

# The origin of our ideas of virtue or moral good

Francis Hutcheson

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type. The division into seven sections is Hutcheson's; so are the 118 headings within sections, except that in the original they are in the margins rather than across the text.—This version is based on the second edition of the work, but some considerable alterations and additions from the third and fourth editions are included; only one of these (starting on page 13) is noted as an importation.

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## Glossary

**affection:** In the early modern period, ‘affection’ could mean ‘fondness’, as it does today; but it was also often used, as it is in this work, to cover every sort of pro or con attitude—desire, approval, liking, disapproval, disliking, etc. The first paragraph of **(1)** on page 11 is interesting about this. See also three paragraphs later, where Hutcheson says that hate is one of the two basic affections.

**amiable:** This meant ‘likable’, ‘lovable’, ‘very attractive’. A good deal stronger than the word’s normal meaning today.

**benevolence:** The desire to do good.

**benefactor:** Someone who does good.

**beneficence:** The doing of good.

**beneficiary:** Someone for whom good is done.

**contempt:** In early modern times, ‘contempt’ had a weaker sense than it does now. To have ‘contempt’ for something was to write it off as negligible—hence ‘contempt of pain’, ‘contempt of death’.

**contentedness, discontent:** These replace Hutcheson’s ‘complacence’ and ‘displacence’ respectively.

**determine, determination:** These are used an enormous amount in early modern philosophy. The basic meaning of ‘determine’ is *settle, fix, pin down*; thus, to determine what to do next is to decide what to do next, to settle the question. In our day ‘He is determined to do x’ means that he resolutely intends to do x; but in early modern times ‘He is determined to do x’ would be more likely to mean ‘Something about how he is constituted settles it that he will do x’; it could be that he is made to do x, or caused to do x. But ‘determine’ can’t simply be replaced by ‘cause’ throughout; when on page 19 Hutcheson speaks of God’s having dispositions that

‘determine’ him to act in a certain way, he would certainly have rejected ‘cause’.

**disinterested:** What this meant in early modern times is what it still means when used by literate people, namely ‘not *self*-interested’. I have ‘disinterested malice’ towards someone if I want him to suffer although there is no gain for me in this (apart, presumably, from the satisfaction of knowing that he is suffering).

**education:** In early modern times this word had a somewhat broader meaning than it does today. It wouldn’t have been misleading to replace it by ‘upbringing’ throughout.

**equipage:** This imprecise term covers: coach and horses, servants’ uniform, elegant cutlery and dishes, and so on. In some but not all uses it also covers furniture.

**evil:** Used by philosophers as a noun, this means merely ‘something bad’. We can use ‘good’ as a noun (‘friendship is a good’), but the adjective ‘bad’ doesn’t work well for us as a noun (‘pain is a bad’); and it has been customary to use ‘evil’ for this purpose (e.g. ‘pain is an evil’, and ‘the problem of evil’ meaning ‘the problem posed by the existence of bad states of affairs’). Don’t load the noun with all the force it has as an adjective.

**indifferent:** To say that some kind of conduct is ‘indifferent’ is to say that it is neither praiseworthy nor wrong.

**industry:** It here means ‘hard work’ or ‘hard-workingness’, with nothing pointing to factories, manufacture, or the like.

**liking:** Today’s meaning for Hutcheson’s word ‘relish’ makes his use of it distracting, so it and its cognates have been replaced by ‘liking’ throughout. These ‘likings’ are thought of as being like *tastes*.

**luxury:** This meant something like: *extreme* or *inordinate* indulgence in sensual pleasures. A 'luxurious' person was someone wholly given to the pleasures of the senses—mostly but not exclusively the pleasures of eating and drinking.

**magistrate:** In this work, as in general in early modern times, a 'magistrate' is anyone with an official role in government; sometimes but not always it was a role in law-enforcement. The magistracy is the set of all such officials, thought of as a single body.

**mean:** Low-down, poor, skimpy etc., in literal and metaphorical uses. On page 18 'meanest selfishness' = 'selfishness that is naked, open, uncaring about the welfare of others'. On page 23 the 'meanest of mankind' = 'the poorest and socially lowest people'. on page 47 'form mean opinions of us' = 'think of us as morally low-down'. On page 48 'meanness of spirit' = 'lack of moral or emotional or intellectual energy'.

**mischief:** This meant 'harm, injury'—much stronger and darker than the word's meaning today.

**moral:** In early modern times, 'moral' could mean what it does today but also had a use in which it meant 'having to do with intentional human action'. Until the 1960s Cambridge University called philosophy 'moral science', a relic of the time when much of philosophy was armchair psychology. In the move from 'moral actions' to 'moral sense' on page 4 Hutcheson may be exploiting this ambiguity; but perhaps not—think about it. Notice also that on page 49 he clearly implies that 'virtues' are only a subset of 'moral abilities'.

**object:** In early modern usage, anything that is aimed at, wanted, loved, hated, thought about, feared, etc. is an *object* of that aim, desire, love, etc. *Anything*: it could be a physical object, but is more likely to be a state of affairs, a state of mind, an experience, etc.

**occasion:** It is often used to mean the same as 'cause' (noun or verb), but it began its philosophical career in opposition to 'cause'. According to the 'occasionalist' theory about body-mind relations: when you are kicked, you feel pain; what causes the pain is not the kick but God, and the kick comes into it not as *causing* God to give you pain (because nothing causes God to do anything) but as the 'occasion' for his doing so. Perhaps something like a signal or a trigger. Writers who weren't obviously pushing the occasionalist line still used 'occasion' sometimes without *clearly* meaning anything but 'cause'.

**occult:** It did and still does mean 'hidden'. The phrase 'occult quality' (page 60) was a standard accusing label for anything that wasn't and perhaps couldn't be explained—e.g. gravity, magnetism.

**offices:** In the phrase 'good offices' (or occasionally with a different adjective, e.g. 'generous offices') the word means 'help given', 'favour done', or the like.

**passive obedience:** The doctrine that anything short of or other than absolute obedience to the monarch is sinful.

**performance:** In 18th century Britain a published work was often referred to as a 'performance' by its author, especially when it was being praised.

**prince:** As was common in his day, Hutcheson uses 'prince' to stand for the chief of the government. The word names a governmental role, not a rank of nobility.

**principle:** Hutcheson uses this word only in a sense, once common but now obsolete, in which 'principle' means 'source', 'cause', 'driver', 'energizer', or the like. (Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* is, as he explicitly tells us, an enquiry into the *sources in human nature* of our moral thinking and feeling.)

**selfish:** This is not a term of criticism. Think of it as 'self-ish', i.e. 'self-related' or 'concerned with one's own interests', but *not* necessarily to the exclusion of proper care for the interests of others.

**sensible:** This means 'relating to the senses', and has nothing to do with being level-headed, prudent, or the like.

**sentiment:** This can mean 'feeling' or 'belief', and when certain early modern writers speak of 'moral sentiments' they may mean both at once, or be exploiting the word's ambiguity.

**ugly:** This word does not occur in this work; nor does 'ugliness'. In the present version they replace 'deformed' and 'deformity', which mean something stronger and nastier

to us but didn't do so in Hutcheson's day. On pages 37–38 he twice uses 'deformed' apparently in our sense.

**uneasy:** Locke turned this into a kind of technical term for some of the writers who followed him, through his theory that every intentional human act is the agent's attempt to relieve his state of 'uneasiness'. It covers pain but also many much milder states—any unpleasant sense of something's being wrong.

**vice:** In this work, 'vice' simply means 'bad behaviour (of whatever kind)', and 'vicious' is the cognate adjective. Don't load either of these with the (different sorts of) extra meaning that they tend to carry today.

## Preface

**[This was the Preface not only of this work but also of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of Beauty, Harmony, Order, Design*. The two works were published together as a linked pair.]**

No part of philosophy is more important than a sound knowledge of human nature and its various powers and dispositions. There has recently been a great deal of investigation of our understanding and of the various methods of obtaining truth. It is generally agreed that the importance of any truth is simply its power to make men happy or to give them the greatest and most lasting pleasure; and 'wisdom' names the ability to pursue this goal by the best means. So it must surely be of the greatest importance to have clear conceptions of this goal itself and of the means necessary to obtain it, so that we can discover which are the greatest and most lasting pleasures, rather than wasting our highly trained reason in trivial activities. In fact, I am afraid that if we don't follow this line of inquiry most of our studies will be of very little use to us. Why? Because they don't seem to aim at anything much except the mere acquisition of speculative knowledge [= 'knowledge of non-evaluative truths'] itself. No-one has clearly explained how knowledge or truth can bring us pleasure.

That is what started me on an inquiry into the various pleasures that human nature is capable of receiving. In our modern philosophical writings we don't find much about this except for •a mere classification of them into 'sensible' and 'rational', and •some trite commonplace arguments to prove that rational pleasures are more valuable than sensible [see Glossary] ones. Our sensible pleasures are skated over, and explained only by some examples of tastes, smells, sounds, or the like that are generally regarded by thoughtful people

as very trivial satisfactions. and our rational pleasures have been treated in much the same way. We are seldom given any notion of *rational pleasure* that goes beyond the notion we have when we think about our possession. . . .of things that may give rise to pleasure. We call such things 'advantageous'; but we can't get a clear concept of *advantage*, i.e. of what is in our interests, until we know

- what pleasures are apt to be provided by advantageous objects [see Glossary], and
- what senses, i.e. powers of perception, we have with regard to such objects.

We may be surprised by how important this inquiry will turn out to be in morals, where it will show that •virtue is something real, and that •it is the surest happiness of the agent.

Our experience of our external senses shows us clearly that our perceptions of pleasure or pain don't depend directly on our will: objects don't please us or displease us according to whether we *want* them to do so. [Hutcheson is here discussing pleasure and pain received through our *external* senses, so the 'objects' in question in this paragraph are material objects.] The presence of some objects necessarily pleases us, and the presence of others equally necessarily displeases us. The only way we can voluntarily get pleasure or avoid pain is by procuring objects of the pleasing kind and avoiding objects of the displeasing kind. It's because of the basic way we are built that one sort lead to delight and the other to dissatisfaction.

This holds equally for all our other pleasures and pains. We do have others, because many other sorts of objects please or displease us as necessarily as do material objects do when they operate on our sense-organs. Almost every object that comes before our minds is the occasion [see Glossary] of some pleasure or pain. Thus we find ourselves pleased with a regular form, a piece of architecture or painting, a composition of notes, a theorem, an action, an affection [see Glossary], a character. and we're aware that this pleasure arises necessarily from the contemplation of the idea that is then present to our minds, with all its circumstances, although some of these ideas have nothing of what we call sensible perception in them; and in those that do involve sense-perception the pleasure arises from some uniformity, order, arrangement, imitation—not from the simple ideas of colour, or sound, or shape etc . separately considered.

These determinations [see Glossary] to be pleased with forms or ideas that we become aware of I call 'senses'. To distinguish them from the powers that are ordinarily called by that name, I'll call our power of perceiving the beauty of regularity, order, harmony, an 'internal sense', and the determination to be pleased with the contemplation of the affections, actions, or characters of rational agents that we call 'virtuous' I'll give the name 'moral sense'.

My main purpose is to show that human nature was not left quite indifferent in matters of virtue, .i.e. was not left with no immediate and instinctive reactions to good and to bad behaviour. If we had nothing of that kind, we would have to make our own observations regarding the advantage or disadvantage of actions, and to regulate our conduct accordingly. The weakness of our reason and the distractions caused by the infirmity and the necessities of our nature are so great that few men could ever have conducted those long inferences that show some actions to be on the whole

advantageous to the agent and their contraries pernicious. The author of nature has equipped us better for virtuous conduct than our moralists seem to imagine, by giving us *instructions* for it, ones that are almost as quick and powerful as the instructions we have for the preservation of our bodies. He has made virtue a *lovely* form, to spur us to pursue it, and has given us strong affections to serve as the springs of each virtuous action.

This *moral sense* of beauty in actions and affections may seem strange at first view. Some of our moralists themselves are offended by its appearance in Lord Shaftesbury's writings, for two reasons. •They are so accustomed to deduce every approval or disapproval from rational views of what is in our interests. . . . and •they think that the notion of a moral sense comes close to the notion of *innate ideas*, of which they have a horror. In my second treatise, on Virtue, I'll show that this moral sense has nothing to do with innate ideas.

Our gentlemen of good taste can tell us of a great many senses, tastes, and likings [see Glossary] for beauty, harmony, imitation in painting and poetry; and mightn't we also find in mankind a liking for a beauty in characters, in ways of behaving? I suspect that our foolish management of philosophy (as well as religion) has made it so austere and unshapely that a gentleman can't easily bring himself to *like* it; and those who are strangers to it can scarcely bear to hear our description of it. What a change from what was once the delight of the finest gentlemen among the ancients—their *recreation* after the bustle of public business!

In the first treatise I may sometimes have assumed a greater agreement of mankind in their sense of beauty than experience will confirm; but all I care about is to show

- that some sense of beauty is natural to men;
- that we find as much agreement in men's likings of forms as in their external senses (which everyone

agrees to be natural); and

- that pleasure or pain, delight or aversion, are *naturally* joined to men's perceptions.

If you are convinced that the mind is caused to be pleased with forms, proportions, resemblances, theorems, it won't be difficult for you to grasp that we have another sense, a superior one that is also natural to men, causing them to be pleased with actions, characters, affections. This is the *moral sense*, which is the subject of the second treatise.

The regular occasions [see Glossary] of perception by the external senses are presented to us as soon as we come into the world, and that may be what makes it easy for us to regard these senses as natural; but the objects of the superior senses of beauty and virtue generally don't crop up as early as that. It probably takes a while for children •to reflect (or anyway to let us know that they do) on proportion and similarity, on affections, characters, temperaments, or •to come to know the external actions that are evidences of these. This leads us to imagine that their sense of beauty, and their moral sentiments [see Glossary] concerning actions, must be entirely a product of instruction and upbringing; ·but that is a weak basis for that conclusion·. It's no harder to conceive •how a character or temperament might be *constituted by nature* as the necessary occasion of pleasure or object of approval than to conceive •how a taste or a sound might have that same status, despite the fact that the character or temperament isn't presented to the child as early in life as tastes and sounds are.

[Hutcheson now has three paragraphs gratefully praising three people who have supported him and given him useful criticisms of the two treatises' first editions. It is only the third person that need concern us here:]

There's no need for me to recommend Lord Shaftesbury's writings to the world: they will be admired as long as any careful thought remains among men. It is indeed to be wished that he hadn't mixed his noble performances [see Glossary] with some prejudices that he had against Christianity—a religion that gives us the truest idea of virtue, and recommends the love of God and of mankind as the sum of all true religion. Imagine that able nobleman coming across a dissolute set of men who enjoy nothing in life but the lowest and most sordid pleasures, searching in Shaftesbury's writings for insinuations against Christianity so that they can be less restrained in their debaucheries, although their low minds are incapable of savouring the noble sentiments of virtue and honour that he has placed in such a lovely light. How indignant that would have made him!

Whatever faults able people may find with this performance of mine, I hope that no-one will find anything in it contrary to religion or good conduct; and I'll be well pleased if I give the learned world an opportunity for a more thorough examination of these subjects that I think are of very considerable importance. My main basis for confidence that my views are mainly correct is that the first hints of them came to me from some of the greatest writers of antiquity. . . .

## 1: The moral sense by which we perceive virtue and vice and approve or disapprove them in others

### Different ideas of moral and natural good

(1) Our perceptions of •moral good and evil [see Glossary] are utterly different from our perceptions of •natural good, i.e. advantage; you'll be convinced of this if you reflect on the difference in your state when you observe a morally good action from your state when you come across something that is advantageous to you. If we had no

•internal• sense of *good*

distinct from the

what the external senses tell us is to our advantage  
or •self•-interest

and from

our •internal• perceptions of beauty and harmony,  
then our feelings for a generous friend or any noble character would be much the same as our admiration and love for a good vegetable-garden or a comfortable house, for in each there would be or might be advantage for us. And we wouldn't admire any action or love any person in a distant country, or at a remote time, whose influence couldn't extend to us, any more than we—not being involved in the Spanish trade—love the mountains of Peru! We would have the same sentiments and affections towards inanimate things as towards rational agents; and everyone knows that in fact we *don't*. Putting the two side by side, our attitude is this: 'Why should we admire inanimate beings or love and esteem them? They aren't trying to do good to us; their nature makes them fit for our uses, but they don't know what these are, and aren't trying to satisfy them. In contrast with that, rational agents do try to serve our interests; they delight in our happiness, and are benevolent [see Glossary] towards us.'

So we are all aware of the difference between •the love and esteem—the perception of moral excellence—that benevolence arouses in us towards the person in whom we observe it and •the opinion that something is a natural good, which only arouses our desire to own it. This difference is strong evidence against the thesis that all approval, i.e. all sense of *good* comes from the prospect of *advantage*. If that thesis were true, why would there *be* this difference? Don't inanimate objects bring advantage to us, as well as benevolent persons who do us offices [see Glossary] of kindness and friendship? Then shouldn't we have the same warm sentiments regarding both? or only the same cold opinion of advantage with regard to both? The reason why that's not how things stand must be this: we have a distinct perception of beauty, i.e. excellence, in the kind affections of rational agents; and this determines [see Glossary] us to admire and love such characters and persons.

### In actions done to ourselves

Suppose we get the same advantage from two men, one of whom does things for us •because he loves us and delights in our happiness, while the other acts •out of self-interest or under constraint. The two are equally beneficial or advantageous to us, and yet we'll have quite different sentiments regarding them. So it's certain that we have perceptions of moral [see Glossary] actions other than those of advantage; and this power of receiving these perceptions can be called a moral 'sense', since it fits the definition of that word, namely 'a determination of the mind to receive an idea from the presence of an object that we are presented with independently of our will'.

**Moral and natural evil**

This may be equally evident from our ideas of evil ·as done to us blindly by some natural event or· done to us designedly by a thinking person. ·If we didn't have the internal sense that I am calling 'the moral sense'· our senses of *natural* good and evil would make us receive

- an assault, a punch, an affront from a neighbour, a cheat from a business partner or trustee
- in the same spirit as that in which we receive
- an equally harmful fall of a beam or a roof-tile, or a tempest,

having the same thoughts and feelings in each kind of case. Villainy, treachery, cruelty, would be as meekly deplored as a storm, or mildew, or a river in flood. But I think that in fact everyone is very differently affected on these occasions, though there may be equal natural evil in both. Indeed, actions that do no harm may give rise to the strongest anger and indignation, if they manifest impotent hatred or contempt. And on the other hand when someone acts in a way that causes us the greatest natural evil, it can happen that moral ideas intervene and prevent us from hating the person or judging his action to be bad. For example, when a magistrate passes sentence on us—the sentence being one that entails great suffering—our belief that the sentence is just will •prevent us from seeing the carrying out of the sentence as morally evil and •prevent us from hating the magistrate.

