4 (on loose talk) or sermons 5 and 6 (compassion) or 15 (human ignorance). But starting at the point we have now reached, he comments briefly on 7 (a puzzle about the book of *Numbers*) and 10 (self-deception); then on 8 (resentment) and 9 (forgiveness). The Preface ends with a paragraph relating to 13 and 14 (piety), followed by a disclaimer, saying that no special principle was at work in the selection of topics for this collection of sermons. Before coming to those final bits, Butler discusses self-love, relating this to sermon 11 though it equally concerns sermon 12.]

·WHAT I PLAN TO DO IN THE REMAINING TWO SERMONS·

The main purpose of the eleventh sermon is to set out the notions of •self-love and •disinterestedness [see Glossary], in order to show that benevolence is not more unfriendly to self-love than it is to any other particular affection. Many people make a show of explaining away all particular affections, representing the whole of life as nothing but one continuous exercise of self-love. This gives rise to a trouble-making confusion in the ancient Epicureans, in Hobbes, in La Rochefoucauld, and in other writers of this type. I'm referring to the confusion of labelling as 'self-interested' actions that are performed in contradiction to the most manifest known

interest, merely for the gratification of a present passion.¹ Now, all this confusion could easily have been avoided by getting clear about what the general idea of **(i)** self-love is, as distinct from all particular movements [see Glossary] towards particular external objects—I mean **(ii)** the appetites of sense, resentment, compassion, curiosity, ambition, and the rest. When this is done, if the words 'selfish' [see Glossary] and 'self-interested' can't be parted with but must be applied to everything, the total confusion of all language could still be avoided by the use of adjectives to distinguish **(i)** 'cool' or 'settled' selfishness from **(ii)** 'passionate' or 'sensual' selfishness. But the most natural way of speaking plainly is to restrict 'self-love' to **(i)** and restrict 'self-interested' to the actions that come from it; and to say of **(ii)** that they don't involve love to *ourselves* but rather movements towards *something outside ourselves*—honour, power, harm to someone else, good to someone else. The pursuit of these external objects could come from self-love; but when it comes instead from one of these other movements it isn't 'self-interested' except in a trivial sense in which every action of every creature must be 'self-interested', merely because no-one can act on anything but a desire or choice or preference of his own.

Self-love can be combined with any particular passion, and this complication very often makes it impossible to determine precisely how far an action—even an action of one's own—has for its principle general self-love, and how far some particular passion. But this needn't create any confusion in the *ideas of* self-love and particular passions. We clearly see what one is and what the others are, though

¹ From Cicero's first book, *De Finibus*, you can see how surprisingly the Epicureans made this mistake: explaining the desire for •praise and for •being beloved as upshots of the desire for •safety, and equating concern for our •country, even in the most virtuous character, with concern for •ourselves. La Rochefoucauld says 'Curiosity comes from self-interest or from pride', and no doubt he would have explained the pride in terms of self-love; as though there were no such human passions as the desire for esteem, for being beloved, or for knowledge! Hobbes's account of the affections of good-will and pity are instances of the same kind.

we may be unsure how far one or the other influences us. Because of this uncertainty, there are bound to be different opinions concerning the extent to which mankind is governed by ·self·-interest; and there will be actions that some will ascribe to self-love and others will ascribe to particular passions. But it's absurd to say that mankind are wholly actuated by either, because obviously both have their influence. . . .

Besides, the very idea of a ·self·-interested pursuit necessarily presupposes particular passions or appetites, because the very idea of someone's *interests*, or his *happiness*, consists in his having an appetite or affection that enjoys its object, ·i.e. is satisfied·. It's not because we love ourselves that we find delight in such-and-such objects, but because we have particular affections towards them. If you take away these affections you leave self-love with nothing to work on—no end or goal for it to aim at except the avoidance of pain. . . .

An important observation:

Benevolence is no more disinterested than any of the common particular passions.

This is worth noting in itself, but I emphasize it here as a protection against the scorn that one sees rising in the faces of people—ones who are said to 'know the world'—when someone describes an action as disinterested, generous, or public-spirited. The truth of The Observation (·as I shall call it·) can be shown in a more formal way: consider all the possible relations that any particular affection can have to self-love and private ·self·-interest, and I think you will *see demonstrably* [Butler's phrase] that benevolence is not in any respect more at variance with self-love than it is with any other particular affection. . . .

If The Observation is true, it follows that •self-love and •benevolence are not opposed but only different. Similarly

with •virtue and •self-interest. It's the same with •virtue and •any other particular affection (e.g. love of the arts)—not opposed, only different. **Everything is what it is, and not another thing.** An action's goodness or badness doesn't come from

its being describable as 'disinterested' or 'self-interested',

any more than from its being describable as 'inquisitive' or 'jealous' or whatever. Nor does it come from

its being accompanied by present or future pleasure or pain.

The action's moral quality comes from its being what it is; that is, its being or not being appropriate for a creature like us, its being or not being what the state of the case requires. So we can judge and determine that an action is morally good or bad before giving the least thought to whether it was ·self·-interested or disinterested. . . . Self-love, in its proper degree, is as just and morally good as any affection whatever. Benevolence towards particular persons may be ·due· to a degree of weakness, and so be blameworthy. As for disinterestedness being in itself commendable: we can't even imagine anything more depraved than disinterested cruelty.

Would it be better if self-love were weaker in people in general? There seems to be no reason to think so. Such influence as self-love has seems clearly to come from its being constant and habitual (which it is bound to be), and not to how intense or strong it is. ·In fact it *isn't* strong·. Every whim of the imagination, every curiosity of the understanding, every affection of the heart, shows self-love's weakness by prevailing over it. Men daily, *hourly*, sacrifice their greatest known interest to fancy, inquisitiveness, love, or hatred, any vagrant inclination. The thing to be lamented is not that

men have so much regard for their own good or
·self·-interest in the present world,

for they don't have enough; it is that

men they have so little regard for the good of others.

And why are they like that? It is because they are so much engaged in gratifying particular passions that •are unfriendly to benevolence and •happen to be most prevalent in them, much more than because of self-love. For a proof of this, consider:

There is no character more void of friendship, gratitude, natural affection, love of country and of common justice—no character more equally and uniformly hard-hearted—than that of someone who is abandoned in the so-called 'way of pleasure'.

Such people are hard-hearted and totally without feelings on behalf of others; except when they can't escape the sight of distress, and so are interrupted by it in their pleasures. But it's ridiculous to call such an abandoned course of pleasure ·self·-interested; the person engaged in it •knows beforehand

that it will be as ruinous to himself as to those who depend upon him, and conducts his life of 'pleasure' under a cloud created by his anxious sense of disaster ahead. [That last clause changes Butler's words quite a lot.]

[Notice that in this next paragraph Butler speaks of happiness 'in this life' and of people's 'temporal [see Glossary] good', explicitly leaving the after-life and divine rewards and punishments out of it.] If •people in general were to develop within themselves the principle of self-love; if •they were to develop the habit of sitting down to consider what was the greatest happiness they could attain for themselves in this life; and if •their self-love were strong and steady enough to keep them in pursuit of their supposed chief temporal good, not being side-tracked by any particular passion, this would obviously prevent countless follies and vices. This was in a great measure the Epicurean system of philosophy. It is far from being the religious—or even the moral—institution of life. Yet even with all the mistakes men would make regarding their interests, it would still be less damaging than the extravagances of mere appetite, will, and pleasure. . . .

