

Three Essays

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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 three items from Butler’s *The Analogy of Religion*:

- chapter 5 of Book 1;
- an appendix discussing personal identity;
- a second appendix discussing virtue.

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Glossary

compare: Butler several times uses ‘compare’ and ‘comparison’ in a sense that is now obsolete, a sense in which to ‘compare’ two items is just to put them side by side in your thought to see how they are related; there needn’t be any question of their being in any way alike.

faculty: This can refer to an ability or to the machinery (as it were) that creates the ability—a vexatious ambiguity. The few occurrences of the word in Butler’s discussions of habit and of personal identity have nearly all been rewritten in the present version; but its many occurrences in the discussion of virtue have been allowed to stand.

future: In this work, ‘future’ always refers to the after-life, life after death.

ill desert: To speak of someone’s ‘desert’ is to speak of what he deserves. Ill desert is just someone’s deserving to have something bad happen to him—basically his deserving to be punished. In this sense of the word, incidentally, ‘desert’ is pronounced in the same way as ‘dessert’ (e.g. plum pudding) and not as ‘desert’ (e.g. the Sahara).

materially virtuous: An action is ‘materially virtuous’ if it consists in doing something that a virtuous person would do in those circumstances; but whether it is actually *virtuous* depends also on what its motive was.

patience: The passive virtue of uncomplainingly putting up with hardship.

personality: Butler often uses this to mean ‘personhood’, the quality or property or status of being-a-person, ‘personhood’ has been substituted as far as possible. But sometimes, e.g. on page 16, Butler seems to use ‘personality’ with a stronger meaning, in which something’s retaining its personality is not merely its continuing to be *a person* but its

continuing to be *the same person*. In those context, ‘personality’ is retained; it doesn’t work very well, but ‘personhood’ would be worse.

present: In Butler as in many other writers, ‘present’ is used to mean ‘before the life after death’.

principle: Butler frequently uses this word in 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.) In this present work Butler is much concerned with ‘the moral principle’ that you and I have built into our natures: it is not a moral *proposition*, and is nearer to being a moral *push*. In the fourth chapter of the *Analogy of Nature* Butler writes: ‘Besides these common passions and affections, there is another principle that men have and other animals don’t, namely conscience, moral sense, reflection—call it what you please—which enables them to review their whole conduct, to approve of some actions in themselves, and to disapprove of others.’ When on page 8 he speaks of ‘*following* the moral principle’ he is talking not about applying a proposition but rather about giving full play to a source of energy; compare ‘following an inclination’ on page 9. See the reference on page 9 to ‘exercising the virtuous principle’.

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.

1: Moral Discipline and Improvement

[This is the fifth chapter of Part 1 of Butler's *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*. In the fourth chapter he has been discussing humanity's 'state of probation'—our life considered as a try-out, a test, to show God what we are capable of. It is, Butler says, a time of 'trial, difficulties, and danger'.]

Given that we are in a probation-state that is so difficult and dangerous, the question naturally arises: How did we come to be in this state? But there are insuperable difficulties in the way of answering this question in its full scope. Some of these difficulties would be lessened by observing •that all wickedness is voluntary (as is implied in the very notion of wickedness); and •that many of life's miseries seem to have good effects; but when we consider details about how wickedness and goodness fit into our lives, and what must be the consequence in a future life of wickedness in this one, it is clear that we can't—that it would be plain folly and presumption to claim to—give an account of the whole reason for this matter, the whole reason for our being put into a condition out of which so much wickedness and misery would in fact arise. Are we capable of finding out or even of understanding the whole explanation of this? If we could understand it, would it help or harm us to have such an understanding? We can't possibly answer either question. But •we know this much•:

- Our present [see Glossary] condition can't be shown to be inconsistent with the perfect moral government of God; and
- Religion teaches us that we were put into this state so that we might by living virtuously come to qualify for another state that is to follow this one.

This is only a *very* partial answer to the initial general question, but it's a more satisfactory answer to another question, one that we really need to have answered, namely: *What is our business here?* •We can work on answering this question on the basis that• the known purpose of our being placed in a state of so much affliction, danger and difficulty is that we should achieve virtue and piety as the pre-requisite for a future [see Glossary] state of security and happiness.

At first glance there seems to be a clear analogy between these:

- (a) in our temporal [see Glossary] capacity: our years as children, considered as an education for being an adult in the present world;
- (b) in our religious capacity: our whole life in this world, considered as a time of trial for a future life.

But some observations about the two taken together, and a clearer look at each separately, will bring out more clearly the extent and force of the analogy between them, and the credibility of the thesis that the present life was intended to be a state of discipline for a future one—a credibility arising from this analogy as well as from the nature of the thing.

(1) Each species of creatures is visibly designed for a particular way of life, for which each individual needs

- (i) the nature, abilities, temperament and qualifications of its species

just as it needs

- (ii) the environment of its species .