**In actions towards others**

(2) In our sentiments regarding actions that affect ourselves, there is indeed a mixture of the ideas of natural and of moral good, which require some attention to separate them. But when we reflect on actions that affect others but not ourselves, we can observe the moral ideas unmixed with those of natural good or evil. ·In saying this I am relying on

something that it is important to get straight·:

The senses by which we perceive pleasure in natural objects, making them advantageous, could never raise in us any desire of •public good but only of what was good •to ourselves in particular. And they could never make us approve an action because it promotes the happiness of others.

But as soon as any action is represented to us as flowing from the agent's love, humanity, gratitude, compassion, concern for the good of others and delight in their happiness, we feel joy within us and we admire the lovely action and praise its author—even if this happened at the far end of the world and centuries ago. And on the other side, every action represented as flowing from hatred, delight in the misery of others, or ingratitude, raises abhorrence and aversion in us.

It's true that the actions of others that we approve of are generally thought to bring some natural benefit to mankind or to some parts of it. But this secret chain between each person and mankind—where does it come from? How are my interests connected with •the most distant parts of mankind? Yet I can't help admiring actions that are beneficial to •them, and loving the author. What is the source of this love, compassion, indignation and hatred even towards fictional characters, and people long ago and far away, according to whether they appear kind, faithful, compassionate, or of the opposite dispositions, towards their perhaps fictional contemporaries? If there is no moral sense that makes intentional actions appear beautiful or ugly [see Glossary]—if all approval comes from the approver's ·self·-interest—*What's Hecuba to us, or we to Hecuba?* [In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet exclaims over an actor's ability to express compassion for Hecuba over the death of her husband, King Priam of Troy, in the words: 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?']

**Moral ideas aren't based on ·self-interest**

**(3)** Some subtle explainers of self-love may tell us that we hate or love characters according to whether we think we *would have been* helped or harmed by them if we had lived at their time. But it's easy to see what is wrong with that. If we had no sense of •moral good in humanity, mercy, faithfulness, why wouldn't self-love and our sense of •natural good always bring us in on the side of the winner and make us admire and love the successful tyrant or traitor? . . . It's obvious that we have some secret *sense* that determines our approval without regard to self-interest; otherwise we would always favour the winners without regard to virtue, and think of ourselves as on that party's side.

Just as Hobbes explains all the sensations of pity in terms of our fear of similar evils when we imagine ourselves in the situation of the sufferers, so others explain all approval and condemnation of actions in distant times or places in a similar way: we imagine ourselves in the situation of others, and see an imaginary private advantage or disadvantage in these actions. But Hobbes's account of pity will never explain how our pity is increased if we think of the sufferer as worthy or if we have been fond of him; because the sufferings of any stranger can suggest the same possibility of our suffering in the same way. And this explanation of (dis)approval can't account for our high approval of brave unsuccessful attempts that do harm to the agent and to those he was trying to help, because in such a case there is no private advantage to be imagined. Nor will it account for our abhorrence of injuries of kinds that we aren't capable of suffering—for example a man's abhorrence of a case of rape. [Hutcheson decorates the point in terms of a legendary case from early Rome.]

Think of two cases of burning cities: in one the fire was started by someone who was acting innocently, and not even carelessly; in the other a cruel and malicious arsonist was

responsible. The amount of damage in the two fires was the same, but who will say he has the same idea of both actions or of sentiments of both agents? Well, then, where does this difference come from?

Now let us consider another fictional example (perhaps not far from being factual), to see if we can't approve of and see moral good in actions that are disadvantageous to us.

- (i)** A few ingenious artisans, persecuted in their own country, flee to ours for protection; they teach us some manufacturing process that supports millions of the poor, increase the wealth of almost every person in the state, and make us formidable to our neighbours.
- (ii)** In a nation not far distant from us some resolute burgomasters, full of love for their country and compassion towards their fellow-citizens, but oppressed in body and soul by a tyrant and by the Inquisition, with untiring diligence, public spirit, and courage •support a long-drawn-out perilous war against the tyrant and •form an industrious republic which rivals us in trade and almost in power.

Everyone can see which of these is more advantageous to us; but look into yourself and consider which of the two characters he has the more agreeable idea of—the **(i)** useful refugee or **(ii)** the public-spirited burgomaster whose love of his own country has led to harm to our interests? I'm confident that you'll find some other basis for respect than *advantage*, and will see a sound reason why the memory of our artisans is so obscure among us while that of our rivals is immortal.

**Self-love is not the basis for approval**

**(4)** Some moralists—ones who would rather twist self-love into a thousand shapes than allow any other principle [see Glossary] of approval than ·self-interest—may tell us •that whatever profits one part of mankind without harming any

other profits the whole, so that some small share of the advantage will come to each individual; •that actions that tend to the good of the whole, if performed by everyone, would do the most for each individual's happiness; and •that we can therefore approve of such actions on the grounds that we think they tend ultimately to our own advantage.

We needn't trouble these gentlemen to show by their intricate sequence of consequences. . . .that we in this age get some benefit from Orestes' killing the treacherous Aegisthius or from the ·fine· actions of ·the Athenian king· Codrus or ·the Roman emperor· Decius. Even if their reasonings are perfectly good, they only prove that after **long reflection and reasoning** we can discover some basis—even a ·self·-interested one—for approving actions that every man, *not* looking at them from the point of view of self-interest, admires **as soon as he hears of them**.

Suppose one of our travelers finds some old Greek treasure: the miser who hid it certainly did something more to the traveler's advantage than Codrus or Orestes ever did; for he can only have a small share of benefit from *their* actions, the effects of which have been scattered and lost down the years and across the nations; so surely this miser must appear to the traveler as a prodigious hero in virtue! Self-interest will make us value men only according to the good they do to ourselves, and will give us ideas of public good that are tailored to our share of it. But can a man admire generosity, faith, humanity, gratitude only if he is as thoughtful as Cumberland or Pufendorf? Does he need that kind of reasoning to see the evil in cruelty, treachery, ingratitude? . . . It would be an unhappy thing for mankind if the only people with a sense of virtue were ones capable of that kind of metaphysical thinking!

#### **Our moral sense can't be bribed**

(5) This moral sense, either of our own actions or of those of

others, has this in common with our other senses: however much our desire for virtue may be counterbalanced by ·self·-interest, our sentiment [see Glossary] or perception of virtue's beauty cannot; whereas it certainly could be if the only basis for our approval was our expectation of advantage. Let us consider this in relation both to our own actions and to those of others.

#### **Judging our own actions**

A covetous man will dislike any branch of trade, however useful it may be to the public, if there's no gain for *him* in it; this is an aversion based on ·self·-interest. Arrange for him to make a profit from this trade and he'll be the first who sets about it, with full satisfaction in his own conduct. Is it like that with our sense of moral actions? ·Absolutely not·! If we are advised to wrong a child or an orphan, or to do something ungrateful towards a benefactor [see Glossary], we are at first horrified; if you assure us that it will be very advantageous to us, if indeed you offer us a reward, our sense of the action is not altered. It's true that these motives ·of self-interest· may make us perform the action, but they can't make us approve of it, just as a physician's advice may lead us to force ourselves to swallow some nauseous medicine but it can't make us enjoy it.

If our only way of thinking about actions was in terms of their advantage or disadvantage ·to us·, could we ever choose an action as advantageous while remaining aware that it was evil? What need would there be for such high bribes to prevail with men to abandon the interests of a ruined party, or for tortures to force out the secrets of their friends? Is it so hard to convince men's *understandings*—if that is the only faculty we have to do with—that it is probably more advantageous •to secure present gain and avoid present evils by joining with the prevalent party than •to wait for the remote possibility of future good through an improbable

revolution? And when men are induced to change sides by the prospect of advantage, do they always approve of their own conduct? Far from it! In many cases their remaining life is odious and shameful, to themselves as well as to others to whom the base action was profitable.

If anyone becomes satisfied with his own conduct in such a case, what's his basis for this? How does he please himself, or vindicate his actions to others? Never by reflecting upon his private advantage, or alleging it to others as a vindication; but by gradually twisting himself into accepting the moral principles of his new party (every party has them!). Thus, men become pleased with their actions when viewing them in terms of appearance of moral good as distinct from advantage.

#### **Our moral sense is not based on religion**

This might be claimed: In the actions of our own that we call 'good' there is always an advantage that outweighs everything else and is the basis for our approval, enabling our self-love to motivate those actions—namely our belief that the Deity will reward them. I'll discuss this more fully later on; all I need say here is that many people •have high notions of honour, faith, generosity, justice, while having almost no opinions about the Deity, and no thoughts of future rewards; and •abhor any thing that is treacherous, cruel, or unjust, without any regard to future punishments.

And another point: Even if these rewards and punishments did make my own actions appear advantageous to me and make me approve them out of self-love, they wouldn't make me approve and love another person for similar actions whose merit would not be mine. Those actions are indeed advantageous to the agent; but his advantage isn't my advantage; and self-love couldn't lead me to approve actions as advantageous to others or to love the authors of them on that account.

#### **Our moral sense of the actions of others is not to be bribed**

This is the second thing to be considered, whether our sense of the moral good or evil, in the actions of others, can be outweighed or bribed by considerations of ·self-interest. I may be thoroughly capable of wishing that someone else would perform an action that I abhor as morally evil, if it was very advantageous to me: ·self-interest in that case may outweigh my desire for virtue in another person. But my ·self-interest can't make me approve an action as morally good if apart from my interests it would have appeared morally evil. . . . In our •sense of moral good or evil, our own private advantage or loss carries no more weight in making an action appear good or evil than does the advantage or loss of a third person. So •this sense cannot be outweighed by ·self-interest. It would be simply ridiculous to try through rewards or threats to get someone to have a good opinion of an action that was contrary to his moral notions. All we can do by such promises or threats is to get the man to *pretend* to have the moral opinion in question.

#### **It isn't an effect of praise**

(6) A clever author who is now deceased [Mandeville] said that the leaders of mankind don't really *admire* such actions as those of Regulus or Decius; they merely note that such men are very useful for the defence of a state; so they use songs of praise and statues to encourage such temperaments in others, as being the most tractable, and useful. Well, consider these two:

- a traitor who sells his own country to us, and
- a hero who defends us.

It may well be that the traitor does as much for us as the hero, but we hate him all the same, though we love the treason; and we may praise a gallant enemy who does us a great deal of harm. Is there nothing in all this but an opinion about what will be to our advantage?

And another point: If this thesis were right, what could a statue or song of praise achieve? Men love praise. They'll do the things that they see to be praised. For men whose only idea of *good* is *advantageous to me*, praise is merely a nation's or party's opinion that a certain man is useful to them. Regulus or Cato or Decius received no advantage from the actions that profited their country, so they themselves couldn't admire those actions, however much their beneficiaries [see Glossary] might praise them. Regulus or Cato couldn't possibly praise or love another hero for a virtuous action, for that wouldn't gain *them* the advantage of honour; and they would have to regard their own actions not as something amiable [see Glossary] that they could think about with pleasure, but merely as the high price they had to pay for the purchase of honour. You don't have to look very hard at such characters to see how *utterly* unlike them this is!

But, our clever author says, these amazingly cunning governors used statues and panegyrics to make men believe that there is such a thing as *•public spirit*, and that this is itself excellent; so men are led to admire *•it* in others and to imitate *•it* in themselves, forgetting the pursuit of their own advantage. That's how easy he thinks it is

- to stop judging others by what we feel in ourselves,
- for a wholly selfish person to think that others are public-spirited,
- for someone whose only idea of *good* is *advantageous to me* to be persuaded by others to adopt a conception of goodness in actions that are admittedly harmful to himself but profitable to others—and indeed to approve such actions thoroughly only to the extent that he thinks they come from a disinterested [see Glossary] care for the good of others.

All this, it seems, is to be accomplished by statues and song of praise!

It's easy enough for men to *say* this or that; but to answer the question 'Don't some moral actions at first view appear amiable even to those who won't profit from them?' we must look into our own hearts. Or the question 'Don't we sincerely love a generous kind friend, or a patriot, whose actions bring honour only to him with no advantage to ourselves?' It's true that the actions that we approve of are useful to mankind, but they aren't always useful to the approver. It might well be useful to mankind as a whole if all men agreed in performing such actions, and then everyone would have his share of the advantage. But this only shows that reason and calm reflection may give us a self-interested basis for liking actions which our moral sense determines [see Glossary] us to admire at first sight, without considering this *•self-•interest*. [Hutcheson here repeats the point that he made just before **(2)** on page 5 about the possibility of a convicted felon's morally approving of the system and the judge who are condemning him to great suffering.]

**Nor by custom, education, &c.**

**(7)** If what I have said shows that we have some amiable idea of actions other than the idea *advantageous to me*, we can infer that this perception of moral good is not derived from custom, education [see Glossary], example, or study. These give us no new ideas: they might make us see advantage to ourselves in actions whose usefulness wasn't at first apparent; or lead us—through some intricate lines of reason, or through a rash prejudice—to see as harmful to us actions that we wouldn't have seen in that way otherwise; but they could never have made us regard actions as amiable or odious independently of our own advantage.

(8) So what we are left with is this: Just as the Author of nature has determined us

- to receive through our external senses ideas of objects that are pleasant or disagreeable depending on whether they are useful or hurtful to our bodies; and
- to receive from uniform objects the pleasures of beauty and harmony, to arouse us to the pursuit of knowledge and reward us for finding it; or to give us evidence of His goodness, as the uniformity itself proves His existence whether or not we have a sense of beauty in uniformity,

so He has also

- given us a moral sense, to direct our actions, and to give us still nobler pleasures so that while we are only intending the good of others we inadvertently promote our own greatest private good.

**This moral sense doesn't involve innate ideas or propositions**

We are not to imagine that this moral sense presupposes innate ideas, knowledge, or practical propositions, any more than our other senses do. All I mean by it is a determination of our minds to receive amiable or disagreeable ideas of actions that we observe, independently of any opinions about whether they will help or harm us; just as we're pleased with a regular form without having any knowledge of mathematics, or with a harmonious composition without seeing any

advantage in it other than the immediate pleasure.

To see more clearly how •moral perceptions differ from •others, consider this: When we taste a pleasant fruit, we're conscious of pleasure; when someone else tastes it, all we do is to form the opinion that it is giving him pleasure, and his doing so is to us a wholly indifferent matter, creating no new sentiment or affection (unless there was some previous good-will or anger towards him). But when we are under the influence of a virtuous temperament and thereby engaged in virtuous actions, we aren't always conscious of any pleasure, and aren't only pursuing private pleasures. . . . The pleasures of virtue come to us only through our •reflecting on ourself and thinking about our temperament and conduct. And when we judge the temperament of someone else to be virtuous, we aren't always imagining him to be having pleasure, though we know that •reflection will give it to him. Also, . . . the quality approved by our moral sense is thought of as residing in the person approved, and to be a perfection and dignity in him; approval of someone else's virtue isn't thought of as making the approver happy or virtuous or worthy, though it is accompanied by some small pleasure. So virtue is called amiable or lovely because it raises good-will or love in spectators towards the agent; and not from the agent's seeing the virtuous temperament as advantageous to him. . . .

## 2: The immediate motive to virtuous actions

### The immediate motive to virtuous actions

To understand the motives of human actions, i.e. their immediate causes, let us first consider the passions and affections. At present I'll restrict myself to the springs of the actions that we call 'virtuous', and only the aspects of them that bear on the general foundation of the moral sense.

### Affections are the motives to actions

(1) Every action that we regard as either morally good or evil is supposed to flow from some affection [see Glossary] towards rational agents; and anything we call 'virtue' or 'vice' either *is* or *results from* some such affection. Or it may be enough to make an action or omission count as vicious if it manifests the lack of the kind of affection towards rational agents that we expect in characters we count as morally good. In any country, all the actions regarded as *religious* are supposed by those who so regard them to flow from some affections towards the Deity; and when we call something *socially virtuous* we are still thinking of it as flowing from affections—in this case affections towards our fellow-creatures. Everyone, it seems, agrees that external motions—actions—can't be morally good or evil if they aren't accompanied by affections towards God or man and don't show a lack of the expected affections towards either.

For example, ask the most abstemious hermit this:

Would **temperance** be morally good in itself, if it didn't show obedience towards the Deity, and didn't do better than luxury in fitting us for devotion, or the service of mankind, or the search for truth?

He will freely grant that in that case temperance wouldn't be a •moral good, though it might still be •naturally good or advantageous to health. And mere **courage** or disregard

for danger, if it weren't aimed at defending the innocent, or righting wrongs, or self-interest, would only entitle its possessor to admission to the mad-house. When that ·seemingly free-floating· sort of courage is admired, as it sometimes is, the admirer is either •silently assuming that the other person intends to use his courage well or •admiring courage just as a *natural* ability that could be well used. **Prudence** when employed in promoting private ·self·-interest is never thought of as a virtue. And **justice** (i.e. observing a strict equality)—if it isn't concerned with the good of mankind, or the preservation of rights, or the securing of peace—is a quality that is better measured by the beam and scales that it carries than by a rational agent. [...scales that it carries? That's a little joke: Hutcheson is thinking of Justice as conventionally personified in statues.] So that these four qualities, commonly called 'cardinal virtues', are given that name because they are dispositions universally necessary to promote public good, and manifest affections towards rational agents; otherwise there would appear no virtue in them.

### Disinterested affections

(2) If it can be shown that none of the affections that we call 'virtuous' comes from self-love or a concern for ·self·-interest, we get the result that *virtue* is not pursued from the ·self·-interest or self-love. That is because all virtue consists in such affections or in actions arising from them.

### Love of contentedness, and hatred of discontent. . .

[For 'contentedness' and 'discontent' see the Glossary.] The affections that matter most in morals are love and hatred; all the rest seem to be only special cases of these two basic affections. In any discussion of love towards rational agents, ·considered as a virtue·, it's obvious that we shouldn't include love

between the sexes; because that, when no other affections go with it, is only a desire for pleasure and is never counted as a virtue. Love towards rational agents is subdivided into

- (i) love of contentedness, i.e. esteem, and
- (ii) love of benevolence.

And hatred is subdivided into

- (iii) hatred of discontent, i.e. contempt, and
- (iv) hatred of malice.

I'll take each of these separately, and consider whether it can be influenced by motives of self-interest.

[In the next paragraph and many later ones we'll see Hutcheson using 'love of' and 'hatred of' in a way that now seems bizarre. What he means by the above numbered four lines is:

- (i) contented love for someone, i.e. esteem for him;
- (ii) benevolent love for someone,
- (iii) discontented hatred of someone, i.e. contempt for him,
- (iv) malicious hatred for someone.

In short, 'love of' and 'hatred of' mean something more like 'love with' and 'hatred with'. The next paragraph won't do anything to get rid of this oddity, so you'll be able to see for yourself that it really is there. Two of Hutcheson's occurrences of 'with' and four of 'of' are in bold type, as an aid to grasping this point. From there on, all the relevant 'of's and 'with's will be Hutcheson's also.]