1: The Social Nature of Man

[Butler prefaces this sermon with a short passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, in which something is said about Christians being 'one body in Christ' and 'members one of another'. He contrasts •what that passage meant to the early Christians to whom it was addressed with •how it should be understood at the time when Butler was writing; and says that this contrast gives him a reason for treating the passage 'in a more general way' than its original recipients would have done. He takes it that he is confronted with a comparison between these two:

- (1) the relation that the various parts or members of a natural body have to each other and to the whole body;
- (2) the relation that each particular person in society has to other particular persons, and to the whole society

This isn't a very good comparison he says, if the 'body' is thought of as not having a mind and thus as 'a dead inactive thing'. He proposes then to replace that contrast by this one (the second item is unchanged):

- (1) the relation that the various internal principles [see Glossary] in human nature have to each other and to the whole nature of man;
- (2) the relation that each particular person in society has to other particular persons, and to the whole society.

Butler gives a weak or obscure reason why 'it cannot be thought an unallowable liberty' to interpret what Paul wrote in this way. And then, with the tiresome Pauline distraction cleared away, the real business can begin.]

We are going to compare •the nature of man as an individual, aiming at his own private good, his own preservation and happiness with •the nature of man as a social being,

aiming at public good, the happiness of that society. These goals do indeed perfectly coincide; aiming at public good and aiming at private good are so far from being inconsistent that they support one another. But in the following discussion they'll have to be considered as entirely distinct from one another, otherwise we can't compare the nature of man as tending to one with his nature as tending to the other. You can't compare two things unless they really are *two*.

From my review of, and comparison between, these two aspects of the nature of man it will plainly appear that the indications in human nature that

- (2) we were made for society and to do good to our fellow-creatures

are as real as the indications that

- (1) we were intended to take care of our own life, health, and private good;

that the two sets of indications are very similar to one another; and that any objections that one of those two assertions is open to bear in the same way against the other.

[A] There is a natural principle of benevolence. . . [At this point Butler has the key to a long footnote which is presented now as main text, ending on page 13.]

·THE START OF FIRST FOOTNOTE·

Suppose a learned man is writing a sober book about *human nature*, and shows in many parts of it that he has an insight into this topic. Among the things he has to give an account of is the **appearance** in men of •benevolence or •good-will towards each other when they are naturally related ·as father and son, brother and brother, etc.· or socially related in various ways. Not wanting to be taken in by outward show, our learned man digs down into *himself* to discover

what exactly it is in the mind of man that produces this **appearance**; and after deep reflection he announces that the principle [see Glossary] in the mind that does this work is only the love of power and delight in the exercise of it. [Butler has a note here, telling us that his target is Hobbes.] Wouldn't everyone think he has mistaken one word for another? That this philosopher was surveying and explaining some *other* human actions, some *other* behaviour of man to man? Could anyone be thoroughly convinced that he really was talking about what is commonly called 'benevolence' or 'good-will' except by discovering that this learned person has a general hypothesis that can't be made to square with the appearance of good-will except in this way? What has this appearance is *often* nothing but ambition, and the delight in superiority is often—or ·for purposes of argument· let's suppose always—*mixed in with* benevolence; but these facts don't make it right to say that benevolence is ambition; it's •superficially more plausible to say this than to say that benevolence is (say) hunger, but it's no more •right. Isn't there often the appearance of one man's wanting another to have some good that he himself can't get for him, and rejoicing when it comes to him through some third person? Can love of power *possibly* explain this desire or this delight? Isn't there often the appearance of someone's distinguishing between two or more others and preferring to do good for one rather than the other(s), in cases where love of power can't at all explain this distinction and this preference? . . . And another point: Suppose that good-will in the mind of man is nothing but delight in the exercise of power: then men will be disposed to engage in and delight in wicked behaviour as an exercise and proof of power. (In particular cases they may be deterred by thoughts about bad consequences for them that could follow from such behaviour; but that depends on particular matters of fact, and on 'the long run'; it is

easy to suppose cases where nothing like that applies; and those are the ones I am talking about.) And this disposition and delight would arise from. . . the same principle in the mind as a disposition to and delight in charity. Thus cruelty, as distinct from envy and resentment, would be exactly the same as good-will in the mind of man; the fact that one tends to the happiness of our fellow-creatures and their other to the misery is, according to this theory, merely an accidental circumstance that the mind pays no attention to. These are the absurdities that even able men run into when something causes them to belie •their nature and perversely disclaim the image of God that was originally stamped on •it and is still plainly discernible upon the mind of man, even if only faintly.

The question is not about how •intensely benevolent people are, or about how •widely their benevolence extends; it is just about whether this affection [see Glossary] •exists at all. Suppose someone does seriously doubt whether there is any such thing as good-will in one man towards another. Well, whether man is or isn't constituted like that is a mere question of fact or natural history, not provable immediately by reason. So the question has to be considered and answered in the same way as other ·questions of· fact or natural history are, namely

- (a) by appealing to the •external senses or •inward perceptions,
- (b) by arguing from acknowledged facts and actions, and
- (c) by the testimony of mankind.

(A note on (a): whether it's external senses or inward perception depends, of course, on what the particular question is about. A note on (b): When we have studied many actions of the same kind, in different circumstances and directed to different objects, we are in a position to draw certainly true conclusions about what principles they don't come from,

and very probable conclusions about what principles they do come from.) Now, that there is some degree of benevolence in men can be as strongly and plainly shown in all these ways as it could possibly be shown. . . . Suppose someone claimed that

resentment in the mind of man is absolutely nothing but reasonable concern for our own safety,

how would we show him to be wrong? How would we show what the real nature of that passion is? In just the same way as, when someone claims that

there is no such a thing as real good-will in man towards man,

we can show *him* to be wrong. ·For us to have benevolence·, all that's needed is for the seeds of it to be implanted in our nature by God. There's much left for us to do upon our own heart and temperament—to cultivate, improve, and call forth our principle of benevolence, and to exercise it in a steady uniform manner. This is our work: this is virtue and religion.

·END OF FIRST FOOTNOTE·

[A] There is a natural principle [see Glossary] of benevolence in man, which to some extent relates to society in the way that self-love relates to the individual. And if there is in mankind

- any disposition to friendship,
- any such thing as compassion (which is momentary love),
- any such thing as paternal or filial affection,
- any affection aiming at the good of someone else,

all this is benevolence, or the love of another. It may be brief, or of low intensity, or narrow in its range; but it still proves the assertion ·that *there is* such a thing as benevolence in man·, and indicates what we were designed for just as really as that would be indicated by a much more intense and wide-ranging benevolence. I must remind you, however, that although benevolence and self-love are different—although

the former tends most directly to public good, and the latter to private good—yet they coincide so perfectly that •the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend on our having an appropriate degree of benevolence, and that self-love is one chief security [Butler's phrase] of our right behaviour towards society. It may be added that their coinciding so that we can hardly promote one without the other is equally a proof that we were made ·not just for benevolence, but· for both.

[B] This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the various passions and affections that are distinct. . . [At this point Butler has the key to a longish footnote which is presented now as main text.]

