

# A Dissertation Concerning the Nature of True Virtue

Jonathan Edwards

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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.—The letters ‘x’ and ‘y’ are used to help you find your way through some of Edwards’s incurably complex sentences; they are of course not in the original.—Edwards wrote this three years before his death; he didn’t publish it, and probably intended to revise it;

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## Glossary

**affection:** In the early modern period, ‘affection’ could mean ‘fondness’, as it does today; but it was also often used to cover every sort of pro or con attitude—desires, approvals, likings, disapprovals, dislikings, etc. That aspect of its meaning doesn’t come into play in this work until page 18.

**analogy:** Like his contemporaries, Edwards uses this word to mean simply ‘likeness’, ‘similarity’.

**arbitrary:** In Edwards’s day calling something ‘arbitrary’ meant only that it was a matter of *choice*; it didn’t necessarily mean that the choice is groundless or random. In chapter 8, however, Edwards has a running battle between ‘God gave us our moral sense arbitrarily’ and ‘The deliverances of our moral sense somehow represent or correspond to the nature of things outside us’. In that context, then, ‘arbitrary’ does strongly suggest ‘groundless’ or ‘random’.

**condescend:** These days condescension involves unpleasant patronising of someone whom one sees as lower on the social scale; but in early modern times it could be a friendly way of not standing on one’s dignity. When in *Pride and Prejudice* an aristocratic lady is described as ‘all affability and condescension’, this is a compliment.

**consent:** Edwards uses this noun always in its old sense of ‘agreement in feeling, sympathy, harmony, accord’ (OED). To say that there is ‘consent’ among the features of a thing is to say (roughly) that they *go together*, that they *feel right* as features of a single thing.

**contempt:** This word used to have a weaker sense than it has today, a sense in which to have ‘contempt’ for something is to write it off as negligible. The weaker sense is at work sometimes in the present work, especially in the link between

‘contempt’ and ‘littleness’ on page 21 and on page 25 in the suggestion that bad people have ‘contempt’ for God.

**deist:** Someone who believes there is a god (opposite of ‘atheist’), but whose theology is *thin* compared with Christianity—e.g. the deist doesn’t think of God as intervening in the world.

**desert:** Deservingness. The stress is on the second syllable, as in ‘dessert’ (the sweet course of a meal).

**feeling:** This replaces Edwards’s ‘sentiment’, which can mean the same but can also mean something more like ‘opinion’ or ‘belief’. See **sense, sentiment**.

**generous:** This often meant something like ‘noble-minded, magnanimous, rich in positive emotions’ etc. That’s the sense in which Edwards is using it on page 21 where he says that women are especially drawn to ‘generosity’ in men.

**heart:** In this work, as in many others, a person’s ‘heart’ is his or her ‘disposition and will’, as Edwards explains on page 1.

**heartfelt:** The few occurrences of this are replacements for Edwards’s ‘cordial’, which means the same thing.

**occasion:** This often means the same as ‘cause’ (noun or verb), but it began its philosophical career in opposition to ‘cause’. According to the ‘occasionalist’ theory about body-mind relations: when you are kicked, you feel pain; what causes the pain is not the kick but God, and the kick comes into it not as *causing* God to give you pain (because nothing causes God to do anything) but as the ‘occasion’ for his doing so. Perhaps something like a signal or a trigger. Edwards has no reason to push the occasionalist line, and

may have no deep reason for sometimes using ‘occasion’ rather than ‘cause’.

**principle:** Edwards uses this word *only* in a sense, once common but now obsolete, in which ‘principle’ means ‘source’, ‘cause’, ‘driver’, ‘energizer’, or the like. (Hume explicitly describes his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* as an enquiry into the *sources in human nature* of our moral thinking and feeling.)

**requital:** This means ‘pay-back’, understood in a neutral way; punishment is requital for a crime, reward is requital for a heroic and virtuous act.

**sense, sentiment:** Through most of this work, Edwards’s ‘sentiment’ is replaced by ‘feeling’ in the many places where that’s what it means. It means that in chapter 8 too, but ‘sentiment’ is retained there as a partner to the related term ‘sense’. The God-given **sense** by which we detect beautiful things as beautiful is our **ability to feel** beauty when we encounter it.

**speculation:** Engaging in theoretical thought about some non-moral matter. Ethics is a ‘practical’ discipline, chemistry is a ‘speculative’ one.

**temperament:** This word replaces ‘temper’ throughout.

**temporal:** It means ‘having to do with this world as distinct from the heavenly world of the after-life’. The underlying thought is that this world is in time (‘temporal’) whereas the after-life is eternal in some way that puts it outside time.

**tendency:** Although the OED doesn’t mention this, early modern philosophers often used ‘tendency’ in a sense that isn’t restricted to what a thing •tends to do or •is likely to do, but includes *all* its causal properties and dispositions. So the ‘tendencies’ of a lump of salt include the fact that if put in water it •*will* dissolve.

**ugly, ugliness:** These words never occur in the original; they are used here in place of ‘deformed’ and ‘deformity’, which used to mean the same though they now mean something nastier.

**uneasiness:** Any unpleasant sense of something’s being wrong, a usage that is prominent in—and perhaps popularized by—Locke’s theory that every intentional act is the agent’s attempt to relieve his ‘uneasiness’. Almost all its occurrences in this work are in chapter 5 and one paragraph in chapter 6.

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

## Chapter 1

### What the essence of true virtue consists in

Whatever controversies and variety of opinions there are about the nature of virtue, everyone agrees on this much: virtue is something beautiful, or rather it is some kind of beauty or excellence. (Everyone, that is, apart from some skeptics who deny that there's any real difference between virtue and vice.) Some kind of beauty, but not every kind. No-one would find virtue in

- the beauty of a building, a flower, or a rainbow.

Virtue is a beauty belonging to beings that have perception and will, -as human beings do-. But even there we don't describe as 'virtuous'

- the beauty of a face or a figure, the gracefulness of motion or harmony of voice.

Virtue is a beauty in the mind. But some things that may be called beauties of the mind still don't qualify as virtue:

- the beauty of understanding and speculation [see Glossary]; and what could be called the 'beauty' in some ideas and conceptions of great philosophers and statesmen.

None of that answers to what is ordinarily meant by 'virtue'.

Virtue is the beauty of the mental qualities and acts that are of a *moral* nature, i.e. ones that bring desert [see Glossary] with them, i.e. qualities and acts that are worthy of praise or blame. As far as I know, things of this sort are generally agreed to relate not to a person's speculative activities but to his •disposition and •will—i.e. to his *heart* (I take it that this use of 'heart' is commonly well understood). So I don't think I'll be departing from the common opinion when I say that virtue is

- the beauty of the qualities and exercises of the heart, or of actions that come from them.

So the question 'What is the nature of true virtue?' is equivalent to 'What is it that makes any habit, disposition, or exercise of the heart truly beautiful?'

Why do I speak of '*true* virtue' and of things that are '*truly* beautiful'? Well, I think everyone agrees that **(i)** things that are truly virtuous have to be distinguished from others that only seem to be so through a partial and imperfect view of things; and that **(ii)** some actions and dispositions appear beautiful—when considered •partially and superficially, or •with regard to some of their properties, and •in some of their circumstances and tendencies [see Glossary]—which would appear otherwise in a wider view that would clearly take in their whole nature and the whole extent of their connections with the rest of the universe.

There is a general beauty and a particular beauty. By 'particular beauty' I mean: what makes a thing appear beautiful when it is considered only with regard to its relations to and effects on some particular things within a limited sphere—as it were, a *private* sphere. A 'general beauty' is what makes a thing appear beautiful when viewed most perfectly and comprehensively, taking into account *all* its tendencies and its connections with *everything* to which it has any relation. A particular beauty may fail to qualify as a general beauty, and may even go *against* the thing's having general beauty. It's like this: a few notes in a tune may be agreeable when considered only by themselves and in their relation to one another, yet be very discordant and

disagreeable when considered with respect to all the notes in the tune, i.e. the entire series of sounds they are connected with. So what I call 'true virtue' is something in the heart of a thinking being that has a *general* beauty—i.e. is beautiful when viewed comprehensively, as it is in itself and in all its relations to other things. And when I am faced with the question:

What is the nature of true virtue? What does this true and general beauty of the heart most essentially consist in?

this is my answer:

True virtue most essentially consists in **benevolence to being in general**. Or—perhaps more accurately—it is the consent [see Glossary], propensity and union of the heart to being in general that is immediately exercised in a general good will.

I may not need to explain to you that when I speak of a thinking being as having a heart united and benevolently disposed to 'being in general' I mean to '*thinking* being in general'—not to inanimate things, i.e. ones with no perception or will, which aren't proper objects of benevolence.

What I said first about true virtue naturally leads us to this notion of it. If it has its seat in the heart, and is the general goodness and beauty of the person's disposition and behaviour—considered •comprehensively, •with regard to all its effects and •as related to everything that it has anything to do with—what *can* it consist in but a consent and good will towards being in general? Beauty consists not in discord and dissent but in consent and agreement. And if every thinking being is related somehow to being in general, and is connected with the whole universal system of existence by being a *part* of it, what *can* its general and true beauty be but its union and consent with the great whole?

Perhaps something like this can be supposed:

A heart united to some particular being or number of beings, disposing it to benevolence towards a private system of beings who are only a small part of the whole; not implying any tendency to unite with the great system, and not at all inconsistent with *enmity* towards being in general.

If this could happen, it would not be a case of true virtue, though it might be good in some respects, and might appear beautiful to someone taking a limited and shrunken view of things. I'll say more about this later.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that •virtue most essentially consists in •love; and this is generally accepted not only by Christian theologians but by the more considerable deists [see Glossary]. And I think the most considerable writers would agree that virtue consists in *general love of benevolence, i.e. of kind affection*; though it seems to me that some of these writers don't make their meaning plain, which may be why error or confusion sometimes occurs in what they write on this subject.

When I say that true virtue consists in love for being in general, I don't think you will take me to mean that no one act of the mind—no exercise of love—is truly virtuous unless it aims *directly and immediately* at being in general, i.e. at the great system of universal existence. That would mean that there's nothing in the nature of true virtue in any exercise of love, i.e. kind affection, towards any one particular being who is only a small part of this whole. My thesis is that the nature of true virtue consists in a *disposition* to benevolence towards being in •general—a disposition that can give rise to an *exercise* of love for a •particular being when that being is presented and the occasions arises. Someone who has a •generally benevolent disposition will be more disposed than others are to have his heart moved with benevolent affection

towards •particular persons whom he is acquainted and in contact with, and from whom arise the greatest and most frequent occasions [see Glossary] for arousing his benevolent temperament; there's nothing surprising in that! And what I'm saying is that affections towards •particular persons or beings are truly virtuous only if they come from a •generally benevolent temper, i.e. from a disposition to love being in general.

There's a common distinction between two kinds of love.

**(1) Benevolent love** is the affection—or propensity of the heart—towards any being *x* which causes the heart to incline to *x*'s well-being, i.e. disposes it to desire and take pleasure in *x*'s happiness. I think it is generally agreed that this propensity doesn't always arise from beauty in the object *x*; that someone can be disposed to want and enjoy the welfare of someone *x* who is not thought of as beautiful (unless mere existence is counted as a beauty!). And God's benevolence or goodness is generally supposed to be prior to the •beauty of many of its objects and even to their •existence, so that **their existence and beauty can't be the reason why God is benevolent towards them**. The common view is that it's God's goodness that moved him to create them and make them beautiful, which means that **God's benevolence towards them is the reason why they exist and are beautiful**. Thus, if all virtue primarily consists in the affection of heart towards being that is exercised in benevolence—i.e. an inclination towards its good—then God's virtue extends so far that he has a favourable attitude not only •to being that is actually existing and actually beautiful but also •to *possible* being. . . .

**(2) Pleasurable love** does presuppose beauty, because what it *is* is just delight in beauty, i.e. getting pleasure from the beloved person—the beloved *being*—just because of his beauty.

•Now here is a point that concerns virtue in relation to both these kinds of love. If

**(i)** virtue is the beauty of a thinking being, and

**(ii)** virtue consists in love,

then it's a plain inconsistency to suppose that

**(iii)** virtue primarily consists in love for something because of its beauty

—whether pleasurable love or benevolent love. The trouble with this trio of propositions is that it implies that

•the **beauty** of thinking beings primarily consists in their love for **beauty**; or that

•their **virtue** first of all consists in their love for **virtue**.

And this is an inconsistency—it goes in a circle. It says that the first or most basic virtue is caused by or based on the love that is itself virtue; making the first •or most basic• virtue to be both the ground and the consequence—both cause and effect—of itself. If virtue consists primarily in love of virtue, then virtue (the thing loved) is the love of virtue, so that virtue consist in the love of the love of virtue. . . .and so on ad infinitum. We never come to any beginning or foundation •for virtue•; it has no beginning and hangs on nothing! Therefore if the essence of virtue (i.e. beauty of mind) lies in love or a disposition to love, it must primarily consist in something different from both •the two kinds of love I have spoken of, namely•

•the pleasurable love that is a delight in beauty, and

•the love that is benevolent towards what is beautiful.

It's just absurd to say that virtue is primarily and first of all the consequence of itself, i.e. that virtue is primarily prior to itself.

Nor can virtue primarily consist in *gratitude*, i.e. the benevolence of one being towards another being because of the other's benevolence to him. Why not? For the same reason as before. Gratitude is *caused by* benevolence, so the

first benevolence—i.e. what benevolence *basically* is—can't be gratitude.

So we are driven to the conclusion that the primary object of virtuous love is *being*, simply considered. That is, that true virtue primarily consists not in

love for any particular beings because of their virtue or beauty or in gratitude because they love us;

but in

the heart's favouring and uniting itself with *being*, simply considered; giving rise to what we might call absolute benevolence—benevolence that isn't in any way conditional or restricted—towards *being* in general.

I'm saying that true virtue *primarily* consists in this. I certainly don't say that this absolute benevolence is the *only* love that has virtue in it. I'll now expound what I think is the truth on this subject.

