An Enquiry into the Sources of Morals

David Hume

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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. Larger omissions are reported within square brackets, in normal-sized type.—Hume's title for this work is *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. In his day a 'principle' was often not a kind of •proposition but rather a •'source of activity' or •'activator' or the like. On page 3 he calls morality an 'active principle', and on page 29 he writes that a certain 'principle still exerts its active energy'—he isn't talking about the active energy of a *proposition*! This sense of 'principle' is what is meant in the title of this work, which on pages 4, 56 and 65 Hume describes as an enquiry into 'the origin of morals'.

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·CHEERFULNESS·

Have you ever spent an evening with sad, serious people, and seen what happened when a good-humoured and lively person joined the group? How quickly the conversation came to life and cheerfulness diffused itself over everyone's face, talk, and behaviour? If so, you'll have no trouble agreeing that cheerfulness carries great merit with it and naturally draws in the good-will of mankind. Indeed, no other quality more readily communicates itself to all around; because no other has a greater propensity to display itself in cheerful talk and pleasant entertainment. The flame spreads through the whole circle, and the most sullen and gloomy are often ignited by it. I have trouble agreeing with ·the Latin poet· Horace that 'the melancholy hate the merry'; because it has always been my experience than when the jollity is moderate and decent, serious people are all the more delighted because it dissipates the gloom that usually oppresses them, and gives them an unusual enjoyment.

The power of cheerfulness to communicate itself and to draw approval shows us that there is another set of mental qualities which, without being useful or tending to produce further good for the community or for the person who has the quality, give satisfaction to the beholders and procure friendship and respect. Having one of these qualities *feels good*; other people enter into the same mood and catch the sentiment by a contagion or natural sympathy; and as we can't help loving whatever gives us pleasure, a kindly emotion arises towards the person who gives so much satisfaction. As between •a cheerful person and •a melancholy, dejected, sullen, anxious person, the former is more enlivening to be with, his presence gives us more serene contentment and enjoyment, and we find it more agreeable to enter into his feelings and disposition. That explains our affection and approval for the cheerful person, and our aversion and disgust towards the gloomy one.[17]

Few men would envy the character that Caesar attributes to Cassius ·in Shakespeare's famous play·:

He loves no play,
As thou dost, Anthony: he hears no music:
Seldom he smiles; and smiles in such a sort,
As if he mocked himself, and scorned his spirit
That could be moved to smile at any thing.

Just before this, Caesar has said that 'Such men are dangerous', and so they commonly are; but also they can never become agreeable to others, or contribute to social entertainment, because they have so little enjoyment within themselves. In all civilized nations a liking for pleasure, if accompanied by temperance and decency, has always been regarded as a considerable merit, even in the greatest men; and in those of inferior rank and character it is needed even more. the French writer Saint-Évremond gives an attractive picture of this aspect of his frame of mind: 'I love virtue without austerity, Pleasure without effeminacy, Life without fearing its end.'

[17] Everyone is from time to time affected with all the disagreeable passions—fear, anger, dejection, grief, melancholy, anxiety, and so on. But to the extent that these are natural and universal, they make no difference between one man and another, and can never be the object of blame. It's only when a person's temperament gives him a *general tendency* to have one or more of these disagreeable passions that they disfigure his character, creating a sentiment of disapproval in the spectator by making him uneasy.

·SUBLIMITY·

[In this next paragraph: 'disdain of slavery' means 'proud refusal to knuckle under to anyone'. Your disdain of slavery is your attitude to *your* being subject to someone else; you may not dislike the idea of *my* being subjected to someone else. Also, both here and further on, 'slavery' covers all sorts of knuckling-under, including ones that aren't as extreme as 'slavery' in our literal sense of the word.] Who is not struck with any notable instance of greatness of mind or dignity of character? with elevation of sentiment, disdain of slavery, and the noble pride and spirit that arises from conscious virtue? Longinus writes that •sublimity is often nothing but the echo or image of magnanimity ·i.e. greatness of mind·; and when someone manifests •this quality, even if he doesn't utter a word, he arouses our applause and admiration. An example of this is the famous silence of Ajax in the *Odyssey*, a silence that expresses a nobler disdain and more resolute indignation than any language can convey. . . .

'*Go!*' cries Alexander to his soldiers who had refused to follow him to India, 'Go and tell your countrymen that you left Alexander completing the conquest of the world.' The Prince of Condé, who always admired this passage, commented: 'Alexander, abandoned by his soldiers among barbarians, not yet fully subdued, felt in himself such a dignity and right of empire that he couldn't believe it possible that anyone would refuse to obey him. It made no difference to him whether he was in Europe or in Asia, among Greeks or among Persians, wherever he found men he expected to find subjects.'

In Corneille's tragedy *Médée*, a friend advises Medea to be cautious and submissive, lists the distresses of that unfortunate heroine, and asks her 'What do you have to support yourself against your many implacable enemies?' She replies: 'Myself! Myself, I say, and that is enough.' Boileau rightly recommends this passage as an instance of true sublimity.

When Phocion, the modest gentle Phocion, was being led to execution, he turned to one of his fellow-sufferers who was lamenting his own hard fate, and said: 'Isn't it glory enough for you that you die with Phocion?' (This is from Plutarch's *Lives*, 'Phocion'.)

Contrast that with the picture Tacitus draws of Vitellius: no longer Emperor, prolonging his period of shame because of his wretched love of life, handed over to the merciless rabble; tossed, punched and kicked around; forced by a dagger held under his chin to raise his head and expose himself to everyone's abuse. What abject infamy! What low humiliation! Yet even here, says Tacitus, he showed some symptoms of a mind not wholly degenerate. To a tribune who insulted him he said 'I am still your Emperor'.[18]

[This paragraph uses 'mean' in a sense that was current in Hume's time but not today. A beggar asks whiningly 'Can you spare a dime?' and I say 'No'. My answer may show that I am 'mean' in our sense; the beggar's question shows that he is 'mean' in Hume's sense.] In our ordinary everyday dealings with one another, we never excuse a total lack of •spirit and •dignity of character, i.e. of •a proper sense of what is due to one's self. This vice constitutes what we properly call 'meanness', when a man

•submits to the basest slavery [see note above] in order to gain his ends,
•fawns on those who mistreat him, or
•degrades himself by intimacies and familiarities with

[18] Tacitus, *Histories*, 3:84-5. He starts this narration thus: 'As he was led away with his clothing all tattered, a dreadful spectacle, many cursed him and no-one wept. The ugliness of his exit had driven out compassion.' To get a proper sense of this way of thinking, he have to make allowance for the ancient maxim: Everyone has a right to dispose of his life, and after anyone's life becomes dishonorable he has not only a •right but a •duty to part with it.

> undeserving inferiors.