·START OF SECOND FOOTNOTE·

Everybody distinguishes self-love from the various particular passions, appetites, and affections; and yet the distinction is often lost sight of. That they *are* totally different will be seen by anyone who distinguishes •the passions and appetites themselves from •attempts to satisfy them. Consider the appetite of hunger, and the desire for esteem (·which is a passion·); because each of these can lead to pleasure and to pain, the coolest self-love may set us to work doing what needs to be done to obtain that pleasure and avoid that pain; and so of course can the appetites and passions themselves. [At this point Butler gets himself side-tracked into laboriously distinguishing self-love from •‘the feelings themselves, the pain of hunger and shame, and the delight from esteem’. What he had set out to do was to distinguish self-love (which can be ‘cool’) from •appetites and passions such as hunger and the desire for esteem (which presumably are never ‘cool’ in that way). Then he gets back on track:] Just as self-love is totally different from the various particular passions and appetites, so also some of the actions coming from self-love are totally different from actions coming from the particular passions. To see that this is obviously so, consider these

two perfectly possible cases. **(a)** One man rushes to certain ruin in order to satisfy a present desire; nobody would call the principle of this action ‘self-love’. **(b)** Another man goes through some laborious work for which he has been promised a great reward, though he has no clear knowledge of what the reward will be; this course of action can’t be ascribed to any particular passion. The behaviour in **(a)** is obviously to be attributed to some particular passion or affection, while the behaviour in **(b)** equally obviously comes from the general affection or principle of self-love. The two principles are frequently mixed together, and run into each other, which is why we can’t always tell to what extent some particular pursuit or actions comes from self-love. I shall return to this in the eleventh sermon.

·END OF SECOND FOOTNOTE·

[B] This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the various passions and affections that are distinct from benevolence and self-love also lead [see Glossary] us tend to further public good as really as they do private good. We could explore in detail the various passions or appetites other than benevolence whose primary use and intention is the security and good of society; and the various passions distinct from self-love, whose primary intention and design is the security and good of the individual. But it might be thought that this would take too long and get us into too much nit-picking detail. [Butler has a footnote here in which he undertakes to do this job for a single case, returning to the pair •hunger and •desire for esteem. They are in fact a bad pair for this purpose, and Butler’s treatment of them here is confusing and apparently confused; we are better off without it. His main text continues:] For present purposes it is enough that

- the desire for esteem from others,
- contempt for others,
- esteem for others,

- love of society (not a desire for the good of it), and
- indignation against successful vice,

are •public affections or passions, have an immediate bearing on others, and naturally lead us to behave in ways that will be helpful to our fellow-creatures. If any or all of these can be considered also as •private affections, as tending to private good, this doesn’t block them from being •public affections too, or destroy their good influence on society or their tendency to public good. And then there’s this point: just as someone who had no belief in the desirableness of life will still be led to preserve his own life merely from the appetite of hunger, so also someone acting merely in the pursuit of reputation, with no thought of the good of others, may well contribute to public good. In both cases they are clearly instruments in the hands of God, to carry out states of affairs—the preservation of the individual and the good of society—which they themselves don’t intend or have in view. The bottom line is this: Men have various appetites, passions, and particular affections that are quite distinct both from self-love and from benevolence; all of these have a tendency to promote both public and private good, and can be considered as relating to others and to ourselves equally; but some of them seem most immediately to concern others, i.e. tend to public good; while others most immediately concern oneself, i.e. tend to private good. The former are not benevolence, and the latter are not self-love: neither sort come from our love for ourselves or for others; both come from our Maker’s care and love both for the individual and for the ·human· species; and they show that he intended us to be instruments of good to each other, as well as that we should be instruments of good to ourselves.

[C] There is a principle of reflection in men that leads them to distinguish between, approve, and disapprove their own actions. We are obviously constituted in such a way that we

reflect upon our own nature. The mind can take a view of what happens within itself,

- its propensities, aversions, passions and affections,
- the goals they aim at,
- their varying degrees of intensity, and
- the various actions they give rise to.

In this survey it approves of one, disapproves of another, and towards a third is affected in neither of these ways, but is quite indifferent. This principle by which man approves or disapproves his heart, temperament, and action is *conscience*. . . . This faculty [see Glossary] tends to restrain men from harming one another, and leads them to do good—all that is too obvious to need special emphasis, but here's an example of it, all the same. A parent has the affection of love for his children, which leads him to take care of them, to educate and make due provision for them. His natural affection leads to this; but his reflection that this is his proper business, that it's up to him, that acting like this is right and commendable, when added to the affection, becomes a much more settled principle, and carries him on through more labour and difficulties for the sake of his children than he would go through purely from that affection without support from his conscience. . . . It is impossible to do something good and not approve of it; but don't think (as some do) that doing x is the same as approving of the doing of x: men often approve of actions by others that they wouldn't imitate, and do things that they don't approve of. So *approval* stands on its own feet, so to speak: it can't possibly be denied that there is this principle of reflection or conscience in human nature. Consider this case:

(1) A man gives help to an innocent person y who is in distress. (2) On a later occasion, the same man in a fury of anger does great harm to a person who has given no just cause of offence, and who is indeed

a former friend who has been good to him. Now our man coolly thinks back on these two actions of his, thinking about them in themselves, without regard to their consequences for himself.

Is anyone going to say that any common man would have the same attitude towards these two actions? that he wouldn't draw any line between them but would approve of both or disapprove of both? Of course not! That is too glaring a falsity to need to be confuted. So there is this principle of reflection or conscience in mankind. We needn't compare its relation to private good with its relation to public good, because it obviously has *as much* to do with the latter as with the former—and is often thought to have *more*. I mention this faculty here merely as another part of man's inner frame, giving us some indication of what we are intended for, and as something that will naturally and as a matter of course have some influence. The particular place assigned to it by nature, what authority it has, and how much influence it ought to have, are questions to be considered later.

From this comparison of benevolence and self-love—our public and private affections—of the courses of life they lead to, and of the bearing of the principle of reflection or conscience on each of them, it's as obvious that we were made for society and to promote its happiness as it is that we were intended to take care of our own life, health, and private good.

This whole survey yields a picture of human nature different from the one we are often presented with. Human beings are by nature so closely united, there's such a correspondence between one man's inward sensations and those of another, that

- disgrace is avoided as much as bodily pain is,
- being esteemed and loved by others is desired as much as any external goods are, and

- people are often led to do good to others as something they simply *want* to do and find enjoyable and satisfying.