Virtuous benevolence has as its basic object *being*, simply considered: its object is *being in general*, and what it ultimately favours is *the highest good of being in general*. It will seek the good of every individual being except ones whose good it thinks are not consistent with the highest good of being in general. In the latter case the good of one or more particular beings may be given up for the sake of the highest good of being in general. And especially: if any being is openly and incurably opposite—an *enemy*—to being in general, then the truly virtuous heart's adherence to being in general will lead it to forsake that enemy and oppose it.

Also: if the **first** object of a truly virtuous benevolence is *being*, simply considered, then the being who has most being—i.e. has the greatest share of existence—will have the greatest share of the favour and benevolent affection of the heart, other things being equal, so long as this being is exhibited to our faculties [= 'is within reach of our knowledge'].

(I say 'other things being equal' mainly because there's a secondary object of virtuous benevolence that must be considered as the ground or motive for a purely virtuous benevolence. I'll discuss it in a moment.) The basic exercise of pure benevolence is simply being's uniting consent [see Glossary] to and favouring of being; and inclining to •the general highest good and to •each individual being x whose welfare is consistent with the highest general good, in proportion to x's degree of existence. But remember: 'other things being equal'.

The second **object** of a virtuous propensity of heart is benevolent being. A secondary **ground** of pure benevolence is virtuous benevolence itself in its object. When anyone x under the influence of general benevolence sees someone else y who has the same general benevolence, this attaches x's heart to y, and draws forth from x greater love for y than y's mere existence would do. Here is why: so far as y has love for being in general, to that extent his own being is as it were *enlarged*—it extends to and in a way *includes* being in general—and therefore x who is governed by love towards being in general must take delight in y and have a greater degree of benevolence towards him. It's as though x were *grateful* to y for y's love for the general existence that x's own heart is extended and united to. . . . Because x's heart is thus united to being in general, when he encounters someone y who has a benevolent favouring of being in general he sees this as a beauty in y, an excellence that makes him worthy of esteem, delight, and the greater good will.

There are half a dozen particular points that need to be made concerning this secondary basis for a truly virtuous love, i.e. the basis that the loved object does himself have general benevolence.

(1) •Loving a being for this reason arises inevitably from •having pure benevolence to being in general; indeed •they



come to the same thing. Someone who has a simple and pure good-will toward general existence must love, in others, the temperament that fits and goes along with this. . . . Anyone who truly and sincerely seeks the good of others *must* approve of and love anything that joins with him in seeking the good of others.

**(2)** This secondary ground of virtuous love is what true moral or spiritual beauty primarily consists in. Spiritual beauty indeed consists *wholly* in •this and in •the various qualities and mental activities that come from it and •the external actions that come from these internal qualities and exercises. Those •three• things are what all true virtue consists in—the •love of being and the •qualities and •acts that arise from it.

**(3)** All spiritual beauty lies in these virtuous principles [see Glossary] and acts, and that is the main reason *why* they are beautiful, namely that they imply consent [see Glossary] and union with being in general. This is the primary and most essential beauty of anything that can rightly be called ‘virtue’, i.e. that is seen as morally excellent by anyone who has a perfect view of things. I specify ‘the primary and most essential’ beauty because there’s a secondary and inferior sort of beauty that I’ll discuss later.

**(4)** This spiritual beauty is only a secondary ground of virtuous benevolence, but it’s the primary ground of delight, or pleasurable love, when this is truly virtuous. [This invokes

the distinction introduced through **(1)** and **(2)** on page 3.]

**the next sentence as Edwards wrote it:** Love to us in particular, and kindness received, may be a secondary ground: but this is the primary objective foundation of it.

**meaning:** ??

**(5)** [This complex paragraph makes the following essentially simple point. Given that x is an instance of true virtue, i.e. of a benevolent inclination of the heart to being in general, there’s a question of degree that we can ask. Edwards puts it in terms of how ‘amiable’ = lovable x is, really meaning how high on the value scale x is. That depends, he says, not just on •how intense x’s benevolent affection is, but also on •how great a being x is. We value two truly virtuous beings more than one; so we’ll also value more an instance of true virtue in someone who ‘has as much existence’ in himself as those two. [He is clearly preparing for putting God’s virtue at the very top of the tree.]]

**(6)** This beauty that consists in general benevolence can’t be appreciated by anyone who doesn’t have it himself. I remarked earlier that if any being has such a temperament he will unavoidably be pleased by anyone else who has it; and it can also be demonstrated that *only* such a spirit will enjoy such a spirit. . . . How could someone x love and value y’s disposition to love and promote something that x doesn’t care about, doesn’t value, doesn’t want to have promoted?

## Chapter 2

### How the love that true virtue consists in relates to the Divine Being and created beings

It's clear from all this that true virtue must chiefly consist in **love for God**—the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best. This is apparent whether we consider the •primary or the •secondary basis for virtuous love. I said that the **first** objective basis for the love that true virtue consists in is *being*, simply considered; and as a consequence of this that the being who has the greatest share of universal existence has correspondingly the greatest share of virtuous benevolence—so far as such a being is exhibited to the faculties of our minds, and other things being equal. But God has infinitely the greatest share of existence. So that all other being—even the whole universe—is as nothing in comparison with the Divine Being.

And the same thing holds for the **secondary** basis for love or moral excellency. For just as God is infinitely the •greatest Being, so also we agree that he is infinitely the •most beautiful and excellent: all the beauty anywhere in the whole creation is only a reflection of the beams radiating from that infinitely bright and glorious Being. God's beauty is infinitely more valuable than that of all other beings, because of *how virtuous* he is and of *how great* he is. And God has sufficiently shown us that he exists and that he is infinitely great and excellent: he has given us faculties through which we can plainly discover his immense superiority to all other beings in these respects. Therefore, anyone who has true virtue, consisting in

- benevolence towards being in general, and
- benevolence towards virtuous being,

*must* have a supreme love for God—both benevolent love and pleasurable love. And all true virtue must radically and essentially. . . consist in this. •Why? I have said why, but I'll say it again. It's because God is not only infinitely greater and more excellent than all other being, but he is

- the head of the universal system of existence;
- the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty.

•Everything is perfectly derived from him. •Everything is absolutely and perfectly dependent on him. . . •His being and beauty are as it were the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence—much more than the sun is the source and summary comprehension of all the light and brightness of the day. [The 'sum and comprehension' of something is the whole extent and essence and inwardness of it; and Edwards presumably meant something similar by 'summary comprehension'.]

You may want to object:

'Virtue consists primarily in benevolence; but the most proper objects of our benevolence are fellow creatures, not God; because we cannot do him any good.'

I have two things to say in reply to this.

(1) Benevolence is exercised towards x not only in •trying to increase x's happiness but also in •rejoicing in his happiness. Just as gratitude towards x for benefits received will not only make us try to requite [see Glossary] the kindness we have received by bringing equal benefit to x, but also—if x is above having any need for us or we have nothing to give him—it will dispose us to rejoice in his prosperity.

(2) Though we can't give to God anything that we have independently of him, we can still do things to promote his glory, in which he takes a true and proper delight. (For more on this, see the full discussion in my *God's End in Creating the World*, chapter 1, section 4.) —Whatever force the above objection may seem to have on some minds, is there *anyone* who accepts that there is a God yet denies that we owe him, and should have towards him, a benevolent affection? If we are not to be benevolent towards God because we can't profit him, then we are also not to be grateful to him for his benefits to us because we can't requite him. What man who believes in a God and a providence will say that?

Some writers on morality seem to be inconsistent about this. They don't wholly exclude a regard to the Deity from their schemes of morality, but they make so little of it that they give grounds for a suspicion that they see it as a subordinate and relatively unimportant part of true morality; and emphasize benevolence towards the *created* system a way that suggests that look on *that* as by far the most important and essential thing in their scheme. But why should it be? If true virtue consists *partly* in a respect for God then doubtless it consists *chiefly* in that. If true morality requires us to have some regard, some benevolent affection, to our Creator as well as to his creatures, then surely it requires us to put our regard for him *first*, and make him in every way the supreme object of our benevolence. If his being above our reach and beyond being helped by us doesn't rule out his being a proper object of our love, then it doesn't rule out our loving him—as best we can—according to the *degree in which* he has the things that make anything worthy of regard. And what are they? No-one will deny that they are two things—greatness and moral goodness. And anyone who thinks there is a God won't deny that he infinitely exceeds all other beings in these two. If God is to

be looked on as a part of—as belonging to—the system of beings towards which we can properly exercise benevolence, he must be regarded as the head of the system, the chief part of it. (That's if it is proper to call him 'a part', given that he is infinitely more than all the rest, so that they in comparison with him are *nothing*, either as to beauty or existence.) If we aren't atheists, then, we must accept that true virtue primarily and essentially consists in a supreme love for God, and that where that is lacking there can be no true virtue.

Nothing is more important than this, so I'll say some more to make it plain that love for God is most essential to true virtue, and that without it no benevolence towards anyone else can be truly virtuous.

Suppose that a person has, for some reason, a mind-set directed to union with and benevolence towards a particular person or a private system that is only a small part of the universal system of being; and that this mental disposition is independent of—i.e. not subordinate to—benevolence toward being in general. Such a disposition or affection of mind is not an instance of true virtue.

Everyone accepts this in the case of self-love, in which good will is directed towards only one person. And the same reasons imply that *any* private affection or good will towards *anything* less than the whole, and not dependent on and subordinate to benevolence towards the whole, shouldn't be counted as truly virtuous. It may extend to a number of persons, but they as a group will fall infinitely short of the universe as a whole, so that by *that* comparison they are on a par with a single person.

Here are three reasons for the thesis I have been advancing.

(1) Any private affection that is *detached from* general benevolence and independent of it will be *against* general benevolence, setting the person against general existence,

making him an enemy to it. That's how it is with selfishness, when a man is governed by a concern for his own private interests independently of any concern for the public good: such a temperament leaves him open to acting as an enemy to the public. . . . That is why a selfish, pulled-in, narrow spirit is generally hated and regarded as low and sordid. But suppose that a man's affection takes in half a dozen people other than himself, extending to his children and family or even to some still larger circle: if the scope of his affection falls short of the universal system and doesn't include being in general, this private affection exposes him to the risk of pursuing the interests of its •particular object in *opposition* to •general existence. That is contrary to the tendency [see Glossary] of true virtue; indeed, *directly* contrary to the *main and most essential* thing in virtue's nature, the main thing making virtue good in itself and in its consequences. . . .

(2) Regarding private affection that isn't subordinate to general affection: it's not just that

- things *may* turn out in such a way that it *could* generate enmity towards being in general, but
- things *do* turn out in such a way that it *will*.

Someone who has such an affection will set up its particular or limited object above being in general; and this naturally tends to produce enmity against the latter. . . .; just as setting up as supreme a prince other than the lawful sovereign naturally tends to produce enmity against the lawful sovereign. Wherever it is sufficiently widely known that the supreme, infinite, and all-comprehending Being requires a supreme regard for himself and insists that this should universally rule in our hearts with every other affection subordinated to it, a consciousness of our having •chosen another prince to rule over us and •subjected our hearts to him. . . .must unavoidably arouse enmity and fix us in open opposition to the Supreme Being. This shows that affection for a private

society or system, independent of general benevolence, can't be truly virtuous. For something to •have the nature and essence of true virtue and yet •have a tendency opposite to true virtue—that's absurd!

(3) When affection for a private system isn't subordinate to a regard for being in general, it doesn't only

*lead to* opposition to the supreme object of virtuous affection, but

•actually *becomes* an opposition to that object.

Considered just in itself and without bringing in its effects, such a private affection is an instance of great opposition to the rightful supreme object of our respect. Why? Because it exalts •its private object above •the other great and infinite object; setting the former up as supreme, in opposition to the latter. It puts being in general—which is infinitely superior in itself and infinitely more important—in an inferior place; indeed, it *subjects* the supreme general object to this private infinitely inferior object. This is treating it with great contempt [see Glossary], and truly acting in opposition to it and to the true order of things. . . . This is to act like an enemy to it. If you take an ordinary citizen and raise him above his prince, you're making him supreme instead of the prince, treating the prince wholly as a subject, and thereby acting the part of an enemy to your prince.

These points, I think, make it obvious that no affection that is limited to a private system, and doesn't depend on or take second place to being in general, can have the nature of true virtue. It doesn't matter how big the private system is; if it is less than the universe it must be—comparatively speaking—*infinitely* less than the universe; and that is all I need for the thesis I am advancing.

From this it is also evident that the divine virtue—the virtue of God's mind—must consist primarily in God's love for himself, or in the mutual love and friendship that the

several persons in the Godhead [= 'the three persons of the Trinity'] eternally and necessarily have for one another. You don't need a long-winded proof of this from me. It's an obvious consequence of the premise that virtue in its most essential nature consists in benevolent affection or leaning of heart towards being in general, and flows out to particular beings in a degree that is proportional to how much existence and beauty they have. It also follows that God's goodness and love towards created beings is derived from and subordinated to his love for himself.

Given a virtuous love of one created being for another, what is the manner in which this depends on and derives from love for God? The answer to that is implicit in what I have already said, which has made it clear that any love for particular beings is virtuous if it arises from a benevolent propensity of heart towards being in general. And I have remarked that •a benevolent propensity of heart towards being in general and •a temperament or disposition to love God supremely are in effect the same thing. If love for a created being comes from that temperament or propensity of the heart, it is virtuous. However, someone *x* who ·virtuously· loves a creature *y* may not be aware that his love comes from love for God, or have any explicit thoughts about how *y* relates to God, whether by similarity, conformity, union, or other relation.

[The above paragraph is doubly defective. (a) It offers no account of *how*—'the manner in which'—virtuous creaturely love depends on love for God. (b) Edwards clearly means the account to hold for *all* virtuous creaturely love, but he doesn't achieve that. He needs the thesis that for any instance *x* of creaturely love,

(*x* is virtuous → *x* is God-based),

but all he says is that

(*x* is God-based → *x* is virtuous).

In his own words: he says that *x*'s being God-based is 'sufficient' for its being virtuous; he needed to say that it is 'necessary' for that.]