Both •intrinsic nature and environment• come into the notion of a species' state or particular way of life, and are constituent parts of it. Change (i) a man's abilities or character as much as they conceivably could be changed and he would

be altogether incapable of a human course of life and of human happiness; and he would be equally incapable of those if, with no change in his ·intrinsic· nature, he were placed in **(ii)** a world where he had no sphere of action, and nothing to satisfy his appetites, passions, and affections of any sort. . . . Our **(i)** nature corresponds to our **(ii)** external condition, ·i.e. the two *match*·. Without this correspondence human life and human happiness would be impossible; so life and happiness result from ·our nature and our ·condition acting together. (By ‘human life’ I don’t mean ·living in the literal sense—i.e. I don’t mean merely being biologically alive·—but ·the whole complex notion commonly understood by those words.) Now, consider the situation of good men in the after-life: without specifying any details of that life—of what men will do in it and how they will be happy—we know that· there must be some specific abilities, some character and qualifications, that men must have to be capable of the after-life; just as there are some that men must have to be capable of their present state of life. Next point:

(2) The constitution of human creatures, and indeed of all creatures that we know about, is such that they can naturally become qualified for states of life for which they were once wholly unqualified. We can *conceive of* creatures that are incapable of having any of their abilities naturally enlarged, or that are unable naturally to acquire any new qualifications; but the abilities of every species known to us are made for enlargement, for the acquisition of experience and habits. [That is the first occurrence of ‘habit’ in this chapter; there will be about sixty more!] We find ourselves in particular equipped with capacities not only for perceiving ideas and having knowledge (or perceiving truth), but also for storing up our ideas and knowledge by memory. We are capable not only of **(i)** acting and of **(ii)** having different momentary impressions made upon us, but also of **(iii)** learning new

ways to act and **(iv)** undergoing fairly permanent alterations in our temperament or character. What gives us **(iii)** and **(iv)** is the power of habits. Neither the perception of ideas, nor knowledge of any sort, are habits; though they are absolutely necessary for the forming of habits. But sensory intake, reason and memory—which are the capacities for acquiring knowledge—are greatly improved by exercise. Are all these improvements cases of habit? To what extent is the power of memory similar to the power of habit? I shan’t try to answer either question, ·though I will say, with regard to the second, that there seems clearly to be *some* similarity·. Consider these two facts about us:

- (a)** Perceptions come into our minds readily and as a matter of course, because they have been there before;
- (b)** With any particular kind of action, we can do it more easily if we are accustomed to doing it.

Don’t those seem to be things of the same sort? . . . There are **(a)** habits of perception, and **(b)** habits of action. An instance of **(a)** is our constant readiness to correct the impressions of our sight concerning sizes and distances, putting ·judgment in the place of ·sensation; this needn’t be voluntary, and we often don’t even notice ourselves doing it. And it seems as if all our other associations of ideas that aren’t naturally connected could be called ‘passive habits’; they are as fit for that label as is our readiness in understanding the words that we see or hear. And our readiness in speaking and writing words is an instance of **(b)** active habits.

To keep things clear we can divide habits into habits of the body and habits of the mind; and the latter will be explained by the former. Habits of the body include all bodily activities or movements, whether graceful or awkward, that are owing to use [i.e. that the person can perform because he has often performed them in the past]. Habits of the mind include general habits of life and conduct, such as those of

- obedience and submission to authority or to any particular person;
- truthfulness, justice, and charity;
- attention, concentration, self-control, envy, revenge.

Habits of the mind and those of the body seem to be produced by repeated acts. And just as habits of the body are produced by external acts, so also habits of the mind are produced by activating inward practical principles [see Glossary] such as those of obedience, of truthfulness, of justice, and of charity. Those habits can't be formed by any external course of action unless it comes from these principles; because strictly speaking the acts of obedience, of truthfulness, of justice, and of charity are the applications of these inward principles. Habits of attention, concentration, and self-control are in the same way acquired by exercise; and habits of envy and revenge by indulgence, whether in outward act or in thought and intention (i.e. inward act, for an intention is an act). When someone *resolves* to do well, that is strictly speaking an act. And virtuous acts include •trying to drum into our own minds a practical sense of virtue, and •trying to get it into others' minds (when one has it oneself). All these, therefore, can and do contribute towards forming good habits.

But someone's going over the theory of virtue in his thoughts, talking well about it and drawing fine pictures, isn't certain to give him a habit of virtue; quite the contrary, it *may* harden his mind against virtue, making it gradually more insensible to all moral considerations—i.e. giving him a habit of moral numbness. Why should that happen? Well, it's a built-in feature of our habit-forming system that passive impressions, by being repeated, grow weaker. We are less strongly aware of thoughts [here = 'mental states'] that have often passed through the mind.

