

Treatise of Human Nature

Book III: Morals

David Hume

1740

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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 described, between brackets, in normal-sized type.

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Contents

Part i: Virtue and vice in general	234
1: Moral distinctions aren't derived from reason	234
2: Moral distinctions are derived from a moral sense	242
Part ii: Justice and injustice	246
1: Justice natural or artificial?	246
2: The origin of justice and property	250
3: The rules that settle who owns what	260
4: The transference of property by consent	266
5: The obligation of promises	267
6: Further thoughts about justice and injustice	272

7: The origin of government	275
8: The source of allegiance	279
9: The measures of allegiance	284
10: The objects of allegiance	286
11: The laws of nations	293
12: Chastity and modesty	295
Part iii: The other virtues and vices	298
1: The origin of the natural virtues and vices	298
2: Greatness of mind	307
3: Goodness and benevolence	312
4: Natural abilities	315
5. Further thoughts about the natural virtues	319
6: Conclusion of this Book	321

Part iii: The other virtues and vices

1: The origin of the natural virtues and vices

We now start to examine the virtues and vices that are entirely natural, not depending in any way on the artifice and contrivance of men. This is the last part of my system of morals.

The chief spring or actuating principle_c of the human mind is pleasure or pain; when these sensations are removed from our thought and feeling, that leaves us to a large extent incapable of passion or action, of desire or volition. The most immediate effects of pleasure and pain are the mind's motions towards or away from things, which can generate

volition, desire and aversion, joy and grief, hope and fear,

depending on what changes there are in *how* pleasure or pain come into the picture—whether as probable or improbable, certain or uncertain, or as considered as out of our power for the present moment. But when the objects that cause pleasure or pain come to be related to ourselves or others, they still arouse desire or aversion, grief or joy, but they *also* cause the indirect passions of pride or humility, love or hatred, which in this case have a double relation of impressions and ideas to the pain or pleasure. [To unpack this condensed sentence, see II.i.5.]

I have already remarked that moral distinctions depend entirely on certain specific sentiments of pain and pleasure, and that •any mental quality in ourselves or others that gives us satisfaction when we observe it or think about it is automatically virtuous, while •everything of this kind that gives us uneasiness is vicious. Now,

•every quality in ourselves that gives pleasure always causes pride, and •every quality in others that gives pleasure always causes love.

Furthermore,

•every quality in ourselves that produces uneasiness causes humility, and •every quality in others that produces uneasiness causes hatred.

It follows from all this that so far as our mental qualities are concerned,

•virtue is equivalent to the power of producing love or pride, and •vice is equivalent to the power of producing humility or hatred.

So we must always judge one through the other, designating as 'virtuous' any quality of the mind that causes love or pride, and as 'vicious' any mental quality that causes hatred or humility.

An *action* can count as either virtuous or vicious only when considered as a sign of some quality or character-trait. It must depend on durable principles_c in that mind—ones that extend over all the person's conduct and are part of his character. Actions themselves, when they don't come from any *constant* principle_c in the person, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility, which is why they are never considered in morality.

This thought is self-evident, and should be attended to as something of the utmost importance in our present subject. In our enquiries concerning the origin of morals we should never consider any single action but only the •quality or •character from which the action proceeded. •These are

the only items durable enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person. A person's actions are indeed better indications of his character than what he says, or even what he wants and feels; but it is only to the extent that they *are* such indications that they bring love or hatred, praise or blame.

To discover the true origin of morals, and of the love or hatred that arises from mental qualities, we must explore at greater depth some of the principles_c that I have already examined and explained.

Let us start by considering again the nature and force of *sympathy*. The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations; any affection [= 'feeling'] that anyone has could be had by anyone else. When ·violin· strings have the same tension, the vibration of one communicates itself to the others; and in the same way all the affections easily pass from one person to another, and create corresponding movements ·of mind and body· in every human creature. When I see the effects of passion in someone's voice and gestures, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms an idea of the passion that is so lively that it soon *becomes* the passion. Similarly, when I see the causes of an emotion, my mind is conveyed to the effects, and comes to have such an emotion. If I were present at any of the more terrible operations of surgery, the preparation of the instruments, the laying out of the bandages, the heating of the irons, along with all the signs of anxiety and concern in the patient and assistants, would have a great effect on my mind, arousing the strongest sentiments of pity and terror—before the operation had even begun! No-one's passion is *immediately* displayed to the mind of someone else. All that our senses shows us are a passion's •causes or effects; from •these we infer the passion; and consequently •these arouse our sympathy.

Our sense of beauty depends to a large extent on this principle_c. Any object with a tendency to produce pleasure in its possessor is regarded as beautiful; just as any object that tends to produce pain is disagreeable and ugly. Thus,

- the convenience of a house,
- the fertility of a field,
- the strength of a horse,
- the capacity, soundness and speed of a vessel,

form the principal beauty of these various objects. The object called 'beautiful' in these cases pleases us only by its tendency to produce a certain effect. That effect is the pleasure or advantage of some other person. Now, the only way the pleasure of a stranger, someone we don't know, can bring pleasure to us is through *sympathy*. So it's sympathy that is responsible for the beauty that we find in everything that is useful. Think about it and you'll easily see how large a part of beauty consists in usefulness. Wherever an object has a tendency to give its owner pleasure. . . ., it is sure to please the spectator through a delicate sympathy with the owner. Most of the works of •art [here = 'things made through human skill'] are regarded as beautiful in proportion to their usefulness to us, and even many of the products of •nature derive their beauty from that source. In most cases a thing's handsomeness or beauty is not an intrinsic quality of it but rather a relative quality, which pleases purely by its tendency to produce an end that is agreeable.

Our moral sentiments often come from the same principle_c as our sentiments of beauty. No virtue is more esteemed than justice, and no vice more detested than injustice; and no qualities contribute more to a character's being lovable or odious. Now, what makes •justice a moral virtue is its tendency to produce good for mankind; indeed, justice is nothing but an artifact that was made for that purpose. The same may be said of •allegiance, of •the laws of nations,

•of modesty, and of •good manners. [That last phrase means ‘good behaviour’ *generally*, not restricted to the relatively minor range of conduct that defines ‘manners’ in our present sense of the word. When on page 310 Hume wants to talk about something more like manners in our sense of that word, he speaks of ‘good-breeding’.] All these are mere human constructs that were made in the interests of society. And since they have, always and everywhere, brought with them a very strong moral sentiment, we must allow that •thinking about the tendency of a given character or mental quality is sufficient to give us •the sentiments of approval and blame. [When Hume speaks of a thing’s ‘tendency’—not its tendency *to do* such-and-such—he means ‘the facts about what the thing causes or is apt to cause’.] Now, we couldn’t like something because it is apt to produce x unless we liked x; in our present case x = the good of society; and what makes us favour the good of society—setting aside cases involving our own interests or those of our friends—is sympathy. It follows that sympathy is the source of our esteem for all the artificial virtues.

Thus it appears •that sympathy is a very powerful principle_c in human nature, •that it has a great influence on our sense of beauty, and •that it produces our moral sentiments regarding all the artificial virtues. This creates a presumption that sympathy also gives rise to many of the other virtues, and that qualities get our approval because of their tendency to produce good for mankind. And we should become certain that this is so when we find that

- most of the qualities that we *naturally* approve of do in fact have that tendency, making the person fit to be member of society, while
- the qualities that we *naturally* disapprove of have a contrary tendency, making the person dangerous or disagreeable to have any dealings with.

•Why should we become *certain* of this? Because after we

find that such tendencies have force enough to produce the strongest moral sentiment, it would unreasonable for us in these cases to look for any other cause of approval or blame. •Why? Because it is an unbreakable rule in philosophy and science that where any particular cause is sufficient for an effect we ought to be satisfied with it, and ought not to multiply causes without necessity. [Hume is here echoing the famous Occam’s Razor: ‘Entities should not be multiplied more than is necessary’.] We have had the good fortune to find cases of the artificial virtues where a quality’s tendency to produce the good of society is the sole cause of our approval •of it, with not a hint of input from any other principle_c. From that we learn the power of that principle_c; and where that principle_c *could* be operating and the quality approved of really *is* beneficial to society, a true philosopher won’t require any other principle_c—any cause other than the belief that the item in question is apt to produce good for society—to account for any approval and esteem, even the strongest.