What shows that our love for a created being arises from the mind-set consisting of a supreme propensity of heart towards God? The best evidence seems to be these two things: **(a)** the kind and degree of our love is in line with God's purpose in creating us and in creating everything; and **(b)** the way in which we express our love—the manner, order, and measure of the things it leads us to do—is like •the manner in which God expresses *his* love for his creatures in creating and governing the world, and •the way in which he, as the first cause and supreme disposer of all things, has a concern for the creature's happiness, in subordination to himself as his own supreme end.

[It seems that Edwards means not '...a concern that you should be: happy but subordinate to him', but rather '...a concern that you should be happy, this concern being subordinate to his concern for himself.].

For the true virtue of created beings is doubtless their highest excellence, their true goodness, what makes them especially agreeable to the mind of their Creator. But a thing's true goodness must be its conformity to its end, i.e. its suitability for the plan for which it was made. So good moral agents are the ones whose temperament or propensity of heart is suitable for the purpose for which God made moral agents. And, as I have shown, the final purpose for which God has made moral agents must be the final purpose for which he has made everything; for obviously the moral world is what the rest of the world is *for*; the inanimate and unthinking world being made *for* the rational and moral world, in the way a house is prepared *for* its inhabitants.

From these things we can see that someone with a truly virtuous mind, being under the sovereign dominion of love for God above all things, will have the glorifying of God as his supreme, governing, and ultimate end. This consists in

- the expression of God's perfections in their proper effects,
- the manifestation of God's glory to created understandings,
- the communications of the infinite fullness of God to the creature,
- the creature's highest esteem of God, love to, and joy in him,
- and the proper exercises and expressions of these.

And so far as a virtuous mind exercises true virtue in benevolence to created beings, it chiefly seeks the good of the creature; consisting in its knowledge or view of God's glory and beauty, its union with God, conformity and love to him, and joy in him. And that disposition of heart, that

consent, union, or propensity of mind to being in general, which appears chiefly in such exercises, is virtue, truly so called; or in other words, true grace and real holiness. And no other disposition or affection but this has the nature of true virtue.

**Corollary.** We see from this that systems of religion or moral philosophy which are *based on* a supreme regard for and love of God, with all other virtues treated in connection with this and subordinated to it, are not •true schemes of philosophy but are •basically and essentially defective. And I stand by this however well in some respects they handle benevolence to mankind and other virtues depending on it.

[Edwards now says all that again, and sums up:] Nothing is of the nature of true virtue in which God is not the first and the last. . . .

## Chapter 3

### Concerning the secondary and inferior kind of beauty

. . . There are other qualities, sensations, propensities, and affections of mind, and principles [see Glossary] of action, that are often called 'virtuous' and are thought by many to have the nature of true virtue, though they are of an entirely different nature from the true virtue I have been talking about. It is just a mistake to confuse them with real virtue.

The consent, agreement, or union of being to being that I have spoken of—i.e. the union or propensity of minds to mental or spiritual existence—may be called the **highest**

**and primary** beauty. That's because it is a beauty that is possessed only by spiritual and moral beings, which are the **highest and first** part of the universal system; it's for the sake of *them* that all the rest exists. But there is another beauty—**lower and secondary**—which has some resemblance to the other and is not restricted to spiritual beings. Even inanimate things can have it. It consists in a mutual agreement of different things in form, manner, quantity, and visible end or design; we give it such labels

as ‘regularity’, ‘order’, ‘uniformity’, ‘symmetry’, ‘proportion’, ‘harmony’ and so on. Examples: the mutual consent [see Glossary] and agreement of

- the various sides of a square, or equilateral triangle, or regular polygon;
- the parts of the periphery of a circle, or surface of a sphere, or corresponding parts of an ellipse;
- the colors, figures, dimensions, and distances of the different spots on a chess board;
- the figures on a piece of chintz or brocade;
- the various parts of a human body or face;
- the various notes of a melodious tune.

It is what Hutcheson in his treatise on beauty describes as ‘uniformity in the midst of variety’, which is just the same as the consent or agreement of different things in form, quantity, etc. He remarks that when there’s uniformity in the midst of variety, the greater the variety the greater the beauty. Which is just to say that the more mutually agreeing things there are the greater is the beauty. That is because it is more considerable to have many things consent with one another than only a few.

Included in this is the beauty that consists in a thing’s visible fitness for its use, and the unity of its design. One thing that contributes to the beauty of the agreement and proportion of various things is their relation one to another—the relation that connects them, brings them into view together, and enables one to suggest the other to the mind; so that the mind is led to compare them and so to expect and desire agreement. Thus the uniformity of many pillars in the corresponding parts of a single building is more beautiful than the uniformity of two or more pillars found in different places. That is how •means and •intended effect are related one to another. A thing’s suitability for its use is only the proportion and fitness of a •cause to the obviously

intended •effect—an effect suggested to the mind by the idea of the •cause or •means. This kind of beauty is not entirely different from the beauty of a well-made joint in carpentry. [Edwards adds that when the parts of a thing inter-relate in a harmonious way, *and* the thing is well designed for its purpose, there is ‘a double beauty’.]

Why has God brought it about that this kind of mutual agreement of things is beautiful and pleasing to the thinking beings who perceive it? Probably one reason is its having some resemblance to the true, spiritual, original beauty that I have spoken of. That primary beauty is the **union** of spiritual beings in a mutual propensity and affection of heart. The secondary kind resembles this because the uniformity that it involves makes different things become as it were **one**. And it pleases God to observe analogy [see Glossary] in his works, as we can see in countless instances of it, especially in his making inferior things with analogy to superior ones. Think of all the similarities between brutes and men, and between plants and animals, in their manner of generation, nutrition, etc. And there are countless ways in which he has made the external world on an analogy with the spiritual world (I could give examples if there were any need for them and if this were a proper place for them). We needn’t inquire here into *why* such analogy in God’s works pleases him. It is enough for us to know the fact. . . . It has pleased God to establish a law of nature by virtue of which

- the uniformity and mutual correspondence of a beautiful plant, and
  - the agreement and union among the parts of a regular building, and
  - the consent or concord of the notes of a good tune,
- should appear beautiful, because they resemble, a little, the consent of mind of the members of a society of thinking beings, sweetly united in a benevolent agreement of heart.

I remark in passing that it's probably because of this resemblance between secondary beauty and true spiritual beauty that God has arranged things so that when those whose hearts are under the influence of a truly virtuous temperament encounter instances of this inferior beauty—especially the kinds of it that most resemble primary beauty (e.g. harmony of sounds, and the beauties of nature)—this

- inclines them towards the exercises of divine love and
- enlivens in them a sense of spiritual beauty.

So you can see that there are two sorts of agreement or consent of one thing to another. **(1)** There is a heartfelt [see Glossary] agreement that consists in concord and union of mind and heart, which. . . .is true virtue, and the original or primary beauty, which is the only true moral beauty. **(2)** There is a natural union or agreement which, though somewhat resembling the other, is an entirely distinct thing because the will and the disposition or affection of the heart have nothing to do with it. . . . We could call this *natural beauty*. This is to let you know how I'll be using

- 'heartfelt' to describe one kind of agreement, and 'moral', 'spiritual', 'divine', and 'primary' to describe the corresponding beauty, original beauty; and using
- 'natural' to describe the other kind of agreement, and 'secondary' to describe the corresponding beauty.

There are five things to be said about the latter, inferior kind of beauty. [The fifth is **E.** on page 15.]

**A.** Why does secondary beauty please men? That's only a law of nature that God has established, i.e. an instinct he has given to mankind;

**how Edwards finishes the sentence:** and not their perception of the same thing which God is pleased to regard as the ground or rule by which he has established such a law of nature.

**what he is getting at:** God has established a law of nature of the form

When a thinking creature *x* encounters a group of items inter-related by the relation *R*, he will be pleased and will see the group as beautiful;

but this doesn't require that *x* be aware of the details of *R*; all that's needed is that *R* acts on him to produce a pleased sense of beauty in his mind.

There are two bits of evidence for that.

(i) The relation *R* that makes this law kick into action has to do with things' mutual agreement and proportion in measure, form, and so on. But in many cases the affected person doesn't think about—and maybe doesn't even know about—the particular agreement and proportion that has caused him to have a pleased sense of beauty. A man may be pleased with the harmony of the notes in a tune without knowing anything about the proportion or adjustment of the notes which, by the law of nature, is the basis for the melody. He doesn't know

- that the vibrations in one note regularly coincide with the vibrations in another;
- that the vibrations of a note coincide in time with two vibrations of its octave; and
- that two vibrations of a note coincide with three of its fifth,

and so on. Perhaps he doesn't even know that there *are* vibrations of the air when a tune is heard, or that there are any corresponding motions in the organs of hearing, and in the auditory nerve or animal spirits. . . . This is a difference between a sensation of •secondary beauty and a sensation of •primary and spiritual beauty, consisting in a spiritual union and agreement. The latter is pleasing to a person because he perceives *the union itself* ·and not merely some upshot of it·. What is pleasing to the virtuous mind is the *immediate*



view of what basically has the beauty.

(ii) In establishing this law of nature God seems to want the natural agreement that causes the pleased sense of secondary beauty to *resemble* the spiritual, heartfelt agreement that original beauty consists in. But men's pleased sense of secondary beauty doesn't come from any reflection on or perception of such a resemblance. Their sensation of pleasure when they encounter secondary beauty is an *immediate* upshot of the law God has established, i.e. the instinct he has given.

**B.** Secondary beauty affects the mind more (other things being equal) when observed in objects that are of considerable importance than when observed in little trivial matters. Thus, the symmetry of the parts of a human body or face affects the mind more than the beauty of a flower; the beauty of the solar system more than an equally large and complex order and uniformity in a tree; and the proportions of the parts of a church or a palace more than the same proportions in a doll's house made to please children.

**C.** . . . The uniformity of similar pillars scattered around the countryside doesn't constitute beauty, or at least nothing like as much beauty as the uniformity of pillars that exist as inter-related parts of a single building. When we see things that are unlike and very disproportioned to one another, if we see them in distant places that have no relation to each other, this doesn't strike us as *ugly* [see Glossary] in the way it would if the things were inter-related and connected. And the closer the relation and the stronger the connection, the more ugly their disagreement will strike us as being.

**D.** This secondary kind of beauty—the kind consisting in uniformity and proportion—is to be found not only in •material and external things but also in •immaterial things; and in many cases it's as plain and perceptible in the latter as in the former. When it is perceived, there's no reason why

it shouldn't be pleasing to those who behold it, by virtue of the same sense—i.e. the same determination of mind to be pleased with uniformity and proportion. If uniformity and proportion are what appear agreeable to this sense of beauty, then why shouldn't they affect the same sense in immaterial things as in material ones if we are equally able to perceive them in both? Indeed, *more* in spiritual things (other things being equal) because they are more important than merely external and material things.

It's not only reasonable to think that this is so—we have countless examples of its actually being so. There's a beauty of *order* in society—apart from anything involving benevolence—which is of the secondary kind. We have an example when the members of society all have their appointed job, position and rank according to their various abilities and talents, and everyone keeps his place and continues in his proper business. There's a beauty in this, not unlike what we get from the regularity of a beautiful building, or piece of skillful architecture where the strong pillars are set in their proper place, the pilasters in a place fit for them, the square pieces of marble in the pavement, the panels, partitions, and cornices etc. in their proper places. Just as the agreement of a variety of things in one common design—e.g. the parts of a building or of a complicated machine—is one instance of the regularity that belongs to the secondary kind of beauty, so also there's the same kind of beauty in what is called *wisdom*, consisting in the united tendency of thoughts, ideas, and particular volitions to one general purpose—quite apart from whether that general purpose is useful and benevolent.

There's a beauty in the virtue called *justice*, in which inter-related things agree in nature, manner, and measure—i.e. harmoniously correspond to one another—so that this is the very same sort of beauty as the uniformity and proportion that we see in external and material things that are regarded

as beautiful. Someone who voluntarily *does* evil to others should *receive* proportionate evil from him (or them) whose business it is to take care of the injured and act on their behalf. When someone whose heart [see Glossary] opposes the general system •is opposed by the hearts of that system or the heart of its ruler, and therefore •receives evil in proportion to the evil tendency of the opposition of his heart, that's a state of affairs in which there is natural regularity and mutual agreement in a literal sense. Similarly, there's an agreement in nature and measure when someone who loves is loved in return; when someone who from his heart promotes the good of someone else has his good promoted by the other person, for appropriate gratitude is in a way *just*.

Indeed most of our duties, if you think about them, will be found to share in the nature of justice. There is

- some natural agreement of one thing to another;
- some adaptedness of the agent to the object;
- some fitting of the act to the occasion;
- some equality and proportion in inter-related things that are alike in nature.

That's how it is with duties involving personal inter-relations:

- duties of children to parents, and parents to children;
- duties of husbands and wives;
- duties of rulers and subjects;
- duties of friendship and good neighborhood;
- all duties that we owe to God, our creator, preserver, and benefactor; and
- all duties whatsoever, considered as •required by God and to be performed in relation to Christ.

This secondary kind of beauty seems to be what Wollaston had in mind when he said that all virtue comes down to an agreement of •inclinations, volitions, and actions with •truth. He is evidently thinking of the justice that there is in virtues and duties. It consists in x's feeling and acting towards

someone else y in ways that are in natural agreement and proportion to y's qualities and his conduct towards x. That conformity of •affection and action with •its ground, object, and occasion is as *natural* as the conformity between •a true proposition and •the fact that it reports.

But *true* virtue and all *truly* virtuous dispositions and actions have a beauty that is higher than the beauty consisting in uniformity or similarity among various things. It is the union of heart to being in general—i.e. to God, the Being of beings—which appears in those •true• virtues which are expressions or effects of it. •Benevolence towards being in general, i.e. to being simply considered, is entirely distinct from •uniformity in the midst of variety, and is a superior kind of beauty. [In that paragraph 'i.e.' replaces 'or' as it does in other places where 'i.e.' is what is meant. It may seem too strong here, but on page 38 Edwards says 'God himself is in effect being in general'.]