- Getting used to danger lessens fear;
- getting used to distress lessens the passion of pity;
- getting used to instances of others' mortality lessens anxious feelings about our own.

So we have this double result: practical habits are formed and strengthened by repeated acts, and passive impressions grow weaker by being repeated upon us. From this it follows that active habits can gradually form and strengthen by a course of acting on such-and-such motives and incentives, while these motives and incentives themselves correspondingly fade from our awareness. . . . And experience confirms this: we find that at the very time when active principles are less lively in perception than they were, they are somehow worked into our temperament and character and are becoming more effective in influencing our conduct. The three things just mentioned [in the indented passage above] provide instances of this. Perception of **danger** is a natural spur to passive fear and active caution: and by becoming used to danger, habits of caution are gradually constructed while fear gradually lessens. Perception of **distress** in others is a natural spur passively to pity and actively to relieve the distress; but if a man sets himself to attend to distressed persons, to find and help them, he'll be unable to help being less and less affected in his feelings by the various miseries of life that he has to deal with; while at the same time his benevolence—not a passion but a practical principle of action—will strengthen. [In that sentence and elsewhere, it is important that 'passive' and 'passion' are next of kin.] While his passive compassion for distressed people lessens, he will acquire a greater aptitude actively to assist and befriend them. Also, at the same time that the daily instances of men's **dying** around us gradually weaken our •passive anxiety about our own mortality, they greatly contribute to strengthening a practical concern for it in serious men;

i.e. to forming a habit of •acting with a constant view to it. And this seems to show yet again that passive impressions made upon our minds by scolding, experience, and example may be very effective (at a distance) in helping to form active habits, but it can do this only by inducing us to *act* in certain ways. And bear in mind that when we seriously try to enforce good impressions on ourselves we are engaged in a kind of virtuous *action*. To what extent is it possible that the same results that we get through use and exercise—i.e. through habit—might be achieved in some more immediate way? We don't know. But my present concern is not with what may be *possible* but with what is *in fact* the nature's way of doing things, and that is: **active habits are to be formed by exercise**. Their progress may be so gradual that we aren't aware of the habit's forming; regarding the system that makes us capable of having habits, it may be hard to explain it throughout its various parts and track it back to its source so as to distinguish it from all other systems in our mind; and it seems as if contrary effects were to be ascribed to it. But •despite these limitations on our knowledge of the details•, the general thesis that our nature is formed to be affected in some such manner as this by use and exercise is a matter of certain experience.

Thus, by getting used to a course of action we become more apt to do it again, finding it easier and more natural to us and often getting pleasure from it. The inclinations that used to turn us against it grow weaker; the difficulties in it—not only the imaginary but also the real ones—lessen; the reasons for it come automatically into our minds on all occasions; and the least glimpse of those reasons is enough to make us go on with the course of action in question. And practical principles appear to grow stronger through exercise; I mean absolutely and not just relatively stronger, i.e. stronger •considered in themselves and not

merely stronger •in relation to contrary principles (which will be progressively weakened by their habit of giving way). In this way one can acquire a character that is *new* in many respects, with many ways of living and behaving that nature doesn't give us but does show us how to acquire.

(3) As regards the capacities we have for improving •ourselves• by experience, acquired knowledge, and habits—we can be sure that we wouldn't have had them if they weren't •necessary and •intended to be used. In fact we find them to be *so* necessary and *so much* intended that if we didn't have them we would be utterly incapable of achieving the goal that we were made for in our temporal capacity, namely the employments and satisfactions of our mature state of life.

Nature doesn't qualify us wholly, let alone doing it all at once, for this mature state of life. Even maturity of understanding and bodily strength are achieved only gradually and only through the continued exercise of our powers of body and mind from infancy. But let us suppose—as far as we can—a person brought into the world with his understanding and his bodily strength in their mature states; obviously he would at first be as unqualified for the life of a mature human as an idiot. He would be beside himself with astonishment, anxiety, curiosity, and suspense; and there's no telling how long it would take for him to become familiar enough with himself and with his environment to be able even to *try* to perform any task. And there's also a question as to whether the natural information of his sight and hearing would be any use at all to him in acting, before he had a course of experience behind him. It seems also that men would be extremely headstrong and self-willed, and disposed to dash at things impetuously in a way that would make society insupportable and impossible to live in, if they didn't have some *acquired* moderation and self-control,

some aptitude and readiness to restrain themselves and conceal their immediate feelings. A lack of everything of this kind—this *learned* kind—would make a man as unfit for society as a lack of language would. (Comparably, his natural ignorance of ship-building, for example, would make him unable to build a ship or even to provide himself with the materials for doing so.) In these respects, and probably in many others that we have no particular notion of, mankind is left by nature as an unformed, unfinished creature. . . .