### **... are entirely disinterested**

Love **of** contentedness, esteem, or good-liking, appears at first view to be disinterested [see Glossary], and so does the hatred **of** discontent, or dislike. These are entirely aroused ·in us· by some good or bad moral qualities that we think to be in the object, ·i.e. in the person loved or hated·. We are determined to love or hate these qualities by the very frame of our nature—·i.e. the basic way we are built·—according to the moral sense that I have explained. Offer a man all the rewards in the world, or threaten him with all the punishments, to get him to love **with** esteem and contentedness a third person whom he either doesn't know or knows and

thinks to be cruel, treacherous, ungrateful; you may get him to speak and act in ways that would go with love for the person in question, real love **of** esteem is something no price can purchase. And this obviously holds also for hatred **of** contempt, which no motive of advantage can prevent. On the contrary, represent a character as generous, kind, faithful, humane, though in the most distant parts of the world, and we can't help loving it **with** esteem and contentedness. A bribe might induce us to try to ruin such a man; some strong motive of our self-interest may spur us to oppose his interests; but it can't make us hate him as long as we see him as morally excellent. Indeed, when we look into ourselves we'll find that we can hardly ever persuade ourselves •to attempt to harm such a person from any motive of advantage, •or to do him harm without the strongest reluctance and remorse—until we have blinded ourselves into thinking of the person as morally bad.

### **Benevolence and malice are disinterested**

(3) As for the love of benevolence, the very name excludes self-interest. If a man is in fact useful to others but is aiming only at his own ·self·-interest, with no desire for or delight in the good of others, he is not someone we call 'benevolent'. If there's any such thing as benevolence, it must be disinterested. . . . There were never any human actions more advantageous than the discoveries of fire and iron; but if these were discovered accidentally, or if the discoverer was only looking after his own interests, there's nothing in those actions that can be called benevolent. Wherever benevolence is supposed, it is taken to be disinterested and designed for the good of others.

### **Self-love joined with benevolence**

Everyone has self-love as well as benevolence, so it can happen that these two principles [see Glossary] jointly drive a

man to the same action; and when that happens they should be thought of as ·analogous to· two forces acting on one body that is in motion. They may

- work together, or
- be irrelevant to each other, or
- be to some extent opposite to each other.

If a man performs a benevolent action while seeing that it will bring advantage also to him personally, if the self-interest factor doesn't increase the amount of good he does, then it doesn't detract in the least from the benevolence of his action. If on the other hand, he wouldn't have produced so much public good if he hadn't had the prospect of self-interest, then the benevolence of his action is fixed by the total good it does *minus* the amount of it that is due to his self-love. And if a man's benevolence is harmful to himself, then his self-love is opposite to his benevolence, and the benevolence is proportioned to the good he produces *plus* the resistance of the self-love that it overcame. Men can hardly ever know how far their fellows are influenced by one or other of these two principles; but yet the general truth is sufficiently certain, that this is how the benevolence of actions is to be computed. Thus, since no love for rational agents can come from self-interest, every action must be disinterested to the extent that it flows from love to rational agents.

[The passage from here to '... than any others.' on page 17 was added in the third edition of the work. It replaced a couple of paragraphs that are not given here.]

#### **Benevolence is disinterested**

(4) Someone who thinks he can deduce •benevolence from self-love has two ways of going about it.

- (a) One is to suppose that we voluntarily bring •this affection upon ourselves—we *make* ourselves become benevolent—whenever we think it will be in our interests to have this affection.

Why would we think that? Because benevolence may be immediately pleasant, or may give our moral sense pleasant reflections afterwards, or may tend to procure some external reward from God or man. The other approach doesn't claim that we can voluntarily choose to have this or that desire or affection. Rather,

- (b) it supposes that •our minds are determined [see Glossary] by how they are constituted to desire whatever is thought to be a means to private happiness; and that •the observation of the happiness of other persons often compels pleasure in the observer, as their misery compels his uneasiness; and as soon as we are alerted to this connection we begin to desire the happiness of others as the means of getting this happiness for ourselves. . . .

The friends of approach (b) claim that it's impossible to desire any event whatsoever—including someone's becoming happy—without conceiving it as the means of some happiness or pleasure to ourselves; but they acknowledge that desire is not raised in us directly by any volition, but arises necessarily when we take some object or event to be conducive to our happiness.

#### **Opinion (a) confuted**

You can see that approach (a) is not sound from the **general** point that neither benevolence nor any other affection or desire can be directly raised by volition. If they could, we could be bribed into any affection whatsoever towards any object, however improper; we could *hire* someone to be jealous, afraid, angry, loving towards any target of our choosing, just we engage men to act externally in certain ways, or to act as though they had certain passions; but everyone knows from his own experience that this is impossible. If we think that having a certain affection towards something will be advantageous so us, we can turn our attention to the

qualities of the thing in question that are sure to produce in us the advantageous affection; and if we find them in the object, the affection will certainly arise. Thus *indirectly* the prospect of advantage can tend to raise an affection; but if these qualities aren't found or thought to be found in the object, no volition or desire of ours will ever raise any affection in us.

Then there's a more **particular** point, namely. . . . that benevolence is not always accompanied by pleasure. Indeed, it often brings pain, when the object is in distress. Desire in general is uneasy [see Glossary] rather than pleasant. It is true indeed that all the passions and affections justify themselves: while they continue. . . ., we generally approve our being thus affected on this occasion—as an innocent disposition or a just one—and we would condemn a person who was affected differently on such an occasion. So people who are sorrowful, angry, jealous, compassionate, approve their various passions in their situation as they see it; but we shouldn't infer from this that sorrow, anger, jealousy or pity are pleasant, or chosen for the pleasure that comes with them. . . .

The same line of thought shows that we do not by an act of our will raise in ourselves the benevolence that we approve as virtuous, aiming to obtain future pleasures of self-approval through our moral sense. If we could stir up our affections in this way, we could be motivated to acquire any affection by the prospect of getting something out of it—not self-approval, perhaps, but wealth or sensual pleasure or the like, which for many temperaments are more powerful. But we all agree that the disposition to do good offices [see Glossary] to others that is raised by these motives is not virtuous; so how can we imagine that benevolence—which is virtuous—is brought upon us by a motive as selfish [see Glossary] as that?

But what will most effectively convince us of the truth on this point is reflection on our own hearts: Don't we have a desire for the good of others usually without any thought or intention of obtaining these pleasant reflections on our own virtue? In fact, this ·benevolent· desire is strongest in cases where we are furthest from thinking about virtue—namely, in natural affection for our offspring and in gratitude towards a great benefactor. *Not* having these affections is indeed the greatest vice, but the affections themselves are not regarded as significantly virtuous. The same reflection will also convince us that these desires or affections are not produced deliberately so as to obtain this private good.

And if no volition of ours can directly raise affections as a means to securing some interest, no volition of ours raise affections with a view to obtaining eternal rewards or avoiding eternal punishments. The motives in the two cases differ only in degree: smaller and greater, shorter and longer-lasting. If affections could be directly raised by volition, the same consideration—·i.e. the prospect of some payment for services rendered·—would make us angry at the most innocent or virtuous character, jealous of the most faithful and affectionate, or sorrowful for the prosperity of a friend; and we all know that we can't possibly do any of these things. The prospect of a future state ·of reward or punishment in the life after death· no doubt has a greater indirect influence than any other consideration—I mean influence by turning our attention to the qualities in the objects that are naturally apt to raise the required affection.

It's probably true that people who are drawn in by the prospect of future rewards to do good offices to mankind are usually motivated *also* by virtuous benevolence. As will appear later on, benevolence is *natural* to mankind, and always operates where there's no opposition of apparent interest and where any contrary apparent interest is overbalanced by

a greater interest. Because we are aware of this, we generally approve good offices that are motivated partly by hopes for the agent's future state; but that approval is based on our belief that another part of the motivation is a disinterested desire on the agent's part to help people. If that first part of the motivation were the whole of it, there would be no limit to the evil that this person might be induced to do through suitable promises of reward or threats of punishment. . . .

### Opinion (b) confuted

(5) The other approach is more plausible. It doesn't say that we voluntarily *make* ourselves benevolent in order to get some private advantage. What it says is that we expect to feel pleasant sensations when we see other people happy, and this motivates us to try to make them happy; and we have a similar motivation to try to keep them out of misery. This connection between the happiness of others and our pleasure, these theorists say, is chiefly felt among friends, parents and children, and eminently virtuous characters. But (they say) this benevolence flows as directly from self-love as any other desire.

[This paragraph departs very far from Hutcheson's wording, but the content is all his.] To show that this theory isn't true to the facts, consider this case:

H is a man who is so truthful that we can absolutely believe him when he tells us whether or not he is happy. I place a bet with someone that next Tuesday H will be a happy man. I am now motivated to want him to be happy and to try to make him so. Will anyone say that these efforts of mine are *virtuous*?

Of course not! But how does this differ from what my present opponents say is going on whenever we have and exercise benevolence? In each case, I seek someone else's happiness as a means to pleasure for myself. The only difference is in

the •kinds of pleasure. And •amounts of pleasure? No; any difference in that respect can be cancelled out by raising or lowering the size of the bet.

Here again the best way to discover the truth is to reflect on our own minds. Many people have never given any thought to this connection ·between our pleasure and others' happiness·; and in the ordinary course of things we *don't* intend to get any such pleasure for ourselves. When we do generous offices for others, we all often feel delight upon seeing them happy, but we didn't pursue their happiness *in order to* have this delight. We often feel the pain of compassion; but when we try to relieve the misery of others we are not ultimately aiming just to free ourselves from this pain. Consider this:

You are confronted by a friend who is in great distress, and God offers you a choice between two things He might do:

- completely blot out all your memory of the person in distress, disconnecting his misery from your pain, so that while he suffers you will be comfortable;
- relieve your friend from his misery.

According to the theory I am examining, you should be as ready to choose the former way as the latter; because since each of them will free you from your pain, which on this theory is the entire goal of the compassionate person.

When we try out this ·thought-experiment· don't we find that our desire is not ultimately for the removal of our own pain? If that were our sole intention, we would run away, shut our eyes, or divert our thoughts from the miserable object, as the readiest way of removing our pain; and we seldom do that—indeed, we crowd around such objects, ·such people in distress·, and voluntarily expose ourselves to

this pain (unless our inclination to help is •countermanded by realization that we can't help or •overpowered by some selfish affection such as fear of danger.

To make this still clearer, suppose that the Deity should tell a good man that he was soon to be suddenly annihilated, and that at the instant of his exit he would have a choice to make: it would be up to him whether a certain friend of his would be made happy or miserable for the future, when he himself could have neither pleasure nor pain from that person's state. Or try variants on the story: the choice concerns the future state of his children, or of his country. Tell me, would he be any more indifferent about their state at that last moment of his life, when he neither hoped nor feared anything to himself from it, than he had been at any previous time in his life? Isn't it a pretty common opinion among us that after we die we won't know anything of what befalls those who survive us? How does it come about then that at the approach of death we *don't* lose all concern for our families, friends, or country? According to my opponents, this has to be a case where we want something only as a means to our own private advantage, but we know that we'll enjoy this good for a few minutes at most and yet we want it as fiercely as if we expected to have it for many years? Is this the way we compute the value of annuities?

It's hard to explain why anyone should think that a disinterested desire for the good of others is inconceivable. Perhaps it comes from the attempts of some great men to give definitions of simple ideas. *Desire*, they say, is uneasiness, i.e. an uneasy sensation because of the absence of some good. ·If that were right, then it would be at least plausible to suppose that basically the only thing one can desire is to be, oneself, in a certain state.· But in fact desire is as distinct from uneasiness as volition is from sensation. Don't these people themselves often speak of our *desiring*

*to remove uneasiness?* If we can do that, then desire is different from uneasiness, however constantly a sense of uneasiness accompanies it; just as the idea of colour is a very distinct idea from the idea of extension, although you can't have one without the other. What is impossible about desiring the happiness of someone else without thinking of that as a means to something further, just as we desire our own happiness without thinking of *that* as a means to anything? If you say 'We desire our own happiness as a means of removing the uneasiness we feel in the absence of happiness', then at least ·you are conceding that· the desire to remove our own uneasiness is an ultimate desire. Why, then, can't we have other ultimate desires? ·And why can't a desire for the happiness of other people be one of them?· . . .

(6) Here are some questions that you might want to raise:

- Since none of these motives of self-interest arouse our benevolence, and since in our virtuous actions we intend solely the good of others, what's the *purpose* of our moral sense, our sense of pleasure from the happiness of others?
- What's the purpose of the wise order of nature by which virtue is even made generally advantageous in this life?
- Why—to what end—are eternal rewards appointed and revealed?

I have already partly answered these questions: all these motives may make us want to have •benevolent affections, and consequently make us attend to the qualities in objects that arouse them; they may overbalance all apparent contrary motives, and all temptations to vice. But beyond that, I hope it will be still thought an end worthy of the Deity to create a wise constitution of nature by which the virtuous are made happy, whether or not all their actions are performed with an intention to obtain this happiness. Beneficent [see

Glossary] actions tend to the public good; it is therefore good and kind to give all possible additional motives to them—to stimulate men who have some weak degrees of good affection to promote the public good more vigorously through motives of self-interest, and to stimulate even those who have no virtue at all to perform external acts of beneficence and to restrain them from vice.

The bottom line turns out to be that there is in human nature a disinterested ultimate desire for the happiness of others; and that our moral sense determines us to approve as virtuous only actions that we think come at least partly from such a desire.

[Hutcheson has a long footnote discussing verses in *Hebrews* 11 and 12, contending that it has been wrong to interpret them as meaning that the essence of virtuous behaviour is acting well in the hope of reward in Heaven. He concludes:] If you appeal to the general strain of the Christian exhortations, you'll find disinterested love more inculcated, and motives of gratitude more frequently suggested, than any others.

#### **Human nature is incapable of calm malice**

(7) As for malice, human nature seems hardly capable of malicious disinterested [see Glossary] hatred, i.e. of a calm delight in the misery of others whom we don't think of as in any way harmful to us or our interests. As for the hatred that makes us oppose those whose interests are opposed to ours, it is only an effect of self-love and not of disinterested malice. A sudden passion may give us wrong thoughts about some of our fellow-creatures and briefly portray them as absolutely evil; and while this is the case we may give some evidences of disinterested malice; but as soon as we reflect on human nature and return to thinking properly, this unnatural passion is allayed and only self-love remains; and *that* may make us, from self-interest, oppose our adversary's

interests.

Everyone these days rejoices in the destruction of our pirates. Now try a thought-experiment regarding them. Let us suppose that a gang of such villains have been dumped on a desolate island, and that we are sure that (for some reason) they will never leave there, so that they can't disturb mankind any more. Now let us calmly think about these people. They

- are capable of knowledge and counsel,
- may be happy and joyful, or involved in misery, sorrow, and pain.
- may return to a state of love, humanity, kindness, and become friends, citizens, husbands, parents, with all the sweet sentiments that accompany these relations.

Then let us ask ourselves, when self-love or concern for the safety of better men no longer makes us want them to be destroyed, and when we stop regarding them—as we did—under the ideas suggested by resentment of recent injuries done to us or our friends—as utterly incapable of any good moral quality, *what do we want to happen to them?* Do we want them to . . . stab one another to death with their swords or suffer a worse fate by excruciating tortures? Or would we prefer that they come to have the ordinary affections of men; become kind, compassionate, and friendly; contrive laws, constitutions, governments, properties; and form an honest happy society, with marriages and dear relations and all the charities of father, son, and brother?

I think the latter would be the wish of every mortal, despite our present abhorrence of the pirates that is soundly based on self-interest or public love and desire to further the interests of our friends who are exposed to their ferocity. This reaction plainly shows that we hardly ever have any calm malice against anyone, i.e. delight in his misery. Our hatred comes only from opposition to our interests; or if we

are capable of calm malice, it must be towards a character that we take to be *necessarily and unalterably* evil. A sudden passion sometimes has us thinking of our enemies in that way, but it may be that in a universe created by a good deity there are no actual examples of such a character.

### Other affections can also be disinterested

[Go on remembering what Hutcheson means by 'love of esteem', love of benevolence' etc. See the note in (2) on page 12.]

(8) I think I have shown that our love of esteem and our love of benevolence are not based on self-love or on a self-interested perspective. Now let us see whether some other affections that may be regarded as virtuous do arise from self-love. Take the example of **fear**, i.e. reverence arising from a belief in the goodness, power, and justice of the being who is revered. (I set aside the fear that consists in base dread and servitude towards a powerful evil being—no-one sees any virtue in *that*—and it is indeed the meanest [see Glossary] selfishness.) The same arguments that show love of esteem to be disinterested also show that this honourable reverence is disinterested too. That is because it clearly arises from a belief in the person's amiable qualities, and love towards him, which creates a horror at the thought of offending him. If we could reverence a being because it was in our interests to do so, a third person might *bribe* us into reverence towards a being who is neither good nor powerful; and anyone can see that that's just a joke. The same line of argument holds for all the other passions that have rational agents for their objects.

### Objections

(9) Nothing so effectively arouses our love towards rational agents as their beneficence to us; and that fact might seem to support an objection against disinterested love, by suggesting that our love of persons as well as of unthinking things

flows entirely from self-interest. But let us here examine ourselves more closely. *Do* we love the beneficent solely because it is in our interests to love them? *Do* we choose to love them because our love is the means of procuring their bounty? If so, then we could love *any* character if someone made it worth our while. It is of course possible to pay us to *serve* someone who is the greatest villain; but if the thesis I am attacking were correct, we could be bribed not merely to serve him but to *love him heartily*; and it's obvious that this is impossible.

Furthermore, isn't our love always a result of bounty rather than a means of procuring it? External show, bowing and scraping, *pretence* may precede and be a means to beneficence; but real love always presupposes it, and is bound to arise from consideration of past benefits, even when we expect no more. If that is wrong, then this is right:

We love beneficent people as we love a field or garden, because of its advantage to us. So our love must cease towards someone who can't do any more for us because he has been bankrupted by the good things he has already done for us (like the way we cease to love an inanimate object that stops being useful. . . .). And we have the same love towards the worst characters as towards the best, if they are equally bountiful to us.

This is all false. beneficence raises our love because it is an amiable moral quality; so we love even those who are beneficent to others.

It may be said that bounty towards ourselves is a stronger incitement to our love than equal bounty towards others. This is true, and I'll explain why in a moment. But it doesn't show that in this case our love of persons comes from the self-interested perspective; because this love isn't prior to the bounty as a means to getting it, but comes after the

bounty even when we expect no more. ·Well, then, why? For two reasons·. **(a)** In the benefits that *we* receive we're more fully aware of their value, and of the details of the action, which manifest a generous temperament in the donor. **(b)** From our good opinion of ourselves we are apt to look on kindness to us as better employed than kindness to others of whom we may have less favourable sentiments! [Hutcheson ends this paragraph by repeating what he said in the preceding one.]

### **Virtue is disinterested**

So we have come this far: •Love towards persons is never influenced by self-love or by the ·self·-interested perspective. •And all virtue flows from love towards persons or from some other affection that is equally disinterested. So there must be some motive other than self-love or ·self·-interest that spurs us to perform the actions that we call 'virtuous'.