No-one can doubt that many of the natural virtues have this tendency to produce good for society. Meekness, beneficence, charity, generosity, clemency, moderation, fairness, loom largest among the moral qualities, and are commonly called ‘social virtues’ to mark their tendency to produce good for society. This goes so far that some philosophers have claimed that *all* moral distinctions arise from artifice and education. •Perhaps they were encouraged in this when they saw skillful politicians using the notions of *honour* and *shame* in an attempt to restrain men’s turbulent passions and make them operate for the public good. But this theory of morality is not consistent with experience. •There are two things wrong with it. **(1)** There are virtues and vices other than the ones that have this tendency to produce profit or loss for the public. **(2)** If men didn’t have a natural sentiment of approval and blame, there would be nothing for

the politicians to arouse, and such words as 'praiseworthy' 'blameworthy' and 'odious' would mean nothing to us; they would be like words in a foreign language that was perfectly unknown to us. . . . Although this system is erroneous, however, it can teach us that •moral distinctions arise in a great measure from the tendency of qualities and characters to further the interests of society, and that •our concern for those interests is what makes us approve or disapprove of them. But it is only from *sympathy* that we have this extensive concern for society, so *sympathy* is the principle_c that takes us so far out of ourselves as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in the characters of others as if they had a tendency to produce profit or loss for ourselves.

Justice differs from the natural virtues in only one way, namely:

•The good that results from the natural virtues arises from every single act, and is the object of some natural passion; whereas •a single act of justice, considered in itself, may well be contrary to the public good.

The advantageousness of justice comes not from this or that individual just act but from mankind's agreeing in a general scheme or system of action ·that produces good for society·. When I bring help to someone who is in distress, what moves me to action is my natural humaneness; and to the extent that I really do help him, to that extent I have promoted the happiness of my fellow-creatures. But look at the questions that come before any court of law! Taking each case on its own, the *humane* thing to do would go against the laws of justice as often as it would conform to them. Judges take from a poor man to give to a rich; they make industrious people work on behalf of dissolute people; and they put into the hands of vicious people the means of harming both themselves and others. The whole system of law and justice, however, is advantageous to the society; and it was *this*

advantage that men wanted to secure through the voluntary conventions that established the system. Once it has been established by these ·•artificial· conventions, it is •naturally accompanied by a strong moral sentiment, which can only come from our sympathy with the interests of society. That's all the explanation we need of the esteem that is given to natural virtues that have a tendency to produce good for the public.

[Hume now offers a paragraph making the point that his theory of sympathy as the basis of morality is 'much more probable' for the natural virtues than for the artificial virtues. [He seems to mean 'much more prima facie plausible'.] That is because 'the imagination is more affected by what is particular than by what is general'; so that we are more stirred by a single act of generosity, beneficence etc. which itself does good to one or more particular people, than by a single instance of justice that may have nothing going for it except its belonging to an advantageous system.] Before I go on, I must comment on two remarkable facts that may seem to be objections to my theory of morality. ·I shall state them as objections·:

(1) When any quality or character has a tendency to do good for mankind, we are pleased with it and approve of it because it presents a lively idea of pleasure, an idea that affects us by sympathy and is itself a kind of pleasure. But this sympathy is very variable, so you might think that our moral sentiments vary in the same way. We sympathize more with persons who are close than with ones who are far away; more with people we know than with strangers; more with our countrymen than with foreigners. But despite this variation of our sympathy, we give the same approval to the same moral qualities in China as in England. They appear equally virtuous, and equally

good candidates for the esteem of a judicious spectator. The sympathy varies without a variation in our esteem. So our esteem doesn't come from sympathy.

[Hume replies that attempts to base morality on reason or on 'comparison of ideas' are dead. Any credible theory of morality must base it on sentiments—i.e. feelings—of pleasure or disgust that we get from seeing or thinking about particular qualities or characters. Now, any such feelings—whether or not sympathy has anything to do with them—are very variable. So **if** the above objection has force against the theory that sympathy lies at the root of everything in morality,] it must have equal force against every other theory. But really it has no force at all; and here is why. There is a continual fluctuation in how we are situated in relation to people and to things; a man who is a long way away now may in a little time become a familiar acquaintance. Besides, each particular man has his own unique set of relations to others; if he had to consider characters and persons only as they appear from this unique point of view, he couldn't possibly have a reasonable conversation with anyone else. [Although he doesn't say so in this sentence, Hume evidently holds that in those circumstances conversation would be impossible because there would be so many conflicts between one person's judgments and the other's.] In order to prevent those continual contradictions and arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we settle on some steady and general points of view, and always think in terms of *them*, whatever our present situation may be. Similarly, external beauty is determined by pleasure; and a beautiful face can't give as much pleasure when seen from twenty paces away as when it is brought closer. But we don't say that 'it appears to us less beautiful' from that distance, because we know what effect it will have at that distance, and by reflecting on that we correct its momentary appearance.

Our sentiments of blame or praise vary according to how

we relate to the person blamed or praised and according to our present frame of mind. But we ignore these variations in our •general decisions, and apply the terms expressing our liking or dislike in the way we would if we remained in one point of view.

[When Hume speaks of our •general decisions', he isn't talking about

(i) general moral views as distinct from moral views about particular cases;

but rather about

(ii) a general way of viewing particular cases.

It seems that (ii) amounts to

(iii) judging a particular case by applying our general moral views to it rather than consulting our present feelings about it.

Three or four further instances of 'general' in this section (and one on page 243) are of this kind; its occurrence in the phrase 'general rules' is not one of them.]

Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or (when the sentiments are more stubborn and unalterable) of correcting our language. . . . Such corrections are common with regard to all the senses; and indeed we couldn't possibly make any use of language, or report our sentiments to one another, if we didn't correct the momentary appearances of things and overlook our present situation.

So we blame or praise a person on the basis of the influence of his character and qualities on those with whom he has dealings. We don't consider whether the people he affects are acquaintances of ours or strangers, compatriots or foreigners. Indeed, even when *we* are among the people affected, we set that fact aside in our general judgments; we don't *blame* a man for opposing us in one of our claims when his own interests are particularly concerned. We make allowance for a certain degree of selfishness in men, because we know it to be inseparable from human nature, built into us all. By these thoughts we correct the sentiments of blame that so naturally arise whenever we meet with opposition.

But these corrective devices are not entirely effective, and our passions seldom correspond exactly to the theory I have been presenting. It rarely happens that men heartily love what lies at a distance from them and can't bring any benefit to them in particular; and it equally rarely happens that someone can pardon someone else for opposing his interests, however justifiable that opposition may be by the general rules of morality. I shall have to settle for saying

that reason requires such impartial conduct, that we can't often bring ourselves to it, and that our passions don't readily follow the decisions of our judgment.

You will easily understand what I mean by this if you bear in mind what I said earlier concerning the reason that can oppose our passion—which we found to be nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, based on thinking about things as though from a distance. When we judge people merely on the basis of how their characters are likely to affect our own or our friends' interests, we find so many contradictions to our sentiments in society and conversation [those eight words are Hume's], and such an uncertainty from the constant changes of our situation, that we look for some other, less variable, standard of merit and demerit. Being thus loosened from our first viewpoint, the most serviceable replacement for it that we can find is sympathy with those who have any dealings with the person we consider. This sympathy is much less lively than what we have when our own interests or those of our particular friends are involved; and it has less influence on our love and hatred; but it fits our calm and general principles just as well, and is said to have an equal authority over our 'reason', and to command our judgment and opinion. We blame a bad action that we read of in history just as much as we blame one performed in our neighbourhood yesterday; and what that means is that we know from reflection that

the historical action *would* arouse in us sentiments of disapproval as strong as those aroused by the recent-nearby action if it related to us in the same way.

I now come to the second noteworthy fact that I said I would discuss; and I shall state this too as an objection:

(2) If someone has a character the natural tendency of which is beneficial to society, we judge him to be virtuous, and are delighted by the thought of his having such a character, even if particular events have prevented it from operating and have made it impossible for him to be serviceable to his friends and country. Virtue in rags is still virtue; and the love that it arouses accompanies a man into a dungeon or desert, where the virtue can no longer be expressed in action and is lost to all the world. That is an objection to the present system [i.e. to Hume's theory of the moral sentiments]. Our sympathy gives us an interest in the good of mankind; and if sympathy were the source of our esteem for virtue, that sentiment of approval couldn't occur except when the virtue actually attained its end and was beneficial to mankind. Where it fails of its end, it is only an incomplete means, and therefore can't acquire any merit from that end. The goodness of an end can give merit to means to it only if the means are complete, and actually produce the end.

My answer is this: If an object is, in all its parts, fitted to attain some agreeable end, it naturally gives us pleasure and is judged to be beautiful even if it isn't completely effectual because of something lacking in the external circumstances. It is sufficient for our judgment of beauty if everything is complete in the object itself. [Hume gives examples: a splendidly designed house that we know won't ever be occupied; a beautiful landscape in a place where no-one lives; a handsome man who will never be allowed out of

prison. Then:] Our imagination is associated with a set of passions on which our sentiments of beauty largely depend. These passions are moved by ideas that •aren't as lively and strong as the ideas that constitute *belief* and •don't imply the real existence of their objects. When a character is in every respect fitted to be beneficial to society, our imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, ignoring the fact that some of the circumstances needed to make the cause a complete one are missing. General rules create a kind of probability that influences the judgment sometimes and the imagination always.