It's true that •benevolence towards being in general naturally inclines the person to justice, i.e. to acting in ways that are fitting, appropriate. If someone loves being, simply considered, he will naturally (other things being equal) love particular beings in a manner that is proportional to their degree of being and degree of true virtue. Doing that is loving beings in proportion to their *dignity*, for that's what a being's dignity *is*—his degree of being and degree of true virtue. This proportionate respect for being is the first and most general kind of justice, which will produce all the subordinate kinds. Thus, given that someone x has benevolence towards being in general, the degree of his benevolence towards a particular being y will be proportional to—and caused by—the degree of benevolence that x observes in y. But no such facts about y are causes of x's benevolence towards being in general. Similarly: the masses of two bodies cause the attraction between them to be such-and-such, but they don't cause the general phenomenon of attraction.

This shows us that a person *x*'s *just affections and acts* have a beauty in them that

- is superior to their uniformity and equality,
- is the cause of the pleasure and delight that such affections and acts give to anyone who has a truly virtuous temperament, and
- expresses and shows *x*'s benevolence towards being in general.

And here are two further reasons why just affections and acts are pleasing. •One is the fact that such affections and acts are in harmony with the will and command of God. •The other is the fact that just affections and acts tend to have consequences that are agreeable to general benevolence. . . . This causal fact about justice makes it beautiful to a truly virtuous mind. So we have two things—

- the tendency of general benevolence to produce justice, and
- the tendency of justice to produce effects agreeable to general benevolence

—which both make justice pleasing to a virtuous mind. These are the two main reasons why justice is pleasing to a virtuous taste, i.e. a truly benevolent heart. But that doesn't mean that there aren't other beauties in justice as well. Similarly with things in the natural world: its regularities have consequences that gratify benevolence because they favour the general good; but natural things can be beautiful in ways that have nothing do with that.

**E.** From what I have said about this secondary kind of beauty, you can see that it isn't a *virtue* in a person that his mind-set disposes him to approve and be pleased with this beauty; this disposition is a totally different thing

from a truly virtuous taste. I have shown that this kind of beauty—whether in material or immaterial things—is utterly different from the beauty of true virtue; which implies that a taste for this kind of beauty is utterly a different thing from a taste for true virtue and therefore isn't itself virtuous. Who would say that a disposition to approve of the harmony of good music, or the beauty of a square or equilateral triangle, is the same as true holiness or a truly virtuous disposition of mind? . . .

Secondary beauty does indeed have some analogy [see Glossary] to spiritual and virtuous beauty—as far as material things *can* have analogy to spiritual things of which they are a mere shadow—but I repeat that it's not because men perceive any such analogy that they like secondary beauty. And not only •reason but •experience plainly shows that men's approval of this sort of beauty doesn't come from a virtuous temperament and has no connection with virtue. If there *were* a connection, men's •delight in the beauty of squares and cubes and regular polygons, in the regularity of buildings, and in the beautiful designs in a piece of embroidery, would increase in proportion to their •virtue. It would rise to a great height in some eminently virtuous or holy men, and be almost wholly absent from others who are very vicious [see Glossary] and low. In fact it's obvious that a liking for these things doesn't depend on general benevolence or any more limited benevolence, any more than does a man's loving the taste of honey or the smell of a rose. A taste for this inferior beauty in immaterial things has been mistaken by some moralists for a true virtuous principle implanted naturally in the hearts of all mankind.

## Chapter 4

### Self-love, and its power to create love or hatred towards others

Many people say that all love arises from self-love. To reach a conclusion about this we must first be clear about we mean by 'self-love'. It is generally defined, I think, as 'a man's love for his own happiness'. That is short, and you may think that it is very plain; but actually it is ambiguous because the phrase 'his own' can mean either of two very different things. A man's 'own' happiness can be meant **(1)** unrestrictedly as including *all* the happiness or pleasure that his mind has because of *anything* that is pleasing to him, or **(2)** more restrictedly as including *only* the pleasure he gets from his own exclusive, private, and separate good. Thus, self-love may be in taken two ways:

**(1)** Someone's 'self-love' may be understood as his love of whatever is pleasing to him, i.e. his liking and being pleased by whatever he likes and is pleased by. On *that* understanding of the term, it's no wonder that people think that all love boils down to self-love!... This labels as 'self-love' something that is merely a general ability to love or hate, to be pleased or displeased; and that is the same as having a faculty of will, because if nothing were either pleasing or displeasing to a man, then he couldn't incline to or will anything. . . .

On this understanding of 'self-love', the question

'Does all our love—our love for each particular object of our love—arise from self-love?'

is an absurd thing to ask. It is tantamount to asking

'When our love is fixed on such-and-such particular objects, is that because we have an ability to love some things?'

That men have this ability can be called a general reason why men love or hate anything at all—unlike stones and trees, which love or hate nothing—but it couldn't be a reason why any man loves x or y in particular, e.g. why he is pleased by the good of his neighbor or the happiness and glory of God.

Those who talk like that may give this explanation:

'We aren't saying that our loving x and y in particular comes from our love for happiness in general; we're saying that it comes from our love for our own happiness, which *consists in* the happiness of x and y; so the reason why we love benevolence to our friends is that we love our happiness, which consists in their happiness, which we take pleasure in.'

This is still absurd. It treats an effect as though it were a cause: our loving x is the cause of our being happy in his happiness; that relation between x's happiness and ours can't be the cause of our loving x. . . . 'Quite generally', the existence of inclinations and appetites is prior to any pleasure in gratifying those appetites.

**(2)** 'Self-love', as the phrase is used in common speech, usually signifies a man's regard for his limited private self, i.e. his love for himself with respect to his private interests.

By 'private interests' I mean that which most immediately consists in personal pleasures or pains. What I am excluding are pleasures and pains that are caused by others' pleasures or pains, because of a benevolent union of heart with others. What I am including are pleasures and pains that are basically ours and not a benevolent echo of the feelings of others. These are perceptions that agree with

or go against certain personal inclinations implanted in our nature—for example •our sense-related appetites and aversions. Also •our mind’s disposition to be pleased with all secondary beauty, consisting in uniformity, proportion, etc., whether in things external or internal, and to dislike the contrary ugliness. And also •men’s natural disposition to be pleased when they see that they are objects of the honor and love of others, and displeased with others’ hatred and contempt. Pleasures and uneasiness [see Glossary] in this latter class are on a par with the pleasures or pains of external sense, in being due to an immediate determination of the mind by a fixed law of our nature. Although caused by the attitudes of others, they are strictly private and personal, and not to be confused with states that we have through our benevolent participation in the happiness or sorrow of others. It’s obviously mere self-love that appears in this disposition; it’s easy to see that a man’s love for himself will make him love love-for-himself and hate hatred-for-himself. And in the nature God has given us, self-love is exercised in no one disposition more than in this. Men are probably capable of much more pleasure and pain through this mind-set—i.e. through love for love-for-oneself and hatred of hatred-for-oneself—than through *any* other personal inclination or aversion. Perhaps we don’t so very often see instances of extreme suffering by this means as by some others; but we often see evidence of men’s dreading •the contempt of others more than •death; •which is a measure of the strength of their hatred for hatred-for-themselves. This gives us some idea of what men *would* suffer if they •knew they were• hated and despised by everyone. We can also reasonably infer from it something of the greatness of the misery that a man would suffer if he lived constantly in the midst of clear and strong evidence that he was the object of the hatred and contempt of an incomprehensibly and immensely great God

who is immediately present to him at every moment and on whom he utterly depends.—These remarks may be sufficient to explain what I mean by ‘private interest’, which is the immediate concern of self-love, properly so-called.

Taking ‘self-love’ in this sense, some love for others may truly be an effect of self-love, arising from it in a regular way under the laws of nature. . . . That a man should love those who are of his party, who are warmly engaged on his side and promote his interests—this is a *natural* consequence of private self-love. •Let us be clear about the status of what I am saying here•. The proposition that

Because a man loves himself and is concerned for his own interests, **therefore** he will also love those who love him and promote his interests

isn’t based on any metaphysical necessity in the nature of things—you can suppose it to be false without being landed in a contradiction. (Two comparable examples: **(i)** The proposition that

Because bodies have solidity, cohesion, and gravitation towards the earth’s center, **therefore** the power that a weight suspended on the beam of a balance will have to counterbalance a weight on the other side will be greater the further it is from the fulcrum

isn’t true because of any absolute metaphysical necessity. If you suppose it false you won’t be contradicting yourself; you’ll only contradict the beautiful proportion and harmony that the Author of Nature maintains in the laws of nature he has established. **(ii)** Nor is there any absolute necessity in this:

Because a sphere is made to be one solid cohesive body by the internal mutual attraction of its parts, **therefore** other bodies in its vicinity will also be attracted by it, and those that are nearest will be attracted most.

These phenomena are connected by the order and proportion laid down in the laws of nature, so that we rightly think that there is just one power of attraction that •draws other nearby bodies down to the earth and •attracts the parts of the earth themselves one to another—a single power exerted under different circumstances.) A man's love for those who love him is similarly the operation of a law of nature, a natural effect of his self-love. For him to love those who love him, all that is needed is that he love himself; there's no need for any further principle, as long as nothing intervenes to block the natural cause-effect connection. So there's no more *true virtue* in a man's thus loving his friends merely from self-love than there is in his self-love itself. So it's a man's self-love that dispose him •to hate those who hate him, •to resent injuries done him, •to love those who love him, and •to be thankful to those who have been kind to him.

Some people are sure of the following line of thought and supporting argument:

Gratitude and anger arise not just from self-love but also from another principle, namely our moral sense—a sense of moral beauty and ugliness—which makes all human minds approve of and be pleased with virtue, and disapprove of and be displeased by vice [see Glossary]. What triggers affections [see Glossary] of gratitude or anger is seeing or supposing this moral beauty or ugliness in the kindness of a benefactor or the opposition of an adversary. If that is wrong, why aren't these affections aroused in us towards inanimate things that help or harm us? Why don't we feel gratitude to a garden or a fruitful field? Why aren't we angry with a tempest, or mildew that kills the crops, or a flooding river? We feel very differently towards those who do us good from the virtue of generosity or harm us from the vice of envy and malice than we do

towards things that hurt or help us but lack reason and will.

I have five things to say about this.

(1) [The basic line of thought in this rather difficult paragraph is as follows. We are up against people who say  
**first argument:** Gratitude and anger can't come from self-love, because if they did we would have them towards *anything*—even the weather—that helped or harmed our interests.

They hold that we direct gratitude and anger towards people rather than things because these affections are guided by our 'moral sense', the source of which is the benevolence—love for others, love for the public—that naturally occurs in the hearts of all mankind. But now consider this:

**second argument:** Gratitude and anger can't come from our love for others, because if they did we would have them towards *anything*—even the weather—that helped or harmed others.

If the first argument is good, Edwards says, then so is the second; so the position of these moral theorists is untenable.]

(2) 'Why aren't these affections aroused in us towards inanimate things that help or harm us?' Because that is how God has ordered things! It isn't surprising that the Author of Nature, who maintains order, uniformity, and harmony in establishing its laws, should arrange things so that it is natural for self-love to cause the mind to be affected differently towards exceedingly different objects; causing our heart to reach out in one way towards inanimate things that gratify our self-love without sense or will, and in another way towards beings whom we look on as having understanding and will, like ourselves, and exercising these faculties in our favor, promoting our interests because of love for us. . . .

(3) If we allow that in gratitude and anger there is *always* the exercise of some kind of moral sense—and I agree that

there's something which *could* be called that—the only moral sense that is essential to those affections is a sense of *desert* [see Glossary]; which brings in the sense of justice that I discussed earlier, consisting in a grasp of the secondary kind of beauty that lies in uniformity and proportion. And this solves all the difficulty in the objection presented in the indented passage above. Others' love and kindness to us, or their ill-will and harmfulness, appear to us to *deserve* our love or our resentment. In other words: we see it as simply *just* that as they love us and do us good we should love them and do them good; and that when others' hearts oppose us and lead them to do us harm our hearts should oppose them and we should want them to suffer in the way we have suffered. That is, we see a natural agreement, proportion, and adjustment between these things; and this is indeed a kind of moral sense, i.e. a sense of beauty in moral things. But I repeat that this is a moral sense of a secondary kind, which is entirely different from a sense or taste for the original essential beauty of true virtue; and it can exist in the absence of any principle [see Glossary] of true virtue in the heart. It's a great mistake to think that •the moral sense at work in a sense of desert is the same as •a love of virtue, i.e. a disposition to be pleased with the true virtuous beauty that public benevolence has. This is further confirmed by the following fact. The passions of gratitude and anger, requiring our actions towards others to *fit* their actions towards us, can exist without there being any notion of justice in them. . . . You'll see this in my next point.

(4) Those who hold that the moral sense that is natural to all mankind •consists in a natural liking for the beauty of virtue, and so •arises from a principle of true virtue implanted by nature in the hearts of all, hold that *true virtue consists in public benevolence*. If that is right, . . . then every time a man feels anger for opposition or gratitude

for a favor, he must have some thought of the opposition as tending to *public* harm and of the favor as tending to *public* benefit. This is far from being true! [Edwards now gives two needlessly lengthy examples. (i) In one, someone arouses the anger of a criminal gang by informing on them to the police. (ii) In the other, someone earns the gratitude of a criminal gang by warning them that the police are on their tail. He continues:] Now I think it is clear that in (i) the anger is not accompanied by any sense that public harm has been done—indeed they know the contrary! Nor in (ii) is there any sense that the person to whom they are grateful has done some public good. In each case there is indeed something at work in the anger or gratitude other than a sense of uniformity and proportion, it isn't •public affection or benevolence but •private affection—indeed that most private of all affections, a man's love for his own person.

(5) Someone who wants to convince us that benevolence •is natural to all mankind and •gives us a •moral• sense, a mind-set in which we delight in virtue, makes a poor choice when he decides to illustrate this with the passion of anger. If anger arose from a moral sense •involving a benevolent temper of heart—•being nothing but a liking for the beauty of benevolence—you'd think that a disposition to anger would increase. . . .as a man had more of a sweet, benign, and benevolent temperament. And experience shows the opposite: the **less** benevolence a man has, and the more he has of the opposite temperament, the **more** disposed he is to anger and deep resentment of injuries.