Now, just as nature has equipped us with the power to make good those deficiencies by acquired knowledge, experience, and habits, so also we are placed in a condition—in infancy, childhood, and youth—that fits us for acquiring the various qualifications that we need in mature age. Hence children right from their birth become increasingly familiar, day by day, with the objects around them and with the human scene in which they are placed and in which they will some day have a part—and learning things that are needed for them to take that part. The lines of authority they are accustomed to in life at home teach them self-control in their common behaviour elsewhere, and prepare them for deference and obedience to civil authority. What they see and what happens to them gives them experience, caution against treachery and deceit, and with countless little rules of conduct that we couldn't live without. These rules are learnt so insensibly and so perfectly that they may be mistaken for instinct, though really they are the effect of long experience and exercise; as much so as language, or knowledge of (for example) ship-building, or the qualifications and behaviour appropriate to the various social levels and professions. Thus our early years are adapted to be, and *are*, a state of education in the theory and practice of mature life. We are greatly helped in this by example, instruction, and the care of others; but a great deal is left for us to do for ourselves.

Some of this is done easily and as a matter of course; but some requires diligence and care, voluntarily going without many things that we desire, and undertaking things that we wouldn't want to do if they weren't prudent or necessary. For people would be greatly unqualified for the work that is absolutely required by their station in life if they weren't accustomed to it in their youth. And how people conduct themselves in the general education that we all go through, and in the particular educations for particular employments, is an essential preliminary to their taking up their various positions in human society: in forming their character it equips them for those roles, and in displaying their character it contributes to the selection process.

[This paragraph echoes the **(a)** and **(b)** on page 1.] So the early part of life should be regarded as an important opportunity that nature puts into our hands; if the opportunity isn't taken then, it won't come round again. And

(b) our being placed throughout this life in a state of discipline in preparation for another world
is a providential arrangement of exactly the same kind as

(a) our being placed during childhood in a state of discipline in preparation for mature age.

Our condition in both respects is uniform and all of a piece, and covered by one and the same general law of nature.

Even if we couldn't at all see *how* the present life could be our preparation for another life, that wouldn't count against the credibility of its being so. We don't see *how* food and sleep contribute to the growth of the body; and we couldn't have any thought that they would do so until we had relevant experience. And children have no idea that the sports and other play to which they are so much addicted contribute to their health and growth; and no idea of the necessity that there is for their play to be restrained; nor could they understand the point of the elements of discipline that they

must be made to submit to in order to qualify them for adult life. So even if we couldn't discover *how* the present life could make us ready for a future one, it would be eminently supposable that it might do so *somehow*, just on the basis of the general analogy of Providence. And as far as I can see this could reasonably be said even if we **left out** any consideration of God's moral government over the world. But:

(4) Take in this consideration, and with it the thesis that what we need to be qualified for the future state is virtue and piety, and then we can clearly see how—in what detailed ways—the present life can be a preparation for the future one. We are lacking in virtue and piety, and can be improved in that respect by moral and religious habits; and the present life is fit to be a state of discipline for such improvement. Compare this with how and in what respects infancy, childhood, and youth are a necessary preparation. . . .for adult life.

Nothing that we see at present would lead us to the thought of an after-life in which we will be •solitary and •inactive; but if we judge at all from the analogy of nature, we must suppose that the after-life will be a community (which is what Scripture says it will be). And there's nothing even faintly unreasonable about thinking of this community as being under the more immediate. . . .government of God. (That is how Scripture represents it; it isn't supported by any analogy.) We don't know

- what our activities will be in this happy community, or therefore
- what particular scope or occasion there will be for the members of the community to be truthful, just, and charitable in their relations with one another;

but that isn't a proof that there won't be any sphere of exercise for those virtues. . . . This general thesis at least must be

admitted: as the government established in the universe is moral, the character of virtue and piety must *somehow* be the •condition of our happiness or the •qualification for it—i.e. something without which we •can't be happy, or without which we •don't deserve to be happy, in the after-life.

From what I have said about our natural capacity for habits, it's easy to see that we are capable of moral improvement through discipline. And how greatly we are in need of this doesn't have to be proved to anyone who is acquainted with •the great wickedness of mankind, or even with •the imperfections that the best people are conscious of •within themselves. But perhaps not everyone is clearly aware that what gives human creatures a need for discipline to improve their virtue and piety can be tracked further back than to •excess in the passions, namely to •indulgence and habits of vice. It is true of mankind and perhaps of all finite creatures that they are constitutionally defective and in danger of deviating from what is right, and therefore to develop virtuous habits as a security against this danger. We have built into us, along with the general principle [see Glossary] of moral understanding, various affections towards particular external objects. The moral principle naturally and rightly governs these affections, laying down what the occasions are on which they may be gratified—when and how far and in what way the objects of them may be pursued—but the principle of virtue can't •arouse these affections or •prevent their being aroused. On the contrary, when the object of such an affection is present to the mind, the affection is naturally felt, not only without considering whether it can be obtained by lawful means but even after it is found that it can't! For the natural objects of affection continue to be so; the necessities, conveniences, and pleasures of life remain naturally desirable even when they can't be obtained innocently—indeed, even when they can't possibly