·The first two of these are somewhat connected with one another, but not with the third, which is an entirely different way of shamefully letting oneself down·. A certain degree of noble-minded pride or self-value is so much needed ·for a worthwhile life· that when someone's mind lacks it we find that upsetting in the same way as we are upset by someone's lacking a nose or an eye.[19]

·COURAGE·

The usefulness of courage, both to the public and to the person who has it, is an obvious foundation of merit. But if you think about it you'll see that this quality has a special shine on it that comes ·not from its consequences but· wholly from itself and from the noble elevation that always accompanies it. The figure of courage as depicted by painters and poets displays in each feature a sublimity and daring confidence that catches the eye, draws the affections, and through sympathy spreads a similar sublimity of feeling over every spectator.

In a speech by ·the Athenian orator and politician· Demosthenes, defending his administration and justifying the obstinate love of liberty with which he had inspired the Athenians, he represented Philip ·of Macedon· in these glowing colours:

> I beheld Philip, the very Philip with whom you have been fighting, pursuing empire and dominion while exposing himself to every wound—his eye gored, his neck twisted, his arm and thigh pierced—whatever part of his body fortune should seize on, he cheerfully gave it up, provided that he could live in honour and renown with what remained. Shall it be said that •he, born in Pella, a place that used to be mean and ignoble, was inspired with such high ambition and thirst for fame while •you, who are Athenians . . .

. . . and on he went. These praises arouse the most lively admiration; and we can see that the view the orator presents doesn't bring in anything about the future advantageous consequences of Philip's valour; it doesn't go beyond the hero himself,

[Hume now gives three examples of peoples who valued courage more highly than civilised people would in modern times. The ancient Romans called courage 'virtue', thereby rating it higher than any other moral qualities. The Suevi, as reported by Tacitus, went in for elaborate hair-styling, not for romantic purposes but to frighten their enemies. The Scythians, as reported by Herodotus, admired most the warriors who had the largest decorative cloths made from their enemies' scalps. He continues:] That shows how greatly, among the Scythians as well as many other nations, bravery in war destroyed the sentiments of humanity, which is surely a much more useful and attractive virtue.

We can see indeed that in all the uncultivated nations that haven't yet had a full experience of the advantages that come with beneficence, justice, and the social virtues, courage is ·regarded as· the predominant excellence, the one that is most celebrated by poets, recommended by parents and instructors, and admired by people in general. The ethics of Homer are in this respect very different from those

[19] The absence of a virtue can often be a vice, and sometimes one of the worst sort. Meanness is one example of that; ingratitude is another. Where we expect a beauty, the disappointment gives us an uneasy sensation and produces a real ugliness. And abjectness of character—·i.e. meanness·—is disgusting and contemptible in another way also. Where a man has no sense of value *in himself*, *we* aren't likely to rate him any higher. And if someone who •crouches to his superiors •is insolent to his inferiors (as often happens), the second kind of behaviour doesn't cancel out the first; it adds to it, making the man still more odious through the addition of a further vice. (See Section 8.)

of Fénelon, his elegant modern imitator. They were well suited to an age in which—as reported by Thucydides—one hero could ask another 'Are you a robber?', without giving offence. Not so long ago similar ethics prevailed also in many barbarous parts of Ireland, if we can believe ·the poet Edmund· Spenser's judicious account of the state of affairs in that kingdom.[20]

·TRANQUILLITY·

Belonging to the same class of virtues as courage is the undisturbed philosophical tranquillity that enables one to rise above pain, sorrow, anxiety, and each assault of bad luck. Conscious of his own virtue, say the philosophers, the ·tranquil· sage elevates himself above every chance happening, and from his secure place in the temple of wisdom he looks down on inferior mortals engaged in pursuit of honours, riches, reputation and every frivolous enjoyment. No doubt a full-strength version of this attitude is far too magnificent for human nature. But the attitude carries with it a grandeur that seizes the spectator and arouses his admiration. And the nearer we can come in practice to this sublime tranquillity and even-mindedness (not to be confused with the insensibility produced by stupor!), the more secure enjoyment we shall attain within ourselves and the more greatness of mind we shall reveal to the world. This philosophical tranquillity may indeed be considered as just one form of magnanimity [= 'greatness of mind'].

Look at Socrates!—his •perpetual serenity and contentment amidst the greatest poverty and domestic troubles, his •resolute contempt [see note on page 10] for riches, and his •magnanimous care for preserving liberty, while •refusing all help from his friends and disciples, so as to avoid even the ·very mild· dependence that consisted of being obliged to someone. Who doesn't admire him?. . . .

Among the ancients, the philosophical heroes as well as the military and patriotic ones have a grandeur and force of sentiment that astonishes our narrow minds—we quickly reject it as •extravagant and supernatural. But then suppose the ancients had an accurate representation of us—and especially of the degree of humanity, clemency, order, tranquillity, and other social virtues that we have achieved in the administration of government in modern times. They would have had good reason to regard our way of doing things as •romantic and incredible! That is how nature—or rather culture—has handled the uneven distribution of excellences and virtues in those different ages.

·BENEVOLENCE·

I have already explained the merit that benevolence has because of its usefulness, its tendency to promote the good of mankind; and that's certainly the source of a considerable part of everyone's esteem for to it. But ·that is not the only thing that makes benevolence attractive to us·. •The softness and tenderness of this sentiment, •its engaging endearments, •its fond expressions, •its delicate attentions, and •all the flow of mutual confidence and concern that enters into a warm attachment of love and friendship—these feelings are delightful *in themselves*, so they are bound to communicate themselves to the spectators, and melt them into the same fondness and delicacy. A tear naturally starts in our eye when we see a warm sentiment of this kind, our breast heaves, our heart is agitated, and every humane tender activator in our make-up is set in motion and gives us the

[20] He writes: 'It is a common custom among their gentlemen's sons that as soon as they are able to use their weapons they immediately round up three or four stragglers or foot-soldiers and wander idly around the country with them, stealing only food; until eventually the young gentleman runs up against real resistance and has to cope with it; and once this is known he is regarded as a man of worth in whom there is courage.'

purest and most satisfactory enjoyment.

When poets describe the Elysian fields, whose blessed inhabitants have no need of each others' assistance, they still represent them as maintaining constant exchanges of love and friendship, and soothe our minds with the pleasing image of these soft and gentle passions. . . .

Who would want to live amidst perpetual wrangling, scolding and mutual reproaches? The roughness and harshness of those emotions disturb and displease us; we suffer by contagion and sympathy [see note on page 6]; and we can't remain indifferent spectators, even if we are certain that the angry passions we are observing won't have any harmful consequences.