And although

- gratitude is regarded by many as a noble principle of virtue which God has implanted in all human hearts,
- there really is a gratitude that is truly virtuous, and
- ingratitude is truly vicious, and shows an abominable depravity of heart,

what I have said should be enough to convince any fair-minded person that not all gratitude—or loving those who love us—arises from a truly virtuous benevolence of heart, any more than all anger—or hating those that hate us—has such a source.

Self-love is also the source of affections towards those who are near to us by the ties of nature. These include our offspring—creatures of whose existence we have been the occasion [see Glossary], and who are in a very special sense *ours*. Their circumstances, right from the beginning of their existence, in many ways lead them to a high esteem for us, and to treat us with great dependence, submission and compliance. The world is structured in such a way that these—the members of a single family—are united in their interests and therefore act as one in countless affairs, with a sharing of each others' affections, desires, cares, friendships, enmities, and activities. (This affectionate tie with those who close to us in nature is just what you'd expect according to the general analogy of nature's laws.) Some hold that the natural affection between parents and children comes from a particular instinct of nature, I'll discuss this later.

And just as men may love persons and things out of self-love, so may their love for qualities and characters arise from the same source. Some writers bring this into their account of what is going on when self-love leads a man to approve of others whom he knows about through hearsay or history-books or sees represented on the stage, and whom he expects no profit or advantage from; and they handle this love for qualities and characters as though a great degree of metaphysical refining was needed to show what is going on in it. It seems not to have occurred to them that what we approve of *in the first place*—i.e. with a person we actually know—is the character; and that leads us on to approve of the person. Self-love leads men to like a temperament or

character

- which has an intrinsic nature and causal powers like those of self-love, and
- and which generally tends to men's pleasure and benefit, this being something we know without metaphysical refining, because it is self-evident and anyway our experience confirms it.

Is there anything strange in that? And on the other side, is it strange that men should dislike what they see tends to men's pain and misery? Do we need a high level of subtlety and abstraction to grasp what is happening when a child who has been given a strong idea of the deadly nature of the rattlesnake should through self-love have an aversion to rattlesnakes, and some aversion and disgust when merely seeing a picture of that animal? Or when from that same self-love the child is pleased with a lively representation of some pleasant fruit of which it has often tasted the sweetness? Or pleased with the image of a bird which it has always been told is harmless and whose pleasant singing has often entertained it? Yet the child doesn't fear being bitten by the picture of the snake, or expect to eat the painted fruit, or to hear the bird-picture sing. Surely no-one will find it hard to believe that such an approval or disgust of a child might arise from its natural delight in the pleasure of taste and hearing and its aversion to pain and death, through self-love together with the habitual connection of these agreeable or terrible ideas with the *qualities* of these objects, the ideas of which are impressed on the mind of the child by their images.

And where is the difficulty of accepting that a person may hate the general character of a spiteful and malicious man for the same reason that he hates the general nature of a serpent; knowing from reason, instruction and experience that malice in men is pernicious to mankind, as is poison



in a serpent? And if a man can from self-love disapprove of the vices of malice, envy, and the like, which naturally tend to be harmful to mankind, why can't he also from that same principle of self-love approve of the contrary virtues of meekness, peaceableness, benevolence, charity, generosity, justice, and the social virtues in general; which he just as easily and clearly knows tend to the good of mankind? It is undoubtedly true that some people have a love for these virtues from a higher principle; but I am certain that mankind in general have a sort of approval of them that arises from self-love.

A further point: Men usually have the greatest approval of the virtues that best agree with their own interests. . . . We see that people low down on the social scale are especially fond of a condescending [see Glossary], accessible, friendly temperament in the great; not only when the condescension has been exercised towards themselves, but also when they hear of it from others or meet it in history-books or even in romances. The poor will most highly approve of and commend liberality [= 'generosity' in our sense]. The weaker sex, who especially need assistance and protection, will peculiarly esteem and applaud fortitude and generosity [see Glossary] in those of the other sex whom they read or hear of or have represented to them on a stage. All this makes it clear, I think, that when self-love leads people to approve of and commend a benevolent temperament, the intensity of the approval may keep in step with the intensity of the benevolence. This explains our being led by our self-love to have some kind of approval for someone who loves his enemies, because his loving his enemies shows that he has an intensely benevolent temperament, its intensity being shown by the obstacles it overcomes. And what I have been saying provides a second reason why men approve of justice—i.e. a reason other than their liking for the secondary

beauty there is in the uniformity and proportion that justice involves [see page 13]. . . . Men, from their infancy, see the need for justice—that it's necessary not only for others or for human society but also for themselves in kinds of situation that turn up frequently. . . .

And another point: Men's approval of **justice** and **desert**, arising from their sense of the beauty of natural agreement and proportion, will have an indirect influence in causing men to approve of **benevolence**, and disapprove of **malice**. It goes like this: men see that someone who hates and harms others deserves to be hated and punished, and that someone who is benevolent, and loves others and does them good, deserves to be loved and rewarded by others; these views about desert rest on the fact that in each case the character or conduct in question has a natural congruity or agreement or *fit* with the treatment it is thought to deserve. In the mind of someone who has always held these views, the idea of malevolence will come to be habitually connected with the idea of being hated and punished, and self-love finds that disagreeable; while the idea of benevolence comes to be habitually connected with the idea of being loved and rewarded by others, which is pleasing to self-love. And by virtue of this association of ideas, benevolence itself becomes pleasing and the contrary displeasing.

Self-love loathes contempt [see Glossary]; which is why people's self-love may lead them to find odious certain vices that they connect with ideas of contempt—for example, drunkenness, gluttony, cowardice, sloth, miserliness. The idea of contempt becomes associated with the idea of such a vice (a) because we see that the vice is often the object of contempt, and (b) because we ourselves have contempt for it. Some of these vices are signs of *littleness*—small abilities, weakness of mind, inability to do anything much on the human scene. Other vices contract the person's influence

into a narrow sphere, making him less important, more insignificant, and therefore—naturally—are regarded as not counting for much. And yet other of these ill qualities—these vices—are very hurtful to human society, and for this reason our self-love leads us to treat them with contempt. *Every* specific moral virtue comes in at least one (usually more) of these ways to have some kind of approval from self-love without the influence of any truly virtuous principle; and every specific vice meet with some disapproval by the same means.

In many people this kind of approval and dislike, through

the joint influence of •self-love and •association of ideas, is greatly intensified by their education. It's by this means that countless ideas come to have a strong, close, almost unbreakable association with others that they aren't connected with in any way except by education; and this is also the means of greatly strengthening idea-associations that people are led into by other means. Anyone would be convinced of this if he had much experience of American savages and their children. [Edwards wrote this work at a time when he was working as a missionary to an Indian tribe.]

## Chapter 5

### Natural conscience, and the moral sense

To do to someone else something that we would be angry with him for doing to us, or to hate a person for doing to us something that we would want to do to him if the roles were reversed, is to disagree with ourselves and contradict ourselves. It would be to choose and adhere to, and yet to refuse and utterly reject, the very same thing! No wonder this is contrary to nature. No wonder that such self-opposition and inward war between a man and his self naturally creates unquietness and makes a disturbance in his mind. And this uneasiness [see Glossary] can be ascribed to self-love.

This brings us to another disposition or principle—very important, and natural to mankind—that can also be looked on as in a way arising from self-love: I'm talking about a man's disposition to be uneasy [see Glossary] when he's aware

of being inconsistent with himself, and as it were acting against himself. This disposition comes into play when a man is aware of •doing to others things that he would be angry with them for doing to him if the roles were reversed, or of •not doing to them something that he would be displeased with them for not doing to him.

(i) I have remarked that in pure love for others—i.e. love not arising from self-love—there is a union of the heart with other people; a kind of enlargement of the mind, in which it extends itself so as to take others into a man's self: so it involves a disposition to feel, desire, and act as though others were one with ourselves. So self-love involves an inclination to feel and act as one with ourselves; and a natural upshot of this is that any awareness of inconsistency with ourselves

and self-opposition to what we ourselves choose and do is uneasy to the mind. **(ii)** And this will cause uneasiness of mind to be the consequence of a malevolent and unjust behavior towards others, and a kind of disapprobation of acts of this nature, and an approbation of the contrary.

[In the puzzling item **(i)** in that paragraph Edwards is offering to explain *why* self-love makes us dislike being at odds with ourselves. It boils down to this:

My love for you involves me in wanting (as it were) to unite with you, so that you and I are *one*.

That is because

My love for *anything* involves me in wanting (as it were) to unite with that thing, so that it and I are *one*;

which implies that

My love for myself involves me in wanting (as it were) to unite with myself, so that I and myself are *one*.

And my desire to be one with myself is a desire not to be in contradiction with or opposition to myself.]

•Approving of actions because in them we act as in agreement with ourselves, and •disapproving and being uneasy in the awareness of disagreeing with ourselves in what we do, is quite a different thing from •approving (or disapproving) of actions because in them we are (·or aren't·) united with being in general—which is loving or hating actions from a sense of the primary beauty of true virtue and of the odiousness of sin. The former of these principles [see Glossary] is private; the latter is public, and is truly benevolent in the highest sense. The former—an inclination to agree with ourselves—is a •natural principle; but the latter—an agreement or union of heart to the great system, and to God the head of it—is a •divine principle.

Much of the inward trouble men have from reflections of conscience is the uneasiness I have been discussing. When men are free from this uneasiness, and are aware of having acted towards others as they would have expected the others to act towards them, they have what is called *peace*

*of conscience* with respect to those actions. And there is also an *approval of conscience* regarding the conduct of others towards ourselves. As when we are blamed, condemned, or punished by them and are aware that if the roles were reversed we would in the same way blame, condemn or punish them. In this way men's consciences may endorse God's anger and condemnation. When the ideas of God's greatness, their relation to him, the benefits they have received from him, the signs he has given them of what he wants, etc. have been strongly impressed on their minds, they become aware of the resentments *they* would feel if they were subjected to such injurious treatment.

Men's thoughts and views certainly often involve an awareness of this kind, though they might not be able to give any account of it. Unless a man's conscience is virtually numb, such states of awareness will naturally and necessarily arise in his mind—habitually, spontaneously, instantaneously, and as it were insensibly [= 'and without his properly noticing them']. In fact, our only way of conceiving of anything that someone else does or undergoes is to recall and arouse the ideas of what we're aware of having found in our own minds; and by letting these ideas of ours stand in for the ideas of the other person, we (as it were) substitute ourselves for him. We have no conception of what understanding, perception, love, pleasure, pain, or desire are in others except by putting ourselves (as it were) in their place, transferring to them the ideas we get of such things in our own minds, with whatever adjustments we think are needed. That's how it is with all moral things that we conceive of in others; and indeed in everything we conceive of in other people apart from the shape, size, complexion, situation, and motion of their bodies. And this is the only way for us to be able to have ideas of any perception or act of anyone else, even of God. We couldn't have any notion of what understanding

or volition, love or hatred, are in other created spirits or in God if we hadn't experienced *our own* understanding and volition, love and hatred. Knowing what they are by our own consciousness, we can ascribe them to God—cleansed of limits, changeableness, and other imperfections.

But although men in thinking about someone else do (as it were) put themselves in the other's place, this operation is so habitual, instantaneous, and unplanned that they can hardly give any account of it, and many would think it strange if they were told about it. In all the thoughts that one man *x* has about another person *y*, in everything *x* grasps concerning *y*'s moral conduct to others or to *x* himself—whether *x* loves or hates *y*, approves or condemns him, rewards or punishes him—*x* has to be (as it were) putting himself in *y*'s place; and that enables him naturally, easily, and quietly to see whether he would feel in the same way if the roles were reversed.

Natural conscience consists in these two things.

(1) In the disposition to approve or disapprove the moral treatment that passes between us and others—a disposition arising from a mind-set to be easy (or uneasy) in an awareness of our being consistent (or inconsistent) with ourselves. [Edwards now repeats his earlier material about what we would think or feel if the roles were reversed. Then:] Thus men's consciences approve or disapprove the sentence of their judge, by which they are acquitted or condemned. But there's more to natural conscience than this. Before the if-roles-were-reversed procedure is performed, a preliminary question has to be faced. When my conscience disapproves of my own treatment of someone else because I'm aware that if our roles were reversed I would be displeased and angry with him for treating me like that, the question arises: What *reason* would I have for the disapproval, displeasure, and anger that I am aware that I would have if the roles were reversed? Therefore. . .

(2) . . . the other thing that belongs to the approval or disapproval of natural conscience is the sense of *desert* [see Glossary] that I discussed earlier. This, you'll remember, consists in a natural agreement, proportion, and harmony between

- malevolence or injury, and •resentment and punishment,
- loving and •being loved,
- showing kindness and •being rewarded,

and so on. The approval or disapproval involved in a sense of desert agrees with—and is indeed the foundation for—the approval or disapproval involved in conscience. Thus, when a man's conscience disapproves of his treatment of his neighbor,

**first** he is aware that if he were in his neighbor's place he would be led to resent such treatment by his sense of justice, i.e. from his sense of how uniformly such treatment relates to resentment and punishment; and **then** he sees that he isn't being consistent with himself in doing what he himself would resent if etc.,

so he disapproves of it because he is naturally averse to opposition to himself.

Approval and disapproval of conscience in the sense I have been explaining extends to all virtue and vice—to *everything* that is morally good or evil—in a mind that •doesn't confine its view to a private sphere but takes things in general into consideration, and that •is free from speculative [see Glossary] error. Given that all virtue or moral good comes down to love for others, whether God or creatures, it's easy for us to see the uniformity and natural agreement there is between loving others and being accepted and favored by others. And given that all vice, sin, or moral evil consists in the lack of this love for others or in malevolence, it's easy for us to see the natural agreement there is between

hating and harming others and being hated and harmed by them (or by God, who acts for everyone and has the care of the whole system). This sense of equality and natural agreement extends to *all* moral good and evil, so it provides a suitably broad foundation for the other kind of approval and disapproval—the kind that arises from an aversion to self-inconsistency and -opposition. In every case of benevolence or malevolence towards others we can put ourselves in the place of the others, and are naturally led to do this and thus become aware of how we would like or dislike such treatment from others. Thus natural conscience goes along with the law of God, has the same range that it does and joins its voice with it in every article; at least, that's the case if the understanding is properly enlightened and stupefying prejudices are removed.