be obtained at all. And when the object of an affection of someone's can't be lawfully obtained but can be obtained unlawfully, it's impossible not to think of the person as having some tendency to venture on such unlawful means. (Note that this concerns his acting on the affection, not his *having* it, which may be innocent and natural and even necessary.) So we must see him as in some danger of acting wrongly in this matter. What is the general security against this danger, against the person's actually straying from the right path? The security must come, as the danger did, from within the person—from the practical principle of virtue within him. And strengthening or improving this principle considered as a principle of *action* will lessen the danger, or increase the security against it. And this moral principle *can* be improved by proper discipline and exercise:

- by calling to mind the practical impressions that examples and experience have made on us;
- by continually raising the question 'What is it *right* for me to do?' in every practical context, large or small, rather than following our mood and mere inclination;
- by getting used to *always* acting on the moral principle, because it is the just and natural motive of action and because this moral course of behaviour *must*—given God's government of the world—be ultimately in our interest.

So we can improve the principle of virtue within us, by turning it into a habit; and this will clearly be a security against the danger that finite creatures are in because of the very nature of propensities or of particular affections, .i.e. because propensities and affections are essentially pushes and pulls. How good a security? That depends on the strength of the habit. . . .

From these things we can see. . . .how it comes about that •creatures who were made upright fall, and that •those

who preserve their uprightness thereby raise themselves to a more secure state of virtue.

•**Why does an upright creature fall?**• To say that it is accounted for by the nature of liberty is merely to say that an event's actually happening is accounted for by the possibility of its happening! [That is based on Butler's view that to say 'He is free to do x' or 'He has the liberty to do x' is merely to say 'His doing x is possible'.] But •we can do a lot better than that, because• the very nature of particular affections or propensities makes it distinctly conceivable •and even unsurprising that moral failure should occur•. Start with the following complex state of affairs:

- There are creatures intended for a particular state of life for which such-and-such propensities are necessary;
- they do have such propensities;
- they also have moral understanding, including a practical sense of virtue as well as a theoretical perception of it; and
- all these active elements (both natural and moral) forming an inward constitution of mind are in proportions *exactly* right for their intended state of life.

These are creatures who have been made upright, or perfect so far as finite beings *can* be perfect. Now, when an F object is present to someone who has a propensity for F objects, he is certain to *feel* •the propensity, even if in the present situation it is impossible or would be immoral for him to gratify •it. That •isn't an empirical generalisation; it• follows from the very nature of propensities. But if the propensity can be gratified by flouting morality, it must be conceived to have some tendency—perhaps not much, but still *some*—to induce the person to gratify it. The more often a particular propensity is aroused, the stronger is the tendency to gratify it. Any episode of immorally giving in to the propensity, even

if only in thought, will increase this wrong tendency [Butler's phrase], and may eventually increase it to the point where, perhaps with help from the details of a particular situation, the tendency leads to action, and danger of deviating from right ends in actual deviation from it. Because the danger arose necessarily from the very nature of propensities, it was unavoidable; but it might have been escaped, or innocently passed through. . . .

Now, it is impossible to say how much the first full overt act of irregularity might

disorder the inward constitution, unsettle the adjustments and alter the proportions that formed it and gave it its uprightness;

but we can say with confidence that repetition of irregularities would produce *habits*; and so the person's constitution would be spoiled, and a creature who was made upright would become corrupt and depraved in his settled character. *How* corrupt and depraved? That would depend on *how often* he had performed individual immoral acts.

How does an upright creature improve himself? On the other hand, these creatures could have improved and raised themselves to a higher and more secure state of virtue by acting in the opposite way—by steadily following the moral principle that we are supposing to be one part of their nature, thereby resisting the danger of defection that inevitably arose from the propensities that are the other part. As they preserved their integrity for some time, their danger would lessen. Here is why:

- (1) Their propensities would become accustomed to giving in, i.e. not prevailing, and so they would do this more easily and as a matter of course.
- (2) Their protection against this lessening danger would increase, because their moral principle would grow stronger through exercise.

The notion of 'virtuous habits' involves both of those things—weak temptations and strong defences against them. Immorally giving in to temptation, then, is not only wrong in itself but also does moral harm to the inward constitution and character. And virtuous self-control is not only right in itself but also improves the inward constitution or character; and may improve it so much that—although

we may think it impossible for particular affections and propensities to coincide perfectly with the moral principle; and we should therefore allow that the creatures we are supposing would *always* be capable of going wrong

—their danger of actually going wrong may be almost infinitely lessened. . . . But still, their higher perfection may continue to consist in (1) habits of virtue formed in a state of discipline and (2) their more complete security against moral dangers.