Here is proof positive that benevolence doesn't get all its merit from its usefulness. We sometimes gently blame someone for being 'too good'; we say this if he exceeds his part in society and takes his care for others beyond the proper bounds. Similarly, we say that someone is 'too high-spirited', 'too daring', 'too unconcerned about fortune'—these being reproaches that really, basically, imply more admiration than many speeches of praise do. Being accustomed to score the merit and demerit of characters chiefly by their useful or harmful tendencies, we can't help applying the *language* of blame when we encounter a sentiment that is so intense as to be harmful; but it can happen at the same time that the sentiment's noble elevation, or its lovable tenderness, so grips the heart that it increases our friendship and concern for the person.[21]

·SOME OTHER EXAMPLES·

The amours and attachments of Henry IV of France, during the civil wars between Protestants and Catholics, frequently hurt his interests and the cause he was fighting for; but many people—the young, the amorous, and perhaps others who can sympathize with the tender passions—will agree that this was a weakness in him while also admitting that it's what chiefly endears that hero to them and interests them in his fortunes.

The excessive bravery and resolute inflexibility of Charles XII ruined his own country and made trouble for all his neighbours; but those personal characteristics of his have such splendour and greatness in their appearance that they strike us with admiration. We might even to some extent *approve* of them if it weren't for the fact that they sometimes reveal clear symptoms of madness.

The Athenians claimed to have invented •agriculture and laws, and they always valued themselves extremely because of the benefit these two inventions brought to the whole race of mankind. They also boasted, and with reason, of their •war-like enterprises, particularly against the innumerable fleets and armies of Persians that invaded Greece during the reigns of Darius and Xerxes. As for the usefulness of these two achievements, one peaceful and the other military, there's simply no comparison; and yet we find that the orators who have written so elaborately in praise of that famous city have chiefly triumphed in displaying its warlike achievements. Lysias, Thucydides, Plato and Isocrates all reveal that same preference or bias. This attitude to military glory, though it is condemned by calm reason and reflection, seems to be very natural in the mind of man.

We can see that the great charm of poetry consists in lively pictures that it draws of the sublime passions (magnanimity, courage, disdain of fortune) or of the tender affections (love and friendship), which warm the heart and spread through

[21] Someone may be blamed for an excess of cheerfulness; but this could hardly happen if it weren't for the fact that dissolute mirth without no proper cause or subject is a sure mark of folly, which makes it disgusting.

it similar sentiments and emotions. In fact we find that **(1)** *all* kinds of passion, even disagreeable kinds like grief and anger, convey satisfaction when aroused by poetry; but **(2)** •the more elevated or softer affections have a special influence, and bring pleasure from more than one cause or source. Not to mention that •they alone interest us in the fortune of the persons represented, or create in us any esteem and affection for their character. [Hume says that **(1)** involves a mechanism of nature that it isn't easy to explain. His own attempt to explain it is his essay 'Tragedy'.]

And can it possibly be doubted that the poet's ability to move the passions. . . .is a very considerable merit? And that enhanced by its extreme rarity, it can exalt the person who has it above every character of the age in which he lives? The prudence, skill, steadiness, and benign government of ·the Roman Emperor· Augustus, adorned with all the splendour of his noble birth and imperial crown, are not enough to bring his fame up to the level of Virgil's, though the fame of Virgil is supported by nothing but the divine beauties of his poetical genius. . . .

I have presented examples of the various species of merit that are valued for the immediate pleasure they give to the person who has them. This sentiment of approval isn't in any way based on usefulness, or future beneficial consequences; yet it is similar in kind to the other sentiment, the one that *does* arise from thoughts about public or private usefulness. What the two have in common is that they both arise from social sympathy or fellow-feeling with human happiness or misery; and the way this keeps turning up in all the parts of my theory can fairly be regarded as a confirmation of it.

Section 8. Qualities immediately agreeable to others

It is the nature—indeed the *definition*—of *virtue* that it is a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every-one who considers or contemplates it. But some qualities produce pleasure because they are useful to society, or useful or agreeable to the person himself; others produce it more immediately, and it is to these others that I now turn.

·COMPANIONABLE VIRTUES·

Here are two parallel developments: **(1)** In society at large, the mutual shocks and oppositions of interest and self-love have constrained mankind to establish the laws of justice so as to preserve the advantages of mutual assistance and protection. **(2)** In smaller private gatherings, the contrarieties of men's pride and self-conceit have introduced the rules of good manners, so as to help the exchange of ideas and keep conversation going. Among well-bred people,

•mutual deference is affected,
•contempt of others is disguised,
•authority is concealed,
•attention is given to each in his turn,

and an easy conversation is maintained, without speaking heatedly, or interruption, or eagerness for victory, and without any airs of superiority. Such conduct is immediately agreeable to others independently of any thoughts of utility or

beneficial tendencies: they draw affection, promote esteem, and enhance the merit of the behaver.

Many of the forms of breeding are arbitrary and casual, but what they *express* is always the same. A Spaniard goes out of his own house before his guest, to signify that he leaves the guest in charge. In other countries the owner of the house walks out last, as a common mark of deference and respect.

But a man won't be perfectly good company unless he has •wit and •ingenuity as well as good manners. It may be hard to define 'wit', but it's surely easy enough to learn that wit is a quality immediately agreeable to others, and that on its first appearance it communicates a lively joy and satisfaction to everyone who has any comprehension of it. [In Hume's day, 'wit' covered more than it does for us today. For something to qualify as an example of 'wit' in his sense, it needs to be clever, imaginative, in some way precise; it doesn't have to be funny.] The most profound metaphysics might be employed in explaining the various kinds of wit; and many of its species that we now class as 'wit' on the sole testimony of taste and sentiment [= 'simply because that's what they *feel* like'] might turn out to be special cases of something more general. But all I need for present purposes is that wit does affect taste and sentiment, and that because it gives immediate enjoyment it is a sure source of approval and affection.

In countries where men pass most of their time in conversation and visits and assemblies, these *companionable* qualities are highly valued and constitute a large part of personal merit. In countries where men live a more domestic life, and either are employed in business or pass the time in a narrower circle of acquaintance, respect is paid mainly to more solid personal qualities. I have often observed that the first questions the French ask regarding a stranger are 'Is he well-mannered? Does he have wit?' In our own country the chief praise bestowed is always that someone is 'a good-natured, sensible fellow'.

In conversation, the lively ·to-and-fro· spirit of dialogue is agreeable, even to those who don't want to take part; which is why the teller of long stories and the pompous conversational lecturer are very little approved of. But most men *do* want to take part in the conversation, and take a very dim view of the loquacity that deprives them of a right that they are naturally so protective of.

On social occasions we often encounter liars who tell stories about marvels. Their usual intention is to please and entertain, and really they are harmless; but men are most delighted with what they think is true, so these liars are utterly mistaken about the means of pleasing, and incur universal blame. We are less hostile to lying or fiction when it occurs in humorous stories, because in that context it really *is* agreeable and entertaining, and truth is not important.