[This next paragraph brings to a climax—here intensified by bold type—Edwards's thesis that natural conscience looks for uniformity, equality, justice, fittingness, 'agreement', desert, etc. Some aspects of true virtue involve those concepts, he says, which is why natural conscience can align itself with true virtue without being able to 'taste' the 'sweetness' of true virtue in itself.] This lets us see in what way this natural conscience stretches out as far as the true virtue that consists in •union of heart to being in general and •supreme love for God. Conscience doesn't see—or rather doesn't *taste*—the primary and essential beauty of true virtue. The sweetness in benevolence towards being in general—being as such—is something that only general benevolence itself can detect; but this natural conscience that we all have can •approve of true virtue because of the **uniformity, equality, and justice** that it involves, and •see wrongness in the contrary ·of true virtue· by seeing that that contrary naturally **agrees** with being hated by being in general. Men's natural conscience enables them to see the **justice** or natural **agreement** that there is in •yielding all to

God because we •receive all from him; and the **justice** there is in our willingly belonging to him who made us. . . . There's also **justice** in our supreme love for God—a natural **agreement** between our having a supreme respect for God and his exercising infinite goodness to us. . . . Also, natural sense ·or conscience· frowns especially severely on **disagreement** and **discord** in our dealings with things that are closely related to us and are of great importance; and this ·obviously· applies to the dealings of creatures with their Creator, given his infinite importance and the infinite closeness of his relation with them. And it's easy to grasp how natural conscience will see the contrary of true virtue—namely opposition and enmity to being in general—as **deserving** punishment. All it takes is to see how •opposing being in general naturally **agrees** with •being opposed by being in general; along with an awareness of how if we were infinitely great *we* would expect to be regarded according to our greatness, and would **proportionally** resent contempt [see Glossary]. This natural conscience, if well-informed, will approve of true virtue, and will disapprove and condemn the lack of it and opposition to it; yet it won't see the true beauty of it. Indeed, if men's consciences were

- fully enlightened,
- freed from confinement to a private sphere, and brought to consider things in general, and
- freed from being stupefied by sensual objects and appetites, as they will be at the day of judgment,

they would approve nothing but true virtue—general benevolence—and the affections and actions that are consistent with it and generated by it. . . .

That's how God has •brought it about that this principle of natural conscience approves (condemns) the same things that are approved (condemned) by a spiritual sense or virtuous taste, without itself involving any truly spiritual sense or

virtuous taste, because it doesn't involve any such thing as actual benevolence towards being in general or any delight in such benevolence considered simply in itself; and has •brought it about that this natural conscience *is* the moral sense that is natural to mankind—or the part of that moral sense that isn't tainted by self-interest or associations of ideas.

The 'moral sense' that many writers these days insist on so much is the sense of moral good and evil—and the disposition to approve of virtue and disapprove of vice—that men have by natural conscience. It seems to have been a misunderstanding of *this* that has led some moralists to proclaim that all mankind have a disinterested moral sense, and to regard that as a sign that there's a disposition to true virtue—a benevolent temperament—naturally implanted in the minds of all men. Some of their arguments do indeed prove that all men have a moral sense or taste that doesn't arise from self-love. But what they write on this subject is (I humbly suggest) somewhat confused, because the instances they produce of men's approval of virtue are not properly sorted out. Some of them involve approval-of-virtue that arises from self-love, which is irrelevant to the purposes of these writers. Other instances do prove that there is a moral taste—i.e. a *sense* of moral good and evil—that we all naturally have and that doesn't arise from self-love. But I think that all instances of this kind can be explained in terms of *natural conscience*, and especially in terms of what is primary in natural conscience's approval, namely •a sense of desert and •an approval of the natural agreement there is—in manner and measure, ·i.e. in facts about *how* and *how much*·—that there is in justice. But what I have said makes it clear, I think, that *no* instances of the sense of moral good and evil that natural conscience generates involve a truly virtuous taste, i.e. a determination of mind to enjoy and

delight in the essential beauty of true virtue arising from a virtuous benevolence of heart.

And look at it this way: if •the approval of conscience were the same as •the approval of the mind's natural disposition to love and be pleased with virtue, then intensity of someone's conscience-driven approval and condemnation would always be in proportion to how intensely virtuous his temperament was; or rather, the intensities would be just the same. In someone with a high degree of a virtuous temperament, therefore, the testimony of conscience in favor of virtue would be equally strong; while someone with little virtue in his temperament would have an equally feeble testimony of conscience in favor of virtue and against vice. But clearly the facts are different. Some men who have clearer light and stronger convictions of conscience than others live sinfully because they have vicious hearts. If •conscience—approving of duty and disapproving of sin—were the same thing as •the exercise of a virtuous principle of the heart in loving duty and hating sin, then remorse of conscience [= 'knowledge that one has acted wrongly'] would be the same thing as repentance; and the more strongly the sinner •feels remorse of conscience for sin the more completely the heart •is turned from the love of sin to the hatred of it, because •they would be the very same thing.

The Scriptures give Christians the greatest reason to believe that on the day of judgment when

- sinners will be called to answer before their judge, and
- all their wickedness in all its terrible details will be brought clearly into the perfect light of that day, and
- God will reprove them and set their sins in order before them,

their consciences will be greatly awakened and convinced, their mouths will be stopped, all dull inactivity of conscience will be at an end and conscience will have its full exercise;

and therefore their consciences will approve the judge's dreadful sentence against them; and seeing that they have deserved so great a punishment, they will join with the judge in condemning them [i.e. they will condemn themselves as the judge condemns them]. And according to the view of conscience that I am opposing, this would be the same thing as

- their being brought to the fullest repentance,
- their hearts being perfectly changed to hate sin and love holiness, and
- virtue or holiness of heart being brought in to the most full and perfect exercise.

But we have reason to suppose that the reality will be ever so much different! On the day of judgment the sin and wickedness of their heart will come to its highest dominion and completest exercise; they will be wholly left by God—given up to their wickedness, just as the devils are! When God has given up waiting on sinners, and his Spirit has finished struggling with them, he won't restrain their wickedness as he does now. Then sin will rage in their hearts like a fire that is no longer restrained or kept under. It is proper for a judge who is condemning a criminal to try to set his guilt before him so as to convince his conscience that the sentence is just. The Almighty will do this effectively and completely, so as thoroughly to awaken and convince the sinner's conscience. But if natural conscience were the same thing as the disposition of the heart to be pleased with virtue, then at the same time that the conscience was brought to its perfect exercise [= 'was made to operate fully, completely, thoroughly'],

the heart would be made perfectly holy—i.e. would be ready to exercise true virtue and holiness in perfect benevolence of temperament. But instead of this, their wickedness will become complete, and wicked men will become very devils and will therefore be sent away as cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

But if natural conscience is what I have described it as being, everything falls into place. When sinners see the greatness of the Being in contempt of whom they have lived with rebellion and opposition, and are given a clear view of their obligations to him as their Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, etc., together with how thoroughly they have acted as enemies to him, they may have a clear sense of what they *deserve* for their sin, consisting in the natural agreement there is between their having contempt for such a Being and his despising and opposing them; between their treating God as an enemy and his acting as their enemy by inflicting dreadful penalties on them; and their being aware of how angry they would naturally be if the roles were reversed. They can achieve all this without needing a virtuous benevolent temperament, relishing and delighting in benevolence and loathing the contrary. The conscience can see the natural agreement between opposing and being opposed, between hating and being hated, without being led by a benevolent temperament to abhor malevolence or being led by a view of the beauty of God's holiness to love him. These things have no necessary dependence on one another.

## Chapter 6

### Natural instincts that resemble virtue

Men naturally have various dispositions and inclinations, depending on particular laws of nature that determine their minds to have certain affections and make them act in certain ways towards particular objects. These laws seem to be established chiefly for the preservation of mankind, and for their comfortably surviving in the world. The dispositions ·that they generate· can be called *instincts*.

Some instincts concern only ourselves individually, e.g. many of our natural appetites and aversions. Some are more social, and extend to others, e.g. mutual inclinations between the sexes. Some of these dispositions are more external and sense-related, e.g. the ones relating to food and drink, and the more sense-related inclinations of the sexes towards each other. Others are more internal and mental, consisting in *affections* [see Glossary] that mankind naturally exercise towards some of their fellow creatures and in some cases towards men in general. Some of these can be called ‘kind’ affections because they

have something in them of benevolence, or a resemblance of it;

others have an angry appearance, e.g. the passion of jealousy between the sexes, especially in the male towards the female.

All I have reason to consider here are the ‘kind’ affections, namely the ones that

have the appearance of benevolence and thus in some respects resemble virtue.

[The two indented clauses are in Edwards’s words; they are put on display because of the slight but perhaps significant difference between them.] I will therefore consider these, and try to show that

none of them can have the nature of true virtue.

The kind affection that people have towards one another in natural relations, especially the love of parents for their children, is regarded by many as an instinct. I have already considered this sort of love—this ‘natural affection’, as it is called—as an affection arising from self-love; and I have shown that when looked at in that way it can’t have the nature of true virtue. But if anyone thinks that natural affection is caused by a particular instinct of nature rather than by self-love, I shan’t think it a point worthy of controversy or dispute. In my opinion both are true: natural affection

- (1) arises from natural instinct; because it depends on a law of nature. *and*
- (2) arises from self-love; because the underlying law of nature—which is a part of orderly and harmonious law-structure of the world as a whole—is connected with and follows from self-love, as I showed earlier.

But my present purpose doesn’t require me to insist on this. If a man’s natural affection for his children or near relations arises from a particular independent instinct of nature—not an integral part of the world’s law-structure, but something special· that the Creator in his wisdom has implanted in men for their preservation and well-being—it still can’t have the nature of true virtue. In chapter 2 I said (and, I humbly think, showed) that if any being has a benevolent mind-set that is directed only to some particular persons or some private system—however many individuals that system may contain, so long as it contains only a finite number of them and is thus an infinitely small part of universal existence and so



bears no proportion to this great and universal system—this limited private benevolence which doesn't arise from and isn't subordinate to benevolence towards being in general cannot have the nature of true virtue. And this is true whatever the cause is of this limited-benevolence mind-set—whether it comes from natural instinct or whatever. However, here are two more points, which make it demonstratively evident that those affections can't have the nature of true virtue.

[In what comes next, 'the principle of virtue' twice replaces Edwards's 'a principle of virtue', which must have been a slip. It's Edwards who speaks of 'this principle'.]

**(i)** They don't arise from the *principle of virtue*. The most considerable recent writers on morality have held that the principle of virtue is •general benevolence, i.e. •public affection; and I think it has been proved to be

the heart's union with *being* as such;

which implies

a disposition to benevolence towards being in general.

Now the affections I am speaking of don't arise from this principle; whether they arise from **(2)** self-love or from **(1)** particular instincts, either way their source is not a principle of general benevolence.

**(ii)** These private affections, as well as not arising from general benevolence or being connected with it from the outset, have no tendency to produce it. This can be seen from what I have already said: not being dependent on benevolence—being detached and not subordinate to it—they involve some •opposition to being-in-general rather than •the love for it which is •general benevolence. Everyone sees and accepts this with regard to self-love; but the reasons why love that is confined to a single person should have an influence against general benevolence are equally reasons why *any* private affection—confined to limits infinitely short of universal existence—should have the same influence.

And affections that don't •arise from a virtuous principle and don't •cause true virtue can't have the nature of true virtue—what is more obvious than that?

For the reasons I have given, it is undeniable that if someone has a benevolent affection towards

- a party, or
- the nation he belongs to, or
- something as large as the Roman empire once was, or
- the whole world of mankind, or even
- all created sensible things throughout the universe,

but doesn't have •a union of heart to general existence and •a love of God, and so doesn't derive his benevolent affection from a supreme regard for God, this affection of his can't have the nature of true virtue.

If 'natural affection' arises from a particular natural instinct, that is especially obviously true of the mutual affection that naturally arises between the sexes. I agree with Hutcheson and Hume that there's a foundation laid in nature for kind affections between the sexes; these affects are different from, and don't arise out of, desires for physical pleasure. There is doubtless a disposition both to a mutual benevolence and a mutual satisfaction that aren't connected by natural laws with any desires for sexual pleasure. But it's clear that affections that are limited to opposite sexes come from a particular instinct that directs *and limits* them. They don't come from the principle of general benevolence, because this has no tendency to any such limitation. And though these affections don't arise from the desires for sexual pleasure, they are implanted by the Author of nature chiefly for the same purpose, namely the preservation or continuation of mankind. That is why men and women become willing to leave their father and mother and all their natural relations in the families they were born and brought up in, •for the sake of a legally established union with a

companion of the other sex, to go through the series of labors, anxieties, and pains involved in the support and upbringing of a family of children; and partly also •for the comfort of mankind as united in a marriage-relation [that last clause is in Edwards's exact words]. But few if any will deny that the special natural disposition for mutual affection between the sexes arises from an instinct, i.e. a particular law of nature; so obviously natural dispositions can't have the nature of true virtue.

Another affection that comes from a particular instinct is the pity that is natural to men when they see others in great distress. It is indeed general, and natural, but it seems clear that this pity doesn't have the nature of true virtue. I'm *not* saying that there's no such thing as a truly virtuous pity among mankind, or that pity never arises from the truly virtuous divine principle of general benevolence to sensitive beings [i.e. beings that can *feel*]. But I don't think that *all* pity is like that. Indeed, the disposition to pity that is natural to all mankind is not like that; and I'll say outright that it doesn't arise from benevolence and shouldn't be called 'benevolent'.