There is such a natural principle of attraction in man towards man that two men may be drawn together as close acquaintances by the slightest of bonds—e.g. their having *years earlier* walked the same tract of land, breathed in the same climate, merely been born in the same artificial district. [Because divisions into districts are ‘artificial’, a same-district relation is artificial, not natural; that is what Butler is getting at in the next sentence when he calls the relation ‘merely nominal’—not an accurate use of ‘nominal’.] Thus, merely nominal relations are sought and invented, not by governors but by the lowest of the people, and serve to hold mankind together in little fraternities and co-partnerships. They are weak ties indeed, and they would seem merely ridiculous if they were regarded as the real principles [see Glossary] of the union of the fraternities etc.. But it would be absurd to credit them with that role. They are really just the occasions [see Glossary]—as anything can be the occasion of anything—upon which our nature carries us on according to its own previous bent and bias [Butler’s good phrase]. These occasions would be nothing at all if there weren’t this prior disposition and bias of human nature. [Butler goes on to say, in a difficult sentence, something amounting to the following. Men are so strongly united with one another that one person may share another’s feelings—all sorts of feelings—being led to this by the ‘social nature’ that all humans have, with triggers or ‘occasions’ involving natural relations, acquaintance, protection, dependence; ‘each of these being distinct cements of society’. He continues:] Thus, to have no . . . regard for

others in our behaviour is the factual error of considering ourselves as single and independent, as having nothing in our nature relating us to our fellow-creatures. . . . This is on a par with the absurdity of thinking that a hand has no natural relation to any other part of the body.

You may grant all this but then ask:

Doesn’t man have dispositions and principles within him that lead him to do evil to others, as well as the good he does? What other source can there be for the many miseries that men inflict on each other?

These questions, as far as they relate to what I have been saying, can be answered with another pair of questions:

Doesn’t man also have dispositions and principles within him that lead him to do evil to himself, as well as the good he does? What other source can there be for the many miseries—sickness, pain, and death—that men inflict upon themselves?

You may think that one of these questions is easier to answer than the other, but the answer to both is really the same. It is that human beings have ungoverned passions that they will gratify, come what may, harming others or damaging their own private self-interest. But there’s no such thing as self-hatred, nor any such thing as ill-will in one man towards another, unless emulation or resentment comes into the picture; whereas there is clearly benevolence or good-will. There’s no such thing as love of injustice, oppression, treachery, ingratitude; there are only eager desires for particular external goods; and it’s an old saying that the worst people would choose to obtain those goods by innocent means if that were as easy and as effective. If you think about what emulation and resentment really are in nature,²

² **Emulation** is merely the desire and hope to be equal with or superior to others with whom we compare ourselves. There doesn’t seem to be any downside to the natural passion apart from the lack that is implied in desire; though this may be so strong as to be the occasion of great suffering. To want to achieve this equality or superiority specifically by means of others being brought down to or below our own level is, I think, the distinct

you'll find nothing that supports this objection; and that the principles and passions in the mind of man which are distinct both from self-love and benevolence, primarily and most directly lead to right behaviour with regard to others as well as himself, and only secondarily and accidentally to what is evil. It can happen that a man tries to avoid the shame of one villainy by perpetrating a greater one; but it's easy to see that the basic function of shame is to prevent the performance of shameful actions; and when it leads men to conceal such actions when they have been performed, that is only because they *have* been performed, meaning that the passion of shame hasn't succeeded in its first purpose.

You may say: 'There are people in the world who are pretty much devoid of the natural affections [see Glossary] towards their fellow-creatures.' Well, there are also people devoid of the common natural affections towards themselves; but *the nature of man* is not to be judged by either of these, but by what appears in the common world in most of mankind.

I am afraid you'll think this very strange, but I'm going to say it anyway. My account of human nature, and my comparison between benevolence and self-love, are supported by this array of facts:

Men contradict the part of their nature relating to themselves, the part leading [see Glossary] to their own private good and happiness, as much and as often as they contradict the part of their nature relating to society and leading to public good. There are as few people who achieve the greatest satisfaction and enjoyment that they *could* achieve in the present [see Glossary] world, as who do the greatest good to others that they could do; indeed, there are as few who really

seriously aim thoroughly to serve their own interests as there are people who aim thoroughly to help others.

Take a survey of mankind [= 'a species-wide opinion poll']: Very nearly everybody, good people and bad, agrees that if religion were out of the picture the happiness of the present life would consist. . . .wholly in riches, honours, sensual gratifications; and this assumption forms the background to almost all reflections people make on prudence, life, conduct. But the assumption is false. Very rich people are no happier than ones who are financially merely comfortable; the cares and disappointments of ambition usually far exceed the satisfactions it brings; similarly with a dissolute course of life, with its miserable periods of intemperance and excess, and often the early death it brings. These things are all seen, acknowledged, *by everyone* acknowledged, yet they aren't seen as objections to the general thesis that the happiness of our present life consists in wealth or ambition or sensual pleasure—despite the fact that they explicitly contradict it. What is the source of all this absurdity and contradiction? Isn't the middle way obvious? Can anything be more obvious than that the happiness of life consists in having and enjoying these three things in moderation, that pursuing them immoderately always brings more inconvenience than advantage to a man, often with extreme misery and unhappiness? Where, I ask again, does all this absurdity and contradiction come from? Is it really the result of men's thinking about how they can become most easy to themselves, most free from care, and enjoy the chief happiness attainable in this world? Isn't it rather—obviously—a result of one or other of these two things? **(a)** They don't have enough cool and reasonable concern for themselves to think about what their

notion of **envy**. It's easy to see from this •that the real goal of the unlawful passion, envy, is exactly the same as the real goal of the natural passion, emulation, namely that of equality or superiority; and •that doing harm is not the goal of envy but merely the means it employs to achieve its goal. Resentment will be discussed in the eighth sermon.

chief happiness in the present life consists in. **(b)** They do think about it, but refuse to act in accordance with the outcome of that thinking; that is, reasonable concern for themselves, cool self-love, is swamped by passion and appetite. So there seems to be no evidence that the principles in the nature of man that most directly lead us to promote the good our fellow-creatures are more generally or more intensely violated than the principles that most directly lead us to promote our own private good and happiness.

The conclusion of all this is obvious.

- (1)** The nature of man, considered as an isolated individual and with respect only to the present world, is adapted to—and leads him to—his getting the greatest happiness he can for himself in the present world.
- (2)** The nature of man, considered as a member of a society, leads him to right behaviour in society, i.e. to

the course of life that we call 'virtue'.

[On 'leads him to' see Glossary.] In both these capacities men follow or obey their nature. . . .to a certain degree, but not entirely; their actions don't measure up to the whole of what their nature leads them to in either of these capacities; and they often violate their nature in both. They neglect the duties they owe to their fellow-creatures. . . ., and they conspicuously neglect their real happiness or ·self·-interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification. For the sake of such gratification they negligently—even knowingly, indeed—are the authors and instruments of their own misery and ruin. Thus they are as often unjust to themselves as to others, and for the most part the two injustices are equal in severity and come from the same actions.

2–3: The Natural Supremacy of Conscience

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves. (*Romans 2:14*) ·Let us call this The Text·.

Truths about things other than morality can be proved in various different ways, and so can ·truths about· moral obligations. If the real nature of any creature leads [see Glossary] him to act in a certain way and is fitted for that kind of behaviour, this is a reason to believe that that's what the Author of •that nature intended •it for. Thus there's no doubt the eye was intended for us to see with. And the more complex any constitution is, and the greater variety of parts of it that tend to some one end, the stronger is the evidence that the thing in question was *designed* to produce that end. But when we are looking at man's inner constitution as a guide in morals, we must be extremely careful

- not to regard as common to our species features of ourselves as individuals, or features that many people have but that are the effects of particular customs; and
- not to overlook or exclude the highest principle [see Glossary], the one whose job is to adjust and correct of all the other inward movements [see Glossary] and affections; ·I am talking, of course, about conscience·.