[In this paragraph 'fortune' means something like 'luck', the way things *happen* to turn out.] It's true that when the cause is complete, and a good •disposition is accompanied by good •fortune which makes it really beneficial to society, the spectator's pleasure is stronger and is accompanied by a more lively sympathy. We are more affected by it; yet we don't say that it is more virtuous or that we esteem it more. We know that an alteration of •fortune may make the benevolent •disposition entirely powerless, which leads us to separate the •fortune from the •disposition as much as we can. This is the same as what happens when we correct the different sentiments of virtue that come from differences in how closely or remotely we relate to the person whose virtue is in question. Our passions don't always follow our corrections; but these corrections serve well enough to regulate our abstract notions, and they are all we go by when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue. . . . All this makes it easy for us to remove any contradiction there may seem to be between the •extensive sympathy on which our sentiments of virtue depend and •the limited generosity that is natural to men. (I have often mentioned this limited generosity, and have argued [see page 256] that it is what brings the notions of *justice* and *property* into play.) My

sympathy with someone else may give me the sentiment of pain and disapproval when I see something that has a tendency to give him uneasiness, even if I am not willing to sacrifice any of my own interests, or thwart any of my passions, for his satisfaction. A house may displease me by being poorly planned from the point of view of its owner's convenience, yet I may refuse to give a shilling towards the rebuilding of it. For sentiments to control our passions they must touch the heart, but to influence our taste they needn't reach further than the imagination. When a building seems clumsy and tottering to the eye, it is ugly and disagreeable even if we are perfectly sure of the solidity of its workmanship. What causes this sentiment of disapproval—this judgment of ugliness—is a kind of fear, but it's not the passion •of fear• that we feel when have to stand under a wall that we think really is tottering and insecure. . . .

Most of the qualities that are attributed to great men when their praises are sung can be divided into two kinds—•those that make the man perform his part in society, and •those that make him serviceable to himself, enabling him to promote his own interests. The prudence, temperance, frugality, industry, assiduity, enterprise and dexterity of great men are celebrated, as well as their generosity and humaneness. Of the qualities that might disable a man from making a figure in life, the one we treat most leniently is *indolence*: we think of this as not depriving the person of his skills and abilities, but only suspending his exercise of them; and it does this without any inconvenience to the person himself, because it comes to some extent from his own choice. But we do count extreme indolence as a fault, and a very great one; and a man's friends will never acknowledge him to be subject to it unless they are using this to defend his character against accusations of more significant flaws. 'He could cut a fine figure', they say, 'if only he put his mind to

it. His understanding is sound, his conception quick, and his memory tenacious; but he hates business and doesn't care about his fortune.' And sometimes a man will say such things about himself, with the air of someone confessing a fault, but really *boasting*—because he thinks that this incapacity for business implies much more noble qualities, such as a philosophical spirit, a fine taste, a delicate wit, or a liking for pleasure and society. But take any quality that *doesn't* indicate any other good qualities, and that does incapacitate a man always for business and is destructive to his interests—e.g. a blundering understanding, a wrong judgment of everything in life, inconstancy and irresolution, or a lack of skill in the management of men and business. These are all agreed to be *imperfections* in a man's character, and many men would rather •admit to the greatest crimes than •be suspected of being in any degree subject to them.

When we are engaged in philosophical researches it's very satisfactory when we find that •different circumstances produce different varieties of the same •basic• phenomenon, and that •we can discover what is common to all of them; this gives extra support to any hypothesis that we use in this discovery. Even if nothing was regarded as virtuous except what was beneficial to society, I'm convinced that my explanation of the moral sense ought still to be accepted, because the evidence for it would be good enough; but the evidence gets better when we find other kinds of virtue that can't be explained except on my hypothesis. Here is a man who is not remarkably defective in his social qualities, but what principally counts in his favour is his dexterity in business, by which he has extricated himself from great difficulties and conducted the most sensitive affairs with notable skill and prudence. I find an esteem for him immediately arising in me; his company is a satisfaction to me; and without knowing anything more about him I would rather do a service to him

than to someone whose character is in every other respect equal but is lacking in this man's practical dexterity. In this case, the qualities that please me are all considered as useful to the man who has them, and as having a tendency to promote his interests. They are regarded only as means to an end, and please me in proportion to their fitness for that end. So the end must be agreeable to me. But what makes it agreeable? The person is a stranger, my interests are in no way connected with him, and I have no obligations towards him. His happiness doesn't concern me and more than the happiness of every human, and indeed of every sentient creature, which is to say that it affects me only by sympathy. Whenever I discover his happiness and good, whether in its causes or effects, my sympathy draws me so deeply into it that it gives me an actual emotion. The appearance of qualities that have a tendency to promote it have an agreeable effect on my imagination, and command my love and esteem.

This theory may serve to explain why the same qualities, in all cases, produce both pride and love, humility and hatred; and why any man who regards himself as virtuous or vicious, accomplished or despicable, is regarded in the same way by others. **(i)** A person in whom we discover any passion or habit that is basically inconvenient only to himself always becomes disagreeable to us merely because of it; just as, on the other hand, **(ii)** someone whose character is dangerous and disagreeable only to others can't be satisfied with himself as long as he is aware of that disadvantage. And we find this not only with characters and conduct but also with the most minute circumstances. **(i)** When someone else has a violent cough, that makes us uneasy even though in itself it doesn't affect us in the least. **(ii)** A man will be humiliated if you tell him that his breath stinks, although obviously this is no annoyance to himself. Our imagination easily changes its

viewpoint; and by surveying ourselves as we appear to others, or considering others as they feel to themselves, we enter into sentiments that are in no way *ours* and which can't be of any concern to us unless sympathy comes into play. We sometimes carry this sympathy so far that we are displeased with a quality ·of ours· that is advantageous for us, merely because it displeases others and makes us disagreeable in their eyes; even if we can never have any *interest* in making ourselves agreeable to them.

Philosophers have advanced many systems of morality down the centuries; but when we look into them closely we find that basically there are just two that merit our attention. Moral good and evil are certainly distinguished by our sentiments, not by reason; but these sentiments can arise either from **(1)** how people's characters and passions strike us, considered just in themselves, or from **(2)** our reflections on what they tend to do for the happiness of mankind and of particular persons. [In that sentence, 'how characters etc. strike us' replaces Hume's 'the mere species or appearance of characters etc.'. That uses 'species' as a mediaeval technical term belonging to an Aristotelian theory of sense-perception. Hume doesn't use 'species' in that sense anywhere else in the *Treatise* except on page 321 below, where this version replaces it by 'the mere look of the thing'.] My opinion is that both these causes are intermixed in our moral judgments, just as they are in our judgments about most kinds of external beauty; though I also think that **(2)** reflections on the likely consequences of actions have by far the greatest influence, and settle where our duty lies in all the major practical questions. Still, in some less important cases our approval comes from **(1)** immediate taste or sentiment. Wit, and a certain easy and disengaged behaviour, are qualities immediately agreeable to others, and command their love and esteem. Some of these qualities produce satisfaction in others through particular principles_c in human nature that

can't be accounted for because they are basic [Hume: 'original']; others are special cases of more general principles_c. I can show this best by getting further into details.

Just as some qualities get their merit from being *immediately agreeable* to •others, without having any tendency to produce results that serve the interests of the public, so also some are called virtuous because they are *immediately agreeable* to •the person who has them. Each of the mind's passions and operations has a particular feeling, which must be either agreeable or disagreeable. The first is virtuous, the second vicious. This particular feeling constitutes the very nature of the passion, so it's not something we need to *explain*.

But however directly the vice/virtue distinction may seem to flow from the immediate pleasure or uneasiness that particular qualities cause to ourselves or others, it's easy to see that it also has a considerable dependence on the principle_c of *sympathy* that I have so often insisted on. •We approve of a person who has qualities that are immediately agreeable to those he has any dealings with, even if we ourselves never got any pleasure from them. •We also approve of someone who has qualities that are immediately agreeable to himself, even if they are of no service to anyone else. To account for •these two facts we must appeal to the force of sympathy.

Now for a general overview of the theory of morality that I am defending. A quality of the mind is called 'virtuous' if the very thought of it gives pleasure, and every quality that produces pain is called 'vicious'. This pleasure and this pain different sources. We get pleasure from the thought of a character that is

- (1)** naturally fitted to be useful to others, or
- (2)** naturally fitted to be useful to the person himself,
- or

(3) agreeable to others, or

(4) agreeable to the person himself.

