

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.