Thus it is clearly conceivable that creatures who came out of the hands of God in a spotless condition may be in danger of going wrong, and may therefore need the security of virtuous habits as well as the moral principle that God built into their natures. Anything that creates their danger or lessens their defences can be regarded as a deficiency in them, which virtuous habits naturally make up for. And because they are naturally capable of being raised and improved by discipline, it may be appropriate and useful for them to be placed in circumstances. . . . that are specially fitted to work for them as a state of discipline for their improvement in virtue.

But won't this hold even more strongly with respect to people who have corrupted their natures and fallen from their original uprightness, and whose passions have become excessive through repeated violations of their inward constitution? Upright creatures may need to be improved:

depraved creatures do need to be renewed. Education and discipline are worthwhile for the upright, but are absolutely necessary for the depraved. There is no one kind of discipline, and no one place for discipline to be on the scale from gentle to severe; but for depraved people the discipline needs to be pretty severe. . . .so as to •wear out vicious habits, to •recover the people’s original power of self-control which has been weakened through indulgence, and to •repair the moral principle in them and make it habitual with them, so as to bring them to a secure state of virtuous happiness.

If you think about it carefully you’ll see that the present [see Glossary] world is excellently fitted to be a state of discipline for this purpose, for anyone who will tackle the task of mending and improving himself. Think about these—

- the various temptations we are surrounded by;
- our experience of the deceits of wickedness;
- our having often been led wrong ourselves;
- the enormous amount of wrongdoing in the world;
- the countless disorders arising from that;
- our encounters with pain and sorrow, either feeling them ourselves or seeing them in others

—some of these things may indeed have a bad effect on our minds, but all of them when duly reflected upon have a direct tendency to bring us to a settled moderation and reasonableness of temperament, a state that is the opposite of two things that are visibly present in undisciplined minds: •thoughtless levity, and •unrestrained self-will and a violent tendency to follow present inclination. Our experience from our present state of

- the frailty of our nature,
- the boundless extravagance of uncontrolled passion,
- the power that an infinite Being has over us, and
- the various capacities for misery that he has given us

—in short, the kind and amount of evidence our experience

gives us that the constitution of nature allows that creatures could—are likely to—actually do—lose their innocence and happiness and become vicious and wretched—is apt to give us a **practical** sense of things very different from mere **theoretical** knowledge, that we are liable to vice and capable of misery. As for the •moral• security of creatures who are in the highest and most settled state of perfection—mightn’t they have reached that pinnacle partly through having had a sense of things such as I have been describing, formed and habitually fixed within them, in some state of probation? And passing through the present world with the moral attentiveness that is needed for acting rightly in it may leave everlasting impressions of this sort upon *our* minds •too•.

Let me put this a little more clearly. The present world is especially fit to be a state of discipline, for those who want to preserve their integrity, because of the snares and temptations of vice that it offers:

- the attractiveness of wrong conduct,
- difficulties in the doing of our duty,
- the need for some thought and care if we are to stay steadily on the path of right conduct, and
- the opportunities that we have (or imagine we have) for satisfying our desires by unlawful means, when we can’t satisfy them—or not so easily—by lawful ones.

These things •are serviceable to us because• they create a situation in which we can’t become and remain morally satisfactory unless we stay on our guard, are resolute, and refuse to let our passions have their way. And it’s just a fact about our nature that each single act of any of those kinds contributes to the forming of a habit of virtue; and such habits can make our exercise of the virtuous principle •real, •more constant and •more intense—the whole thing adding up to a stronger effort of virtue exerted into act.

Consider a person who knows that for some time to come he is going to be in particular danger doing something wrong, and who fully resolves not to do that. To stay true to that resolution he'll need to stay focused and to keep on his guard; if he does so, that will be an excellent example of continuously virtuous action. If his temptation had been brief and weak, his virtue wouldn't have needed to be—and perhaps wouldn't have been—continuous and strong. It is indeed ridiculous to say that self-denial is essential to •virtue and piety; but it is nearer the truth, though still not strictly true, to say that self-denial is essential to •discipline and improvement. Actions that are materially virtuous [see Glossary], and aren't hard to perform because they fit right in with our particular inclinations, might be performed only from these particular inclinations, in which case they wouldn't be any exercise of the •principle of virtue, i.e. wouldn't be virtuous actions at all. But they might instead be exercises of that •principle—i.e. it might be the case that you do something because it is the virtuous thing to do, though it does in fact also satisfy your present non-moral wants; and when this happens it will have *some* tendency to form and reinforce the habit of virtue. But when the exercise of the virtuous principle is more continued, oftener repeated, and more intense, the habituating tendency is increased proportionally, and a more confirmed habit is the result. More intense? Yes, it must be more intense in circumstances where there is any kind or degree of danger, temptation or difficulty.