It may be surprising that amidst all these interests and pleasures—of ‘the person himself’ and of ‘others’—we should forget *our own*, which concern us so much on every other occasion. But we’ll stop being surprised when we consider this:

Because no two persons’ pleasures and interests are the same, men could never agree in their sentiments and judgments unless each of them dethroned his own viewpoint and they chose some *one* point of view from which they could *all* survey their object, so that it could appear the same to all of them.

What common viewpoint will it be? Well, in judging characters the only interest or pleasure that appears the same to every spectator is •that of the person himself whose character is being examined or •that of persons who are connected

with him in some way. Such interests and pleasures touch us more faintly than our own do, but because they are more constant and universal they counterbalance our own pleasures and interests—not just in theory but even in practice. They are the only standard of virtue and morality that we recognise in theorising about morality; they are the only source of the particular feeling or sentiment that moral distinctions depend on.

As for the good or ill desert—the rewards or punishments—of virtue or vice: this is an obvious consequence of the sentiments of pleasure or uneasiness. These sentiments produce love or hatred; and it’s a basic fact about the human constitution that love and hatred are accompanied by benevolence and anger, i.e. with a desire to make happy the person we love, and to make miserable the one we hate. I discuss this more fully elsewhere [in *Treatise II*].

2: Greatness of mind

It is time now to illustrate this general theory of morals by applying it to particular instances of virtue or vice, showing how the merit or demerit of each of them arises from the four sources listed above. Let us start by examining the passions of pride and humility, and consider the vice that lies in having too much of one of them and the virtue that consists in having them in the right proportions. An excessive pride or overweening conceit is always regarded as vicious and is hated by everyone, whereas modesty—i.e. a proper sense of one’s own weakness—is regarded as virtuous and procures

everyone’s good-will. Of the four sources of moral distinctions, this is to be ascribed to (3) others’ finding a quality to be agreeable or disagreeable—finding this *immediately*, without thinking about the tendency [see note on page 300] of that quality.

In order to show this, I have to bring in two principles_c that are very conspicuous in human nature.

(i) The first is the *sympathy* and *passing on of sentiments and passions* that I have talked about. Human souls correspond to one another very closely and intimately; as soon as

someone approaches me, he spreads all his opinions onto me, drawing along my judgment to a greater or lesser extent. My sympathy with him often stops short of entirely changing my sentiments and way of thinking, but it is usually strong enough to •disturb the easy flow of my thought, and •give authority to the opinion that is recommended to me by his assent and approval. It makes no difference what the topic is that he and I are thinking about. Whether we are making judgments about someone who is of no concern to either of us, or about my own character, my sympathy gives equal force to his decision; and even his sentiments regarding his own merit make me consider him in the same light in which he regards himself.

This principle_c of sympathy is so powerful and penetrating that it plays a part in most of our sentiments and passions, and is often at work when there's an appearance of its contrary! Whenever someone opposes me in something that I care a lot about, arousing my passion by contradicting me, I have *some* sympathy with him, nor does my •commotion proceed from any other origin. [This means: 'and it's only because of this element of sympathy that I am so upset'. Hume presumably thinks that if I had no sympathy for your opposition to my project I wouldn't get into a turmoil about it, but would just hate you steadily and calmly.] We find here an obvious conflict or collision between opposite principles_c and passions. On the one side, there is the passion or sentiment that is natural to me; and it is observable that the stronger this passion is, the greater is the •commotion. There must also be some passion or sentiment on the other side, and there's nothing that this passion can come from except sympathy. Other people's sentiments can't affect us except by becoming to some extent our own; and then they operate on us, opposing some of our passions and increasing others, just as they would have done if their basic source had been our own temperament

and disposition. While they remain concealed in the minds of others, they *can't* have any influence on us; and even when they are known, if our knowledge of them consisted only in our having *ideas* of them, that still wouldn't enable them to affect us. Why not? Because our •idea-having faculty, i.e. •our imagination or •power of• conception, is so accustomed to objects of all different kinds that a mere *idea* •of something• contrary to our sentiments and inclinations wouldn't be able to stir us up.

(ii) The second principle_c I shall take notice of is that of *comparison*, i.e. the mechanism [not Hume's word] through which our judgment concerning one object varies according to how the object compares with some other object that we choose to compare it with. We judge objects more by comparison than by their intrinsic worth and value, and regard things as mean [= 'not much good'] when they are contrasted with better things of the same kind. The most obvious thing to compare things with is *oneself*, which is why we make that comparison constantly, letting it influence most of our passions. This kind of comparison is directly contrary to sympathy in its operation, as I remarked when discussing compassion and malice:

'In every kind of comparison of one object x with another object y, y makes us get from x a sensation contrary to the one we get from x when we consider it individually and non-comparatively.' 'The direct survey of someone else's pleasure naturally gives us pleasure, and therefore produces unpleasure when compared with our own. His unpleasure considered in itself is unpleasant to us, but it augments the idea we have of our own happiness and so gives us pleasure.' (II.ii.8).

So the principles_c of •sympathy and of •comparison with ourselves are directly contrary to one another. Can we form

general rules to govern which of them should prevail in this or that case—apart from the temperament of the particular person? If I am safely on land, and want to get some pleasure from this fact, I must •think about the miserable condition of those who are at sea in a storm, and must •try to make this idea as strong and lively as possible, so as to make myself conscious of my own good fortune. But however hard I work at this, the comparison won't be as effective as it would be if I were down at the shore and *saw* a ship at a distance tossed by a tempest and in danger every moment of being wrecked on a rock or sand-bank. Now suppose that my idea of the endangered ship becomes still more lively. Suppose the ship is driven so near to me that I can clearly see the horror on the faces of the seamen and passengers, hear their wailing cries, see dearest friends give their last adieu or embrace with a resolve to perish in each other's arms; no man has a heart so savage that he could get any pleasure from such a scene, or prevent himself from being filled with the tenderest compassion and sympathy. So it's obvious that there is a **medium** in these matters: if the idea is too faint it has no influence through comparison; if it is too strong it operates on us entirely through sympathy, which is the opposite of comparison. Because sympathy is the conversion of an *idea* into an *impression*, it requires more force and vivacity in the idea than is needed for comparison.

It's easy to apply all this to the present subject. When we are in the presence of a great man, or one whose abilities and intellect are far above ours, we sink very much in our own eyes; and this humility is a considerable ingredient in the respect that we pay our superiors—or so I argued in II.ii.10 when discussing respect. Sometimes even envy and hatred arise from the comparison, but in most men it goes no further than respect and esteem. Because sympathy has such a powerful influence on the human mind, it causes •pride

to have an effect rather like that of •merit; and by making us enter into and share the proud man's elevated feelings about himself presents the comparison that is so humiliating and disagreeable. Our judgment doesn't go the whole way with him in the flattering •idea of himself that he enjoys, but still it is shaken up enough to admit into our minds the •idea it presents and to give it a greater influence than would be had by the loose conceptions of the imagination. A man who idly passed the time by forming a notion of a person of a merit very much superior to his own wouldn't be humiliated by that fiction; but when we are confronted by a man who really is—we think—of inferior merit, if we see him as having any extraordinary degree of pride and self-conceit, his firm belief in his own merit takes hold of our imagination and diminishes us in our own eyes, just as though he *had* all the good qualities that he so liberally attributes to himself. Our idea is here precisely in the **medium** that is required for it to operate on us through comparison. If our idea were accompanied by belief, and the person seemed to us to *have* the merit that he claims to have, that would have a contrary effect and would operate on us through sympathy. The influence of that principle_c—i.e. of sympathy—would then be superior to that of comparison, contrary to what happens where the person's merit seems to be below his pretensions.

From these results it follows rigorously that pride—i.e. an overweening conceit of ourselves—must be a vice, because it causes uneasiness in all men and constantly presents them with a disagreeable comparison. It's a commonplace in philosophy and even in everyday life and conversation that •what makes us dislike so much the pride of other people is our own pride, and that •we can't bear vanity in others only because we are vain. Cheerful people naturally keep company with others who are cheerful; amorous people

keep company with others who are amorous; but the proud can't bear the proud! They seek instead the company of those who are of an opposite disposition, ·i.e. those who are humble·. . . .

But although it is vicious and disagreeable for us to have an arrogantly exaggerated idea of our own merit, it is utterly praiseworthy for us to regard ourselves as valuable if we really do have valuable qualities. A quality can be a source of virtue in us not only through being •agreeable to others but also through its being •useful and advantageous to us; and certainly nothing is more useful to us in the conduct of life than a proper level of pride, •making us aware of our own merit and •giving us confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprises. Whatever abilities someone has, they are entirely useless to him if he isn't acquainted with them and doesn't make plans that are suitable to them. We *always* need to know our own force; and if it were allowable to err about this, it would be more advantageous to overrate our merit than to form ideas of it that don't do it justice. Fortune commonly favours the bold and enterprising; and nothing inspires us with more boldness than a good opinion of ourselves. . . .