If our only idea of *good* is *advantageous to me*, we must think that every rational being acts only for its own advantage. We may call a beneficent being 'good' because it acts for our advantage, but on the view I am now examining we should be hard to convince that there is in nature *any* being that is beneficent, i.e. that acts for the good of others. And another point: if there's no sense of excellence in public love and promoting the happiness of others, what makes people think that the Deity will make the virtuous happy? Can we show that it is somehow in the Deity's *interests* to do this? This will surely be looked upon as very absurd unless we suppose that some beneficent dispositions are essential to the Deity—a part of his intrinsic nature—which determine him to •care about the public good of his creatures, and •reward those who co-operate with his kind intention. And if there are such dispositions in the Deity, what's impossible about there being some small degree of this public love also in his creatures?

In short: if we don't acknowledge some principle of action in rational agents other than self-love, I see no basis for expect beneficence or rewards from God or man other than what it is in the interests of the benefactor to provide. As for expectation of benefits from a being whose interests are independent of us—that is perfectly ridiculous! What would induce the Deity to reward virtue? According to this view of things, virtue is only a skillful way of caring for own happiness consistently with the good of the whole; and vice is the same thing foolishly pursued in a manner that is less likely to succeed and is contrary to the good of the whole. But how is the Deity concerned in this whole, if every agent always acts from self-love? And what ground have we, from the idea of *a god* itself, to believe the Deity is good in the Christian sense, i.e. that he cares for the good of his creatures? Perhaps their misery may give him as much pleasure as their happiness; and who can blame such a being for caring to make them miserable, for what else should we expect? An *evil god* is a notion that men would as readily find in their heads as that of a *good god*, if there is no excellence in disinterested love, and no being acts except for its own advantage. . . .

### **The true spring of virtue**

**(10)** Having removed these false springs of virtuous actions, let us next establish the true one, namely something in our nature that determines us to care for the good of others; or some instinct—independent of any ·self·-interested reason—which influences us to love others; just as the moral sense (I have explained) makes us approve of actions that flow from this love in ourselves or others. This disinterested affection may seem strange to men who have had the notion of self-love as the sole spring of action stamped on their minds by the pulpit, the Schools [here = 'the Aristotelian philosophy departments'], and the systems and conversations dominated by them.

But let us consider the strongest and simplest kinds of disinterested affection; they will show us that this is a possibility, and then it won't be hard for us to see how widespread it is.

### **Natural affection**

An honest farmer will tell you that he cares about the preservation and happiness of his children, and loves them without any design of good to himself. But some of our philosophers maintain that the happiness of their children gives parents pleasure, and their misery gives them pain; and therefore to obtain the pleasure and avoid the pain they care for the good of their children out of self-love. Well, consider this case:

Several merchants combine all of their wealth into a partnership; one of them is employed abroad managing the stock of the company; his prosperity brings gain to them all and his losses give them pain because of their share in the loss.

Is *this* the kind of affection that parents have for their children? Is there the same tender, personal regard? I don't think any parent will say so. In this case of merchants there is a plain conjunction of interests; but what creates a conjunction of interests between the parent and child? Do the child's sensations give pleasure or pain to the parent? Is the parent hungry, thirsty, sick, when the child is so? No, but his love for the child results in his being affected with the child's pleasures or pains. So this 'parental' love comes before the conjunction of interests: it's a cause of it, not an effect; so this love must be disinterested. 'No!' says another clever arguer—'our children are *parts of* ourselves, and in loving them we are merely loving ourselves in them.' A very good answer! Let us carry it as far as it will go. How are they parts of ourselves? Not in the way a leg or an arm is; we don't feel their sensations. 'But their bodies were

formed from parts of ours.' So is a fly or a maggot that can breed in any discharged blood or other bodily fluid—dear little insects! 'Since that's no good' there must be something else then that makes our children parts of ourselves; and we know what it is—its the affection that nature leads us to have towards them. This love *makes* them parts of ourselves, so it isn't something that comes from their having been parts of ourselves before. This 'parts of' is indeed a good metaphor; and wherever we find a group of rational agents whose natures lead them to mutual love, let each individual be looked on as a part of a great whole, and concern himself with the public good of it.

Another author thinks that all this can easily be derived from self-love. Children are not only made of our bodies but *resemble* us in body and mind; they are rational agents as we are, and we only love our own likeness in them. Excellent stuff! But what is likeness? It is...only being included under one general or specific idea. Thus

- there is likeness between us and other men's children,
- any man is like any other in some respects,
- a man is like an angel, and in some respects like a lower animal.

Then does every man have a natural disposition to love his like, to wish well not only to his individual self, but to any other thinking or feeling being that is *like* him? Is this disposition strongest where there is the greatest likeness in the more noble qualities? If all this is called 'self-love', so be it. The highest mystic needs no principle [see Glossary] higher than this one! It is not confined to the individual, but spreads ultimately to the good of others; and it may extend to everyone, because each one some way resembles each other. Nothing can be better than *this* 'self-love', nothing more generous. . . .

But a later author [Mandeville] observes that natural affection in parents is weak until the children begin to show signs of having knowledge and affections. Mothers say they feel it strongly from the very first. . .

**Hutcheson, puzzlingly, verbatim:** . . . and yet I could wish for the destruction of his hypothesis, that what he alleges was true; as I fancy it is in some measure, though we may find in some parents an affection towards idiots.

Seeing the signs of understanding and affections in children, which make them appear to be moral [see Glossary] agents, can increase love towards them without any prospect of self-interest; for I hope this increase of love doesn't come from the prospect of advantage from the knowledge or affections of the children for whom parents are still toiling with no expectation of being refunded their expenses or recompensed for their labour except in cases of extreme necessity. So, if observing a moral capacity can lead to an increase in love that doesn't involve self-interest and comes from our basic nature, mightn't this be a basis for weaker degrees of love—with no preceding tie of parentage—extending to all mankind?

#### **Public affections are natural**

**(11)** To see that this is in fact so, consider some attachments that are more distant than parent to child. I shall present three of these. **(i)** Think about your neighbours, people who simply live near to you but haven't done you any favours and with whom you haven't formed partnerships or even friendships, let alone family ties: won't you be better pleased with their prosperity (when their interests aren't in conflict with yours) than with their misery and ruin? If the answer is Yes, then you have found a bond of benevolence that extends far beyond family and children, although the ties are not so strong. **(ii)** Suppose that a man leaves his native country and

settles abroad, conducting a successful trading company. His extended family all live in the new country; the man doesn't expect to return to his native land, though it has never harmed him and he has nothing against it. Would this man take pleasure in hearing of the prosperity of his country? or could he, now that his interests are separated from that of his nation, be just as glad to hear that it was laid waste by tyranny or a foreign power? I imagine that his answer would show us a benevolence extending beyond neighbourhoods or acquaintances. **(iii)** Let a calmly stable man devote his leisure time to reading about the states of affairs in a foreign country in a most distant part of the earth, observing its art and design, and studying the public good in the laws of this foreign land. What effect will this have on his *attitude* to the people of that land? His mind will be moved in their favour; he'll be devising corrections and amendments to their political set-up, and will regret any unlucky part of it that may be pernicious to their interest; he'll bewail any disaster that befalls them, and accompany all their fortunes with the affections of a friend. Now this proves benevolence to be in some degree extended to all mankind (when there's no conflict of interests that might draw self-love into obstructing it). And if we had any notions of rational agents capable of moral affections in the most distant planets, our good wishes would still go with them and we would delight in their happiness.

#### **Love of one's country**

**(12)** I note in passing what the foundation is for 'national love', i.e. love of one's native country. In any place we have lived in for a considerable time we have been most clearly aware of the various affections of human nature; we have known many lovely characters; we remember the associations, friendships, families, natural affections, and other human sentiments; our moral sense determines us

to approve these lovely dispositions where we have been most clearly aware of them; and our benevolence draws us into a concern for the interests of the people who have them. When we come to observe similar things as clearly in another country, we begin to acquire a national love towards it also; and in our thoughts about this, our own country isn't given a preference over other countries, except through an association of the pleasant ideas of our youth with the buildings, fields, and woods where we received them. This can show us how this national love, this the dear idea of a country, is destroyed by tyranny, faction, neglect of justice, corruption of manners, and anything that brings about the misery of the subjects.

**The reason why natural affections do not always appear**

The only reason for the apparent lack of natural affection among collateral relations [i.e. blood-relatives who are not in the same direct line] is that these natural inclinations are often overpowered by self-love in cases where there's a conflict of interests; but where there's no such conflict we'll find all mankind under the influence of natural affections, though with different degrees of strength depending on •how closely related the people are to one another, and on •the extent to which he the natural affection of benevolence is combined with and strengthened by esteem, gratitude, compassion, or other kind affections, or on the contrary weakened by discontent, anger, or envy.

### **3: The sense of virtue**

#### **—the various opinions about it reduced to one general foundation.**

#### **How to compute the morality of actions**

#### **All virtue is benevolent**

(1) If we examine all the actions that are regarded as amiable [see Glossary] anywhere, and enquire into *why* they are approved, we shall find that the person who approves them always see them as benevolent—i.e. flowing from a love of others and a concern for their happiness—whether or not the approver is one of the beloved persons who are to profit from the action. Thus, all the kind affections [see Glossary] that incline us to make others happy, and all actions that are thought to flow from such affections, appear morally good—provided they don't accompany benevolence towards some persons with a pernicious effect on others. We won't find anything amiable in any •action that we don't see as benevolent, or in any •disposition or ability that we don't think of as being useful for—and designed for—benevolent purposes. Indeed (to repeat a point already made), actions that turn out to be exceedingly useful will appear to us to have no moral beauty if we know that they didn't come from kind intentions towards others; whereas an unsuccessful attempt at kindness or at promoting public good will appear as amiable as the most successful if it flowed from as strong a benevolence.

#### **Religion**

(2) So affections that would lead us to do good to *our benefactor* will appear amiable, and the contrary affections odious, even when our actions can't possibly do him any good or any harm. Thus

- a sincere love and gratitude towards our benefactor,
- a cheerful readiness to do whatever he requires, however burdensome it is,
- a strong inclination to comply with his intentions, and
- contentment with the state he has placed us in

are the strongest evidences of benevolence to such a person that we can show; so they must appear exceedingly amiable. I am talking here about every possible kind of rational devotion—i.e. of religion—towards a deity who is apprehended as good.

#### **Gratitude**

One aspect of our nature is wonderfully adapted to promote benevolence, namely: just as a benefit conferred necessarily arouses gratitude in the person who receives it, so also the expression of this gratitude, even from the meanest of mankind, is wonderfully delightful to the benefactor [see Glossary]. There has never been anyone so poor, so inconsiderable, that his grateful praise would not bring some pleasure. . . .

As for public religious practices, they are no doubt very various in different nations and ages; and education may get men to think that certain actions are pleasing to the Deity, and others displeasing; but •despite this, there is a common thread running through all the ceremonial variety, namely: wherever some rite of public worship is approved, at that time and place it is thought to come from love towards the Deity, or some other affection necessarily joined with love—such as reverence, repentance, or sorrow over having offended. Thus, the general principle [see Glossary] of love is the foundation for

all the apparent moral excellence of worship, even of the most fantastic rites that were ever approved. There are also •rites that are intended only to appease a furiously angry Being; but surely no-one thinks there is any virtue or excellence in •them—they are obviously chosen only as a dishonourable way of avoiding a greater evil [see Glossary]. Because there are different theological opinions about what is acceptable to the Deity, there are inevitably many different religious practices; but all the moral goodness of actions is still presumed to flow from love.

### Social virtues

(3) Here is another bit of evidence that anything in the social virtues that is recognised as excellent is based on love, or benevolence: amidst the diversity of views about this among various sects, the agreed way to decide any controversy about any disputed practice is to enquire whether the practice will effectively promote the public good—the universal natural good of mankind—and when that question is answered the morality is immediately adjusted to fit. . . .

In our recent debates about passive obedience [see Glossary] and the right of resistance in defence of privileges, the dispute among men of sense concerned the answer to the question

When privileges are invaded, which of the two responses—•submission by everyone and •temporary insurrections—would probably bring greater natural evils?

and not to the question

If some course of action tends on the whole to further the public natural good, does that make it morally good?

If we thought that a divine command favoured the passive obedience side in the debate, that would introduce eternal rewards and punishments into the picture, and would surely

throw the balance of natural good onto that side, which we would choose for reasons of •self-interest. And yet our sense of the moral good in passive obedience would still be based on some sort of benevolence—e.g. gratitude towards the Deity, and submission to the will of Someone to whom we are so much obliged. But I suspect that those who believe the Deity to be good wouldn't rashly claim that he had given such a command unless they also claimed that the commanded course of action did tend more to the universal good than did the contrary course—by preventing the external evils of civil war, or by training men in •patience or •some other quality that they thought to be necessary for everlasting happiness. Without that backing, •divinely commanded passive obedience might be recommended as an inglorious method of escaping greater harm, but it couldn't have anything morally amiable in it.

But let us leave the disputes of the learned, on whom custom and education may be thought to have had a powerful influence, and look at the grounds on which actions are approved or condemned, vindicated or excused, in common life. We would all be ashamed to call an action *just* because it tends to our advantage or to the agent's; nor would we look down on a beneficent kind action because it isn't advantageous to us or to the agent. Blame and censure are based on

- a likelihood of causing public evil, or
- a principle of private malice in the agent, or at least neglect of the good of others, or
- inhumanity of character, or at least selfishness that is strong enough to stop the agent from caring about the sufferings of others;

and so we may blame and censure an action that has no effect on ourselves. Whenever an action has some bad consequences that make it appear to be wrong, any all the

moving and persuasive defence of it is based on the claim that •the action was required for some greater good that outweighed the evil; •severity towards a few is compassion towards multitudes; •transitory punishments are required if we are to avoid more long-lasting evils; •if some people didn't suffer in such cases, there would be no living for honest men. And so on. And even when an action can't be entirely justified, its guilt can be greatly lessened if we can plead that it was only the effect of carelessness without malice, or of partial good nature [= 'favouritism'], friendship, compassion, natural affection, or love of a party. All these considerations bring out the foundation of *all* our sense of moral good or evil, namely: benevolence towards others on one hand, and malice (or even laziness and uncaringness about the apparent public evil) on the other. Notice that we are so far from imagining all men to act only from self-love that we •expect everyone to have a regard for the public, and •regard the lack of this not merely as the absence of moral good or virtue but as positively evil and hateful.

#### **Moral evil is not always malice**

(4) Contraries can illustrate each other; so let us look in more detail at the general basis for our sense of moral evil. Disinterested [see Glossary] malice, or delight in the misery of others, is the highest pitch of what we regard as vicious; and we see as evil every action that we think flows from any degree of this affection [see Glossary]. Perhaps a violent passion may hurry men into it for a few moments, and our rash angry feelings about our enemies may represent them as having such odious dispositions •as disinterested malice; but the reasons I have given make it very probable that there is no such degree of wickedness in human nature as to be cold-bloodedly pleased with the misery of others while having no thought of this being useful to oneself.

The frequent, and apparently unprovoked cruelties of Nero and his like are often put forward in opposition to all this; but perhaps wrongly. Such tyrants are aware of being hated by all •those whom the world regard as virtuous, and they sense danger from •them. A tyrant looks on such men as designing, crafty, or ambitious, under a false show of virtue. He thinks that the surest way for him to stay safe is to appear terrible, and to deprive his enemies of all hopes of getting mercy from him. When an eminent person is known for his virtue, this is matter for envy, and is a reproach on the tyrant: it weakens his power, and makes such a man dangerous to him. Power becomes the tyrant's object of delight; and in his display of •it he may break through all the constraints of justice and humanity. Habits of cruelty can be acquired through a course of events like that. This seems to account for the cruelties of tyrants better than the supposition that they have a principle of calm malice-without-self-interest, of which the rest of mankind seem entirely incapable.

#### **A tyrant's temperament**

The temperament of a tyrant seems likely to be a continued state of anger, hatred, and fear. To form our judgment of his motives of action and those of less highly-placed men with similar temperaments, let us look into ourselves—when we are temporarily subject to any of the passions that are habitual with the tyrant, what view do we take of mankind? When we have just suffered an injury, our minds are wholly filled with thoughts about the person who harmed us, representing him as absolutely evil and as delighting in doing harm. (We overlook the virtues that we could have observed in him if we were calm; we forget that he may have been moved only by self-love, not malice; or perhaps he had some generous or kind intention towards others.) These are probably the opinions that a tyrant constantly forms concerning mankind; and having very much weakened all

kind affections in himself, however he may pretend to have them, he judges other people's characters by his own. If men really were as he takes them to be, his treatment of them wouldn't be very unreasonable. We will generally find that our passions come into play in a manner that fits our view of what other people are like; if these views are the rash output of some quick little glimpses of other people, it's no wonder if they lead to behaviour that is very little suited to the real state of human nature.

#### **Ordinary springs of vice**

The ordinary springs of vice [see Glossary] among men, therefore, must be a mistaken self-love that has become so violent that it overcomes benevolence; or affections arising from false and rashly formed opinions about mankind—opinions that we run into through the weakness of our benevolence. When men who used to have good opinions of each other come to have contrary interests, their good opinions of each other are apt to be weakened by their imagining that they are being deliberately *and maliciously* opposed; they can hardly hate one another unless that's what they think. Thus two candidates for the same position wish each other dead, because that's an ordinary way by which men make room for each other; but if they still have some thought about each other's virtue, as sometimes happens with benevolent temperaments, then their opposition may be without hatred; and if another better position (where there is no competition) were given to one of them the other will rejoice at it.

#### **Self-love is indifferent** [see Glossary]

(5) Actions that flow solely from self-love but don't harm others and therefore show no signs of lack of benevolence seem to be perfectly *indifferent* in a moral sense, and don't raise love or hatred in the observer. Our reason can indeed discover certain limits such that

the welfare of society as a whole needn't be harmed by actions motivated by self-love within those limits, but also, more strongly,

the welfare of society as a whole *will* be harmed if people *don't* act from self-love within those limits.

So someone who pursues his own private good while intending this to square with the good of the whole, and even more someone who promotes his own good with the positive intention of making himself more capable of •serving God or •doing good to mankind, acts not only innocently but honourably and virtuously. That is because in each case—•service to God, help for mankind—•a motive of benevolence runs in harness with self-love to arouse him to the action. . . . But when self-love •breaks through the limits I have mentioned, and •leads us into actions detrimental to others and to the whole or •silences the generous kind affections in us, then it appears vicious and is disapproved. Similarly, if some small injury or sudden resentment or weak superstitious idea makes our benevolence so faint that we entertain odious and unfounded conceptions of some men, thinking of them as wholly evil or malicious or anyway as worse than they really are, these conceptions are bound to lead us into malevolent affections or at least weaken our good ones, thus making us really vicious.

#### **Self-love isn't excluded by benevolence**

(6) 'Benevolence' is a good enough word to denote the internal spring of virtue, as Cumberland always uses it. But. . . under this name some very different dispositions of the soul are included. Sometimes it denotes (i) a calm, extensive affection or good-will toward all beings that are capable of happiness or misery; (ii) sometimes a calm deliberate affection of the soul toward the happiness of certain smaller systems or individuals (e.g. patriotism, friendship, parental affection), as it is in persons who are wise and self-controlled; (iii)

sometimes the various passions of love, pity, sympathy, congratulation. . . .