Endowments that seem immediately agreeable and have a merit distinct from their usefulness include •eloquence, •intellectual excellence of all kinds, and even •good sense and sound reasoning when they occur in a high degree and are employed on subjects that are worthy and suitably challenging. And these noble talents of the human mind get additional value from their rarity, because rarity greatly increases the price of everything.

·Valuing oneself·

'Modesty' can be understood in different senses, even if we set aside chastity, which I have already discussed. [Hume identifies and sets aside four things that he says can be called 'modesty'—perhaps they could then, but not now. Then:] But its most usual meaning is in contrast to impudence and arrogance, and expresses

•diffidence about one's own judgment, and due attention and respect for others.

Especially in young men, this quality is a sure sign of good sense; and it's also a certain means for a young man to increase his endowments by keeping him always wanting to improve himself and keeping his ears open to instruction ·on how to do it·. And this kind of modesty has a further charm to every spectator: it flatters •the spectator's vanity by presenting the appearance of a teachable pupil who listens attentively and respectfully to every word •he utters.

Men have in general a much greater tendency to overvalue than to undervalue themselves, notwithstanding Aristotle's opinion.[22] This makes us more hostile to someone's over-valuing himself, and causes us to regard with a special indulgence any tendency towards modesty and diffidence about one's abilities, because we don't think that anyone's undervaluing himself risks going to such an extreme that it constitutes a vice. Analogously: in countries where people tend towards obesity, personal beauty is associated with a much greater degree of slenderness than it is in countries where the most usual defect is thinness. Being so often struck with examples of one kind of ugliness, people think they can never keep at too great a distance from it, and want always to lean to the opposite side.

Similarly, if the door were opened to self- praise, and we followed Montaigne's maxim that one should not shrink from saying 'I have sense, 'I have learning', 'I have courage' or '. . . beauty' or '. . . wit' if one thinks it is true, we all know that such a flood of insolence would break in on us that it would make society wholly intolerable. That is why custom has established it as a rule in public gatherings that men should not indulge themselves in self-praise, or indeed say *anything* much about themselves; and it is only among intimate friends or very mature people that a man is allowed to do himself justice. Nobody finds fault with the Prince of Orange for his reply to someone who asked him 'Who do you think is the first general of the age?', to which he replied 'The Marquis of Spinola is the second'. Notice that the Prince's implied self-praise is better implied than if he had directly and openly expressed it.

Only a very superficial thinker would imagine that all instances of mutual deference are to be understood as being meant seriously and literally, and that there is something admirable about being ignorant of one's own merits and accomplishments! We look with favour on •a small bias towards modesty even in the internal sentiment, especially in young people, and on •a strong bias in the outward behaviour; but this doesn't exclude a noble pride and spirit that may openly display itself in its full extent when one is being attacked or oppressed in any way. The 'noble obstinacy' of Socrates, as Cicero calls it, has been highly celebrated down through the centuries; and when joined to the usual modesty of his behaviour it forms a shining character. Iphicrates, the Athenian, being accused of betraying the interests of his country, asked his accuser 'Would you have been guilty of that crime in those circumstances?' 'By no means!' replied the other. 'Well then,' cried the hero, 'can you imagine that Iphicrates would be guilty?' In short, a noble spiritedness and self-value is a great excellence when it

- •is well founded,
- •is decently disguised,
- •is courageously supported under distress and calumny, and
- •seems to derive its merit from the noble elevation of its sentiment, or its immediate agreeableness to its possessor.

[22] [In a footnote Hume cites Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. He is presumably thinking of the description in 1125^a of 'unduly humble' men. Their fault is worse than that of unduly proud men, Aristotle says, and is commoner.]

In people with ordinary characters we approve of a bias towards modesty, which is a quality immediately agreeable to others. ·So we have two virtues—**(1)** a noble sense of one's own value and **(2)** modesty.· When **(1)** is excessive, the resultant vice—insolence or haughtiness—is immediately disagreeable to others; when **(2)** is excessive, the resultant vice is immediately disagreeable to the person himself. That's how we settle the boundaries of these duties.

A desire for fame, reputation, or *standing* in society is so far from being blameable that it seems inseparable from virtue, intellectual power and creativeness, and a noble disposition. Society expects and demands that we attend even to trivial matters in order to please others, so it's no surprise to find a man in company •dressed more elegantly and •conversing more pleasantly than when he is at home with his own family. Well, then, what is *vanity*, which is rightly regarded as a fault or imperfection? A man's vanity seems to consist chiefly in

- •immoderately displaying his advantages, honours, and accomplishments, and
- •openly and pushily demanding praise and admiration,

to such an extent that he offends others and encroaches too far on *their* vanity and ambition, which they have kept secret. It's also a sure symptom of the lack of the true dignity and high-mindedness that is such a great ornament in any character. Why that impatient desire for applause, as if you weren't rightly entitled to it and couldn't reasonably expect that you would always get it? Why so anxious to tell us about the great people you have been associating with, the compliments that have been paid to you, the honours and distinctions you have received, as if these were not matters of course that we could easily have imagined without your telling us about them?

·'Clean and decent'·

Decency, or acting appropriately to one's age, sex, character, and station in the world is one of the qualities that are immediately agreeable to others and therefore are praised and approved. •Effeminate behaviour in a man, •a rough manner in a woman—these are ugly because they are unsuitable to each character and different from the qualities we expect in the sexes. It's as if a tragedy were full of fine comic bits, or a comedy were full of tragic scenes. The disproportions hurt the eye, and convey to the spectators a disagreeable sentiment that is the source of blame and disapproval. . . .

Cleanliness deserves a place among the virtues, because our cleanliness naturally makes us agreeable to others, and is a considerable source of love and affection. No-one will deny that someone's neglecting to keep himself clean is a fault; and what makes this *a fault* —i.e. a minor vice—must be the uneasy sensation it gives to others. So this seemingly trivial matter clearly reveals the origin of moral distinctions, about which the learned have involved themselves in such mazes of perplexity and error.

·'I know not what'·

In addition to all the agreeable qualities the origin of whose beauty we can to some extent explain and account for, there is something else—something mysterious and inexplicable—which conveys an immediate satisfaction to the spectator although he has no idea of why. There is a •manner, a grace, an ease, a genteelness, an I-know-not-what, that some men possess more of than others; it's very different from external beauty and comeliness, yet it catches our affection almost as suddenly and powerfully ·as beauty does·. And though this •manner is chiefly talked about in connection with sexual passion, where the concealed magic is easily explained, surely much of it carries weight in *all* our valuing

of characters, and forms a considerable part of personal merit. So this class of accomplishments must be trusted entirely to the blind but sure testimony of taste and sentiment, ·i.e. must be handled entirely through our feelings, with no guidance from any theoretical considerations·. And it must be considered as a part of ethics, left by nature to baffle all the pride of philosophy and make her aware of how narrow her scope is and how meagre her possessions.