Thus, self-satisfaction and vanity may be not only •allowable but •required in a character. However, there can be no doubt that good-breeding [see note on page 300] and decency require us to avoid all signs and expressions that tend directly to show that we are satisfied with ourselves. We have—we *all* have—a wonderful partiality for ourselves, and if we were always to give vent to our self-satisfaction we would make one another extremely indignant—not only by the immediate presence of such a disagreeable a subject of comparison, but also by the conflicts of our judgments. And so, just as

•we establish the laws of nature so as to secure

ownership in society and prevent conflicts among opposing self-interests,

so also

•we establish the rules of good-breeding so as to prevent conflicts among different men's pride, and make conversation agreeable and inoffensive.

Nothing is more disagreeable than a man's arrogant too-high opinion about himself. Almost everyone has a strong propensity to this vice; and no-one can within himself sharply distinguish that vice from ·the neighbouring· virtue, because that would require him to be certain that his estimation of his own merit is well founded. For these ·two· reasons, *all* direct expressions of personal pride are condemned, including those of men of sense and merit. They aren't allowed to do themselves justice openly in •words, any more than other people are; and it is regarded as virtue in them if they even show a reserve and secret doubt in doing themselves justice in their own •thoughts. The absurd propensity that most men have to over-value themselves has given us such a prejudice against self-applause that we are apt to condemn it by a general rule wherever we meet with it; we have difficulty in exempting men of sense from the rule, even in their most secret thoughts. It can't be denied that *some* disguise of one's self-estimate is absolutely needed; and that if we are secretly proud of ourselves we must. . . .have the appearance of modesty and mutual deference in all our conduct and behaviour. We must *always* be ready •to prefer others to ourselves, and •to treat even our equals with a kind of deference—acting as the lowest and least in any company where we are not very much distinguished above the rest. If we observe these rules in our *conduct*, men will have more indulgence for our secret *sentiments* when we reveal them in an oblique manner.

I don't think that anyone who has had any experience

of living in society and can penetrate into the inward sentiments of men will assert that the humility required of us by good-breeding and decency concerns anything more than our outward behaviour, or that a thorough sincerity about this is regarded as a real part of our duty. [The insincerity that Hume is permitting here consists in **(i)** thinking of yourself as a high-grade specimen while **(ii)** speaking and acting as though you regarded yourself as something much lower. The demand for 'thorough sincerity' that he says we don't make would be a demand that your thoughts about yourself match your modest behaviour, not that your behaviour match your proud thoughts!] On the contrary, we can see that •a genuine and hearty pride or self-esteem, if it is justified and well concealed, is essential to the character of a man of honour; and that •this quality of the mind is absolutely required for someone to get the admiration and approval of mankind. . . .

When we turn to history we find that all the great actions and sentiments that have become the admiration of mankind are based on nothing but pride and self-esteem. [Hume illustrates that with the example of Alexander the Great. Then:] In general we can see that anything that we call heroic virtue, and admire as an example of high-mindedness or greatness of mind, •has as a major ingredient a steady and well-established pride and self-esteem or even •consists of nothing but that. [That sentence contains Hume's only use of 'greatness of mind' in the body of this section. He will go on to speak of 'magnanimity', which comes from Latin meaning 'greatness of mind', but he seems to think of magnanimity as just one component in greatness of mind.] Courage, intrepidity, ambition, love of glory, magnanimity, and all the other shining virtues of that kind, clearly have a strong mixture of self-esteem in them, and get much of their merit from that. And so we find that many religious activists decry those virtues as purely 'pagan' and 'natural', and point us to the excellence of the Christian religion, which

counts humility among the virtues and corrects the judgment of the world—even of philosophers, who usually admire all the efforts of pride and ambition. I'm not discussing whether this virtue of humility has been rightly understood. I am content with the concession that the world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride, which secretly energizes our conduct without breaking out into improper expressions of vanity that might offend the vanity of others.

The merit of pride or self-esteem has two sources: **(1)** its utility, by which it capacitates us for getting things done, and **(2)** its agreeableness to ourselves, by which it gives us an immediate satisfaction. When it goes beyond its just bounds, pride loses the first advantage, and even becomes prejudicial; which is why we condemn extravagant pride and ambition even when it is regulated by the rules of good-breeding and politeness. But such an extravagant passion is still agreeable to the person who has it, giving him an elevated and sublime sensation; and our sympathy with that sensation reduces the intensity of our blame for it because of its dangerous influence on his conduct and behaviour. And so we find that someone's having excessive courage and magnanimity, especially in threatening and dangerous situations, •contributes greatly to his counting as a *hero* and being admired by posterity, while it also •ruins his affairs and leads him into dangers and difficulties that he would never have encountered otherwise.

Most people greatly admire heroism, i.e. military glory, considering it as the most sublime kind of merit. Coolly reflective men are not so sanguine [Hume's word] in their praises of it. The infinite confusions and disorder that military heroism has caused in the world greatly reduce its merit in their eyes. When they want to oppose the common view of •heroism, they depict the evils that •this supposed virtue has produced in human society, the subversion of

empires, the devastation of provinces, the destruction of cities. While we are thinking about *these* we're more inclined to hate heroic ambition than to admire it. But when we fix our view on the individual person who is the author of all this mischief, there's something so dazzling in his character. . . .that we can't refuse it our admiration. The pain that we get from its tendency to harm society is overpowered by a stronger and more immediate sympathy.

Thus, my account of the merit or demerit of different degrees of pride or self-esteem can serve as a strong argument for my over-all theory, by showing how the principles_c that I explained earlier create all the variations of our judgments concerning pride. This reasoning doesn't just show that the vice/virtue distinction arises from the four principles_c of the advantage and of the pleasure of the person himself and of others [page 306] it can also give strong support to some of the more detailed applications of that hypothesis.

No-one who thinks hard about this matter will hesitate to agree that any piece of ill-breeding, or any expression of pride and haughtiness, is displeasing to us merely because it shocks our own pride and leads us by sympathy into a comparison that causes the disagreeable passion of humility. Now, insolence of this kind is blamed even in someone who has always been civil to ourselves in particular—indeed, to someone whose name is known to us only from history-books—so our disapproval of it must come from our sympathy with others, and from the thought that such a character is highly displeasing and odious to everyone who has any conversation or other dealings with the person who has it. We sympathize with those people in their uneasiness; and as their uneasiness proceeds in part from a sympathy with the person who insults them, we see here a double rebound of the sympathy, which is a principle_c very like the one I called attention to in II.ii.5.

3: Goodness and benevolence

Having thus explained the origin of the •praise and approval that greets everything we call *great* in human affections, I now proceed to give an account of their •goodness, showing what the origin is of their merit.

When experience has made us reasonably well-informed about human affairs, and has taught us how their scope relates to the scope of the human passions, we see that men's generosity is very limited, seldom extending beyond their friends and family and never extending beyond their native country. When we know this about the nature of man,

we don't expect any impossibilities from him; and when we want to form a judgment of someone's moral character we confine our view to the narrow circle in which he moves. If the natural tendency of his passions leads him to be useful within his sphere, we approve of his character and love him as a person, through our sympathy with the sentiments of those who are more closely connected with him. In making judgments of this kind we soon have to forget our own interests, because ·if we don't· we'll perpetually be running into contradictions—in speech and other behaviour—with

people whose situations and interests are different from ours. For our sentiments about a person to harmonize with those of other people, we must all adopt a single point of view, namely the person's influence on those who have some immediate connection or dealings with him. And although the help or harm he brings to them is often very remote from ourselves, sometimes it is very near to us and is of great concern to us, because of our sympathy. We readily extend this concern to other cases that resemble the given one; and when these are very remote, our sympathy is correspondingly weaker and our praise or blame fainter and more hesitant. This is like what happens in our judgments concerning external bodies. When objects move away from us they seem to shrink; but although our basic standard for judging objects is how they appear to our senses, we don't say that they actually shrink as they move away; rather, we correct the appearance by thinking about the effects of distance on apparent size, and thus arrive at a more constant and established judgment about them. Similarly, although sympathy is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and our sympathy with distant persons is much fainter than our sympathy with persons who are nearby, we neglect all these differences when we are forming calm judgments about the characters of men. [Hume now says again that if each person x judges the character of a person y purely from the standpoint of how y 's character affects x , it would often be impossible for x to discuss y 's character with a third person z , because x will relate to y differently from how z relates to him. And Hume adds a further point: how x relates to y is liable to change through time, so that x 's basis for judging x 's character may in fact be not a single viewpoint but a sequence of different viewpoints.]