There is undoubtedly some truth in this, but I don't know how far it goes. There's a limit to how far our •intellectual powers or our •bodily strength can be improved; it is possible for either of them to be over-matched. Well, perhaps something like this holds also for our •moral character. But this is hardly worth considering. I mention it only in case some reader of this work might have that thought and regard it not

as an exception to what I have been saying (which perhaps it is) but as a refutation of what I have been saying (which it is not). There may be several other exceptions. Observations of the kind I have been offering can't be supposed to hold in the finest detail and in every case. It is enough that they hold in general. The theses I have advanced obviously hold as far as I intend them to, namely far enough to establish that the present world is especially fit to be a state of discipline for our improvement in virtue and piety. . . .

This has to be admitted: judging by outcomes, the present state of the world is so far from serving as a discipline of virtue for most men that they actually seem to make it a discipline of vice! And the world's viciousness creates the various temptations that give the world what force it has as a state of discipline of virtue for good men. I am not offering to explain the whole purpose. . . . of mankind's being placed in such a state as the present world; I am only calling attention to one good aspect of it. What appears amidst the general corruption is this fact:

There are some people who have within them the principles [see Glossary] of amendment and recovery, and who attend to and follow the not-always-clear signposts towards virtue and religion that are provided for them; and the present world is not merely *an* exercise of virtue for these people, but an exercise of it whose kind and intensity-level makes it especially good for this purpose, being apt to improve virtue beyond what would be needed in a perfectly virtuous society, or in a society of people at *their* imperfect level of virtue.

For many people, perhaps even for most, the present world doesn't *actually become* a state of moral discipline causing them to improve or grow better in it; but is this evidence that it wasn't *intended* for moral discipline? No-one will

think so who has observed the analogy of nature. [Remember that this is part of a book about 'the analogy of nature' to religion.] Think of all the •seeds of vegetables and •bodies of animals that are structured and positioned to develop to natural maturity and perfection—how many get there? Perhaps one in a million? The vast majority of them decay before they have developed that far, and appear to be absolutely destroyed. But only someone who denies that there are any final causes—i.e. who rejects the idea that any natural item is *for* something—will deny that the seeds and bodies that do reach maturity and perfection are achieving the goal for which they were really designed by nature, and therefore that nature designed them for such perfection. And I can't help adding, though it's irrelevant to my present purpose, that as between

- the amazing waste of those seeds and bodies in nature, caused by external factors, and
- the present and future ruin of so many moral agents, caused by themselves, i. e. by vice

the second is much more terrible than the first, but they are on a par in our inability to explain them.

Here is another objection that may be raised against this whole notion of moral discipline:

To the extent that a course of behaviour that is materially virtuous comes from hope and fear, to that extent it is only a discipline and strengthening of *self-love*.

But doing what God commands, because he commands it, is *obedience*, even if it comes from hope or fear. And a regular practice of such obedience will form habits of it. Similarly, a constant regard for truthfulness, justice, and charity may form separate habits of these particular virtues, and will certainly form habits of self-control and of denying our inclinations, whenever this is required for truthfulness,

justice, or charity. Some people, wanting to devalue all religion that comes from hope and fear, pretend to be very finely scrupulous about this, but there is no basis for this attitude [Butler calls it 'this great nicety']. The fact is that

- (1) truthfulness, justice, and charity,
- (2) regard for God's authority, and
- (3) concern for our own main interests

don't just coincide; each of them is in itself a just and natural motive or principle [see Glossary] of action. And someone who begins a good life from any one of them, and who perseveres in it, can't fail to have increasingly the character that corresponds to •the constitution of nature as moral, and to •the relation that God has to us as its moral governor; so he can't fail to obtain the happiness that this constitution and relation imply is connected with that character.

These remarks about the active principle of virtue and obedience to God's commands apply also to passive submission or resignation to his will: which is another essential part of a right character, connected with the active part and very much in our power to develop in ourselves. You might think that this ·passive· virtue isn't needed except where there are afflictions, so that it doesn't have any role in a state of perfect happiness and thus can't be any kind of requirement for achieving such happiness. Well, it's not experience that makes you think this! When we are prosperous but lack something that we think desirable, our very prosperity creates extravagant and unbounded thoughts. Imagination is every bit as much a source of discontent as anything in our external condition. It is indeed true in a condition where sorrow shall be no more, there can't be any scope for patience [see Glossary]; but even then there may be need for a frame of mind that has been formed by patience. Self-love, considered merely as an active **principle leading us to pursue our own chief interests**, must always coincide with the **principle of**