We approve of someone because of his wit, politeness, modesty, decency, or any agreeable quality that he possesses, even if we have never met him and so have never derived any benefit from these accomplishments of his. We do have an •idea of the effect they must have on those who *are* acquainted with him; that has an agreeable influence on our imagination, and gives us the sentiment of approval. All our judgments concerning people's manners and characters have this •idea as one of their sources.

Section 9: Conclusion

Part 1

You could reasonably find it surprising that at this late stage in history anyone should think it necessary to argue elaborately for the thesis that

> Personal merit consists entirely in the possession of mental qualities that are •useful or •agreeable to the person himself or to other people.

You might have thought that this principle must have occurred even to the first rough and ready enquirers into morals, and have been accepted as self-evident without any argument or disputation. Whatever is valuable in any way so naturally classes itself as either •useful or •agreeable—·in Latin· as *utile* or *dulce*—that it's hard to think why we should ever seek further, or consider the question as a matter of intricate research or inquiry. And if a quality that someone has is useful or agreeable, it must be useful or agreeable *to* or *for* someone—either the person himself or other people. Out of this a complete delineation or description of merit seems to emerge as naturally as a shadow is cast by the sun or an image is reflected on water. If the ground on which the shadow is cast is smooth and level, if the water-surface from which the image is reflected is calm, an accurate figure is immediately presented ·naturally·; nobody has to work at it! Why has such a simple and obvious theory so long have escaped the most elaborate examination? It seems reasonable to suppose that it's because systems and hypotheses have perverted our natural understanding, ·like wind ruffling the surface of the water and spoiling the reflection·.

Anyway, whatever has happened in philosophy, in ordinary everyday life these principles are still *implicitly* maintained. Whenever we applaud or censure any human behaviour, we never allude to anything else—·i.e. anything except facts about what is useful/agreeable to him/others·. If we observe men in every interaction of business or pleasure, in every discourse and conversation, we won't find

them having any difficulty about this subject ·of the basis for praise and blame·—except in the philosophy departments! Think about how *natural* the following conversation is:

- •First speaker: You are very fortunate that you have given your daughter to Cleanthes. He's a man of honour and humanity. Everyone who has any dealings with him is sure of fair and kind treatment. (·Qualities useful to others·.)
- •Second speaker: I congratulate you also on the promising expectations of this son-in-law. His hard work studying the laws, and his quick mind and knowledge (impressive in one so young) both of men and of business, promise that he is due for great honours and advancement. (·Qualities useful to the person himself·.)
- •Third speaker: You surprise me when you speak of how hard Cleanthes works at his business. When I met him recently in a very cheerful group, he was the very life and soul of our conversation: I have never before encountered anyone with so much wit along with good manners, so much gallantry without affectation, so much non-trivial knowledge so genteelly delivered. (·Qualities immediately agreeable to others·.)
- •Fourth speaker: You would admire him still more if you knew him better. The cheerfulness that you might notice in him isn't something he switches on when he is in company; it runs through the whole tenor of his life, and keeps a perpetual serenity on his face and tranquillity in his soul. He has met with severe trials, misfortunes and even dangers, and his greatness of mind enabled him to rise above them. (·Qualities immediately agreeable to the person himself·.)
- •Then I join in: The picture of Cleanthes that you have just presented is a picture of accomplished merit. . . . A philosopher might select this character as a model of perfect virtue.

In common life, •every quality that is useful or agreeable to ourselves or to others is regarded as a part of personal merit, and •nothing else will be so regarded as long as men are judging things by their natural, unprejudiced reason, without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion. Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification [= 'physically hurting oneself'], self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues—why are they everywhere rejected by men of sense? It's because they serve no purpose of any kind: they don't advance a man's fortune in the world or make him a more valuable member of society; they don't qualify him for the entertainment of others or make him better able to enjoy himself. What we see is just the opposite: they interfere with all those desirable ends; they stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the imagination and sour the temper. So we are right to transfer them to the opposite column, putting them in the list of vices; and no superstition has enough force among men of the world to pervert entirely these natural sentiments ·relating to what is useful/agreeable to oneself/others·. A gloomy, hare-brained fanatic may after his death have a place in the calendar ·of saints·, but while he is alive he'll scarcely ever be admitted into intimacy and society except by those who are as delirious and dismal as he is.

It seems like a good feature of my theory that it doesn't get into the vulgar dispute about the *degrees* of benevolence or self-love that prevail in human nature, ·i.e. the dispute that sprawls across the territory between those who hold that •human beings are very benevolent and not very selfish and those who hold that •they are very selfish and not very benevolent. That dispute isn't likely ever to be settled, for two reasons: because •men who have taken part in it are not

easily convinced, and because •the phenomena that can be produced on either side are so scattered, so uncertain, and open to so many interpretations, that it's scarcely possible to command a clear view of them as a totality, or draw from them any determinate inference or conclusion. All I need for my present purpose is agreement—and surely it would be the greatest absurdity *not* to agree—that there is in our make-up *some* benevolence, however little; *some* spark of friendship for human kind; *some* particle of the •dove worked into our constitution along with the elements of the •wolf and the •serpent. However weak these generous sentiments ·or feelings· are, even if they don't have enough force to move a hand or a finger, they must still direct the decisions of our mind, and produce—other things being equal—a cool preference for what is useful and serviceable to mankind as against what is harmful and dangerous. This immediately gives rise to a moral distinction, a general sentiment of blame and approval, a (perhaps very faint) preference •for states of affairs of one kind and •against ones of another kind. As for the thinkers who so earnestly maintain that mankind are predominantly selfish—they won't be scandalized by hearing of the weak sentiments of virtue implanted in our nature. On the contrary, those philosophers are as ready to maintain the one tenet as the other; and their wish to mock mankind (for that, not corruption, seems to be what drives them) naturally gives rise to both opinions, which are closely linked and can hardly be separated.

[One of the 'tenets' is the thesis that human beings are predominantly selfish. What is the other?

> **(a)** That human beings in general have *some* sentiment of benevolence? or
>
> **(b)** That human beings in general have *a very weak* sentiment of benevolence?

All Hume has laid a foundation for is **(a)**, but the last two sentences of the paragraph require **(b)**. He has moved across by going from **(a)** 'However weak these generous sentiments are . . . ' to **(b)** '. . . by hearing of the weak sentiments of virtue implanted in our nature'.]