Although all these different dispositions come under the general label 'benevolent', they are very different and have very different degrees of moral beauty. **(i)** is above all amiable and excellent: it may be the sole moral perfection of some superior natures; and the more power it has in any human mind, the more amiable the person appears, even when his benevolence doesn't merely check and limit his lower appetites but controls or counteracts his kindly particular passions. **(ii)** is more amiable than **(iii)** when it is strong enough to influence our conduct; and **(iii)**, though of a lesser moral dignity, is also beautiful when it doesn't in any way conflict with these more noble principles. And when there is a conflict between passion and principle, though •the passion doesn't justify actions that are really harmful to greater systems, •it is still a strong extenuating factor which does much to alleviate the moral ugliness. We are all aware of this when someone does something hurtful to larger societies out of friendship, parental affection, or pity.

Every moral agent rightly regards himself as a part of this rational system that may be useful to the whole; so that he may be in part an object of his own benevolence. Indeed, as I indicated earlier, he may see that the preservation of the system requires that each person innocently care for his own welfare. He may draw from this the following conclusion:

An action that brings greater evil to the agent than good to others, however well it speaks for the agent's benevolence or virtuous disposition, must be based upon an exaggerated view of what the action will do for the public good.

Thus, a man who was thinking straight and comprehensively wouldn't act like that, however strong his benevolence, and wouldn't recommend others to act like that either. . . .

Consider a situation where a concern for myself tends as much to the good of the whole as a concern for you (say), or where the evil to myself is equal to the good that will come to you. If in this situation I act •for your good rather than mine, I'll be showing a very amiable disposition; but if instead I act •in my own interests, I shan't be showing an evil disposition, or any lack of the most extensive benevolence, because the amount [Hutcheson uses the word 'moment'] of good to the whole is exactly the same in the two cases. This isn't to deny that sometimes I ought to make gifts, although then I lose as much as the recipient receives; and here is why. The good that comes to the recipient is in a compound ratio of •the quantity of the good itself and •the poverty of the person. Thus, a gift from me to that street-sweeper may add much more to his happiness than it subtracts from mine. The most useful and important gifts are those of the rich to the poor. Gifts from equals are not useless, because they are often strong evidence of mutual love, and so increase the happiness of giver and recipient. But gifts from the poor to the rich are really foolish, unless they are merely small expressions of gratitude, which can also produce of joy on both sides. . . .

When an action does more harm to the agent than good to the public, his doing it shows him to have an amiable and truly virtuous disposition, although he is obviously acting on a mistaken view of his duty. If the private evil to the agent is so great that it makes him incapable at a later time of promoting a larger public good than is at stake in this action, then his action may really be evil. Though it flows from a virtuous disposition, it shows a neglect of a greater attainable public good for a smaller one.

**How benevolence is affected by the qualities of its object**

**(7)** The moral beauty or ugliness of an action isn't altered by the moral qualities of its object, any more than the qualities

of the object increase or diminish the action's benevolence or the public good intended by it. Thus, benevolence towards the worst characters. . . . may be as amiable [see Glossary] as any benevolence whatsoever; indeed it is often more amiable than benevolence towards the good, because it is evidence of a degree of benevolence that is strong enough to surmount the greatest obstacle, the moral evil in the object, .i.e. the person to whom good is done. That is why love for an unjust enemy is counted among the highest virtues. [Hutcheson mentions an exception: the case where benevolence towards a bad man encourages him in his badness. But] benevolence towards evil characters, when it doesn't encourage them or help them to do mischief [see Glossary], and doesn't divert our benevolence from more useful persons, has as much moral beauty as any whatsoever.

#### **Qualities determining our choice of how to act**

**(8)** When we have a choice of several possible actions and want to decide which of them to perform, i.e. which of them has the greatest moral excellency, our moral sense of virtue leads us to judge thus:

. . . . The virtue of an action is in a compound ratio of  
 •the quantity of good it produces and •the number of people who receive it (the dignity or moral importance of the people may make up for a smaller number of them). Similarly, the moral evil or vice of an action is as the degree of misery and number of sufferers.

Thus, the best action is the one that procures the greatest happiness for the greatest number; and the worst action is the one that occasions the greatest misery for the greatest number.

#### **How consequences affect the morality of actions**

**(9)** When all of a set of proposed actions have consequences that are mixed—partly advantageous, partly pernicious—the

good action is the one whose good effects outweigh the evil by being useful to many and pernicious to few, and analogously for the evil action. [Hutcheson presumably meant to say that the *best* of the proposed actions is the one whose good effects *most* outweigh etc.] Here again the dignity or moral importance of the people may make up for a smaller number of them. So may the degrees of happiness or misery: to procure a small good for many but an immense evil to few may be evil; and an immense good to few may outweigh a small evil to many.

Many actions that have no immediate or natural evil effects—indeed that actually produce good effects—may still be evil, because the morality of an action depends not only on its direct and natural effects but on *all* the events that otherwise would not have happened. Suppose that I perform action A that I expect to do a great deal of good and no harm; but I foresee that if I do A that will probably lead *others* to act in ways that outweigh all the good produced by A. How might that happen? Well, they might, with foreseeable stupidity, •regard A as a precedent for superficially similar actions in very different circumstances, or •be provoked to act very badly because they wrongly think that A has infringed on their rights in some way. If I foresee anything like this when I perform A, then that action of mine is evil. In such cases, the *probability* has to be computed on both sides. [If I establish an orphanage in Somalia and this provokes some radicals to bomb a hospital, the ruin of the hospital and the birth of the orphanage are both things that 'wouldn't have happened' if I hadn't acted in that way. But Hutcheson doesn't count the former as a 'direct and natural' effect of my action because, presumably, it flows from my action *through the will of someone else*.]

That is why many laws prohibit all actions of a certain kind K, even though some particular instances of K would be very useful. •Allowing K actions across the board would—given the mistakes men would probably fall into—be

more pernicious than forbidding them across the board; and •there is no way of legally drawing the line between the right cases and the wrong ones. Faced with laws like these, we have a duty to comply with the generally useful constitution; and if in some very important cases violating the law would have better consequences than obeying it, we must patiently resolve to accept the penalties that the state has for good reasons set down; and this disobedience ·of ours· will have nothing criminal in it [he means: will not be morally wrong].

Although every kind affection, abstractly considered, is approved by our moral sense, we don't give equal approval to all sorts of affections or passions that pursue the good of others, because they don't seem all to be virtuous in the same degree. Our calm affections, whether private or public, are plainly different from our particular passions; calm self-love is quite different from hunger, thirst, ambition, lust, or anger; so calm good-will toward others is different from pity, passionate love, parental affection, or the passion of special friends. Now, every **kind passion** that isn't harmful to others is indeed approved as virtuous and lovely; and yet a **calm good-will** toward the same persons appears more lovely. So calm good-will toward a •small system is lovely, and preferable to more passionate attachments; and yet a •more extensive calm benevolence is still more beautiful and virtuous; and the highest perfection of virtue is a •universal calm good-will toward all beings that can feel. . . .

#### **How partial benevolence is virtuous**

(10) From all this we can see what actions our moral sense will most recommend for us to choose as the most perfectly virtuous, namely:

those that appear to have the most universal unlimited tendency to the greatest and most extensive happiness of all the rational agents to whom our influence can reach.

*All benevolence is amiable* [see Glossary] if it isn't inconsistent with the good of the whole; but doing good for only a few people isn't *very* virtuous unless the range of our beneficence has been limited by lack of power and not lack of love for the whole. All strict attachments to parties, sects, factions, have only an imperfect species of beauty except in cases where the good of the whole requires a stricter attachment to a part—as in natural affection, or virtuous friendships. Another example: it might be that parts are so enormously useful to the whole that even universal benevolence would lead us to attend to their interests with special care and affection. Thus universal benevolence would incline us to a stronger concern for the interests of great and generous people in high positions, or the interests of a generous society whose whole constitution was designed to promote universal good. [Hutcheson decorates this point with a lengthy and not very helpful architectural analogy.]

This increase in the moral beauty of actions or dispositions according to how many persons they benefit may show us why actions that flow from the closer attachments of nature, such as that between the sexes and the love of our offspring, are not as amiable and don't appear to be as virtuous as actions that do an equal amount of good towards persons who are less attached to us. The reason is obvious: these strong instincts are limited by nature to small numbers of mankind, such as our wives or children; whereas a disposition that would produce the same amount of good for others with no special attachment ·to us·, if it was accompanied by a natural power to accomplish its intention, would be incredibly much more productive of great and good effects for the whole.

#### **Moral dispositions and abilities**

From this primary idea of moral good in *actions* arises the idea of good in *dispositions*—natural or acquired—that

•enable us to do good to others or •are presumed to be acquired or cultivated for that purpose. So as long as nothing appears contrary to that presumption, those ·dispositions or· abilities may increase our love for the person who has them; but when we see them as intended for public mischief, they make us hate him all the more. Examples:

penetrating judgment,  
tenacious memory,  
quick-wittedness,  
willingness to endure labour, pain, hunger,  
disregard for wealth, rumour, death.

These may be called ‘natural abilities’ rather than ‘moral qualities’. It is foolish to venerate these qualities except to the extent that they are employed for the public good; such veneration flows from our moral sense on the basis of a false opinion; for if we plainly see them maliciously employed they make the agent more detestable.

#### How we compute the morality of actions. . . .

(11) To find a universal system for computing the morality of any actions with all their details—actions by ourselves or by others—we need the following six propositions or axioms:

[Hutcheson decorates five of the six with pseudo-mathematical equations, of which only the first will be given here, just as a sample. He dropped all of them from the final edition of the work.]

- (i) The moral importance of an agent—i.e. the quantity of public **g**ood he produces—is in a compound ratio of his **b**enevolence and his **a**bilities, i.e.  $g = b \times a$ .
- (ii) Similarly, the amount of private good or interest produced by any person for himself is in a compound ratio of his self-love and his abilities.
- (iii) When two agents are equal in ability and are acting in similar circumstances, the amount of public good they produce will differ in proportion to the difference between their strengths of benevolence.

(iv) When two agents are equal in benevolence and other circumstances alike, the amount of public good they produce will differ in proportion to the difference between their abilities.

(v) The virtue or benevolence of two agents always varies •directly with the amount of good they produce in similar circumstances, and •inversely with their abilities.

[The sixth ‘axiom’ needs a good deal of introduction, which Hutcheson provides:] The natural consequences of our actions are various—

- some good to ourselves and evil to the public,
- others evil to ourselves and good to the public,
- yet others useful to ourselves and others, and
- others again pernicious to both.

So the entire motive for good actions is not always benevolence alone; nor is the sole motive for bad actions malice alone (indeed malice is seldom a motive at all). In most actions we must look upon self-love as another force, sometimes working with benevolence, when we are aroused by prospects of private ·self·-interest as well as public good; and sometimes opposing benevolence, when the good action is difficult or painful to perform or has consequences that are detrimental to the agent. . . . I’ll discuss these selfish [see Glossary] motives more fully later. Just now I’ll bring them all under the general label ‘self·-interest’ . [And now we come to the meat of the sixth ‘axiom’:]

(vi) When self-interest works *with* benevolence in any action where ‘more’ and ‘less’ are appropriate, it must produce more good than benevolence alone would have done; and therefore. . . [The rest of the passage is needlessly complex. Its basic content is clear:]

- if x acting purely from benevolence produces the same amount of good as y produces acting from benevolence and **co-operating** self-interest, then x’s

virtue in this is **greater than** y's by the amount of y's relevant self-interest.

- If x acting purely from benevolence produces the same amount of good as y acting from benevolence and **against** self-interest, then x's virtue in this is **less** than y's by the amount of y's relevant self-interest.

A qualification of this that Hutcheson awkwardly tacks onto the end of the next paragraph really belongs here, namely:] Self-interest lessens the virtue or benevolence only if without it the action wouldn't have been undertaken, or would have been less effective in bringing benefit to others.

#### **Intention and foresight affect actions**

Suppose that somebody x performs a kind action that brings benefit to others: •if it also brings benefit to x, that fact doesn't make it less amiable if the benefit wasn't intended; and •if it has adverse consequences for x, that fact doesn't make it more amiable if those consequences were not foreseen or intended. That is because in the former case benevolence isn't helped along by x's self-love, and in the latter it doesn't have to fight against x's self-love. . . .

Axiom **(vi)** only explains the external marks that men must judge by because they don't see into each others' hearts. It may often happen that an agent has enough benevolence to overcome any difficulty but doesn't meet with any difficulty; and in that case there's as much virtue in him—though he doesn't give proof of it to his fellow-creatures—as if he *had* surmounted difficulties in his kind actions. This must also be the case with the Deity, for whom nothing is difficult.

#### **Perfect virtue**

. . . .When the agent acts to the utmost of his power for the public good, that is the perfection of virtue. [Hutcheson expresses this in terms of his mathematical formulae, which he says] may show us the only basis for the Stoics' boast

that a creature who is supposed innocent can by pursuing virtue with his utmost power equal the gods in virtue. . . .

#### **How moral evil is computed**

**(12)** The same axioms can be used to compute the moral evil in actions. I shall give the label 'hatred' to the disposition that leads us to evil (though it is oftener only self-love plus carelessness about consequences). Then

- (i)** The amount of **evil** produced by any agent is the product of his **hatred** and his **ability**, that is,  
$$e = h \times a.$$

[Axioms **(ii)**, **(iii)** and **(iv)** are uninteresting corollaries of this, expressed with formulae. Then:]

- (v)** The motives of self-love may co-operate with hatred, or oppose it, just as they can with benevolence; and the evil of an action is lessened to the extent that self-interest contributed to it, and is increased to the extent that self-interest worked against it.

[Here is an application of 'axiom' **(v)**: 'It was vile of him to murder her.' 'Well, it wasn't quite as bad as you might think, because as well as hating her he stood to inherit her wealth.' This is so absurd that Hutcheson couldn't have looked it in the eye and judged it to be reasonable. Then why did he say it? Perhaps he thought that murdering someone from pure hate is worse than murdering someone through a mixture of hate and love, even if the love is the murderer's love for himself. We can't take this seriously when we see what it implies. And in any case it is reduced to rubble by Hutcheson's statement that what we call 'hatred' is more often 'only self-love plus carelessness about consequences'. Presumably he arrived at 'axiom' **(v)** by reading it off mechanically from the structurally analogous thesis about benevolence, without thinking about it. ]

#### **Intention, foresight**

But innocence is not the only thing that expected from all mortals; they are presumed from their nature to be to some extent inclined to public good; so that someone's merely

lacking this desire is enough to get him to be thought of as evil. An action can be evil even if it doesn't come from any direct intention to produce public evil; all that is needed is for it to flow from self-love, along with a mere *neglect* of the good of others, or an insensibility to their misery, which the agent foresees or regards as probable.

It's true that my present action isn't made criminal or odious by public evil that arises from it but that I don't confidently foresee or regard as probable. Perhaps I *would have* foreseen it if I had seriously examined my own actions; but as things are, my **present** action doesn't present evidence of malice or lack of benevolence. However, my **past** negligence in not examining the tendency of my actions is clear evidence of my not having the degree of good affections that is necessary for a virtuous character; so strictly speaking the guilt attaches to that past neglect, rather than to the present action which—we may suppose—really flows from a good intention. But human laws can't examine the agent's intentions or secret knowledge, so it has to judge, bluntly, the action itself, presupposing that the agent knew everything that he ought to have known.

Similarly: no good effect of my action makes it morally good if I didn't actually foresee and intend it. But human laws or governors, who can't search into men's intentions or know their secret designs, rightly reward •actions that tend to the public good, even if the agent was motivated only by selfishness and consequently wasn't encouraged in •them by any virtuous disposition.

The difference in degree of guilt between

(a) crimes of ignorance, where the agent's ignorance about the likely upshot of his action was avoidable, and he is at fault for it, and

(b) crimes of malice or direct evil intention, consists in this: (a) show by the past neglect that the agent

lacked the proper degree of benevolence, i.e. right affection; (b) shows that the agent has direct evil affections, which are vastly more odious.

#### **Morality is distinct from •self-love**

(13) From axiom (v) [the one on the page 30] we can infer almost demonstratively that we have a sense of goodness and moral beauty in actions, as something distinct from advantage: if our only basis for approving of actions was the advantage that might come to us from them. . . ., we wouldn't care about the agent's abilities as distinct from what he did for us. We do in fact care about the abilities •as well as the actions• because abilities are relevant to the degree of benevolence, which presupposes that benevolence is amiable. Who ever liked a barren rocky farm or an inconvenient house any better by being told that the poor farm gave as much product as it could? or that the house accommodated its possessor as well as it could? Whereas in our attitude to actions that do very little good, our sense of the beauty of an action is enormously much intensified when we learn that the poor agent had done all could for the public, or for his friend.

#### **Morality of characters**

(14) The moral beauty of characters arises from what they do or sincerely intend to do for the public good, according to their power. We form our judgment of them according to what appears to be their fixed disposition, and not according to any particular little surges of unkind passions, although these do lessen the beauty of good characters, just as episodes of the kind affections lessen the ugliness of the bad ones. What strictly constitutes a virtuous character, then, is not a few passing thrusts of compassion, natural affection, or gratitude; but rather a fixed humanity or desire for the public good of everyone to whose happiness we can make any difference—a desire that uniformly arouses us to

all acts of beneficence, according to our utmost prudence and knowledge of the interests of others; and any strongly benevolent person takes the trouble to be well-informed about the best methods of serving the interests of mankind. Every episode of the kind affections, ·however brief·, appears to be in some degree amiable; but what we say about a man's character is based on the prevailing principle [see Glossary] ·in his make-up·.

### **Instinct may be the spring of virtue**

(15) Some people hold that nothing that flows from instincts or passions can be virtue, but they can't be right. They say that virtue arises from *reason*, but what is reason? It's nothing but the intelligence we use in pursuing any end. The ultimate end proposed by the common moralists [Hutcheson's phrase] is the happiness of the agent himself, and it's certain that he is driven by instinct to pursue it. Well, mightn't there be another instinct—this time towards the public good, the good of others—that is as genuine a principle of virtue as the instinct towards private happiness is? And wouldn't reason have just as much work to do in our pursuit of that goal as it does in pursuit of the other? This much is certain: whereas we look on the selfish actions of others with indifference at best, we see something amiable in every action that flows from kind affections or passions towards others—so long as they are conducted with prudence and have some measure of success. Our passionate actions, as I showed earlier, aren't always self-interested; when we act from passion, our intention is not to •free ourselves from the discomfort of the passion but to •alter the state of the object.

·HUTCHESON'S NEXT TWO SENTENCES, VERBATIM·

If it be said, that actions from instinct, are not the effect of prudence and choice; this objection holds full as strongly against the actions which flow from self-love; since the use

of our reason is as requisite, to find the proper means of promoting public good, as private good. And as it must be an instinct, or a determination previous to reason, which makes us pursue private good, as well as public good, as our end; there is the same occasion for prudence and choice, in the election of proper means for promoting of either.