obedience to God's commands, if our interests are rightly understood. That is because •this obedience and •the pursuit of our own chief interests must always be the very same thing. But it is still open to question whether self-love, considered merely as the **desire for our own interest or happiness** can from its nature absolutely and always coincide with **the will of God**. . . ., in such a way that it isn't liable to be aroused in ways that can't be gratified consistently with the constitution of things or with God's commands. For this reason, then, habits of resignation [= 'patience'] may be needed by all creatures—the word is *habits*, meaning something that is formed by use. However, it is obvious in general that both **self-love** and **particular affections** in human creatures, considered only as passive feelings, distort and tear the mind, and therefore need discipline. Now, if in a course of active virtue and obedience to God's will, you deny those particular affections—i.e. refuse to act on the basis of them—that will have a tendency to **moderate them**; and it seems also to have a tendency to get the mind into the habit of being satisfied with the degree of happiness that is allotted us, i.e. to **moderate self-love**. But the proper discipline for resignation is affliction. Here is why:

When we are under the trial of some kind of affliction, the right way for us to behave is •to pull ourselves together and think of this in the way religion teaches us to think of it, as coming from the hand of God; and •to receive it as what he dictates or thinks proper to allow in his world and under his government. Doing this will habituate the mind to a dutiful submission. And that submission, together with the active principle of obedience, give us the temperament and character that answers to God's sovereignty and absolutely belongs to us as dependent creatures.

Don't say that this is forcing the mind to submit to mere

power, because mere power may be accidental, and precarious, and illegitimate. Rather, it is forming within ourselves an attitude of resignation to the rightful authority of One who is by nature supreme over all.

Let us sum it up. A certain character and certain qualifications are needed for a mature state of life in the present world, and nature alone doesn't just hand them to us; it makes us acquire them in our progress from. . . childhood to mature age, doing this by •giving us capacities for this development and by •placing us early in our lives in a condition fit for it [that six-word phrase is Butler's]. And this is a general analogy to our condition in the present world as in a state of moral discipline for another world. Someone might object:

That can't be the purpose of our present life, because we could have been spared all the trouble and the danger that unavoidably accompany such discipline by our being created at the outset with the characters that we were eventually to have.

That is just wrong. Our experience tells us that the character we were eventually to have was to be an effect of our conduct. What nature does is not to save us trouble or danger, but to make us capable of coping with trouble and danger and to force us to do so. Acquirements of our own—namely, experience and habits—are the natural •make-up for our deficiencies, and •security against our dangers. 'Natural'? Yes indeed, because it is as obviously natural for us to try to acquire the needed *qualifications* as to try to acquire the external *things* that we need. Think about the status of this:

Chiefly in our earliest years but also throughout the whole of our lives, we should form and cultivate practical principles within us—doing this by attention, use, and discipline—with an eye to our temporal [see Glossary] long-term interests.

If anything is a natural law, *that* is! And it is left to us to choose: we can improve ourselves and better our condition, or we can instead remain deficient and wretched. So it is perfectly credible, from the analogy of nature, that the same may be the case with regard to •our happiness in a future [see Glossary] state, and to •the qualifications necessary for it.

A third thing that may seem implied by the present world's being a state of probation is its being a stage on which the actors—us, you and I—can display our characters with respect to a future one [the last seven words are Butler's]; not of course displaying them to an all-knowing Being, but to his creation or part of it. . . . It is at least possible that men's displaying what is in their heart, what their real character is, may have an effect on their future life in ways that we aren't acquainted with. In particular, it may be a means (God seems never to do anything without means!) of their having an after-life that is suitable to their characters; and of its being known to the creation. . . .that that's where they are heading. I shan't go into conjectures about this; I'll just remark that the display of persons' characters contributes a great deal in various ways to how things go in the human-involving part of the general course of nature. . . .

You may think that a sense of interest [Butler's phrase] would be as effective in restraining creatures from doing wrong—as effective, I mean, as all this probation, habit-forming, discipline and so on. But if by 'a sense of interest' you mean a conviction or belief that such-and-such an indulgence would cause them, over all, more unpleasantness than satisfaction, then I reply that our experience shows us that *this* sense of interest is not sufficient to restrain them from thus indulging themselves. And if by 'a sense of interest' you mean a practical concern with what *is* upon the whole our happiness, then I reply that this doesn't just •square with the principle of virtue or moral rectitude but is •a part of the idea of virtue or moral rectitude. And it's obvious that this reasonable self-love stands in need of improvement as much as any part of our nature does. Why? Because we daily see it overpowered not only by the more boisterous passions but also by curiosity, shame, love of imitation, *anything*, even laziness, especially if the temporal [see Glossary] interest that is the aim of such self-love is a good way off. This shows •how wrong profligate men are when they claim to be wholly governed by interestedness and self-love, and •how little reason moralists have to scorn self-interestedness.