This highest principle will as a matter of course have *some* influence, but *ought to* preside over and govern all the rest, because it is in nature supreme, as I shall now show. There's less agreement about what the internal nature is that all men have than about their common external form, and there seem to be three reasons for this. •The two warnings I have just given are hard to attend to adequately; •it appears that

men do differ from one another a little with respect to their natural sense of moral good and evil, ·i.e. with respect to conscience·; and •it is difficult for us to get an exact picture of what goes on in our minds. ·But let's not make too much of this·. We don't have a precise account of what shape is possessed by all and only human *bodies*, either, and yet we understand one another when we speak of 'the ·**external**· shape of a human body'; and so we do when we speak of 'the heart and **inner** principles of a human being', however far the standard is from being exact or precisely fixed. So it isn't unreasonable to try to show men to themselves, show them what course of life and behaviour their real nature points out and would lead them to. [The next bit is expanded in ways that the ·small dots· convention can't easily indicate. Its first sentence is a sheer addition. The paragraph gets back to being close to Butler's words at 'A man can no more. . .'.] It is sometimes said that morality is just a matter of individual feelings and attitudes, and that there's no absolute right or wrong about it; let us get that error out of the way at the outset. This is indeed true:

When we show that men have obligations to behave virtuously, and try to reinforce their motives for doing so, doing all this on the basis of a review of the nature of man, we are appealing to **(a)** each individual person's heart and natural conscience.

But then so is this:

When we offer support for non-moral propositions such as scientific theses, we are appealing to **(b)** each individual person's external senses.

Now, our **(a)** inward feelings are every bit as real as **(b)** the perceptions we get through our external senses; so there can't be any more objection to drawing conclusions about life

and conduct from **(a)** than there is to arguing for non-moral truths from **(b)**. A man can no more doubt whether his eyes were given him to see with than he can doubt the truth of the science of optics that is derived from ocular experiments. And he can no more doubt that the inward feeling of shame was given him to prevent him from doing shameful actions than he can doubt that his eyes were given him to guide his steps. . . . Neither his •inward feelings nor his •external senses can be wholly mistaken, though •the former are to some extent liable to greater mistakes than •the latter.

There can be no doubt about this:

The heart of man contains a number of propensities or instincts—a number of principles—that take him into •society and lead him to contribute to •its happiness.

The way in which this happens isn't matched by any inward principle leading man to do evil.

These principles, propensities, or instincts that lead him to do good are approved of by a certain inner faculty [see Glossary] that is quite distinct from these propensities themselves. I have fully defended all this in the first sermon.

•THE OBJECTION•

An objector may say this: 'Even if all this is true, what help does it give to virtue and religion? These require not only that

We do good to others when we are led to by the fact that at that moment benevolence or reflection happens to be stronger than •our• other principles, passions, or appetites,

but also that

Our whole character is based on thought and reflection; everything we do is directed by some determinate rule—some other rule than the strength and prevalence of any principle or passion.

What evidence is there in •our nature (for that's where we are

looking for evidence) that this was intended by •its Author? How does the various and flighty temperament of man seem to be adapted to it? It may indeed be absurd and unnatural for men to act without any reflection—indeed, to act without consulting the particular kind of reflection that you call 'conscience', because this does belong to our nature. . . . Anyone would approve of a humane action more than a cruel one, if •self-interest and passion didn't come into it. But •self-interest and passion *do* come into it; they are often too strong for reflection and conscience, and prevail over it. Now, just as the lower animals have various instincts that carry them on to the end the Author of their nature intended them for, isn't man in the same condition except for the one difference that in addition to his instincts (i.e. appetites and passions) he has the principle of reflection or conscience? And just as lower animals act in conformity with their nature, following whatever principle or particular instinct is strongest in them at that moment, doesn't man similarly act in conformity with *his* nature—or obey the law of his creation—by following the principle, whether a passion or conscience, that happens to be strongest in him at that moment? And so we have

- men whose particular nature bustles them along in the pursuit of honour, or riches, or pleasure;
- men whose temperament leads them to an unusual degree of kindness, compassion, doing good to their fellow-creatures; and
- men who are given to suspending their judgment, weighing and considering things, and acting on •the basis of• thought and reflection.

Let everyone then quietly follow his own nature, according to which parts of it—passion, reflection, appetite—happen to the strongest; but let the virtuous man not take it upon himself to blame the ambitious, the greedy, the dissolute;

because these are obeying and following *their* natures, as he follows *his*. In some cases we follow our nature in doing the works contained in the law, and in others we follow nature in doing contrary.’

·END OF THE OBJECTION·

All this licentious [= ‘super-permissive’] talk depends entirely on the supposition that when someone

follows his nature in violating the known rules of justice and honesty for the sake of a present gratification, and someone else

follows his nature in abiding by the rules of justice when he isn’t tempted to do otherwise,

this involves ‘following his nature’ *in the same sense* [Butler’s phrase]. And if that were true, St Paul couldn’t be right in asserting that men are ‘by nature a law to themselves.’ If ‘following nature’ merely meant ‘acting as we please’, there would be. . . . no distinction between following one’s nature and not following it; for no-one ever acts otherwise than as he pleases!. . . . Language itself should teach people another sense to the words ‘following nature’ than merely ‘acting as we please’. Now, we do have to get straight about the meaning of the phrase ‘human nature’, but my real purpose in this sermon is not to explain the meanings of any words except insofar as I have to do that in order to understand and explain the assertion that ‘every man is naturally a law to himself; that ‘everyone can find within himself the rule of right, and obligations to follow it’. St Paul affirms this in the words of The Text ·on page 19·, and The Objection above really denies it by seeming to accept it. The Objection will be fully answered, and The Text explained, by •pointing out that nature is considered from different viewpoints, and ‘nature’ is used in different senses; and by •showing what viewpoint is being adopted, and in what sense the word ‘nature’ is used, when it is meant to intended to stand for that which is

the guide of life, that by which men are a law to themselves. The explanation of the word will be enough, because it will enable you to see that in some senses of the word nature *can’t* be a law to us while in another sense it obviously *is* so.

(1) The word ‘nature’ is often used to mean no more than ‘*some principle in man*’, with no regard for its kind or its degree. Thus, the passion of anger and the affection of parents to their children would be called equally ‘natural’. And because one person often has contrary principles pulling him in opposite directions, he can by a single action both •follow his nature and •contradict his nature, in this sense of the word; he may follow one passion and contradict another.

(2) Nature is often spoken of as consisting in the strongest passions, the ones that most influence the ·person’s· actions; and because the strongest are the vicious ones, mankind is in this sense ‘naturally vicious’ or ‘vicious by nature’ [see Glossary]. Thus St Paul says of the Gentiles, who were dead in trespasses and sins and walked according to the spirit of disobedience that they were ‘by nature the children of wrath’ [Ephesians 2:3]. The only way they could be children of wrath by nature is by being vicious by nature.

Here, then, are two different senses of the word ‘nature’, in neither of which men can at all be said to be ·by their nature· a law to themselves. I mention them only to set them aside, so as to prevent their being mixed up—as **(2)** is in The Objection—with another sense of it, which I shall now inquire into and explain.