Avarice, ambition, vanity, and all the passions that are commonly though wrongly classified as kinds of self-love, are excluded from my theory concerning the origin of morals, not because they are too weak but because they aren't in the right way *directional*. ·Let me explain·. The notion of *morals* implies

> some sentiment that *all mankind have*,

a sentiment that produces general approval—approval by everyone or nearly everyone—for the very same objects. It also implies

> some sentiment that *is aimed at all mankind*,

a sentiment that leads us to •applaud or •censure the actions and conduct of people, *any* people, even ones who are far away, according to whether they •do or •don't conform to the rule of right that is established. The only thing in the human make-up that satisfies these two requirements is the sentiment of humanity that I am emphasizing here—**(1)** everyone has it, and **(2)** we have it towards everyone·. The other passions produce in everyone many strong sentiments of desire and aversion, affection and hatred; but they can't be the basis for any general system and established theory of blame or approval, because they satisfy neither **(1)** nor **(2)**.

When a man refers to someone else as 'my enemy', 'my rival', 'my antagonist', 'my adversary', he is understood to be speaking the language of self-love; he is expressing sentiments that are specifically *his*, and arise from *his* particular circumstances and situation. But when he characterizes someone as 'vicious' or 'odious' or 'depraved', he is speaking a different language, and expressing sentiments that he expects to be shared by all who hear him. In this second case, therefore, he must depart from his private and particular situation and choose a point of view that is common to him

and the others; he must

what Hume wrote next: move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string to which all mankind have an accord and symphony.

what he meant: set moving some action-generator that is built into the human constitution, and pluck a string that is tuned to a note that will resonate with all mankind.

If what he means to express is that this man has qualities whose tendency is harmful to society, then ·he has done what is needed for this to be proper moral speech. That is·, he has chosen a common point of view and has touched the principle of humanity that is found in some degree in everyone. For as long as the human heart is made out of the same elements as at present, it won't ever be wholly indifferent to public good, or entirely unaffected by the likely consequences of characters and manners. This feeling of humanity may not generally be credited with as much strength as *vanity* or *ambition*, but because it is common to all men it is the only possible basis for morals, i.e. of any *general system* of blame or praise. Your ambition is not mine, and something that would satisfy yours wouldn't satisfy mine; but your humanity is mine and is everyone's—the same things arouse this passion in all human creatures. [In this context, 'humanity' refers not to the •property of being human but rather to the •feeling of benevolence towards all human beings.]

And the sentiments that arise from humanity are not only **(1)** the same in all human creatures, and produce ·in them· the same approval or censure; but they are also **(2)** *directed at* all human creatures, so that there's no-one whose conduct or character isn't open to being censured or approved by everyone. In contrast with that, the passions that are standardly called 'selfish' **(1)** produce different sentiments in each individual according to his particular situation; and also **(2)** contemplate most of mankind with the utmost indifference and unconcern. Whoever has a high regard and esteem for me flatters my vanity; whoever expresses contempt embarrasses and displeases me; but these feelings connect me with only a small part of mankind—the majority of mankind can't be targets of such feelings because they don't even know my name. But if you present me with an account of tyrannical, insolent or barbarous behaviour in any country at any time, that quickly carries my thoughts to the harmful consequences of such conduct, and I feel the sentiment of repugnance and displeasure towards it. No-one can be so remote from me that his character and conduct are wholly indifferent to me: I will always be drawn to whatever is beneficial to society or to the person himself. And every quality or action of every human being must in this way be put into some class—given some label—that expresses general censure or applause.

What more can we ask, therefore, to •distinguish the sentiments that depend on humanity from the ones connected with any other passion, or to •explain to us why the former and not the latter are the origin of morals? Whatever conduct gets *my* approval by touching my humanity procures also the applause of *all mankind* by affecting the same principle in them; whereas what serves my greed or ambition pleases these passions in me alone and has no effect on the avarice and ambition of the rest of mankind. There is no conduct in any man, provided it has a beneficial tendency, that isn't agreeable to my humanity, however remote from me the man is; but if a man is remote enough from me not to thwart or help my greed and ambition, *those* passions of mine pay no attention to him. When we have such a large and obvious distinction between two kinds of sentiment, language is bound to follow its contours and to invent a set of terms specifically to express sentiments of one of the two

kinds—specifically, the universal sentiments of censure or approval that arise from humanity, i.e. from views of general usefulness and its opposite. And so

- •virtue and vice become known;
- •morals are recognized;
- •certain general ideas of human conduct are formed;
- •·on these ideas we base rules of conduct that· men are expected to measure up to;
- •we judge that *this* action conforms to our abstract rule, while *that* one doesn't.

And the particular sentiments of self-love are often controlled and limited by such universal principles ·or rules·.[23]

From instances of popular tumults, seditions, factions, panics, and all passions that are shared with a multitude, we can learn the influence of society in arousing and supporting any emotion; and from the same source we can also learn that the most ungovernable disorders grow from the slightest and most frivolous causes. ·The Athenian ruler· Solon dealt harshly with people who didn't take sides in a civil war; but I don't think many people would get into trouble in *that* way if their feelings and ways of talking were allowed to count in their favour! In a civil war no selfishness, and hardly any philosophy, has sufficient force to keep one entirely cool and indifferent; someone who in that situation didn't catch fire from the common blaze would have to be more than a man—or less than a man! So it's no wonder that moral sentiments are found to have such influence in life, although they come from sources that may at first sight appear somewhat small and delicate. But remember that these principles are social and universal; they form, in a manner, the *party* of mankind against vice or disorder, mankind's common enemy. And because the benevolent concern for others is spread in a greater or lesser degree through all men, and is the same in all, it crops up more often in discourse, is cherished by society and conversation; and that has the effect that the blame and approval that depend on it are roused from the lethargy into which they are probably lulled in solitary and uncultivated nature. [Hume is referring to a theoretical state of nature in which men are solitary and primitive; he isn't necessarily assuming that there is or ever was such a

[23] It seems certain, both from reason and from experience, that a rough untaught savage regulates his love and hatred chiefly by the ideas of benefit to *him* and harm *to him*, and has only a faint conception of a *general* rule or system of behaviour. His attitude to the man who stands against him in battle (·'the enemy', for short·) is this:

> He hates the enemy heartily, not only for the present moment (which is almost unavoidable) but for ever after; and he won't settle for anything less than extreme punishment and vengeance ·for the enemy·.

Now consider how we, accustomed to society and to taking broader views, regard someone (·'the enemy' again·) who opposes us in battle:

> We bear in mind that •the enemy is serving his own country and community; that •any man in the same situation would do the same, and that includes *us*; and that •it is best for human society in general if men do conform to such maxims ·as that a man should fight for his country when called upon·. And with the help of these suppositions and views we somewhat correct our rougher and narrower positions ·which are like those of the savage·.

And though much of our friendship and enmity is still governed by private considerations of benefit and harm, we at least pay a certain homage to the general rules that we are accustomed to respecting. I mean the homage of perverting our adversary's conduct by imputing malice or injustice to him, so as to give vent to passions arising from self-love and private interest. When the heart is full of rage it is never short of pretences of this nature. . . .

state.] Other passions are •selfish and •private; and that has the result that the •social and •public benevolent concern often overpowers them and takes command of our emotional state, even when the other passions were stronger at their outset.