So the interplay of sentiments in society and conversation requires us to form some general fixed unalterable standard

by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners. The heart doesn't always go along with those general notions, or let them regulate its love and hatred, but they are sufficient for discourse—serving all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the stage, and in the schools.

From these principles we can easily account for the merit that is commonly ascribed to generosity, humaneness, compassion, gratitude, friendship, fidelity, zeal, disinterestedness, liberality, and all those other qualities that make up a good and benevolent character. If a man tends to have the tender passions, that makes him agreeable and useful in all the parts of life, and steers all his other qualities, which otherwise might do harm to society, in the right direction. Courage and ambition, when not regulated by benevolence, are fit only to make someone a tyrant or a public robber. Similarly with good judgment and versatility and all the qualities of that kind. In themselves they are neither good for society nor bad for it, and which kind of influence they have will depend on whether and how they are directed by these other passions.

Something else that may be a considerable reason why we praise all the passions that include love, and blame all those in which hatred is a considerable ingredient, is the fact that love is immediately agreeable, and hatred immediately disagreeable, to the person who has it. We are infinitely touched by a tender sentiment, as well as by a great one. The very thought of such a sentiment brings tears to our eyes, and we can't help feeling the same tenderness towards the person whose sentiment it is. All this seems to me good evidence that in those cases our approval has a different origin from the prospect of utility and advantage, either to ourselves or others. And I should add that men naturally and unreflectively approve of a character that is most like their own. When a man with a mild disposition and

tender affections forms a notion of 'the most perfect virtue' he includes in the mix a greater amount of benevolence and humaneness than does a brave and enterprising man, who naturally thinks of the most accomplished character as consisting in a certain elevation of mind. This must come from men's having an immediate sympathy with characters similar to their own. . . .

Nothing touches a humane man more than any instance of extraordinary delicacy in love or friendship, where a person is attentive to the smallest concerns of his friend, and is willing to sacrifice to them his own most considerable interests. Such delicacies have little influence on society, because they make us regard the greatest trifles [those eight words are Hume's]; but their very smallness makes them all the more engaging, and they show the highest merit in anyone who is capable of them. The passions are so contagious that they easily pass from one person to another, and produce corresponding feelings in all human breasts. When I encounter a really striking example of friendship, my heart catches the same passion—and is warmed by the same sentiments—that display themselves before me. Such agreeable feelings must give me an affection towards everyone who arouses them. This is the case with everything that is agreeable in any person. The transition from pleasure to love is 'always' easy; but in our present case the transition is especially easy, because the agreeable sentiment that is aroused by sympathy is love itself, so that all that's needed is to change the object.

That's why there is a special merit in benevolence in all its shapes and appearances. It's why even the weaknesses of benevolence are virtuous and lovable, so that someone whose grief over the loss of a friend is excessive will still be esteemed on that account. His tenderness bestows a merit on his melancholy, and also bestows a pleasure.

All the angry passions are disagreeable, but it doesn't follow that they are all vicious. Our human nature entitles us to a certain licence in this respect, because anger and hatred are passions that are built into our constitution. Sometimes a person's lack of anger and hatred is not a virtue in him but rather evidence of his feebleness. And where anger and hatred appear only in low intensity, we don't merely excuse them because they are natural but even applaud them because they are less intense than they would be in most people in those circumstances.

Where these angry passions are strong enough to generate cruelty they are the most detested of all vices. All our pity and concern for the miserable sufferers of this cruelty turns against the person guilty of it, producing in us a stronger hatred than we are aware of on any other occasion.

Even when the vice of inhumanity is not as intense as that extreme, our sentiments concerning it are greatly influenced by our thoughts of the harm that results from it. This brings up a general point: If we find in someone any quality that makes him have an adverse effect on those who live and have dealings with him, we always count this as a fault or blemish, without any further examination. On the other hand, when we list a person's good qualities we always mention the parts of his character that make him a safe companion, an easy friend, a gentle master, an agreeable husband, or an indulgent father. We consider him with all his relationships with others, and love or hate him according to how he affects those who have any direct dealings with him. And it is a most certain rule that

what Hume wrote next: if there be no relation of life in which I could not wish to stand to a particular person, his character must so far be allowed to be perfect. If he be as little wanting to himself as to others, his character is entirely perfect.

what he meant: if I would be willing to relate in *any* such ways to a person—e.g. as a companion, a friend, a pupil, a son—that shows that his character is *perfect in its relations to other people*. And if he is as kind and decent to himself as

he is to others, his character is *entirely perfect*.

This is the ultimate test of merit and virtue.

4: Natural abilities

All systems of ethics distinguish •natural abilities from •moral virtues, placing the former on a level with bodily endowments and supposing them to have no merit or moral worth. If you think about it you'll see that a dispute about it would be merely about words, and that although •these qualities are not of exactly the same kind they are alike in the ways that matter most. They are both mental qualities, are equally able to give pleasure, and so have an equal tendency to procure the love and esteem of mankind. Nearly everyone is as touchy and concerned about his •good sense and knowledge as about his •honour and courage, and much more than he is about his •temperance and sobriety. Men are even afraid of being thought to be good-natured, in case that is taken to show that they are stupid; they often boast of more debauches than they have really taken part in, to give themselves airs of fire and spirit. In short,

- the figure a man makes in the world,
- the reception he meets with in company,
- the esteem he gets from those who know him

—all these advantages depend almost as much on his good sense and judgment as on any other part of his character. Suppose a man has the best intentions in the world, and is the furthest from all injustice and violence, he still won't be

able to get much respect unless he has at least a moderate share of abilities and understanding. . . .

Even if we won't call natural abilities 'virtues', we have to accept that •they procure the love and esteem of mankind, that •they give a new lustre to the other virtues, and that •someone who has them is much more entitled to our good-will and help than one who is entirely without them. [Hume in fact *does* call them 'virtues'. In four places in this section he contrasts natural abilities with 'the other virtues', and in the next section he calls them 'the natural virtues'.] You may want to claim that the sentiment of approval that those natural abilities produce . . . is somewhat different from the sentiment that accompanies the other virtues. But I don't think that this is a sufficient reason for excluding them from the catalogue of 'virtues'.

Each of the virtues—even benevolence, justice, gratitude, integrity—arouses its own special sentiment or feeling in the spectator. The characters of Caesar and Cato, as drawn by •the Roman historian• Sallust, are both *virtuous* in the strictest sense of the word, but in different ways, and the sentiments they cause in us are different also. Caesar produces love, Cato produces esteem; Caesar is lovable, Cato

is awe-inspiring; we could wish to *meet* Caesar and have him as a friend, whereas we would be ambitious to *be* Cato!

In the same way the approval that natural abilities are greeted with can feel somewhat different from the approval produced by the other virtues, without putting them into an entirely different species. Notice also that the natural abilities don't all produce the same kind of approval, any more than the other virtues do. Good sense and creative intelligence generate esteem; wit and humour arouse love.¹³

Those who attach great importance to the distinction between •natural abilities and •moral virtues may say that natural abilities are entirely involuntary, and so have no merit attached to them because they don't depend on liberty and free will. ·I have three things to say in reply to this·. **(1)** Many of the qualities that all moralists (especially the ancients) bring under the label 'moral virtues' are just as involuntary and necessary as the qualities of judgment and imagination. Virtues of this kind include constancy, fortitude, magnanimity and—in short—all the qualities that make someone a great man. Something similar can be said of the other virtues: it is almost impossible for the mind to change its character to any significant extent, or to cure itself of a passionate or angry temperament if these are natural to it. The more intense these blameworthy qualities are, the •more vicious they become, and yet the •less voluntary! **(2)** Tell me *why* virtue and vice can't be involuntary in the way that beauty and ugliness can be. The moral distinction between virtue and vice arises from the natural distinction

between pain and pleasure; we call a quality or character vicious or virtuous according to the feelings we get from considering it. I don't think anyone will say that a quality can't cause pain or pleasure to the person who considers it unless it is perfectly voluntary in the person whose quality it is! **(3)** As for free will: I have shown that it doesn't come into men's actions any more than it does into their qualities. ·There is a place here for the notion of involuntariness, but it's no help to the people I am arguing against·. The inference from 'That item was voluntary' to 'That item was free' is not valid; our actions are more voluntary than our judgments, but they aren't any freer.

But although this distinction between voluntary and involuntary doesn't *justify* the distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues, it does give us a plausible reason why moralists have *invented* that distinction. Men have noticed that although natural abilities and moral qualities are mostly on the same footing, there is this difference between them:

- Natural abilities can hardly ever be changed by any skill or hard work ·or in any other way·, whereas
- moral virtues—or at least the actions that come from them—*can* be changed by the motives of rewards and punishment, praise and blame.