·WHAT HE MAY HAVE BEEN GETTING AT·

Here is something you might say as an objection to my thesis that benevolence is a basic trait of human nature, an *instinct*:

'It can't be an instinct, because actions from instinct are not the effect of **prudence** and **choice**; in acting on an instinct you don't spend time and thought on pondering how to go about it; but that is just what you often *do* do when acting out of benevolence. In short: we use **reason** when acting benevolently, but one doesn't use when acting from instinct.'

Well, think about our basic determination [see Glossary] to try to further our own private interests; *that* is basic enough to count as an instinct, isn't it? But obviously when we act on it, i.e. act self-interestedly, we often do this **prudently**, using **reason** to help us **choose** a course of action. The two cases are strictly parallel. In each we have an instinct that is entirely separate from reason, and in each case reason comes on the scene helping us in the choice of means to the end that our instinct sets before us.

I see no harm in supposing that men are naturally disposed to virtue, and aren't left merely indifferent about how to act except when their action can affect their private good. Surely, the supposition of a *benevolent universal instinct* would make human nature and its Author more lovable by any good man, while leaving plenty of room for the use of reason •in devising and instituting rights, laws, and constitutions, and •in inventing and practising skills

and techniques to make the most effective job of gratifying that generous inclination. If we must bring in self-love to make virtue rational, a little reflection will reveal that this benevolence is our greatest happiness; and *that* could lead us to cultivate this sweet disposition as much as possible and to despise every opposite interest. Not that we can be truly virtuous if all we intend is to obtain for ourselves the pleasure that accompanies beneficence, without being moved by our love of others; indeed this pleasure itself is based on our being conscious of disinterested love for others as the spring of our actions. Self-interest may be our motive for choosing to stay in this agreeable state, but it can't be the sole motive—or even the principal one—of any action that appears virtuous to our moral sense.

#### **Heroism, at all social levels**

It may initially strike you as extravagant and wild to apply mathematical calculations to moral subjects; but some corollaries of my axioms, which I will easily and securely derive, may show what a useful procedure this is if it could be further pursued. Right now I shall draw only one conclusion, which seems to be the most joyful imaginable to people at *every* level of society, namely that no external circumstances of fortune (e.g. extreme poverty) and no involuntary disadvantages (e.g. blindness) can exclude any mortal from the most heroic virtue. However little public good he can accomplish, if his abilities are correspondingly small the quotient that expresses the degree of virtue may

be as great as anyone's.

[Hutcheson is here applying axiom (i) from page 30, namely  $g = v \times a$ , the amount of public good someone produces is the mathematical product of his virtue and his abilities. (Back there he spoke of 'benevolence' rather than 'virtue', but he equates the two, so it's all right to switch from  $b$  to  $v$ .) From that 'axiom' we get by simple arithmetic  $v = \frac{g}{a}$ . A blind pauper will have a terrifically low value for  $a$ , and that gives him a chance for an impressively high value of  $v$ .]

So it's not only the prince [see Glossary], the statesman, the general that are capable of true heroism. These are indeed the chief characters whose fame spreads through the world and down the ages; but when we find in an honest shop-keeper

- the kind friend,
- the faithful prudent adviser,
- the charitable and hospitable neighbour,
- the tender husband and affectionate parent,
- the sedate yet cheerful companion,
- the generous assistant of merit,
- the cautious calmer of contention and debate,
- the promoter of love and good understanding among acquaintances;

if we think that these were all the good works his position in the world gave him an opportunity to perform, we should judge this person's character to be in fact just as amiable as those whose external splendor dazzles an injudicious world into thinking they are the only heroes in virtue.

## 4: This moral sense is universal

### This moral sense is universal

(1) To show how far mankind agree in what I have said is the universal foundation of this moral sense, namely benevolence, I have already pointed out that when we are asked why we approve this or that action, we always answer in terms of its usefulness to the public, not its usefulness to the agent himself. If we are defending an action that has been condemned, and are maintaining that it was lawful, we always have as one article of our defence that it didn't harm anybody, or that it did more good than harm. On the other hand, when we blame any piece of conduct we show it to be harmful to people other than the agent, or at least to show a neglect of their interests when •it was in the agent's power to serve them or when •gratitude, natural affection, or some other disinterested tie should have raised in him a concern for their interests. If we sometimes blame foolish conduct in others, without any thought about its tendency to harm the public, this is still prompted by our benevolence, which makes us concerned for the evils befalling the agent, whom we must always look on as a part of the system. We all know •how great an extenuation of crimes it is to plead that the poor man does harm to nobody but himself, and •how often this turns hatred into pity. And yet if we examine the matter well, we'll find that most of the actions that are immediately harmful to the agent and are often regarded as innocent towards others do really tend to harm the public by making the agent incapable of doing the good things he could otherwise have done and perhaps would have been inclined to do. That is the situation with intemperance and extravagant gluttony.

### Benevolence is the only ground of approval

(2) We have never approved of any action by another person except of the basis of our belief—on good evidence or bad—of some really good moral quality •in the person•; it is always some really amiable and benevolent appearance that draws our approval. We may perhaps commit mistakes, judging that actions tend to the public good when really they don't; or be so stupidly careless that we focus on some partial good effects and overlook many evil consequences that counter-balance the good ones. Our reason may do its work very defectively, giving us *partial* representations of the tendency of actions; but it is still some apparent species of benevolence that commands our approval. And this •moral• sense, even when outweighed by motives of external advantage that are stronger than it, doesn't stop operating: even in those cases it has enough strength to make us uneasy and dissatisfied with ourselves. In this respect it is like our other senses: for example, reasons of •self•-interest make us force ourselves to swallow some disgusting potion, but our sense of taste is still at work making the stuff taste dreadful.

### False approvals

So it's not relevant here to point out that (i) many actions tending to do public harm are performed and approved; this is parallel to the fact that (ii) actions tending to harm the agent are often performed and *for a while* approved. We don't infer from (ii) that the agent has no self-love, no sense of •self•-interest; so we shouldn't infer from (i) that such men have no sense of morals, no desire for public good. The facts are clear: men are often mistaken about actions' tendency to public or to private good; indeed, sometimes violent passions will (while they last) make them approve *as advantageous*

actions that are **(i)** very bad in a moral sense or **(ii)** very harmful to the agent. But this proves only that sometimes there may be some more violent motive to action than **(i)** a sense of moral good, and that men's passions may blind them even **(ii)** even to their own interests.

To prove that men have no moral sense, we would have to find cases where cruelly malicious actions are performed, and approved by others, when there's no motive of real or apparent self-interest except gratifying that very desire to harm others. We must find a country where murder in cold blood, torture, and everything malicious—without any advantage to anyone—is approved, or at least regarded with indifference and no hostility towards the perpetrators, by the unconcerned onlookers. We must find men for whom the treacherous, ungrateful, and cruel are on a par with the generous, friendly, faithful, and humane; and who approve the latter no more than the former except when they personally are affected by the influence of these dispositions. . . . Although the universe is large enough, and stored with a considerable variety of characters, it may be questioned whether it will provide us with any instance—any nation, any club, any individual person—who will have no moral attitude to any actions that don't relate to its own concerns.

#### **Explaining the diversity of manners. . .**

**(3)** From what I have said, we can easily explain the vast diversity of moral opinions across the nations and down the centuries. This diversity is indeed evidence that there are no innate ideas or propositions; but it doesn't show that mankind lacks a moral sense to perceive virtue or vice in actions. There are three main reasons for this diversity. I deal with one here, and the others in **(4)** and **(5)**.

#### **(i) . . . from various notions of happiness**

First, there are different opinions about happiness—i.e.

natural good—and of the most effective way to increase it. Thus in one country where a courageous disposition is prevalent, where liberty is counted as a great good and war as an inconsiderable evil, all uprisings in defence of privileges will appear as morally good to our sense, because they'll appear as benevolent; and yet the same sense of moral good in benevolence will make those same actions appear odious in another country where the spirits of men are more abject and timorous, not putting much value on liberty and regarding civil war as the greatest natural evil. In Sparta, where the security of possessions didn't matter much because they weren't interested in wealth, and where they did want, above all, the state to stay healthy through having an abundance of hardy agile young people, there was so little dislike of skillfully done *theft* that it was actually protected by law.

But in these and all such cases the approval is based on benevolence, because of some real or apparent tendency to the public good. We can't expect this moral sense of ours to give us, automatically, accurate ideas of complex actions or of their natural tendencies to good or evil; all it does is to make us approve of benevolence whenever it appears in any action, and to hate the contrary. Similarly, our sense of beauty doesn't give us—without reflection, instruction, or observation—ideas of the regular solids such as temples and theatres; all it does is to make us approve and delight in uniformity amidst variety wherever we observe it. If we read the preambles of any laws we regard as unjust, or the defences by moralists of any disputed practice, we'll doubtless find that men are often mistaken in computing the over-all natural good or evil resulting from certain actions; but the basis on which any action is approved is still some tendency to the greater natural good of others, in the opinion of those who approve it.

**Travelers' reports of barbarous customs .**

Some travelers have reported strange cruelties practised towards the aged or children in certain countries, and this has been treated as an objection to the thesis that the moral sense is universal throughout mankind; but this objection can be met in the same way as the preceding one. If such actions are performed in sudden angry passions, all they show is that other motives—other springs of action—can overpower benevolence ·even· in its strongest ties. And if in the countries in question those cruel actions really are universally allowed and seen by everyone as innocent, that will certainly be because in some way they appear ·to those people· as benevolent. Perhaps they think they are

- securing them against insults of enemies,
- saving them from the infirmities of age (which they may regard as worse than death), or
- freeing the vigorous and useful citizens from the expense of maintaining them or the labour of caring for them.

A love of pleasure and ease may be stronger in some people than gratitude towards their parents or natural affection for their children. But the fact that such nations stay in existence despite all the toil in educating [see Glossary] their young is a sufficient proof of natural affection. ·I say 'natural affection'· because I don't think we'll find that such nations have laws compelling parents to provide a proper education for  $n$  of their offspring, for some precise value of  $n$ ! We know very well that an appearance of public good was the basis for equally barbarous laws enacted by Lycurgus ·of Sparta· and Solon ·of Athens·, providing for the killing of deformed or weak people so as to prevent a burdensome crowd of useless citizens.

The late Lord Shaftesbury rightly remarked on the absurdity of the monstrous taste that has possessed both the

writers of travels and their readers. They tell us almost nothing about the natural affections, the families, associations, friendships, clans, of the Indians; and just as little about their abhorrence of treachery among themselves, their proneness to mutual aid and to the defence of their various states, their contempt [see Glossary] of death in defence of their country or on points of honour. These are common stories—no need to travel to the ·West· Indies for what we see in Europe every day! So the entertainment in these ingenious works consists chiefly in creating horror and making men stare. The ordinary employment of the bulk of the Indians in support of their wives and offspring or relatives has nothing amazing about it; whereas a human sacrifice or a feast on enemies' carcasses can create horror and amazement at the wondrous barbarity of Indians—and this is in nations that are no strangers to the massacre at Paris, the Irish rebellion, or the journals of the Inquisition! The Europeans behold *these* with religious veneration; but the Indian sacrifices, flowing from a similar perversion of humanity by superstition, arouse the highest abhorrence and amazement. What is most surprising in these books is the way in which some gentlemen who claim to be cautiously sceptical on other matters are utterly credulous when it comes to marvelous memoirs of monks, friars, sea-captains, pirates; and to the histories, annals, chronologies that they get from oral tradition or hieroglyphics.

**The use of reason in morals**

Men have reason given them to judge regarding the tendencies of their actions, so that they won't stupidly follow the first *appearance* of public good; but still it is some appearance of good that they pursue. And it's a strange thing that everyone thinks that ·all· men have reason, despite all the stupid, ridiculous opinions that are accepted in many places, and yet absurd behaviour based on those

very opinions is taken as evidence against ·there being· any moral sense; although the bad conduct is an upshot not •of any irregularity in the moral sense but •of a wrong judgment or opinion. If putting the aged to death really is, with all its consequences, a furthering of the public good and a lessening of the misery of the aged, it is no doubt justifiable; indeed, even the aged themselves might choose it, in hopes of a future state. If a deformed or weak population can't possibly make themselves useful to mankind, and are going to become an absolutely unsupportable burden, involving a whole state in misery, it is *just* to put them to death. We all agree that this ·line of moral reasoning· is sound when applied to an over-loaded boat in a storm. As for parents' killing a ·new-born· child when they have enough children already, infanticide is perhaps practised and allowed from self-love; but I can hardly think it counts as a good action anywhere. If wood or stone or metal •is a deity, •has power and uses it to govern, and •has been the author of benefits to us, it is morally amiable to praise and worship it. If the true deity is pleased with worship before statues or any other symbol of some more immediate presence or influence, then image-worship is virtuous. If he delights in sacrifices, penances, ceremonies, cringings, they are all laudable. Our sense of virtue generally leads us accurately enough according to our opinions; so the absurd practices that prevail in the world are much better evidence that men have no reason than that they have no moral sense of beauty in actions.

**(ii) . . . from the perverting influence of narrow systems**

**(4)** The second reason for the diversity in ·moral· sentiments is the diversity of the systems to which men—led by foolish opinions—confine their benevolence. I indicated earlier that it is regular and beautiful to have stronger benevolence towards the morally good parts of mankind, who are useful

to the whole, than towards the useless or pernicious parts. Now, if men accept a low or base opinion of any group or sect of men—if they see them as •trying to destroy the more valuable parts ·of the human race·, or even merely as •useless burdens—benevolence itself will lead them to neglect the interests of those people and to suppress them. This why among nations with high notions of virtue every action towards an enemy can be counted as just; and why Romans and Greeks could approve of enslaving those they called 'barbarians'.

**Sects are harmful to virtue**

The late Lord Shaftesbury rightly said •that the various sects, parties, factions, cabals of mankind in larger societies, are all influenced by a public spirit; •that they come into existence when some broad-minded notions of public good. . . .arouse men of the same faction or cabal to the most disinterested mutual support and help; and •that all the conflicts amongst the different factions, and even the fiercest wars against each other, are influenced by a sociable public spirit within a limited system. Men certainly don't owe much to those who often skillfully raise and foment this party spirit; or split them into several sects for the defence of very trifling causes. Associations for innocent business purposes, cabals for the defence of liberty against a tyrant, or even less elevated clubs for social amusement or improvement by conversation, are very amiable and good. But

- when men's heads are filled with some trivial opinions,
- when operators, for their own purposes, raise in men's minds some unaccountable notion of sanctity and religion in tenets or practices that don't increase our love for God or for our own species,
- when the various factions are taught to look on each other as odious, contemptible, profane, because of their different tenets or opinions,

- when these tenets, whether true or false, are often perfectly useless to the public good,
- when the keenest passions are raised about such trifles, and men begin •to hate each other for things that in themselves have no evil in them, and •to love the zealots of their own sect for what is in no way valuable—indeed for their fury, rage, and malice against opposite sects (which is what all parties commonly call ‘zeal’), in short
- when our admiration and love, or contempt and hatred, are thus perverted from their natural objects,

it’s no wonder if our moral sense is much impaired and our natural notions of good and evil almost lost.

If you have had the good fortune never to hear of the party-tenets of most of our sects, or if you have heard of them but have either never joined any sect or joined all of them to the same extent, you have the best chance to have a truly natural and good disposition, because your temperament has never been soured about vain trifles, and you haven’t caught—like a disease!—any sullenness or rancour against any part of mankind. If any opinions deserve to be defended, they’re the ones that give us lovely ideas of the Deity and of our fellow-creatures; if any opinions deserve to be opposed, they’re the ones that •create doubts in our minds about the goodness of providence, or •represent our fellow-creatures as base and selfish by instilling into us some ill-natured, cunning, shrewd insinuations that our most generous actions are based entirely on self-interest. This *wise* philosophy of some modern followers of Epicurus can’t produce anything but discontent, suspicion, and jealousy—a state infinitely worse than any little transitory injuries that we might be exposed to by a good-natured credulity. But despite such opinions, our nature itself leads us into friendship, trust, and mutual confidence, for which we owe thanks to the kind

Author of our nature.

Robbers show a moral sense in the equal or fair division of their takings, and in faith to each other. If we mixed socially with them we would find that •they have their own lofty moral ideas of their gang as generous, courageous, trusty—even honest, indeed; and that •people whom we call honest and industrious are regarded by the robbers as mean-spirited, selfish, churlish, or extravagantly self-indulgent, as not *deserving* their wealth, which the robbers therefore want to put to better uses in maintaining gallanter men who have a right to a living as well as their neighbours, who are their declared enemies. If we attend to what is said by our professed debauchees, our most dissolute rakes, we’ll find their vices clothed in their imaginations with some amiable dress of liberty, generosity, just resentment against the contrivers of cunning rules to enslave men and rob them of their pleasures.

It may be that no-one ever pursued vice for long with peace of mind unless he had some such deluding fiction of moral good, helping him to remain unaware of the barbarous and inhuman consequences of his actions. The idea of an *ill-natured villain* is too frightful ever to become familiar to any mortal. Hence we’ll find that the basest actions are disguised by a tolerable mask. Here are some of the disguises:

- avarice . . . . prudent care of one’s family or friends;
- fraud . . . . skillful conduct;
- malice and revenge . . . . a just sense of honour, and a vindication of our right to our possessions or our fame;
- fire and sword, and desolation among enemies . . . , a just thorough defence of our country;
- persecution . . . . zeal for the truth, and for the eternal happiness of men, which heretics oppose.

In all these cases, men generally act from a sense of virtue based on false opinions and mistaken benevolence; on wrong or partial views of public good and the means to promote it; or on very narrow systems formed by similar foolish opinions. The horrid crimes that fill our histories don't come from a delight in the misery of others, i.e. from malice, but generally from an unwise and unreasonable enthusiasm for some kind of limited virtue.

**(iii) . . . and from false opinions about the divine laws**

**(5)** The last source of ·moral· diversity consists in false opinions about the will or laws of the Deity. We are bound to obey these, ·the zealots say·, by gratitude and also by God's right (as they see it) to do what he pleases with the fortunes of his creatures. I needn't cite particular examples: everyone knows that this has produced follies, superstitions, murders, devastations of kingdoms—all from a sense of virtue and duty. I will only remark that all those follies or barbarities confirm rather than destroy the thesis that we have a moral sense:

·THE REMAINDER OF THE SENTENCE VERBATIM·  
since the Deity is believed to have a right to dispose of his creatures; and gratitude to him, if he be conceived good, must move us to obedience to his will: if he be not conceived good, self-love may overcome our moral sense of the action which we undertake to avoid his fury.

·THE MODIFIED VERSION NOW RESUMES·  
As for the vices that commonly come from love of pleasure, or from any violent passion, since the agent usually becomes aware of their evil—sometimes in the heat of the action—they only prove that this moral sense, and benevolence, can be overcome by the more urgent calls of other desires.