Another spring of our constitution that adds a lot of force to moral sentiments is the love of fame, which rules with such uncontrolled authority in all generous minds, and is often the grand object of all their designs and undertakings. [A person with a 'generous' mind, in the sense in which Hume meant that word, is someone whose aims and aspirations have scope and grandeur, whose thoughts are broad and deep and sweeping, whose ambitions are not hemmed in by caution. We don't have any one word that captures it. Some uses of the word earlier in this work may also carry that meaning, though they could all be understood in the sense that 'generous' has today.] By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we frequently review our own conduct and consider how it appears in the eyes of people who come in contact with us. This constant habit of surveying our own reflection, so to speak, •keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and •creates in people with noble natures a certain reverence not only for others but for *themselves*—and this is the surest guardian of every virtue. The animal conveniences and pleasures sink gradually in their value, while every inward beauty and moral grace is carefully acquired, and the mind comes to be equipped with every perfection that can adorn or embellish a rational creature.

Here is the most perfect morality we know; here is displayed the force of many sympathies. Our moral sentiment is itself a feeling chiefly of that nature [those are Hume's exact eleven words], and our concern for being in good standing with •other people seems to arise only from our concern for being in good standing with •ourselves; wanting to be on good terms with ourselves, we find that our shaky judgment has to be propped up by the corresponding approval of mankind.

Suppose for purposes of argument that all these reasonings of mine are false. I shall now adopt the following stance:

- •I was simply wrong when I said that the sentiments of humanity and sympathy were the source of our pleasure in thoughts or prospects of utility.
- •I have to find some *other* explanation of our applause for things—whether inanimate, animate, or rational—that have a tendency to promote the welfare and advantage of mankind.

It sounds absurd to suppose that an object is approved of because of its tendency produce a certain end, while the end itself is a matter of total indifference; but let us swallow this absurdity, in order to see where it takes us. The description or definition that I have given of *personal merit* is still evidently true and authoritative: it must still be conceded that every quality of the mind that is useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others communicates pleasure to the spectator, commands his esteem, and is accepted under the honourable labels 'virtue' and 'merit'. **(1)** Why are justice, fidelity, honour, truthfulness, faithfulness and chastity held in such high esteem? Isn't it because of their tendency to promote the good of society? Isn't that tendency inseparable from humanity, benevolence, gentleness, generosity, gratitude, moderation, tenderness, friendship, and all the other social virtues? **(2)** Can it possibly be doubted that industry, discretion, frugality, order, perseverance, forethought, judgment, and this whole class of virtues and accomplishments that it would take many pages to list—can it be doubted (I repeat) that the tendency of these qualities to promote the interests and happiness of the person who has them is the whole basis for their merit? Compare

- a mind that supports a perpetual serenity and cheerfulness, a noble dignity and undaunted spirit, a tender affection and good-will to everyone within reach, with
- a mind that is dejected with melancholy, tormented with anxiety, irritated with rage, or sunk into the most abject baseness and degeneracy.

(3) Who can dispute that the former has more enjoyment within itself, and is also a more animating and joy-giving spectacle to others? **(4)** As for the qualities that are immediately agreeable to others: they speak sufficiently for themselves; and if you have never perceived the charms of a humorous wit or flowing affability, of a delicate modesty or decent genteelness of speech and manner, you must be *very* unfortunate either in the temperament you have or in the company you keep.

I'm aware that nothing can be more unphilosophical than to be positive or dogmatic on any subject; and that even excessive scepticism (supposing it could be maintained) wouldn't be more destructive of all sound reasoning and inquiry than dogmatism is. I'm convinced that where men are the most sure and arrogant is generally where they are the most mistaken. It's because they have given passion a free rein, without the proper deliberation and suspension of judgment that are their only protection against the grossest absurdities. But I must confess that my four-item list puts the matter in so strong a light that I can't at present be more assured of any truth that I have learned from reasoning and argument than I am that personal merit consists entirely in the •usefulness or •agreeableness of qualities to •the person who has them or •to other people who interact with him. But I remind myself that although

- the size and shape of the earth have been measured and described,
- the motions of the tides have been explained,
- the order and system of the heavenly bodies have been brought under their proper laws, and
- infinity itself has been reduced to calculation,

men are still arguing about the foundation of their moral duties. When I think about *that*, I fall back ·from dogmatism· into diffidence and scepticism, and suspect that any hypothesis as obvious as mine would, *if it were true*, have received long ago the unanimous vote of mankind.

Part 2

Having explained the moral approval that comes with merit or virtue, my only remaining task is briefly to consider how if at all our interests create an obligation to conform to morality. The question is this:

> 'For any man who has any concern for his own happiness and welfare, the best course of action is for him to perform every moral duty.' True or false?

If the answer 'True' can be clearly derived from my theory, I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that I have advanced principles that don't just (I hope) •stand the test of reasoning and inquiry but also •may contribute to the amendment of men's lives and their improvement in morality and social virtue. ·Let me reflect for a moment on the relation between 'true' and 'salutary'·. The philosophical truth of a proposition never depends on its tendency to promote the interests of society; ·but a proposition that has the opposite tendency, though it may be *true*, perhaps ought not to be made *public*·. Only a very nasty man would ·publicly· deliver a theory—even a perfectly true one—that he has to admit will lead to conduct that is dangerous and harmful. Why explore the corners of nature that spread nastiness all around? Why dig up the disease-carrying stuff from the pit in which it is buried? The skill of your researches may be admired, but your system will

be detested; and mankind will agree that if they can't refute it they can at least bury it in eternal silence and oblivion. ·And they*can* do that; because· •truths that are *harmful* to society (if there are any) will be overcome by •falsehoods that are salutary and *helpful*.

But no philosophical truths could be more advantageous to society than the ones I have presented here. They represent virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms, and make us approach her with ease, familiarity, and affection. She loses the dismal dress that she has been covered with by many theologians and some philosophers, so that all we see is virtue in all her gentleness, humanity, beneficence and kindly politeness—even sometimes her play, frolic and gaiety. She doesn't talk to us of useless austerities and rigours, suffering and self-denial. She declares that her sole purpose is to make her devotees and all mankind cheerful and happy during every instant of their existence, if possible; and she never willingly parts with any pleasure except to get ample compensation at some other period in the person's life. The only trouble that she requires us to take is that of accurate calculation, ·which we sometimes need if we are to maintain· a steady preference for the greater happiness. And if she is approached by would-be moralists who are enemies to joy and pleasure, she either rejects them as hypocrites and deceivers or, if she admits them to her circle, she ranks them among the least favoured of her devotees.