(3) ·In The Text· [page 19] the apostle says that the Gentiles ‘do *by nature* the things contained in the law’. He puts ‘nature’ in here to distinguish this from revelation, ·i.e. from the thesis that revelation leads them to do the things contained in the law·; but it isn’t a mere negative. St Paul is not only saying what *didn’t* lead them to conform to the law but also saying what *did*, namely nature. The word ‘nature’

clearly doesn't mean the same in this passage as it did in the earlier one from *Ephesians*, where nature is spoken of as evil; for in this *Romans* passage it is spoken of as good, i.e. as something that did or could have led them to act virtuously. What that is in man by which he is naturally a law to himself is explained in the following words:

... which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. [*Romans* 2:15, just after The Text]

If there's any distinction to be made between **(i)** the 'works written in their hearts' and **(ii)** the witness of 'conscience' it will have to be this:

(i) What is written in their hearts must be the natural disposition to kindness and compassion, to do what is respected and praised, to which this apostle often refers; the part of the nature of man. . . .that leads him—with very little reflection and as a matter of course—into society, and by means of which he naturally acts rightly and well in it except when other passions or self-interest lead him astray. But other passions and concerns for our own interests, which lead us. . . .astray, are themselves in a degree equally natural and often most prevalent; and we have no way of discovering the particular degrees in which one or the other is placed in us by nature; so the naturally kind content of our hearts can't be a law to us, any more than the other passions and concerns can be. But there is a superior principle of reflection or

(ii) conscience in every man, which distinguishes amongst the internal principles of his heart as well as amongst his external actions; which passes judgment upon himself and them, crisply pronouncing some actions to be in themselves just, right, good and others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust; which without being consulted or asked for advice

magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns the person whose actions they are. (And which if it isn't forcibly stopped will naturally and as a matter of course always go on to anticipate a higher and more effective sentence that will at a later time confirm and affirm its own. But dealing explicitly with this last part of the task of conscience—the part of looking ahead to God's eventual confirming judgment—is beyond my present design.) It is through this natural faculty that man is a moral agent, a law to himself. Through this faculty, I repeat, not considered merely as one principle in man's heart that is to have some influence along with the others; but considered as a faculty that is in kind and in nature [Butler's phrase] supreme over all the others, and bears its own authority of being so.

This. . . .natural supremacy of the faculty that surveys and approves or disapproves the various affections of our mind and actions of our lives. . . .deserves to be further explained to you; and I hope you will find it explained if you attend to the following reflections.

A man can act according to the principle or inclination that is currently the strongest and yet act in a way that. . . .violates his real personal nature. Suppose a fox or some other lower animal is lured into a snare by some bait, and is then destroyed: he clearly follows the bent of his nature, leading him to satisfy his appetite. His action is natural, because it entirely corresponds to his whole nature. Now suppose that a man *who foresees that same danger of certain ruin* nevertheless rushes into it for the sake of a present gratification; he is following his strongest desire, as did the fox; but there's a conspicuous disproportion [= 'mis-match', 'failure of fit'] between this action and the man's nature—as conspicuous as that between a random scribble by me and a masterpiece by Leonardo. I am not talking about the action in itself, or about its consequences, but

only about •its relation to the man’s nature. And since such an action is utterly disproportionate to the nature of man, it is *unnatural*, in the strictest and most proper sense of that word. So now we can replace the phrase ‘disproportionate to his nature’ by the more familiar term ‘unnatural’, but do bear in mind that those mean the exactly same thing.

Now, what makes such a rash action unnatural? That he went against the principle of reasonable cool self-love, considered *merely* as a part of his nature? No: for if he had acted differently he would equally have gone against a principle or part of his nature, namely passion or appetite—the passion or appetite that did in fact lead to the action we are discussing. But there’s nothing unnatural about

(a) denying a **present appetite** because one sees that satisfying it would immediately lead to ruin or extreme misery.

Whereas in the case we are discussing it is unnatural to

(b) contradict or go against **cool self-love** for the sake of satisfying a present appetite.

So the unnaturalness of the action in (b) doesn’t come from •the man’s going against some principle or desire, or from •his going against the principle or desire that happens to be currently the strongest; because each of those is equally true of (a). So passions and appetites must differ from cool self-love in some way that I haven’t yet mentioned. It’s not a difference in strength or degree; I call it a difference in nature and in kind. In our present cases, if (b) passion prevails over self-love, the action is unnatural; but if (a) self-love prevails over passion, the action is natural; so it’s clear that self-love is in human nature a superior principle to passion. A passion can, whereas self-love can’t, be contradicted without violating the man’s nature; so if we want to act in a way that fits, goes with, harmonizes with the economy [see Glossary] of man’s nature, reasonable self-love must govern. So we can have

a clear conception of one inward principle’s superiority to another; we see that this is a natural superiority, quite distinct from degrees of strength; and we have reached this result without saying anything about conscience.

Let us now look at human nature as consisting partly of •appetites, passions, affections, and partly of •the principle of reflection or conscience; leaving out all consideration of the different degrees of strength they need in order to prevail; and we’ll see again that there is this natural superiority of one inner principle over another, or that this superiority is even part of the idea of reflection or conscience.

Passion or appetite implies a direct simple tendency towards such-and-such objects, with no thought of the means by which they are to be obtained. So there will often be a desire for some particular objects, in a situation where they can’t be had without obvious harm to others. Reflection—i.e. conscience—comes in, and disapproves the pursuit of them in these circumstances; but the desire remains. Which is to be obeyed, appetite or reflection? Can’t this question be answered just on the basis of the economy and constitution of human nature, without saying which is strongest? Wouldn’t the question be intelligibly and fully answered by saying this?—

The principle of reflection or conscience is obviously superior to men’s various appetites, passions, and affections, independently of how they may differ in strength. However often the passions etc. happen to prevail, when they do that is mere usurpation, •i.e. seizing power that you aren’t entitled to. Conscience is still in nature and in kind its superior; and every case of such prevalence of passion etc. is a case of breaking in upon and violating the constitution of man.

All this is just the distinction between mere (i) power

and **(ii)** authority. Everyone is familiar with this distinction, though usually to mark the difference between what is **(i)** possible and what is **(ii)** permitted by the law of the land; whereas I have been applying it to the various principles in the mind of man. Thus, the principle that leads us to survey our own heart, temperament, and actions and either approve or disapprove of them, is to be considered not only as **(i)** having some influence (you can say *that* much about every passion and appetite, even the lowest), but also as **(ii)** being superior—as from its very nature plainly claiming superiority over all others. You can't form a notion of this faculty, conscience, without bringing in the notions of judgment, direction, supervision. This is a constituent part of the idea, i.e. of the faculty itself; the very economy and constitution of man requires that conscience presides and governs; if it had strength to match its right, if it had power to match its obvious authority, conscience would absolutely govern the world!

This tells us more about the nature of man. It shows us what course of life we were made for; not only that

- our real nature leads us to be influenced in some degree by reflection and conscience,

but similarly

- to what extent we are to be influenced by it if we are willing to go along with the constitution of our nature and act agreeably to it,

and also that

- this faculty was placed within us to be our personal governor—to direct and regulate all our under-principles, passions and motives of action.