**The objection from incest**

**(6)** Before leaving this subject, I should remove one of the

strongest objections against the thesis I have been defending, namely that this ·moral· sense is natural, and independent of custom and education. The objection is that some actions always arouse the strongest immediate abhorrence throughout some whole nations, although they don't manifest anything contrary to benevolence; and those same actions in other nations are regarded as innocent or ·even· honourable. Thus, among Christians incest is abhorred at first appearance as much as murder, even by those who don't know or don't think about any necessary tendency it has to the detriment of mankind. Now we generally allow that anything that comes from nature in one nation would come from nature in all. So this horror over incest can't come from nature, because in ·ancient· Greece it was regarded as honourable to marry one's half-sister, and the priestly class in ancient Persia honoured marrying one's mother. Therefore—the argument goes—mightn't it be that *all* our approval or dislike of actions arise the same way from custom and education?

This is easily answered on the basis of what I have already said. If we didn't have a moral sense that is natural to us, we would only look upon incest as hurtful to the perpetrator, and avoid it; we wouldn't hate other incestuous persons any more than we do a bankrupt merchant; so this abhorrence does presuppose a sense of moral good. Also. . . wherever incest is hated, it is regarded as offensive to the Deity, and as exposing the person concerned to his just vengeance. Now, everyone agrees that it is the grossest ingratitude and baseness for any creature to go against the will of the Deity, to whom he owes so much. So this is plainly a morally evil quality that incest is seen to have, and is reducible to the general basis of malice or rather of lack of benevolence. Furthermore, where this opinion that ·incest is offensive to the Deity prevails, ·it directly conflicts with benevolence in a second way, because we must see the perpetrator as

exposing an associate—one who should be dear to him by the ties of nature (·as his sister and mother are·)—to the lowest state of misery, baseness, infamy and punishment. But in countries where there's no prevalent opinion about the deities hating or prohibiting incest, if it isn't accompanied by any obvious *natural* evils, it can be regarded as innocent.

And a last point: just as

men who have a sense of taste may acquire from others prejudices against certain foods, regarding them as nasty though they have never tasted them,

so also it can happen that

men who have a moral sense may acquire an opinion, by implicit faith, about the moral evil of actions in which they don't themselves see any tendency to natural evil.

Perhaps they think that others do see such a tendency; or perhaps their education has left them with ideas associated with the idea of incest, giving them an abhorrence of it for

which they have no reason. But ·this has been about men who do have a moral sense·. Without such a sense we couldn't acquire a prejudice against any actions except as being naturally disadvantageous to ourselves.

#### **The moral sense doesn't come from education**

(7) That everyone has this moral sense, and that it is independent of instruction, can be seen in the sentiments of children when they hear the stories that they are commonly entertained with as soon as they understand language. They always passionately align themselves with the side where kindness and humanity are found; and they detest the cruel, the covetous, the selfish, or the treacherous. How strongly we see their passions of joy, sorrow, love, and indignation being moved by these moral representations, although no-one has worked to give them ideas of a deity, of laws, of a future state, or of the intricate ways in which the universal good tends to the good of each individual!

## **5: Further evidence that we naturally have practical dispositions to virtue**

### **A further account of our instinct to benevolence in its various degrees**

#### **Additional motives of ·self-interest, namely honour, shame and pity**

#### **Degrees of benevolence**

(1) I have tried to show that there is a universal determination to benevolence in mankind, even towards the most distant parts of the species; but don't think that this benevolence is equally strong towards everyone. There are closer and

stronger degrees of benevolence towards ·people to whom we are more closely related (some of these have been given distinct names—'natural affection', 'gratitude') or towards people for whom we have a greater love of esteem [see note on page 12].

**Natural affection**

One sort of natural affection, namely the one that parents have towards their children, I have already discussed. I'll here add only the further point that there is the same kind of affection among siblings, though in a weaker degree. You can see this at work in all families unless some opposition of interests produces contrary actions or outweighs the power of this natural affection.

**Not based on merit or acquaintance .**

Parental affection can't be entirely based on merit or acquaintance. . . .because it operates where acquaintance would produce hatred, even towards children thought to be vicious. Further evidence that parental affection is natural is the fact that we always see it descending from parents to children and not ascending from children to parents. Nature, who sometimes seems frugal in her operations, has strongly set parents to care for their children, because they all stand in absolute need of parental support; but she has left it to reflection and a sense of gratitude to produce returns of love in children towards their kind benefactors, who seldom have such an absolute need for support from their offspring as their children did for support from them. Now, if natural affection were produced by acquaintance, or by merit, we would find it strongest in children, on whom all the obligations are laid by a thousand good offices; but that is *not* what we find. Indeed, •benevolence seems not to be confined to mankind, but extends to other animals, though we hardly ever think of them as having *merit*, and •it is observed to continue in them only for as long as the needs of their young require. It wouldn't do their young any good if it did continue, because when they are grown up they couldn't get any benefit from the love of their mothers. But that's not the case with rational agents, so *their* affections—•*our* affections—continue for longer, even for our whole lifetimes.

**Gratitude**

(2) Nothing will give us a sounder idea of how wisely human nature is formed for universal love and mutual assistance than thinking about the strong attraction of benevolence that we call 'gratitude'. Everyone knows that beneficence [see Glossary] towards ourselves makes a much deeper impression upon us, and creates gratitude, which is a stronger love towards the benefactor than would be produced in unequal beneficence towards a third person. There are vastly many human beings scattered around the globe, and no-one can be significantly useful to so many; if our benevolence were equally spread across all of them, it would either •be hopelessly distracted by the multiplicity of beneficiaries whose equal virtues would equally recommend them for our concern, or •become useless through being directed equally at scattered multitudes whose interests we couldn't understand or promote because we'd had no previous dealings with them. To avoid this, nature has more powerfully made us admire and love the moral qualities of others who affect ourselves, and has given us more powerful impressions of good-will towards those who are beneficent to ourselves. We call this 'gratitude'. In this way a foundation is laid for joyful associations in •all kinds of business and in •virtuous friendships.

This fact about how people are constituted results also in a benefactor's being more encouraged in his beneficence, with a higher likelihood of an increase of happiness through grateful returns, than if his virtue were to be honoured only by the colder general sentiments of people who weren't connected to him, and couldn't know his needs or how to be profitable to him, especially when they would all be driven to love innumerable multitudes of people whose equal virtues would give them the same claims to their love. We escape that •weakening of love by spreading it thinly and equally

over everyone· by having a constitution that gives us greater love for people who are more closely attached to us or to our friends, by good offices that affect ourselves, or our friends.

This universal benevolence towards all men can be compared with the force of gravitation. This may extend to all bodies in the universe; but like the love of benevolence it increases as the distance is lessened, and is strongest when bodies come to touch each other. This increase of attraction as things get nearer to one another is as necessary to the structure of the universe as the bare fact of there being any attraction at all. If there were a general attraction, equal at all distances, the interplay amongst such multitudes of equal forces would put an end to all regularity of motion and might even bring everything to a halt.

This increase of love towards the benevolent, scaled to how close to us their benefits place them, can be seen in the high degree of love that heroes and law-givers universally receive in their own countries—higher than what they find abroad, even among those who are aware of their virtues. It can also be seen in all the strong ties of friendship, acquaintance, neighbourhood, partnership, which are utterly necessary for the order and happiness of human society.

#### **Love of honour**

**(3)** From considering our nature's strong determination to gratitude and love towards our benefactors, which I earlier showed to be disinterested, we move smoothly along to consider another equally natural determination of our minds, namely to delight in the good opinion and love of others even when we don't expect any other advantage from them. . . . This fact about our constitution makes honour an *immediate* good, ·i.e. something that is good •in itself and not merely good •because of what may follow from it·. (I would call this desire for honour 'ambition', if custom hadn't joined some evil ideas to that word, making it stand for a desire

for honour—and also for power—that is so violent that the person who has it will stop at nothing in his efforts to obtain them. [Despite this aside, Hutcheson does call the desire for honour 'ambition' in four places.] On the other hand, we are by nature subjected to a grievous sensation of misery when others have an unfavourable opinion of us, even if we have no fear that they'll harm us. This sensation is *shame*. It works as an immediate evil, just as (I have said) honour is an immediate good.

If there were no moral sense, i.e. if our only ·evaluative· idea of actions were *advantageous ·to me·* or *hurtful ·to me·*, I see no reason why we would be delighted with honour or vulnerable to the uneasiness of shame; or how it could happen that a man who was secure from punishment for some action would ever be uneasy at its being known to all the world. The world thinks worse of him because of it; but what puts his ease [see Glossary] at the mercy of the opinion of the world? Perhaps from now on he •won't be so much trusted in business, and •will suffer loss in that way. But if *that's* the only reason for shame—if it has no immediate evil or pain in it, apart from the fear of loss—then whenever we expose ourselves to loss we should be ashamed and try to conceal the action. But that is now how things stand.

[Hutcheson adds a paragraph saying that a business loss in a good cause can be a positive source of pride rather than shame.]

#### **Morals are not based on the opinions of our country**

**(4)** Some writers hold that the opinions of our country are the first standard of virtue. They contend that we first distinguish between moral good and evil by setting actions alongside those opinions; and then (they say) our chief motive is ambition, i.e. the love of honour. But what is honour? It isn't merely *being universally known, no matter how*. A covetous man isn't honoured by being universally known as

covetous; nor is a weak, selfish, or luxurious man, when he is known to be so. Much less can a treacherous, cruel, or ungrateful man be said to be *honoured* for being known as such! A contortionist, a fire-eater, or a stage magician is not *honoured* for these public shows, unless we see him as a person capable of giving the pleasures of admiration and surprise to multitudes. Thus, honour is the opinion of others concerning our •morally good actions or •abilities presumed to be used in morally good ways. . . . Now, it is certain that ambition or the love of honour is really selfish; but this determination to love honour presupposes a sense of moral virtue both in those persons who confer the honour and in him who pursues it. [Here and below, Hutcheson is *not* using 'ambition' to name a vice; he is using it—as he implied early in (3) that he wouldn't—as a general name for the love of honour. If you think the word 'selfish' shows otherwise, see the Glossary on that.]

Still, if we knew that someone was motivated in his actions solely by ambition, we wouldn't see any virtue even in his most useful actions, because they wouldn't have flowed from any love for others or desire for their happiness. Because honour is naturally pleasant to us, it may be an additional motive to virtue, comparable with the pleasure that comes from reflecting on our own benevolence; but the person we see as perfectly virtuous acts *immediately* from the love of others. However, these less immediate interests may be joint motives for him to set about acting as he does, or to cultivate every kind inclination, and to despise every contrary interest because it would give less happiness than •he can get from• reflection on his own virtue and awareness of the esteem of others.

Because of how we are constituted, shame is in the same way an immediate evil, and influences us in the same way to abstain from moral evil; though no action or omission would appear virtuous if its sole motive was fear of shame.

### Opinions flow from the moral sense

(5) Let us look further into the thesis that the opinions of our countrymen can raise •in us• a sense of moral good or evil. If an opinion is universal in a country, men who don't think much will probably embrace it. [Throughout the rest of this paragraph, Hutcheson writes about 'an action' where his real topic is a *kind* of action.] If an action is believed to be **advantageous to the agent**, we may be led to believe so too, and then self-love may make us perform it [= 'to perform an action of that kind'; and so on throughout]; and similarly we may be made to avoid an action that is reputed to be **harmful to the agent**. If an action is regarded as **advantageous to the public**, we may believe so too. . . but then what? If we don't have disinterested benevolence, what will move us to perform it? 'Oh, we love honour; and to obtain this pleasure we will perform the action out of self-interest.' •This is a renewed attempt to make 'the love of honour' play the role that really belongs to the moral sense; and it won't work•. Is honour only the opinion of our country that an action is advantageous to the public? No! We don't see honour being given to

- the useful treachery of an enemy whom we have bribed to work on our side,
- actions that happened to bring advantage to the public but weren't intended to do that, or to
- useful things done by cowards under compulsion;

and yet we *do* see honour being paid to *unsuccessful* attempts to serve the public, motivated by sincere love for it. Thus, honour presupposes a sense of something amiable other than advantage, namely a sense of excellence in a public spirit; so the first sense of moral good must be prior to honour because honour is based on it. The company we keep may lead us to believe uncritically that certain actions tend to the public good; but our company's honouring such actions and loving the agent must flow from a sense of some

excellence in this love of the public. . . .

‘That is why we pretend to love the public,’ say my opponents, ‘although ·really· we only desire the pleasure of honour; and we’ll applaud everyone who seems to act in that manner, so as to •reap advantage from his actions or •get others to believe that we really love the public.’ But. . . will I ever really love men who appear to love the public, if I don’t have a moral sense? No—without a moral sense of my own. I couldn’t form any idea of such a temperament. As for these pretenders to public love, ·if I had no moral sense· I would hate them as hypocrites and as my rivals for fame. This is all that could be achieved by the opinions of my countrymen, even supposing *they* had a moral sense, provided I didn’t; they could never make me admire virtue or virtuous characters in others, but could only give me opinions about advantage or disadvantage in actions, according to whether they tended to bring me the pleasures of honour or the pain of shame. [Hutcheson wrote that using ‘we’ and ‘our’, not ‘I’ and ‘my’; the shift to the singular in this version is meant as an aid to clarity; it doesn’t affect the philosophical argument.]

But if ·instead· we suppose that men naturally have a moral sense of goodness in actions, and that they are capable of disinterested love, everything falls into place. The opinions of our company may make us rashly conclude that certain actions tend to harm everyone and are morally evil, when perhaps they are not so; and then our ·moral· sense may determine us to have an aversion to them and their authors. Or we may in the same way be led into prejudices in favour of actions as good, ·when they are not so·; and then our desire for honour may co-operate with benevolence in moving us to perform such actions. ·Those are two kinds of moral mistake that we couldn’t make if we didn’t have a moral sense·. If we had no •sense of moral qualities in actions, nor any •conceptions of them except as advantageous or hurtful

·to us·, we could never have honoured or loved agents for public love, or had any concern with their actions except for their effects on ourselves in particular. We might have formed the metaphysical idea of public good, but without a principle of benevolence we would never have •desired it apart from its bearing on our own private ·self·-interest, or •admired and loved those who worked to achieve it. A late author [Mandeville] called virtue the ‘offspring of flattery, begot upon pride’; this is so far from the truth that *pride* (in the bad meaning of that word) is the spurious brood of ignorance by our moral sense—or, in language like Mandeville’s, the ‘offspring of ignorance, begot upon our moral sense’—and flattery is only an engine that a cunning person may use to turn the moral sense in others to the purposes of *his* self-love.

#### **The moral sense doesn’t come from love of honour**

(6) To explain what I have said about the power of honour, ·try this analogue of it·. Suppose that a state or its ruler, seeing the money that is drawn out of England by Italian musicians, were to decree honours, statues, titles, for great musicians. This would certainly stir all who had hopes of success to the study of music, and men with a ‘good ear’ would approve of the good performers not merely as very entertaining but also as useful subjects. But would this give all men a good ear, or make them delight in harmony? Or could it ever make us really love, in the same way we love a patriot or a generous friend, a musician who studied nothing but his own gain? I doubt it! Yet friendship, unaided by statues or honours, can make persons appear exceedingly amiable.

Here’s another example. Suppose that statues and triumphal arches were decreed, as well as a large sum of money, to the discoverer of •the longitude or •any other useful invention in mathematics. [That is, the discoverer of a reliable means

for mariners at sea to know where they are on the east-west dimension. A monetary prize *was* offered for its discovery, which was made soon after this work of Hutcheson's appeared. The comparable problem about knowledge of latitudes had been solved for centuries.] This would stir everyone into wanting (from self-love) to make this discovery; but would it lead men to love a mathematician as they do a virtuous man? Would a mathematician love every person who had reached perfection in that knowledge, even while knowing that it wasn't accompanied by any love to mankind or care for their good, but by ill-nature, pride, covetousness? In short, whatever external honours we shower on someone who makes such a discovery, if we don't see or assume that he acted out of benevolence . . . we won't have for him the endearing sentiments of esteem and love that our nature determines us to have for benevolence, i.e. for virtue.

Love of honour and aversion to shame may often move us to perform actions for which others claim to honour us though we ourselves see no good in them; and conduct that complies with the inclinations of others may earn the agent some love—as it evidences humanity—from spectators who see no moral good in the conduct itself. But without some *sense of good* in the actions, men will never be fond of such actions in solitude, or ever love anyone for perfection in them (or for performing them) in solitude; and much less will they be dissatisfied with themselves when they act otherwise in solitude. But *we do* when it's a matter of virtue; so we must have by nature a moral sense of virtue antecedent to and therefore independent of honour.

This will enable us to evaluate the judgment of a late author [Mandeville] when he compares the origin of our ideas of virtue and of approval of it to the procedure of regulating the behaviour of difficult children by commendation. I'll show later on that our approval of some gestures and of what we call 'decency' in motion depends upon some moral ideas in

adults. But before children come to observe this relation between the conduct and morality, they try to behave as they are desired because of good nature, an inclination to please, and love of praise; not because of any perception of excellence in this behaviour. So they have no concern about gestures when alone, unless they are merely practising, with a view to pleasing the adults when they return to company; and they don't ever love or approve others for any perfection of this kind, but rather envy or hate them—until they either come to see how the gestures are connected to moral qualities, or reflect on the good nature that is manifested by such a compliance with the desires of the adult company.

#### **False honour**

(7) Thinking about honour as I have explained it may show why men are often ashamed for things that aren't vicious and honoured for actions that aren't virtuous. If an action only *appears* vicious to a group of people, even if it isn't so, they will have a bad idea of the agent; and then he may be ashamed, i.e. suffer uneasiness in being thought to be morally evil. In the same way, those who look on an action as morally good will honour the agent, and he may be pleased with the honour even if he himself doesn't perceive any moral good in what has brought it to him.

#### **Moral incapacity is shameful**

[Hutcheson is now using 'moral' in its old sense (see the Glossary), so that 'moral incapacity means 'inability to engage in some part of the ordinary business of being a human being'.]

Again, we shall be ashamed of every evidence of moral incapacity or lack of ability; and there's a sound basis for this when this lack is brought about by our own negligence. Indeed, if any circumstance is looked on as indecent in any country—as ugly, i.e. offensive to others—our love of the

good opinions of others will lead to our being ashamed to be found in such circumstances, even when we're aware that this indecency or offensiveness is not based on nature but is merely an effect of custom. (Thus, being observed in functions of nature [Hutcheson's phrase] that are regarded as indecent and offensive will make us uneasy, although we're aware that they really don't manifest any vice or weakness.) Whereas, on the other hand, since moral abilities of any kind bring us the esteem of others (on the general presumption that we'll use them well), we shall value ourselves on them, i.e. grow proud of them, and be ashamed of any discovery of our lack of such abilities. That is why wealth and power—the great engines of virtue—bring honour from others when they are presumed to be intended for benevolent purposes towards our friends or our country, and are apt to generate pride in the possessor. Because pride is a general passion that can be either good or evil depending on what its basis is, we can describe it as 'the joy that arises from the real or imagined possession of honour or a claim to it'. It's the same with the effects of knowledge, sagacity, strength, which is why men are apt to boast of them.