If everything that we call 'pity'—all the uneasiness [see Glossary] at the sight of others' *extreme distress*—really did have the nature of benevolence, then those who have it would also have some level of uneasiness when they become aware of people who merely have *a total lack of happiness*. (Why? Because the most immediate upshot of benevolence or good will towards a person y is a desire for y's happiness.) But this isn't the case for everyone who is disposed to exercise pity. Consider someone x who doesn't think there is an after-life and views death merely as a cessation of all feeling; x hears that someone y has died; this doesn't cause x to have any strong feelings although he thinks that y now has no happiness at all; yet x would have been moved with pity towards y if he saw y under some very extreme anguish. •And

the point goes beyond pity towards *people*: some people would be moved with pity by seeing a brute-creature under extreme and long torments, yet suffer no uneasiness in knowing that thousands of such creatures die every day and so have an end put to all their pleasure. •And another point: it's the nature of true benevolence towards y to desire and rejoice in y's prosperity and pleasure. . . . But it can happen that someone greatly pities y when he is in extreme pain, without getting any lift from the knowledge that y is experiencing positive pleasure. . . .

Indeed, x can have pity towards y not only •without benevolence towards y but •with outright malevolence towards him. It may be that x positively wants y to suffer some calamity, but will pity y if his calamity goes too far, i.e. beyond x's hatred. If x has true malevolence towards y, wanting him to have nothing good in his life, only evil, it may be that his hatred isn't infinite—it has a limit. And when x sees y in misery far beyond x's ill will, he may then pity him because the natural instinct begins to operate. . . . It can be very clear that x's heart has no benevolence towards y, and is indeed under the power of malevolence towards him, because he

- would be sorry to see y prosper, and
- would be outright glad if y died,

and yet x would pity y if he was being tortured or otherwise subjected to a level of misery out of proportion to x's malevolence towards him.

All this may convince us that natural pity is very different in nature from true virtue, arising not •from a disposition of the heart to general benevolence but •from a particular instinct that the Creator has implanted—chiefly for the preservation of mankind, and perhaps partly also for their well-being. It's because of God's mercy that he gives us this instinct; it is an instance of his love for the world of mankind, and is evidence that although the world is so

sinful God doesn't aim to make it a world of punishment, and has therefore made many merciful ways for relief to be given in extreme calamities. We have natural pity for sufferers beyond those with whom we are closely connected, especially when the suffering is great, because in many such cases •men need help from others besides their near friends, and •if help isn't given the sufferer will die. Why hasn't the Author of nature given men an instinct inclining them as much •to rejoice at the sight of others' great prosperity and pleasure as •to grieve at their extreme calamity? It may be because such an instinct isn't needed for their survival. . . .

The instincts that in some respects resemble a virtuous benevolence are suitable to the state that God designed mankind for in this world, where he intends them to survive

and live comfortably. But in the world of punishment—where the state of the wicked inhabitants will be exceedingly different, and God will not be pursuing any of these merciful plans—we have good reason to think that there will be no such thing as a •disposition to pity for anyone, no •natural affection towards near relations, and no •mutual affection between opposite sexes.

A final point: natural instinct that disposes men to pity others in misery is also a source of •a kind of abhorrence in men of some vices, e.g. cruelty and oppression, and so also of •a sort of approval of the contrary virtues, e.g. humanity, mercy, and so on. But this aversion and this approval, insofar as they arise from this cause alone don't owe anything to a principle of true virtue.

## Chapter 7

### Why these non-virtues are often mistaken for true virtue

**1.** [We'll come to **2.** on page 34.] Although these things—these instincts—don't have the •specific and distinguishing nature and essence of virtue, they do have something that belongs to the •general nature of virtue. The general nature of true virtue is love. There are two forms of it: •benevolent love and •pleasurable love; but primarily •benevolence to persons and beings, and consequently and secondarily in •delight in virtue, as I have shown [see **(1)** and **(2)** on page 3]. These are two respects in which the natural affections and principles

that I have been talking about have something of the general nature of virtue.

Many of these natural affections have, in part, something of the *effects* that benevolence has. Pity to others in distress, though it isn't really *love*, as I have demonstrated, has some of the same influence and effect as benevolence. One effect of x's true benevolence towards y is for x to •be uneasy when y is in distress and to •want to bring him relief. And natural pity has the same effect.

Other natural affections really do involve a sort of private benevolence, but it falls short of true virtuous benevolence—both in its nature and in its range. Natural gratitude, though not properly called love, works in the same way as friendship—though with three limitations:

- it is only partial,
- it doesn't last for very long, and
- it concerns only as much of its object's welfare as appears to be a deserved requital [see Glossary] for kindness received.

[A long subordinate clause in that sentence says *why* gratitude isn't really love. It is 'because persons may on certain occasions be moved with a degree of gratitude towards others for whom they have no real and proper friendship. For example, Saul was grateful to David on more than one occasion when David, with a good opportunity to kill Saul, had spared his life'. Edwards expects his readers to know that Saul and David certainly weren't *friends*.] In other cases gratitude has a more general and abiding influence, so as more properly to be called 'love'; and quite often men's natural gratitude creates in them a sort of benevolence, a love for those who love them. From this, together with some other natural principles, men may love their near friends, their own party, their country, and so on. The natural disposition to mutual affection between the sexes often operates by something that can properly be called 'love'. Between a man and a woman there often truly is a kind of benevolence and mutual satisfaction, as there also is between parents and children.

So these things—these instincts or natural dispositions—have something of the general nature of virtue. What essentially stops them from *being* virtuous is that they are private in their nature; they don't •arise from, and don't •cause, a temperament of benevolence to being in general. But what they have of the general nature of virtue makes them **beautiful within their own private sphere**—i.e. we see

them as beautiful if we confine our view to that private system and don't think about anything outside it that it is related to. [The force of those last five words is to confine what Edwards is saying to the whole of *this* universe, the whole of what is in any spatial, temporal, causal or psychological relation to us. He is allowing that there may be universes—total systems—that don't stand in any relation to us. That precaution drops out of the next sentence, but shows up again in the one after that.] If that private system contained the whole of universal existence, the benevolence involved in some of the instincts would have true beauty; i.e. it would be **beautiful, all things considered**; but as things are it is not so. Any such private system is so far from containing the whole of universal being, or taking in all existence to which we stand related, that it contains only an infinitely small part of it. What makes men so ready to take these private affections for true virtue is the narrowness of their view, and above all their being so prone to leave the Divine Being out of their view—to leave him out of their thoughts, or to think of him as though he didn't properly belong to the system of real existence but was a kind of shadowy, imaginary being. And although most men allow that there is a God, they leave him out when thinking about the state of things, not attributing to him the influence and effect of something that really exists, as they do with other beings that they experience and have dealings with through their external senses. In their views of beauty and ugliness, and in their inward sensations of displeasure and approval, they don't *naturally* view the Deity as part of the system, and as the head of it, in comparison of whom all other things are to be viewed with corresponding impressions. [From the last comma to the end, that is in Edwards's exact words.]

Indeed, when we are judging the beauty of affections and actions, the narrowness of our views is apt to limit our consideration to only a small part of the created system.

When private affections reach out to a considerable number, we're ready to •look on them as truly virtuous and •applaud them highly. That's what happens with a man's love for a large party, or for a country. His private system contains only a small part even of the world of mankind (•let alone of the whole universe•), but there are quite a lot of individuals in it, and—given the limitedness of his mind and the narrowness of his views—they are ready to occupy his whole mental field and seem to be everything. Among the Romans, for example, love for their country was the highest virtue; yet this vaunted affection of theirs was employed for the destruction of the rest of mankind, as it were. The larger the number of individuals to which •a private affection extends, the more closely that private system will resemble the universe, and the more apt men will therefore be to mistake •it for true virtue,

That's why self-love is not mistaken for true virtue. It does involve love and good will, as does true virtue, but what it is directed at is so private, the limits are so narrow, that it comes nowhere near to taking up the person's whole view—unless he is so proud that he pictures himself as though he were the universe. A man's mind is large enough to take in vastly more than merely himself; and although self-love is far from being useless in the world—indeed, society utterly needs it—we can all see that it can make a man a common enemy to the general system if it isn't subordinated to and regulated by some other more extensive principle. And the same thing holds for any other private affection, even one that extends to a system containing millions of individuals. [The rest of this paragraph is true to the content of what Edwards wrote at this point, but departs greatly from his wording.] Consider two private systems:

P<sub>1</sub>: the Roman Empire as it was in 40 CE;

P<sub>2</sub>: the Emperor Caligula.

(Caligula is to be thought of as the 'system' to which his

self-love is directed.) Now, as compared with the whole of reality, these two are on a par: each is infinitely less than the whole; it's just not true that P<sub>1</sub>'s size is a bigger proportion than P<sub>2</sub>'s of **the size of the universe**. But the difference of size is significant in another way: P<sub>1</sub>'s size is a bigger proportion than P<sub>2</sub>'s of **the greatest size of what can be crammed into a man's thought and imagination**, and so it is more likely to be *regarded as* being the universal system or at least as being very like it.

I have noted that many of these natural principles resemble virtue in its primary operation, which is benevolence. Many of them also have a resemblance to it in its secondary operation, namely approval of and delight in virtue itself. [see (1) and (2) on page 3] Several kinds of approval of virtue don't have the nature of a truly virtuous approval consisting in a sense and enjoyment of the essential beauty of virtue. One example is the approval of conscience •from a sense of the inferior and secondary beauty—namely the beauty of uniformity—that there is in virtue; and •from a sense of desert, consisting in a sense of the natural *fit* between loving and being loved, showing kindness and receiving kindness. And that same principle, •conscience•, yields •a disapproval of vice, based on a natural opposition to ugliness and disproportion, and •a sense of ill-desert, i.e. the natural agreement there is between hated and being hated, opposing and being opposed etc., together with a painful sensation naturally arising from a sense of opposition to oneself and inconsistency with oneself. Approval by conscience is more easily mistaken for a truly virtuous approval because God has wisely constituted the world in such a way that a well-informed and thoroughly alert conscience will agree with God fully and exactly regarding •what items are to be approved, though not regarding •the basis and reason for that approval. This conscience approves of all virtue and

condemns all vice. It approves of true virtue and indeed approves of nothing that is against it or falls short of it, as I have shown. Natural conscience is implanted in all mankind to serve in place of God (as it were), as an *internal* judge or standard for distinguishing right from wrong.

I have also shown how the influence of self-love, together with the association of ideas [see page 21], leads us to approve of the virtue that consists in benevolence and to dislike the vice that consists in ill will. Similarly, men don't have or need any *reason* for disliking the qualities in things that they have always connected with the ideas of hurtfulness, malignancy, perniciousness; or for approving of things that they habitually connect with the ideas of profit, pleasantness, and so on. This approval of virtue, and dislike of vice, is easily mistaken for true virtue, not only because •the things it approves of have the nature of virtue, and the things it dislikes have the nature of vice; but also because •it is in itself very *like* virtuous approval, because each of them involves pleasure that comes from love—the only difference being that in one case it is •love for being in general while in the other it is •self-love.

The natural instinct of pity also, as I have shown, makes us like some virtues and dislike some vices. There are many reasons why we are apt to mistake this for the exercise of true virtue. We have here a kind of pleasure in items that have the nature of virtue; the virtues themselves are very lovable, e.g. humanity, mercy, tenderness of heart, etc.; their contraries are very odious; and, in addition to all that, the approval comes not from self-love but from compassion—an affection that is directed towards others and resembles benevolence, as I have explained.

**2.** [Following on from **1.** on page 31.] Another reason why the natural instincts are mistaken for true virtue is that there is in them a true negative moral goodness. By a 'negative moral

goodness' I mean the negation or absence of true moral evil. They have this negative moral goodness because the lack of them would show a much greater moral evil. Consider someone who has a natural conscience that operates at a decent level and exhibits a fair degree of sensibility [here = 'moral awareness']: he doesn't have real **positive** virtue, i.e. true moral goodness; but he has a **negative** moral goodness, because the state of his conscience is evidence that he *doesn't* have the higher degree of wickedness that kills moral awareness and numbs the conscience. For sin offends not only against a •spiritual and divine sense of virtue, but also against •the dictates of the moral sense that natural conscience contains. It's no wonder that this •moral• sense, being long opposed and often conquered, grows weaker. All sin originates in selfishness, i.e. self-love that isn't subordinate to a regard for being in general; and natural conscience chiefly consists in a sense of *desert*, i.e. the natural fit between sin and misery. But a man wouldn't deserve punishment for always putting himself first if he really was more considerable than the rest of the universe taken together. So it's no wonder that men who for years act from the selfish principle, and get used to treating themselves *as though* they were everything, increase in pride and come to regard themselves as *being* everything, and so to lose entirely the sense of deserving punishment for putting themselves before everything else. Nor is it any wonder that someone who repeatedly sins without being punished or seeing himself threatened with punishment comes to have a less and less live sense of sin's connection with punishment.

The sense that an awakened conscience has of what sin deserves consists chiefly in a sense of its deserving resentment from God, the fountain and head of universal existence. But it's no wonder that by a long continued worldly and sensual life men gradually lose all sense of the Deity, who

is a spiritual and invisible being. Through spending years involved in and absorbed by objects presented by the senses, the mind becomes sensual in all its operations; it excludes all views and impression of spiritual objects, and isn't fit to think about them. Thus •conscience and •general benevolence are entirely different principles; and thus a sense of conscience differs from the holy obedience of a benevolent and truly virtuous heart. But persistent wickedness can in time greatly diminish a sense of conscience. Thus, the possession of an awakened conscience counts as negative moral goodness, because it is evidence of the absence of the higher degree of wickedness that makes the conscience go numb.

Similarly with natural gratitude: there may be no virtue merely in loving those who love us, but the contrary ·attitude of rank ingratitude· may be evidence of a great degree of depravity: it may show a high degree of selfishness in a man who has come to look on himself as everything and others as nothing, implying that their respect and kindness are also nothing. Thus an increase in pride diminishes gratitude. So does sensuality, or the increase of sensual appetites; which, coming more and more under the power and impression of sensible objects, tends by degrees to make the mind insensible to anything else. Those appetites take up the whole soul; and through habit and custom the water is all drawn out of other channels in which it naturally flows, and is all carried into one channel.