This is its right and its assigned task; so its authority is sacred. And however often men violate it and rebelliously refuse to submit to it, for the sake of supposed personal interests that they can't otherwise pursue, or for the sake

of a passion that they can't otherwise satisfy, this makes no difference to the natural right and the assigned task of conscience.

Let us now view the whole matter from a different angle.

•For purposes of inquiry•, suppose that this is true;

There is no such thing as this supremacy of conscience. The only difference between one inner principle and another is a difference not in authority but in strength.

What would be the consequence of this?

•EXPLORING THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FALSEHOOD•

•For example•: How far can man go in his actions with regard to •himself, •his fellow-creatures, and •the Supreme Being? What limits are there other than those set by the limits on our natural power? With respect to the first two, the only further limits are these:

No man **(c)** seeks misery as such for himself, and no-one who hasn't been provoked **(b)** does harm to someone else for the sake of doing it.

Within those bounds, men knowingly (from passion or wantonness) **(a)** bring ruin and misery upon themselves and **(b)** upon others; and **(c)** impiety and profaneness (I mean what would be counted as impiety and profaneness by everyone who believes that God exists) have absolutely no bounds at all. Men openly blaspheme against the Author of nature, renouncing in words their allegiance to their Creator. Now consider any concrete example of any one of these three (I shall take just two of them•). **(c)** Even if we suppose that men don't actually *mean* anything by it, their routinely profane swearing etc. implies wanton disregard and irreverence towards an infinite Being, our Creator. Is this as suitable to the nature of man as reverence and dutiful submission of heart towards that Almighty Being? **(b)** Or take the case of someone who murders his father in an utterly cruel way:

he will have done this because its principle [see Glossary] was at that moment the strongest; and if inner principles differ from one another only in strength, that's all there is to be said about this man's inner nature at the time of his crime. So his action clearly corresponds to the principle which at that moment had such-and-such a degree of strength, so it corresponds to the whole nature of the man. We set the action alongside the whole nature, and we see no disproportion, no unsuitableness between them, any more than there is a disproportion between an act of filial duty and the nature at that time of the man who performs it. We can't distinguish the murder from the action of filial duty, considered as the actions of the men who perform them, and must in our coolest hours approve or disapprove them equally. Nothing could come down to a greater absurdity than that.

That ends sermon 2. Sermon 3 now flows straight on, under the same title and with no new Biblical text.

Having established the natural supremacy of reflection or conscience, we can use this to get a clear notion of what is meant by 'human nature' when virtue is said to consist in following human nature and vice in deviating from it.

·For purposes of comparison, let us start with· the idea of a civil constitution, ·i.e. an organised political entity of some kind·. This involves

- united strength, and
- various subordinations (·downward-sloping lines of authority·)
- under the sole direction of the supreme authority.

The different strengths of each particular member of the society doesn't come into the idea of it; but if you leave out •the subordination, •the union, and •the one direction, nothing is left of the idea of a civil constitution. Similarly, the

idea or notion of human nature doesn't involve the different strengths of the various appetites, passions, and affections; but ·the idea of· human nature *does* involve •these principles considered as naturally related to each other, and the various passions' being naturally •subordinate to the one superior principle of reflection or conscience. Every inner bias, instinct, and propensity is a real part of our nature, but ·the totality of those is· not the whole of human nature; add to them the *naturally* superior faculty whose role it is to adjust, manage, and preside over them, and you complete the idea of human nature. Just as

in civil government the constitution is broken in upon and violated when power and strength prevail over authority,

so also

the constitution of man is broken in upon and violated when the lower faculties or principles within prevail over the one that is naturally supreme over them all.

Thus, when the ancient writers said that torture and death are not as contrary to human nature as injustice is, they certainly didn't mean that mankind are less averse to torture and death than to injustice! What they meant was that torture and death are contrary to our nature only on a *partial* view of it, a view that takes in only the lowest part of our nature, the part that we have in common with the lower animals; whereas injustice is contrary to our nature considered as a system and constitution, i.e. contrary to the whole economy of man. [The next paragraph is a footnote in the original.]

·A FOOTNOTE ABOUT 'SYSTEM OR CONSTITUTION·'

Every man in his physical nature is one individual single agent. It's also true that he has ·inner· properties and principles each of which can be considered separately, setting aside its relations to the others. Neither of these—the physical

unity or the jumble of inner principles—is the *nature* that we are considering. What makes human nature is the inner frame of man considered as a system or constitution, whose various parts are united not physically but by the relations they have to each other. And the chief relation is the subordination of •the appetites, passions, and particular affections to •the one supreme principle of reflection or conscience. These relations and this subordination create the system or constitution; they *are* the system or constitution. Thus, the •human• body is a system or constitution; so is a tree; so is every machine. If you think about all the parts of a tree without bringing in their natural relations to one another, that won't give you the idea of a tree; but if you add these relations, you *do* have that idea. The body can be impaired by sickness, a tree can decay, a machine can be out of order, without their system and constitution being totally dissolved. And there's clearly something analogous to all this in the moral constitution of man. Consider your own nature and you'll see that the various appetites, passions, and particular affections have different relations amongst themselves: they restrain one another, and are proportional to one another. This proportion is just and perfect when all the under-principles perfectly coincide with conscience as far as their nature permits, and are always under its absolute and entire direction. If any of the under-principles is out of proportion to others or in any way fails to square with conscience, even if this doesn't generate any action it is still a degree of disorder [roughly = 'sickness'] in the moral constitution. But perfection, though plainly intelligible and supposable, has never been achieved by any man. If the higher principle of reflection •or conscience• keeps its place, and does what it can to correct any disorder, and hinders it from breaking out into action, that's the most that can be expected in a creature such as man. And though the

appetites and passions don't have exactly the proportions to each other that they should—though they often try to overcome judgment or reflection •or conscience•—as long as they fail in this, i.e. as long as conscience retains its superiority, the character, the man, is good and worthy and virtuous.

•END OF FOOTNOTE•

From all these things put together, nothing can be more obvious than that—quite apart from anything we know from revelation—man can't be regarded as a creature left by his Maker to act at random, throwing himself around (to the extent of his natural power) in whatever direction he happens to be taken by passion, mood or wilfulness. . . ., but that from his constitution or nature he is the strictest and most proper sense 'a law to himself'. He has the rule of right within him; all that's needed is for him honestly to attend to it.

Some men of leisure have searched for a general rule in terms of which to characterise our actions as good or bad—according to whether they conform to it or clash with it—and this work of theirs has been useful in many ways. [Why 'men of leisure'? Perhaps this was a crack at Shaftesbury, who was wealthy and an earl. Butler was a hard-working clergyman.] •But we don't *need* any such rule•. Let any plain honest man ask himself 'Is this thing that I am about to do right or is it wrong? Is it good or is it evil?' I haven't the slightest doubt that this question would be answered correctly—agreeably to truth and virtue—by almost any **fair**-minded man in almost any circumstances. The only apparent exceptions to this involve •superstition or •partiality to ourselves [= 'letting ourselves down lightly']. Perhaps superstition is something of an exception: •an honest man might have some superstitious belief that leads him to think *wrongly* that what he is about to do is right—e.g. the belief that God had just told him to cut his son's throat [*Genesis* 22:1–12]•. But partiality to ourselves is

not an exception to my generalisation about how an **honest** man would answer the right/wrong question, because such partiality is itself **dishonesty**. For a man to think ‘What I am about to do is fair, moderate, right’ when it is an action that he would regard as hard, unjust, oppressive if someone else performed it—that is just plain bad behaviour and can only come from great **unfairness** of mind.