So legislators and preachers and moralists have mainly worked on regulating these voluntary actions, trying to provide additional motives for being virtuous in those ways. They knew that it would be pointless to punish a man for folly, or exhort him to be prudent and wise, though the same punishments and exhortations might have a considerable

¹³ Love and esteem are basically the same passion, arising from similar causes; both are produced by qualities that are agreeable and give pleasure. But when •this pleasure is severe and serious, or •its object is great and makes a strong impression, or •it produces some level of humility and awe—in all those cases the passion arising from the pleasure is better called 'esteem' than 'love'. Benevolence goes with both, but is more strongly connected with love.

influence when applied to justice and injustice. But men don't, in their everyday life and talk, keep in mind questions about what can or can't be altered; they just naturally praise or blame whatever pleases or displeases them, and consider •prudence as a virtue along with •benevolence, and •high intelligence as a virtue along with •justice. Indeed, we find that almost all moralists fall into this same way of thinking (the only exceptions being ones whose judgment has been perverted by their strict adherence to some theory). The ancient moralists, especially, had no qualms about putting •prudence at the head of the cardinal •virtues. There is a sentiment of esteem and approval that can be aroused in some degree by *any* capacity of the mind in its perfect state and condition; and it is the business of philosophers to account for this sentiment. As for the question of what qualities are entitled to the label 'virtue': that's for grammarians to examine, and when they work on it they may find it harder than they had expected.

The principal reason why natural abilities are esteemed is that they tend to be useful to the person who has them. No plan can be successfully carried through unless it is done with prudence and discretion; the goodness of our intentions is never enough on its own to procure a good outcome to our enterprises. Men are superior to beasts primarily because of the superiority of their reason; and differences in level of reason are what create such infinite differences between one man and another. All the advantages of art are due to human reason, and the most considerable part of these advantages must fall to the share of those who are prudent and sagacious, except when someone has unusually good luck.

Suppose the question is raised as to which is more valuable—

•quick apprehension **or** slow apprehension?

- someone who can take something in at a glance but can't get any further with careful study **or** someone who always has to work things out laboriously?
- a clear head **or** fertility in coming up with ideas?
- profound genius **or** sure judgment?

—in short what character or kind of mind is better than another? Obviously we can't answer any of these questions without considering which qualities fit a man best for the world and carries him furthest in any of his undertakings.

There are many other mental qualities whose merit has the same origin. Industry, perseverance, patience, activity, vigilance, application, constancy—along with other virtues of that kind (you can easily add to the list)—are regarded as valuable purely because of the help they give in the conduct of life. Similarly with temperance, frugality, economy, resolution; just as (on the other side)

prodigality [i.e. extravagance with money],

luxury, [i.e. extreme and self-indulgent sensuality]

irresolution, [i.e. indecisiveness about what to do]

uncertainty [i.e. indecisiveness about what to believe]

are vicious merely because they draw ruin down on us and incapacitate us for business and action.

(2) Wisdom and good sense are valued because they are useful to the person who has them, and (3) wit and eloquence are valued because they are immediately agreeable to others. (4) Good humour is loved and esteemed because it is immediately agreeable to the person himself. [Those numbers match the ones given on page 306.] Hume doesn't here illustrate (1) usefulness to others. It is obvious that the conversation of a man of wit is very satisfactory, and that a cheerful good-humoured companion diffuses joy over the whole company through their sympathy with his gaiety. Because these qualities are agreeable, they naturally create love and esteem, and so they qualify as 'virtues'...

[Hume adds some remarks about the virtuousness of •writing or speaking in an interesting way, •being personally clean, and •having various qualities in degrees that are appropriate to one's age. In the middle of this he writes:] Besides all the qualities that make a person lovely or valuable, there is also a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* of *agreeable* and *handsome* that contributes to that same effect. In this case, as well as in the case of wit and eloquence, we must resort to a certain •sense that acts without reflection and pays no attention to the tendencies of various qualities and characters—i.e. to that they are likely to cause. Some moralists invoke this •sense to account for all the sentiments of virtue. That's a very plausible theory, which can't be dislodged by any rival unless one looks in detail into the facts. When we find that •almost all the virtues *do* have such particular tendencies, and also find that these tendencies can, unaided, lead to a strong sentiment of approval, we can't doubt any longer that qualities are approved of in proportion to the advantage that results from them.

The mental faculty that matters least to a person's character, and has the least to do with virtue or vice through all its great variety of degrees, is *memory*. We usually take no notice of its variations, or mention them in praise or dispraise of any person. (Except at the extremes: a memory so stupendously good that it surprises us, or so bad that it harms the person's judgment.) It is so far from being a virtue to have a good memory that men generally put up a pretence of complaining of a bad one! They do this when trying to persuade everyone that what they say is entirely original, sacrificing their memory so as to praise their inventiveness and judgment! And yet if we consider the matter in the abstract it's not easy to find any reason why the capacity for •recalling past ideas with truth and clearness shouldn't have as much merit in it as the capacity for •ordering our

present ideas so as to form true propositions and opinions. The •twofold• reason for the difference has to be this:

(i) memory is exercised without any sensation of pleasure or pain, and (ii) in the practical concerns of life it doesn't make much difference how good one's memory is unless it is extremely good or extremely bad.

Whereas, on the other hand:

(ii) The slightest difference in quality of judgment can make a notable difference in the upshot, and (i) whenever judgment is exercised at a very high level there is extraordinary delight and satisfaction.

Our sympathy with this (ii) utility and (i) pleasure gives merit to the understanding; and the absence of such sympathy makes us think of memory as a faculty on which blame and praise get no grip.

Before I leave this subject of natural abilities, I must remark that one source of the esteem and affection that comes to them may be the importance and weight that they bestow on the person who has them. •If someone has a high level of natural ability•, he becomes of greater consequence in life; his decisions and actions affect more of his fellow-creatures; his friendship and his enmity are important. And it's easy to see that someone who is elevated in this way above the rest of mankind must arouse in us the sentiments of esteem and approval. Anything that is important engages our attention, fixes our thought, and is thought about with satisfaction. •Here is another example of the same principle_c at work•:

The histories of kingdoms are more interesting than domestic stories; the histories of great empires more than those of small cities and principalities; and the histories of wars and revolutions more than those of peace and order. In reading of them, we encounter

people who suffer, and we sympathize with the various sentiments that their fortunes give them. The mind is occupied by the multitude of the objects, and by the strong passions that display themselves; and this occupation or agitation of the mind is commonly agreeable and amusing.

The same theory accounts for the esteem and regard we pay

to men of extraordinary parts and abilities. The good and ill of multitudes are connected with their actions. Whatever they undertake is important, and challenges our attention. Nothing relating to them is to be overlooked and despised. And where any person can arouse these sentiments, he soon acquires our esteem, unless other circumstances of his character render him odious and disagreeable.

5. Further thoughts about the natural virtues

In my discussion of the passions I pointed out that pride and humility, love and hatred, are aroused by any advantages or disadvantages of the mind, body, or fortune; and that these advantages and disadvantages create those passions by producing a separate impression of pain or pleasure. The pain or pleasure arising from the general survey or view of any action or quality of the mind constitutes its vice or virtue, and gives rise to our approval or blame, which is merely a fainter and less noticeable love or hatred. I have assigned four different sources of this pain and pleasure [see page 306]; and I now bring in a further fact, which strengthens the case for my theory. It is that the advantages or disadvantages of the body, and of fortune, produce pain or pleasure from the very same principles^c. The tendency of anything to be useful to the person who has it or to others, or to convey pleasure to him or to others—any of these convey an immediate pleasure to the person who thinks about the item in question, and commands his love and approval.

Let us begin with advantages of the body. I start with a phenomenon that might appear somewhat trivial and ludi-

crous, if anything could be trivial that strengthened a conclusion of such importance, or ludicrous that was employed in philosophical reasoning. It is generally known that anyone that we would call ‘a good women’s man’—because he has shown this by his amorous exploits, or because his physical constitution indicates extraordinary vigour of that kind—will be well received by the fair sex, and will naturally draw the affections even of women whose virtue prevents them from having any thought of some day giving employment to those talents of his. It’s clear that the real source of the love and esteem that such a man meets with among the females is their view of his *ability* to give enjoyment; and those who love and esteem him while having no chance of receiving that enjoyment themselves must be moved by their sympathy with anyone who does have a love-relationship with him. . . .

Another source of the pleasure we get from thinking about bodily advantages is their usefulness to the person who has them. A considerable part of the beauty of men and of other animals consists in a bodily form that we find by experience •to go with strength and agility and •to fit the creature for any

action or exercise. Broad shoulders, a flat belly, firm joints, taper legs—all these are beautiful in our species because they are signs of force and vigour; and because these are advantages that we naturally sympathize with, they convey to the spectator a share of the satisfaction that they give to the person who has them.