Enough of metaphors! What hopes can we ever have of drawing mankind into a way of life that we admit to be full of austerity and rigour? What theory of morals can ever serve any useful purpose unless it can show in detail that all the duties that it recommends are also the true interest of each individual? The unique advantage of my system seems to be that it furnishes a proper basis for that result.

There's presumably no need to *argue* that the virtues that are immediately useful or agreeable to the person who has them are desirable from the point of view of self-interest. Moralists can spare themselves all the trouble they often take in *recommending* these duties. What's the point of collecting arguments to show that temperance is advantageous and that the excesses of pleasure are harmful, when it's obvious •that these excesses are only called 'excesses' because they are hurtful, and •that if the unlimited use of rum (for example) did no more harm to one's health or the faculties of one's mind and body than the use of air or water, it wouldn't be a whit more vicious or blameable?

There also seems to be no need to argue that the companionable virtues of good manners and wit, decency and genteelness, are more desirable than the contrary qualities. Our vanity alone, without any other consideration, is a sufficient motive to make us want to have these accomplishments. No man was ever willingly lacking in them. All our failures here proceed from bad upbringing, lack of abilities, or a perverse and rigid disposition. 'Do I want my company to be wanted, admired, followed, rather than hated, despised, avoided?' Can anyone seriously *deliberate* about this? Just as no enjoyment is sincere without some reference to company and society, so no society can be agreeable—or even tolerable—when a man feels that his presence in it is unwelcome, and discovers all around him symptoms of disgust and aversion.

But why shouldn't all this hold just as well for the greater society or get-together of mankind, as well as for particular clubs and gatherings? I have been arguing for this:

> •The limited endowments of ingenuity and politeness are desirable from the point of view of happiness and self-interest.

Why, if we are sure of that, would we doubt this?—

- The enlarged virtues of humanity, generosity and beneficence are desirable from the point of view of happiness and self-interest.

Are we afraid that •those social affections will interfere with private utility to a greater extent and in a more immediate way than any other pursuits, so that •they can't be gratified without some important sacrifice of honour and advantage? If so, we aren't well informed about the nature of the human passions, and are more influenced by verbal distinctions than by real differences.

Whatever contradiction may be commonly thought to exist between **selfish** sentiments or dispositions and **social** ones, there's really no more conflict between those two than there is between **selfish** and **ambitious**, **selfish** and **revengeful**, **selfish** and **vain**.

what Hume wrote next: It is requisite that there be an original propensity of some kind, in order to be a basis to self-love, by giving a relish to the objects of its pursuit; and none more fit for this purpose than benevolence or humanity.

what he seems to have meant: A person's self-love or selfishness is active only when he selfishly pursues his goals; but he can't *have* any such goals unless he has—lying deeper within him than his self-love—some sort of leaning or liking or preference for something-or-other. And the best candidate for that role is benevolence or humanity, i.e. a leaning or liking for the welfare of mankind.

The goods that the world brings us are spent in one gratification or another: the miser who accumulates his annual income and lends it out at interest has really spent it in the gratification of his greed. And it would be hard to show why a man loses more by a generous action than by any other method of expense, since the most he can achieve by the most elaborate selfishness is the gratification of some liking.

Suppose that you have full power to model your own disposition: now deliberate about what appetite or desire you would choose to be the basis for your happiness and enjoyment, ·the 'leaning or liking' referred to above·. (You'll want to have *some* appetite or desire; a life without passion would be altogether insipid and tiresome.) You'll have noticed that *every* liking, when gratified by success, gives a satisfaction proportional to the force and violence of the liking; that's an advantage that *every* liking has, ·so it doesn't favour benevolence over any of its rivals. But it has other advantages that do select it out of the herd·. The immediate feeling of benevolence and friendship, humanity and kindness is sweet, smooth, tender and agreeable, come what may. These virtues are also accompanied by a pleasing awareness or memory: while we retain the pleasant thought of having done our part for mankind and society, that keeps us on good terms with ourselves as well as with others. If we devote ourselves to trying to satisfy our greed and ambition, we may have 'successes' that all men will resent; but we can be almost sure of their good-will and good wishes so long as we persevere in the paths of virtue, and devote ourselves to generous plans and purposes. What other passion is there that brings together so many advantages—an agreeable sentiment, a pleasing consciousness, a good reputation? But men are pretty much convinced of these truths without help from me; and when they are deficient in their duty, not *wanting* to be generous, friendly and humane, it's because they don't *feel that they are* generous, friendly or humane.

Treating vice with the utmost fairness and making all possible concessions to it, we must acknowledge that there is never the slightest pretext—from the point of view of self-interest—for preferring it to virtue; except perhaps in the case of justice, where a man may often seem to be a loser by his integrity. It is agreed that no society could

survive without a respect for *property*; but because of the imperfect way in which human affairs are conducted, it could happen in a particular case that a sensible knave thinks that a dishonest or treacherous act will make a considerable addition to his fortune without greatly weakening the bonds that hold society together. [The phrase 'sensible knave' is a kind of technical term in the writings of Hume and of many who have come after him. It refers to a bad man who gives some thought to what he is doing.] The thesis that honesty is the best policy—·meaning 'best' from the self-interested point of view·—is a good general rule, but there are many exceptions to it; and it might be thought that the wisest person is the one who obeys the general rule except for taking advantage of all the exceptions. I must confess that if someone thinks that this line of thought needs an answer, it won't be easy to find one that will convince him. If his heart doesn't rebel against such harmful maxims, if he doesn't shrink from the thought of villainy or baseness, he has indeed lost a considerable motive to virtue; and we may expect that his behaviour will fit in with his doctrine ·that he should be honest except where it is better *for him* to be dishonest·. But in all openly honest natures, the dislike for treachery and roguery is too strong to be counter-balanced by any views of ·personal· profit or monetary advantage. Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct—these are all very much required for happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man who feels the importance of them.

Such a person will also have the frequent satisfaction of seeing knaves, with all their supposed cunning and abilities, betrayed by their own maxims. A knave who *intends* only to cheat with moderation and secrecy will come across a tempting opportunity ·to go further·; nature is frail, and he'll fall into the snare from which he can never extricate himself without a total loss of reputation, and the forfeiture of all future trust and confidence with mankind.

But even if a knave is ever so secret and successful, an honest man, if he has the slightest touch of philosophy or even just common observation and reflection, will discover that the knave is in the last analysis the greatest dupe, having sacrificed the priceless enjoyment of a good character—at least in his own eyes—in return for the acquisition of worthless toys and trinkets. So little is needed to supply the necessities of nature! And from the point of view of pleasure, there is no comparison between

- the feverish, empty amusements of luxury and big spending, and
- the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study, even health and the common beauties of nature, but above all the peaceful reflection on one's own conduct.

These natural pleasures, indeed, are really priceless—it costs nothing to get them, and the enjoyment of them is above all price.