Granting that every man has the rule of right within himself, you may want to ask: ‘What obligations are we under to attend to this rule and to obey it?’ My answer comes from something I have already proved:

Man is by his nature a law unto himself, a law that he is aware of without thinking explicitly about the rewards and punishments that we feel to be associated with it or the ones that we are led by the light of reason to believe are associated with it.

[Butler calls these rewards and punishments ‘positive sanctions’ of the law in question, where ‘positive’ means ‘decided by *someone*’; in the present context the thought is ‘rewards/punishments’ associated with right/wrong behaviour by the decision of humans or of God.]

The question then carries its own answer along with it. What obliges you to obey this law?—its being *the law of your nature*. That your conscience approves of such a course of action is, just in itself, an obligation. Conscience doesn’t merely offer to show us the path we should take but also carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide. [In that sentence, the last bit—‘carries. . . guide’—is verbatim Butler.] It is the guide assigned to us by the Author of our nature; so it belongs to our condition of being [Butler’s phrase]; it is our duty to walk that path and follow this guide, without looking to see whether we might get away with straying from the path.

Still, we should hear what is to be said *against* obeying this law of our nature. It boils down to merely this:

‘Why should we be concerned about anything but ourselves? If we do find within ourselves regards to [see Glossary] others and all sorts of different restraints, these are just obstacles that hinder us from going the shortest way to our own good; so why shouldn’t we try to suppress and get rid of them?’

That’s the sort of thing that some people *say*; but when we apply it to human nature and the condition it is placed in, these words are really meaningless. It all presupposes that our happiness in this world consists in something other than regards to others, and that vice has the privilege of not being restrained or confined. The truth is quite the opposite: our enjoyments—in a way, *all* the common enjoyments of life including the pleasures of vice!—involve one or another kind of regards to our fellow-creatures. If we threw off all regards to others, we would be quite indifferent to disgrace and honour; there could be no such thing as ambition, and hardly any such thing as the desire for wealth. Why not? Because we wouldn’t care about the disgrace of poverty, the various neglects and kinds of contempt that come with poverty, or about the reputation of riches, the attention and respect they usually procure. And don’t think of ‘restraint’ as a purely moral affair. Far from its being a special feature of one course of life, restraint is made absolutely necessary by our very nature and our situation. We can’t achieve *anything* without restraining ourselves to the use of the proper means to our goal, and that confinement is often painful and distressing. And in countless cases a present appetite can’t be satisfied without such obvious and immediate ruin and misery that the most dissolute man in the world chooses to forego the pleasure rather than endure the pain.

So the people I am opposing *can’t* mean what their words mean! Perhaps they really mean:

We should •indulge the regards to our fellow-creatures, and submit to the restraints, which on the whole bring more satisfaction than unpleasantness, and get rid of only the ones which bring more unpleasantness and inconvenience than satisfaction.

‘Doubtless this was our meaning’, •they may say. Well, then, you have changed sides! Keep to this—be consistent with yourselves—and your *general* position will be exactly the same as that of the men of virtue. But let’s be careful to avoid mistakes. Don’t take it for granted that a temperament of envy, rage, resentment, produces more delight than comes from meekness, forgiveness, compassion, and good-will, especially given that, as everyone admits,

- rage, envy, resentment, are in themselves mere misery; and the satisfaction you can get from a bout of rage or the like doesn’t amount to much more than the pleasure of having it come to an end; whereas
- the temperament of compassion and benevolence is in itself delightful; and when you indulge it by doing good you’ll get new positive delight and enjoyment.

Don’t take it for granted that your satisfaction in the reputation and respect you can get from being rich and powerful (however your wealth and power were obtained) is greater than the satisfaction you can get from a reputation for justice, honesty, charity, and from the esteem that everyone agrees to be their due. And if it’s doubtful which of these satisfactions is the greater (and some people think that neither of them amounts to much), there can’t be any doubt concerning •ambition and greed as contrasted with •virtue and a good mind, considered in themselves and as leading to different courses of life. There can be no doubt, I repeat, which of these two temperaments and courses of life is accompanied by more peace and tranquility of mind, and which by more

perplexity, vexation, and inconvenience. And both the virtues and the vices that I have mentioned equally involve one or another sort of regards to our fellow-creatures. As for restraint and confinement: if you think about the restraints that come with almost every kind of vice you’ll soon be convinced that the man of virtue is by no means at a disadvantage in this respect! I mean such restraints as go with:

- fear and shame,
- dissimulation [= ‘faking’],
- low-down tricks of concealment,
- servile compliances [= ‘feebly going along with what someone else wants you to do’].

How often does it happen that men feel the chains of vice that grip them, admit that they are there, and cry aloud against them, yet won’t shake them off? How often does someone obviously suffer more pain and self-denial to •satisfy a vicious passion than would have been needed to •conquer it? And there’s also this point: when virtue has become habitual, when a virtuous temperament is acquired, ways of behaving that used to be *confining* stop being so because they come to be chosen and to give delight. . . . It is obvious that in everyday life there is rarely any inconsistency between our duty and what is •called •self-interest. It is even rarer for there to be an inconsistency between duty and what is •really our present interest; meaning by ‘interest’ happiness and satisfaction. Thus, even when we think of •self-love only in relation to our interests in the present [see Glossary] world, we still find that •it does in general perfectly coincide with virtue, so that self-love and virtue lead us to the very same course of life. Whatever exceptions there are to this (and there are nowhere near as many as is often thought), they’ll be set right at the final distribution of things. To think that in a world administered by a perfect mind, evil will finally prevail over good—what an absurd idea!

The whole argument that I have been pressing can be summed up and given to you in one view, as follows. The nature of man is adapted to some course action or other. Some actions appear to be suitable to this nature, and to correspond to it; other actions show up as unsuitable to man's nature, or disproportionate to it. The former set of actions are natural; the other set are unnatural. An action's corresponding to the nature of the agent doesn't come from its being agreeable to the currently strongest principle [see Glossary]; an action may be quite in tune with the strongest principle while also being quite disproportionate to the nature of the agent. So the correspondence or disproportion has some other source. What it must be is a difference in nature and kind between the inner principles ·that cause the actions in question·—and I don't mean a difference in how strong they are. Therefore, some ·principles· are •superior in nature and kind to others. And the correspondence comes from the action's being conformable to the •higher principle; and the unsuitableness from its being contrary

to it. •Reasonable self-love and •conscience are the chief or superior principles in human nature, because an action can be suitable to this nature while violating every other principle, but an action by which either of those two is violated is unsuitable. Conscience and self-love, if we understand our true happiness, always lead us the same way. Duty and ·self·-interest are coincide—

- usually, in this world, and
- entirely and always if we take into account everything, including our life after death

because this is implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things. Thus, anyone who has been so worldly-wise as to be concerned only with his own supposed ·self·-interest, at the expense of others, will eventually discover that he hasn't provided for his own ·self·-interest and happiness anything like as well as has someone who has given up all the advantages of the present [see Glossary] world, rather than violate his conscience and the relations of life.

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...