That was about the ways in which a quality of the body may be •useful. Then there is the immediate •pleasure it can give. The beauty of a man's body comes from his appearing to be not merely strong and agile but also healthy; •not merely useful to himself and others, but also pleasant to himself. And someone's looking sickly is always disagreeable, because of the idea of pain and uneasiness that it conveys to us. [The remainder of this paragraph is basically clear enough, but it's difficult because it is so compressed. In it Hume says that each of us is pleased with the appearance of his own face, regarding himself as fairly handsome; but, he says,

(i) this pleasure comes to us largely through our sympathy with the pleasure that others get from seeing our face.

He also writes that

(ii) our handsomeness doesn't 'give us any satisfaction' unless we 'in some measure set ourselves at a distance'.

Perhaps he intends **(ii)** merely as an abstract way of formulating **(i)**. But it may be that he means **(ii)** as saying that we don't enjoy our own handsomeness if we stand very close to the mirror in which we survey ourselves; in which case he is presumably offering **(ii)** as evidence that supports **(i)**.] To what extent do the advantages of *fortune* produce esteem and approval from the principles_c that I have been talking about? You can get the answer to that by thinking back over the arguments about this that I presented ·in II.ii.5·. I remarked ·there· that our approval of people who have the advantages

of fortune could have any of three different causes:

- (1)** the immediate pleasure that a rich man gives us by the view of the beautiful clothes, carriages, gardens, or houses that he owns [this is 3 in the list on page 306];
- (2)** the advantage that we hope to get from him by his generosity and liberality [1 in the list];
- (3)** the pleasure and advantage that the man himself gets from his possessions and that produce an agreeable sympathy in us [2 and 4 in the list].

Whether we ascribe our esteem of the rich and great to one or all of these causes, we can clearly see the traces of the principles_c that give rise to the sense of vice and virtue. I think that most people will at first sight be inclined to ascribe our esteem of the rich to **(2)** self-interest and the prospect of advantage; but ·that can't be right, because· our esteem or deference extends beyond any prospect of advantage to ourselves. Clearly, then, the sentiment in question must come from sympathy with people who have an immediate connection with—in the form of a dependence on—the person we esteem and respect. We consider him as a person capable of contributing to the happiness or enjoyment of his fellow-creatures, whose sentiments with regard to him we naturally embrace. And this consideration will serve to justify my preference ·in II.ii.5· for the third principle_c over the other two, ascribing our esteem for the rich to our sympathy with **(3)** the pleasure and advantage that they themselves get from their possessions. [The 'consideration' in question doesn't occur anywhere in the list of possible causes displayed above. Why should it for **(3)**? The only answer Hume offers is in the next sentence, which is given here verbatim.] For as even the other two principles_c cannot operate to a due extent, or account for all the phenomena, without having recourse to a sympathy of one kind or other, it is much more natural to choose the sympathy that is immediate and direct than that which is

remote and indirect. . . .

Perhaps this is the place to call attention to the flexibility of our sentiments—how easily and variously they are altered by the facts about what they are aimed at—their objects. All the sentiments of approval that accompany any particular species of objects have a great resemblance to each other, even when they are derived from different sources; and, on the other hand, sentiments directed to different objects *feel* different even if they come from the same source. Thus, the beauty of all visible objects causes a pleasure pretty much the same, though sometimes it comes from •the mere look of the thing and sometimes from •sympathy and an idea

of its utility. Similarly, when we survey the actions and characters of men without our own interests being involved, the pleasure or pain we get from the survey is pretty much of the same kind, even if there's a great diversity in its causes. And on the other side: a convenient house and a virtuous character don't cause the same *feeling* of approval, although the source of our approval, namely sympathy and an idea of their utility, is the same in both cases. There's something quite inexplicable in this variation of our feelings, but our experience presents it to us with regard to all our passions and sentiments.

6: Conclusion of this Book

I hope I have provided everything that is needed for a detailed proof of this system of ethics. We are certain that **sympathy** is a very powerful principle_c in human nature. We are also certain that **it** has a great influence on our sense of beauty—when we regard external objects and also when we make moral judgments. We find that **it** has enough force to give us—acting alone, with no input from any other principle_c—the strongest sentiments of approval, e.g. in the cases of justice, allegiance, chastity, and good manners [see note on page 300]. We can see that everything needed for **its** operation are found in most of the virtues, which for the most part bring good to society or to the person who has them. If we set all these cases side by side we won't doubt that sympathy is the chief source of moral distinctions; especially when we realize that any objection to the 'sympathy' theory

in one case will also hold against it in all the others. It's perfectly clear that justice is approved of purely because it has a tendency to produce public good; and the public good matters to us only to the extent that our sympathy gives us a concern for it. We can presume that this holds for all the other virtues that have a similar tendency to serve the public good. All their merit must come from our sympathy with the people who get some advantage from them; just as the virtues that tend to procure the good of the person who has them get their merit from our sympathy with *him*.

Most people will freely grant that the useful qualities of the mind are virtuous *because* they are useful. This way of thinking is so natural, and comes up so often, that few will hesitate to admit it. And once that has been admitted, the force of sympathy must necessarily be acknowledged.

- Virtue is ·here being· considered as means to an end.
- Means to an end are valued only to the extent that the end is valued.
- The happiness of strangers—·the end·—affects us only through sympathy.

So it is to that principle_c, *sympathy*, that we must ascribe the sentiment of approval that arises from the survey of all the virtues that are useful to society or to the virtuous person. These constitute the most considerable part of morality.

My theory of morality contains many things that might make you *like* it—if it were proper to bribe your assent or try to win you over by anything but solid argument! All lovers of virtue (and that is all of us, in theory, however much we back-slide in practice) will surely be pleased to see moral distinctions derived from such a noble source, one that gives us a sound notion of both the •generosity and the •capacity of human nature. One doesn't need much knowledge of human affairs to see that a sense of morals is a principle_c inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful things in the human constitution. But this ·moral· sense must become even stronger when, thinking about itself, it approves of the principles_c from which it is derived, finding in its own origin nothing that isn't great and good. Those who hold that the sense of morals comes from basic instincts of the human mind can defend the cause of virtue with sufficient authority, but they don't have the advantage possessed by those who account for the moral sense by an extensive sympathy with mankind. According to this latter theory, we have to approve not only of

virtue

but also of

the sense of virtue;

and not only that but also

the principles_c from which that sense is derived.

So that nothing comes into the account, from any direction, except what is praiseworthy and good.

This carries over to justice and the other virtues of that kind. Though justice is artificial, the sense of its morality is natural. What makes any act of justice beneficial to society is its bringing men together in a *system* of conduct. And once justice has that tendency, we *naturally* approve of it. If we didn't, no combining or convening could possibly produce that sentiment of approval in us.

Most of the inventions of men are subject to change. They depend on mood and whim. They are fashionable for a while, and then are forgotten. You may be thinking that if justice is granted to be a human invention then it too must be flimsy and impermanent in that way; but the cases are quite different. The interest on which justice is founded is the greatest imaginable, and extends to all times and places. It couldn't possibly be served by any other invention. It is obvious, and reveals itself at the very first formation of society. These facts jointly make the rules of justice steadfast and unchangeable—as unchangeable as human nature, anyway. If they rested on basic instincts, could *that* give them any greater stability? This same theory can help us to form a sound notion of the happiness of virtue as well as of its dignity, and can draw every principle_c of our nature into caring about, embracing, and cherishing that noble quality. Everyone feels his pursuit of •knowledge and ability gathering speed when he considers that, besides the advantage that immediately result from •these acquisitions, they also give him a new lustre in the eyes of mankind, and draw esteem and approval from everyone. And no-one can think that any advantages of fortune would outweigh ·the disadvantage of· a breach of •the social virtues, however small, when he bears in mind that how other people regard his character entirely depends on his strict observance of

those virtues. And so does his peace and *inward* satisfaction, because no mind can bear to look at itself if it hasn't been relating as it should to mankind and society. But I shan't go on about this. Such reflections require a separate work, very different from the basic conceptions of this present one. An anatomist ought never to try to copy the painter, as though in his minute dissections and portraitures of the smaller parts of the human body he could give his figures any graceful and engaging attitude or expression! . . . But an anatomist

is admirably fitted to give advice to a painter; indeed, it is hardly possible to excel in painting without the assistance of the anatomist. We must have an exact knowledge of the parts, their positions, and their connections, before we can draw with any elegance or correctness. And thus the most abstract speculations concerning human nature, however cold and unentertaining, become subservient to practical morality; and they can render this latter science more correct in its precepts, and more persuasive in its exhortations.