In the same way, natural affection and natural pity, though they don't have the nature of virtue, can be greatly diminished by an increase of •pride and •sensuality; and as a result of this they can be habitually disposed to envy, malice, and so on. When •these lusts are very prevalent they can overcome and diminish the exercise of those natural principles; just as they often overcome and diminish common prudence in a man, stopping him from seeking his own

private interests in matters of health, wealth, or honour. But no-one will think that a man who prudently pursues his own personal and temporal [see Glossary] interests, ·and isn't side-tracked by pride or sensuality·, is exhibiting anything with the nature and essence of true virtue.

**3.** A third reason why these natural principles and affections are mistaken for true virtue is that they have some of the same *effects* that true virtue has. This happens in various ways, especially these two:

(i) God in his wisdom and goodness has made the world in such a way that these natural principles mostly tend [see Glossary] to the good of mankind. So do natural pity, gratitude, parental affection, and so on. In this they resemble the causal powers of general benevolence, which seeks and produces the general good. But this doesn't show that these natural principles have the nature of true virtue. Self-love is exceeding useful and necessary; and so are the natural appetites of hunger, thirst, and so on. But nobody will say that they have the nature of true virtue.

(ii) The upshots of these principles are like those of true virtue in that each tends in various ways to restrain vice and prevent many acts of wickedness. Natural affection in the form of love for our party or our friends tends to keep us from the real wickedness of acting unjustly towards these persons. Pity blocks cruelty that would be a real and great moral evil. Natural conscience tends to restrain sin in general. But this can't prove that pity and conscience themselves have the nature of true virtue. Merciful God has so organised the present state of things that even self-love often restrains men from acts of true wickedness; and indeed sets them to work seeking true virtue; but self-love, far from being true virtue, is the source of all the wickedness in the world.

**4.** Some of these inferior affections are regarded as virtuous because they share their names with affections that *are*

truly virtuous—for example the names ‘pity’ and ‘compassion’. General benevolence creates a truly **virtuous pity** or compassion towards others who are afflicted; it would do this even if there were no particular instinct or any other principle making the mind go that way. It is easy to see how benevolence, which seeks another’s good, should cause us to desire his deliverance from evil; and this is a source of pity far more extensive than the other, ·i.e. than the pity that we have as an instinct·. It arouses compassion in places that the natural instinct overlooks; and when both kinds of pity are at work in a given case, the •benevolent, virtuous kind mixes its influence with the •natural principle, and guides its operation. When that happens, the resultant pity can be called a ‘**virtuous compassion**’. There is also **virtuous gratitude**—a gratitude that arises from self-love *and* from a superior principle of disinterested general benevolence. Thus, when we receive kindness from someone whom we love already, we are

- more likely to be grateful, and
- likely to be more grateful,

than when ·we receive a benefit from someone for whom· our mind has no such friendly attitude in advance. So when the superior principle of virtuous love has a governing hand ·in our gratitude· and regulates it, it may be called a virtuous gratitude. There is also a **virtuous love of justice**, arising

from pure benevolence to being in general; because such benevolence naturally and necessarily inclines the heart towards wanting every particular being to have a share of benevolence that is appropriate to its dignity—i.e. to the degree of its being and the degree of its virtue. So it’s easy to see how there can be a **virtuous sense of desert** different from the natural and common one; and a **virtuous conscientiousness**, or a sanctified conscience. And because natural affections can be called ‘virtuous’ when their operations are •mixed with and directed by virtuous benevolence, we can properly speak of •virtuous love of parents to children, and between other near relatives; a •virtuous love of our town or country or nation. Yes, and a •virtuous love between the sexes, because there too the influence of virtue can be mingled with instinct; and virtue may govern what happens between the two, guiding their relationship to ends that are agreeable to the great purposes of true virtue.

Genuine virtue prevents the habits of pride and sensuality from growing to the point where they diminish the exercises of the useful and necessary principles of nature. And a principle of general benevolence softens and sweetens the mind, makes it more open to the proper influence of the gentler natural instinct, directs each instinct into its proper channel, ensures that the exercise of it is appropriate and not extreme, and guides everything to the best ends.



## Chapter 8

### In what respects virtue or moral good is based on sentiment and how far it is based on the reason and nature of things

[See Glossary on **sense** and **sentiment**.]

Virtue is a certain kind of beautiful nature, form or quality. A form or quality is called 'beautiful' if it appears as in itself agreeable or attractive, i.e. if the view of it is immediately pleasant to the mind. I say agreeable 'in itself' and 'immediately pleasant' so as to exclude things that are not attractive—perhaps that are outright disagreeable—in themselves but which appear desirable and agreeable *indirectly* because of something else that they are connected with. Such indirect agreeableness in things. . . . is not beauty. But when a form or quality appears lovely, pleasing, and delightful in itself, then it is called 'beautiful'; and this agreeableness or pleasingness of the idea *is* beauty. How do we come by the idea of beauty? Obviously, by **immediately sensing** the pleasingness of the idea called 'beautiful', and not by **finding out by argumentation** any of its consequences or other relations; any more than tasting the sweetness of honey or perceiving the harmony of a tune is done by argumentation regarding connections and consequences. What does *not* happen is this:

We have the idea, and *then* reason regarding it in order to find out whether it is beautiful or not.

What *does* happen is this:

Our frame of mind when the idea first appears declares it to be pleasing, i.e. to appear beautiful.

We know this about the idea as soon as we have it.

If that is all that is meant by those who say that virtue is founded in **sentiment** and not in **reason**—if their thesis is just that

those who see the beauty of true virtue perceive it not •by argumentation regarding its connections and consequences but •by the frame of their own minds, i.e. a certain spiritual sense given them by God, by which they immediately perceive pleasure in the presence of the idea of true virtue in their minds, i.e. are directly pleased by the view or thought of true virtue

—they are certainly right. But perhaps they mean that the God-given frame of mind or inward sense by which the mind is disposed to delight in the idea of true virtue is given arbitrarily [see Glossary], so that God could have chosen to give a contrary sense and determination of mind, which would have agreed as well with the necessary nature of things.

This I think is not true.

Virtue (I repeat) consists in the heartfelt consent [see Glossary] or union of •being to •being in general. And the frame of mind in which it is set to enjoy and be pleased with the view of virtue is benevolence, i.e. union of the heart with being in general—meaning that it is a universally benevolent frame of mind. Now, someone whose temperament involves love for **being in general** must be disposed to approve and

be pleased with **love for being in general**. So our question is whether this is true:

**P:** When God gave this temperament to a created mind, he was acting so arbitrarily that a contrary temperament would have agreed as well with the nature of things as this one does.

•There are at least four reasons for saying that this is false. •

**(1)** To assert P would be a plain absurdity, and contrary to the very supposition. We are supposing that virtue in its very essence consists in agreement or consent of being to being. Now certainly •agreement to being in general must necessarily agree better with general existence than •opposition and contrariety to it.

**(2)** When God gave creatures that kind of temperament he was giving something that is agreeable to his own temperament and nature—the nature that he has by absolute necessity. For, as I have already observed, God himself is in effect being in general; and there can be no doubt that it's inherently necessary that God should agree with himself, be united with himself, love himself; so when he gives the same temperament to his creatures this is more agreeable to his necessary nature than the opposite temperament—which would indeed be *infinitely* contrary to his nature.

**(3)** All that *can* be created by such a temperament are created beings that •are united to and •agree with one another. Why? Because this temperament consists in consent and union to being in general; which implies agreement and union with every particular being (except where union with a being would be somehow inconsistent with union to general existence). If any particular created being had a temperament opposed to being in general, that would imply the most universal and greatest possible discord of creatures with their Creator *and* of created beings with one another.

**(4)** This is the only temperament in which a man can agree with himself or be without self-inconsistency, i.e. without having some inclinations and likings in outright opposition to others. Here is why. Every being that has understanding and will necessarily loves happiness. To suppose that a being doesn't love happiness would be to suppose that he doesn't love what is agreeable to him; and that is a contradiction, or at least would imply that for him nothing is agreeable or desirable, which is to say that he has no faculty of will, no power to choose. So every being who has a faculty of will *must* have an inclination to happiness. So if he is consistent with himself, and doesn't have any inclinations conflicting with others, he must

- approve of inclinations that lead beings to desire the happiness of being in general, and
- be against any disposition in favour of the misery of being in general;

because otherwise he would be approving of opposition to his own happiness. . . . Anyone who loves a tendency to universal misery in effect loves a tendency to his own misery; and as he necessarily hates his own misery, one of his inclinations conflicts with another. Also: it follows from self-love that men love to be loved by others, because in this others' love agrees with their own love. But if men loved hatred to being in general, they would be inconsistent with themselves, with one natural inclination contrary to another.

These things may help us to understand why the spiritual and divine *sense* by which those who are truly virtuous and holy perceive the excellence of true virtue that is in the Bible called 'light', 'knowledge', 'understanding', and so on. If this divine sense were merely arbitrarily given, with no foundation in the nature of things, it wouldn't be right to call it by such names. For if a sense didn't involve a correspondence with the nature of things that a contrary sense wouldn't have

involved, the idea we obtain by this spiritual sense couldn't *at all* be called 'knowledge' or 'perception' of anything except our own states of mind, because the idea wouldn't represent anything outside the mind. But because it is agreeable (in the respects I have mentioned) to the nature of things, and especially because it represents the moral perfection and excellence of the Divine Being, it gives us a *perception* of that moral excellency, of which we otherwise couldn't have had a true idea. And that is how people get the true knowledge of God that •enlightens the mind in the knowledge of **divine things** in general and •in many ways helps people to get a right understanding of **things** in general, seeing the nature and truth of them. . . . (I could show this if it were required for the main purpose of this work.) Whereas the lack of this spiritual sense and the prevalence of dispositions that are contrary to it tends to darken and distract the mind, and dreadfully to delude and confound men's understandings.

And the common human moral sense contained in natural conscience is also *not* a sentiment arbitrarily given by the Creator, with no relation to the necessary nature of things. It is established in agreement with the nature of things, and established in such way that there couldn't be any *sense* that was contrary in itself and in its effects. Here are two things that show this:

**(i)** If the understanding is well informed, and is exercised freely and in an extensive manner, without being restrained to a private sphere, •this moral sense approves the very same things that •the spiritual and divine sense approves—all those, and only those—though not on the same grounds or with the same kind of approval. Therefore, because that divine sense is agreeable to the necessary nature of things (as I have shown), this inferior moral sense being must also agree with the nature of things.

**(ii)** I have shown that this moral sense—the inferior

one that conscience includes—consists in approving the uniformity and natural agreement there is between one thing and another, -e.g. between crime and punishment, between benefit and gratitude, and so on. And just that fact about it ensures that it is agreeable to the nature of things. . . . And such a mental temperament is more agreeable to the nature of things than an opposite temperament would be.

We use language to express our *sentiments* or ideas to each other; so that the words by which we signify things of a moral nature express the moral sentiments that are common to mankind. So the *moral sense* that natural conscience includes is what chiefly •governs the use of language and •serves as the mind's rule of language in these matters. It is indeed the general natural rule that God has given to us all to judge moral good and evil by. The words 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'evil', when used in a moral sense, ordinarily mean something about what deserves praise or blame, respect or resentment; and this natural moral sense gives mankind in general a sense of desert.

So here's a question that may be worth considering:

Given that •sentiment governs language about what is called 'good' or 'evil', 'worthy' or 'unworthy', and that •obviously sentiment—at least about many particular cases—differs in different persons, especially in different nations, with one person or nation regarding as praiseworthy something others regard as worthy of blame, how can virtue and vice *not* be arbitrary, determined not at all by the nature of things but only by men's sentiments about the nature of things?

To answer this question clearly, I shall divide it into two: **(a)** Are men's sentiments regarding moral good and evil casual and accidental? **(b)** Is their way of using words like 'good' and 'evil' arbitrary, not reflecting any common sentiment that conforms to the nature of things?

As to **(a)**: when men have a sense of something's *deserving* esteem or resentment, it may be that the general •disposition or •sense of mind that is in play is the same in all of them, although they may differ regarding what particular items deserve this or that. Because of bias or error, different men or groups of men may differ greatly about particulars. So the over-all situation may be this:

- We all have the same notion of *deserving* love or resentment—a notion of the suitableness or natural uniformity and agreement between •the affections and acts of the agent and the •affections and treatment of others who are somehow involved—
- and yet we differ greatly in what particular occasions and objects fit this common notion, because we differ in how and with what biases we view them.

And the variety may be caused in countless other ways—example, custom, education, and association—but I needn't go on about this here because other writers, especially Hutcheson, have abundantly shown that the differences existing among different persons and nations, concerning moral good and evil, are consistent with there being a general moral sense that is common to all mankind.

And **(b)** the use of the words 'good' and 'evil', 'right' and 'wrong', when used in a moral sense, are not altogether unfixed and arbitrary, despite the variety of notions, opinions, and views that give rise to the variety of sentiment that I have mentioned. For although the signification of words is determined by •particular uses, what *governs* the use of terms is •general or common use. And mankind *have to aim* at a use that the same for all of them, because it's easy to see that the purpose of language—namely, to be a

common medium for expressing ideas and sentiments—can't be obtained except through a consistent use of words, in which men are consistent with themselves and with one another. And the only way men can be *consistent* in what they say about what's right or wrong, worthy or ill-deserving, is by being *right* in what they say, attributing praiseworthiness or blameworthiness to things that truly deserve praise or blame. . . . Thieves or traitors may be angry with informers who bring them to justice, and call their behavior by odious names; but in doing this they are inconsistent with themselves, because if the roles were reversed they would approve of the things they now condemn. So they are open to being convinced that they are misusing language in applying these odious terms as they do. Similarly, a nation that pushes an ambitious plan of universal domination by subduing other nations with fire and sword may apply words that signify the highest degrees of virtue to the conduct of those who show the most engaged, stable, resolute spirit in this affair, and do most of this bloody work. But they are capable of being silenced by being convinced that they're using these terms inconsistently, and misusing language in doing so. And when men use such words otherwise than to signify *true* merit or ill-desert they are inconsistent not only with themselves but also with one another. . . . Mankind in general seem to assume that there's some general *standard or foundation in nature* for universal consistency in the use of the terms expressing moral good and evil, a standard that no-one can depart from except through error. This is obviously presupposed in all their disputes about right and wrong, and in all their attempts to prove that something is either 'good' or 'evil' in the moral sense of those words.