But when we find that the possessor of such abilities or natural advantages plans to use them only for his own private advantage, the honour ceases, and he tries to conceal them or at any rate doesn't enjoy parading them; and this holds even more strongly when there's a suspicion that his use of his abilities and advantages will be not merely selfish but positively ill-natured. Thus some misers are ashamed of their wealth, and try to conceal it, as the malicious or selfish try to hide their power—sometimes even when there is no positive evil intention, because diminishing their abilities increases the moral good of any little kind action that they perform. [E.g. the millionaire purports to be only mildly affluent, so that he can get big credit for donating £100 to the church-tower fund.]

### **Selfishness is shameful**

In short, actions that flow from public love are, we find, always performed with generous boldness and openness; whereas malicious actions—and even ones that are merely selfish [see **Glossary!**]  
—are performed with shame and confusion and attempts to conceal them. The love of private pleasure is what ordinarily leads to vice; and when men have acquired any lively notions of virtue, they generally begin to be ashamed of everything that reveals selfishness, even in instances where it is innocent. We're apt to think that when others see us engaged in such pursuits they form mean [see **Glossary**] opinions of us, seeing us as too much set on private pleasure; and so we find that in most civilized nations such enjoyments are concealed from those who aren't taking part in them. One example is sexual pleasures between married couples; another is eating and drinking elegant and expensive sorts of meat or drink. In contrast with this, a hospitable table is rather matter of boasting, and so are all other kind, generous offices between married persons, where there's no suspicion of *self*-love in the agent, and he is taken to be acting out of love for his partner. I imagine that this is what first introduced ideas of modesty in civilized nations, and custom has strengthened them enormously, so that we are now ashamed of many things upon the basis of some confused tacit opinions of moral evil, though we don't really know what our reasons are.

### **Honour and shame often come from associations of ideas**

This also shows us why we aren't ashamed of any of the methods of grandeur or high-living. There is such a mixture of moral ideas—

- benevolence,
- abilities kindly employed;
- so many dependents supported,
- so many friends entertained, assisted, protected;

•such a capacity imagined for great and amiable actions,  
—that we are never •ashamed but rather •boast of such things: we never try for obscurity or concealment, but rather want our state and magnificence to be known. If it weren't for this conjunction of moral ideas, no mortal could bear the drudgery of state [here = 'formalized high living'] or refrain from laughing at those who could. Could any man be pleased to have sitting with him at his table a company of *statues* that •had been skillfully designed to eat his various courses, and •were caused by some servant—like so many puppets!—to say the usual trivial things in praise of the meal? Who would want to host a formal reception with a set of *machines* to perform the cringes and whispers?

The shame we suffer from the meanness of dress, table, equipage [see Glossary] is entirely due to the same thing. This meanness is often thought to be evidence of avarice, meanness of spirit, inability or idleness or moral disabilities of one kind or another. To confirm this, notice that men will glory in the meanness of their food when this was part of a good action. Many men who would be •ashamed to be caught having a dinner of cold meat will •boast of having eaten dogs and horses at the siege of Londonderry, and they'll all tell you that they weren't and aren't ashamed of this.

This ordinary connection in our imagination between •external grandeur, propriety in dress, equipage, retinue, badges of honour and •greater than ordinary moral [see Glossary] abilities may *matter* more in the world than some reclusive philosophers realize—I mean the philosophers who pride themselves on despising these external shows. It may be a large part of the reason for a fact that some regard as miraculous, namely that

civil governors who are no abler than their neighbours manage somehow—through some inexpressible awe

and authority—to quell the spirits of the common people and keep them *under* by means of armed forces that are really small—so small that they could easily be conquered by a force that could be recruited from among the disaffected. . . .

We also have here an explanation of why gratifying our superior senses of beauty and harmony, or enjoying the pleasures of knowledge, never gives us any shame or confusion even if our enjoyment is known to all the world. The objects [see Glossary] that provide this pleasure are of a kind that can give the same delights to multitudes; one person's enjoyment of them needn't exclude anyone else from a similar enjoyment. Thus, although we pursue these enjoyments from self-love, because our enjoyment can't be prejudicial to others we can pursue the fullest possible enjoyment of them without being thought to be any way inhumanly selfish. . . . No-one takes someone else to be too selfish because of his pursuit of objects of unexhausted universal pleasure.

This view of honour and shame may also show us why most men are uneasy at being praised in their own presence. Everyone is delighted with the esteem of others, and must get great pleasure from hearing himself being commended; but we don't want others to •see our (selfish) enjoyment of this pleasure, or to •think that we are fond of it or that our good actions are influenced by hopes of being praised; so we choose secrecy for the enjoyment of it, as we do with respect to other pleasures in which others don't share with us.

#### **Compassion is a motive to virtue**

**(8)** Compassion is another state of our mind that strongly proves benevolence to be natural to us—it disposes us to care for the interests of others without looking for private advantage. I hardly need to give examples. Every mortal is made uneasy by any grievous misery he sees someone else involved in, unless he takes the person to be morally evil;

indeed, even in that case it is almost impossible for us to be unmoved. Our own private advantage may •make us do something cruel, or may •overcome pity; but it hardly ever •extinguishes it. In a sudden passion of hatred or anger we may see a person as absolutely evil, and so extinguish pity ·for him·; but when the passion is over, the pity often returns. Sometimes pity is coolly overcome by the force of some disinterested cause that we are engaged in, such as love for our country or zeal for religion. Persecution is generally occasioned [see Glossary] by •love of virtue and •a desire for the eternal happiness of mankind, although our folly makes us choose absurd means to promote it; and it is often accompanied with enough pity to make the persecutor uneasy in the line of conduct that he has chosen, for his powerful reasons; unless his opinion leads him to regard the heretic as absolutely and entirely evil.

The constitution of human nature is wonderfully adapted to move compassion. Our misery or distress immediately •appears in our faces if we don't try hard to prevent it, and •passes some pain along to all the spectators, who always understand the meaning of those dismal signs. Whenever we are suddenly confronted by a risk of evil, we emit shrieks and groans mechanically, so that sometimes no regard for decency can restrain them. This is the voice of nature, understood by all nations, by which everyone present is roused to our assistance and sometimes our injurious enemy is made to relent.

We are not (I repeat) *immediately* aroused by compassion to want our own pain to be removed: we think it right that we should be so affected in this situation, and we dislike those who aren't. What we are immediately aroused to do is to bring relief to the person in misery, without any thought of this relief's also being a private good to ourselves. If we see that relief is impossible, we may think our way through to

the realization that it would be pointless for us to act on our compassion any further; and *then* self-love will prompt us to pull back from the object that occasions our pain and to try to think about other things. But where this line of thought doesn't occur, people are hurried by a natural, kind instinct to •see objects of compassion and •expose themselves to this pain when they can give no reason for it. Public executions are an example of this.

This same urge leads men to see stage tragedies; but another strong reason is also at work here, namely the moral beauty of the characters and actions that we love to behold. I doubt if any audience would be pleased to see fictitious scenes of misery if they weren't informed about the moral qualities of the sufferers, or of their characters and actions. Without such knowledge there would be no beauty to make us want to see such representations; and I don't think we would expose ourselves to the pain ·of compassion· from misery that we knew to be fictitious.

It was the same cause that crowded the Roman theatres to see gladiators. There the people had frequent instances of great courage, and contempt [see Glossary] of death, two great moral abilities, if not virtues. Hence Cicero regards gladiatorial combats as great instructions in fortitude. Among the thoughtless members of the public the antagonist gladiator [evidently the one cast in the role of the 'bad guy'] bore all the blame for the cruelty that was committed, and the courageous and skillful one obtained a reputation for virtue and favour among the spectators, and was justified by the necessity of self-defence. In the meantime they—these thoughtless people—weren't aware that the true occasion of all the real distress or assaults that they were sorry about was their crowding to such sights and favouring the men who gave them such spectacles of courage and opportunities to indulge their natural instinct for compassion.

[This next paragraph concerns the putting on of gladiatorial shows etc. by candidates for political office, as a means of becoming popular with the public.] Suppose a candidate had presented his countrymen only with scenes of misery—emptied the hospitals and infirmaries of all their pitiable inhabitants, or tied up slaves and then butchered them with his own hands—what opinions about himself would he have created? Even if compassion caused his ‘shows’ still to draw the crowds, I very much doubt his chance of being elected if his political rival put on entertainments that were apparently more virtuous or had some scenes of virtue mixed into them.

**Compassion is natural**

This disposition to compassion doesn’t depend on custom,

education, or instruction, as can be seen from the prevalence of compassion in women and children, who are less influenced by custom etc. It’s true that children delight in some actions that are cruel and tormenting to animals they have in their power; but the source of this is not malice or lack of compassion, but rather •their ignorance of the signs of pain that many creatures make, along with •their curiosity to see the various contortions of the animals’ bodies. When children become better acquainted with these creatures, or come by any means to know their sufferings, their compassion often becomes too strong for their reason; as it generally does when they see executions, where as soon as they observe the evidences of distress or pain in the malefactor they are apt to condemn this necessary method of self-defence in the state.

## **6: The importance of this moral sense to the present happiness of mankind Its influence on human affairs**

### **Importance of the moral sense**

(1) You may now see that despite the corruption of manners that is so rightly complained of everywhere, this moral sense has a greater influence on mankind than is generally imagined, although it is often •misdirected by very partial and imperfect views of public good, and often •overcome by self-love. But I'll present some further considerations to show that it gives us more pleasure and pain than all our other faculties. To avoid repetitions let me say now that

wherever any morally good quality gives pleasure from reflection or from honour, the contrary evil one will give corresponding pain from remorse and shame.

Now I shall discuss the moral pleasures, not only as they occur in isolation but also as the most delightful ingredient in the ordinary pleasures of life.

Everyone seems •to be convinced that there is something excellent in the possession of good moral qualities, something superior to all other enjoyments, and on the other hand •to look on a state of moral evil as worse and more wretched than any other whatsoever. We mustn't form our judgment about what people think from how they act; however much they may be influenced by •moral sentiments it's certain that self-interested passions frequently overcome •them, and one-sided views of what our actions will lead to make us do morally evil things while thinking them to be good. Let us rather examine the sentiments that •men always form regarding the state of others when •they are in no way immediately concerned; for in these sentiments human nature is calm and undisturbed and shows its true face.

What picture would we give ourselves of a thinking

creature in a sufficiently happy state, with his mind wholly and uninterruptedly occupied with pleasant sensations of smell, taste, touch etc., with all other ideas being excluded? Wouldn't we not think his state was low, mean and sordid if there were no society, no love or friendship, no good offices [see Glossary]? Next, consider someone whose condition is closer to what we in fact have: I mean someone who has no pleasures but those of the external senses, but who has them ·not uninterruptedly but· with long intervals in between. What will *his* state be like? Do these short fits of pleasure make luxurious [see Glossary] people happy? ·Of course not·! How insipid and joyless the reflections on past pleasure are! The ·intermittent· return of the transient sensation—what a poor compensation that is for the nauseous satieties and wearied boredoms in the intervals! This fact about the structure of our nature—that we are incapable of long enjoyments of the external senses—alerts us to the fact that there must be some other more durable pleasure that doesn't come with such tedious interruptions and disgusting thoughts.

·In our thought-experiment·, let us even combine the pleasures of the external senses with the perceptions of beauty, order, harmony. These are certainly nobler pleasures, and seem to enlarge the mind; and yet how cold and joyless they are if one doesn't also have the moral pleasures of friendship, love and beneficence! Now, if in our judgment the mere •absence of moral good makes the state of a thinking agent contemptible, we always imagine the •presence of contrary dispositions to sink him into a degree of misery from which no other pleasures can relieve him. Would we ever want to be

in the same condition as a wrathful, malicious, revengeful, or envious being even if we were at the same time to enjoy all the pleasures of the external and internal senses? The internal pleasures of beauty and harmony do contribute greatly towards soothing the mind into a forgetfulness of wrath, malice or revenge; and they *must* do so before we can have any tolerable delight or enjoyment, because while these affections [see Glossary] possess the mind there is nothing but torment and misery.

#### **Castle-builders prove it**

What builder of 'castles in the air', depicting to himself imaginary scenes of life in which he thinks he would be happy, ever included treachery, cruelty, or ingratitude in his day-dream, whether as •the steps by which he would climb to his wished-for elevation or as •parts of his character once he had attained it? In such day-dreaming we always conduct ourselves according to the dictates of honour, faith, generosity, courage; and the lowest we can sink is hoping we may be enriched by some innocent accident, chancing to find a pot of gold! But labour, hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, danger, have nothing so detestable in them that our self-love can't allow us to be often exposed to them. On the contrary, the virtues that these •hardships give us opportunities to display are so amiable and excellent that imaginary heroes in romances or epics are hardly ever brought to their highest pitch of happiness without first going through •them all. Where there's no virtue, there's nothing worth wanting or thinking about; the romance or epic must end. Indeed, the virtue of the good action that is being portrayed is so greatly increased by the difficulty—i.e. the natural evil—that accompanies it that we can't easily sustain these •literary or theatrical• works after the distress is over; and if we continue the work, it must be by presenting a new scene of benevolence in a prosperous fortune. A scene of external

prosperity or natural good, without any thing moral or virtuous, can't entertain a person of the dullest imagination, however engaged he is on the side of his hero, because when virtue ceases there's nothing left to wish for our favourite. . . .

#### **Virtue owned superior to all pleasure**

[The Roman consul and soldier Regulus has been mentioned several times already, but now it is necessary to sketch his story. In the first war between Rome and Carthage, Regulus and some of his men were captured. The Carthaginians proposed an exchange of prisoners (or a peace; accounts vary), and they paroled Regulus so that he could go to Rome to present the proposal. In Rome he argued against acceptance, and then honoured his parole—kept his promise—by returning to Carthage where he was tortured to death.]

Let us look at a particular example, to test how much we prefer the possession of virtue to all other enjoyments, and how we look on vice as worse than any other misery. No-one could ever read the history of Regulus without involving himself in the fortunes of that gallant man, sorrowing at his sufferings, and wishing him a better fate. But better *how*? Should he have done what the Carthaginians wanted, saving himself from the intended tortures at the expense of harm to his country? Or should he have violated his oath and promise of returning to Carthage? Will anyone say that either of these is the 'better fate' he wishes his favourite to have? If he had acted in either of those ways, the virtue that gets everyone concerned with his fortunes would have been gone. Let him take his fate like other common mortals. What else do we wish then, but that the Carthaginians had relented in their cruelty, or that providence had by some unexpected event rescued him out of their hands.

Can't we learn from this that we are indeed determined to judge •virtue with peace and safety to be preferable to •virtue with distress, but that at the same time we regard the state of the virtuous, the public-spirited, as preferable—even in the

utmost natural distress—to any flood of of other enjoyments? For this is what we choose to have our favourite hero in, despite all its pains and natural evils. We would never have imagined him as being happier if he had acted otherwise, or in a preferable state with liberty and safety at the expense of his virtue. We judge that that price would have been too high; so we don't think for a moment that he acted foolishly in securing his virtue, his honour, at the expense of his ease, his pleasure, his life. . . .

#### **Necessary in other pleasures**

(2) Let us in the same way examine our sentiments regarding the happiness of others in common life. Wealth and external pleasures loom large in our imaginations; but isn't this opinion of happiness-in-wealth always accompanied by some thought of benevolently doing good offices to persons dear to us, at least to our families or relatives? And when we imagine ourselves as happy through external pleasure, don't our thoughts always include some ideas of the moral enjoyments of society, some communication of pleasure, something of love, of friendship, of esteem, of gratitude? . . . And if someone seems to be violent in pursuit of these pleasures, how base and contemptible everyone sees him as being, even those who couldn't expect any advantage to themselves from his having a more generous notion of pleasure!

If we had no moral sense, no happiness in benevolence, and if we acted from no other principle [see Glossary] than self-love, there's no pleasure of the external senses that we couldn't enjoy alone, with less trouble and expense than in society. But what gives us such a liking [see Glossary] for such pleasure is the admixture of the moral pleasures; what preserves the pleasures of the luxurious from being nauseous and insipid is some appearance of friendship, of love, of communicating pleasure to others. . . .

For further evidence regarding where the happiness of wealth and external pleasure lies, think about having wealth and external pleasure combined with

malice, wrath, revenge;

or merely with

solitude, absence of friendship, of love, of society, of esteem.

You see, all the happiness vanishes like a dream! And yet love, friendship, society, humanity, though accompanied by poverty and toil—even accompanied by lesser degrees of pain, such as don't wholly occupy the mind—are not only loved by others but are even copied; which plainly shows that virtue is the chief happiness in the judgment of all mankind.

#### **The charm in beauty**

(3) Everyone knows that a person's external beauty has a great power over human minds. What gives it this powerful charm, above all other kinds of beauty, is some apprehended morality, some natural or imagined indication of virtue accompanying the beauty. What are the details of beauty that are commonly admired in faces? They are sweetness, mildness, majesty, dignity, vivacity, humility, tenderness, good-nature—i.e. certain airs, proportions, *je ne sais quois* are natural indications of such virtues, or of abilities or dispositions towards them. As I said before about misery or distress appearing in faces, so it is certain that almost all •habitual dispositions of mind shape the face in such a manner as to give some indications of •them to the spectator. Our violent passions are obvious at first view in the countenance, so that sometimes it's impossible to conceal them; and lesser degrees of them have some less obvious effects on the face, effects that an accurate eye will observe. And when the natural air of a face comes close to what such-and-such a passion would produce in it, we make a conjecture from this concerning the main disposition of the person's mind.

As for the fancies that prevail in certain countries towards large lips, little noses, narrow eyes: unless those people themselves tell us under what idea such features are admired—whether as •naturally beautiful in form or in proportion to the rest of the face or •or as indications of some moral qualities—our best guess must be that it is the latter, since this is so much the basis for our own approval or aversion towards faces. And when someone’s face is somewhat disagreeable in form, his moral qualities can get us to like him—even to like his face! With us certain features (hollow eyes, large lips) are imagined to indicate dullness, and others (a certain hair-colour) to indicate wantonness, and both these may be without foundation in nature. Well, can’t we conclude that similar associations of ideas are the basis for approvals that appear unaccountable to us? . . .

Notice how Homer characterizes Helen. However high he had raised our idea of her external beauty, it would have been ridiculous to have brought his countrymen into a war for such a Helen as Virgil has presented her. So Homer still gives her something amiable in a moral sense amidst all her weakness, and often suggests to his reader that ‘Helen’s fear and lonesome sighs’ [Hutcheson gives it in Greek] are the spring of his countrymen’s indignation and revenge.

#### **Why people differ in what they find beautiful**

This line of thought may show us one reason (there are many others) for differences in men’s likings for beauty. The mind of man, though generally disposed to value benevolence and virtue, can through special attention to some kinds of virtue come to have a stronger admiration for some moral dispositions than for others. Military men may admire courage more than other virtues; less courageous persons may admire sweetness of temperament; thoughtfully reflective men. . . . will admire those qualities in others; men with keen passions expect equal returns of all the kind affections,

and are utterly charmed when they get them; a proud man may like those of higher spirit, as being more suitable to his dignity—though pride, when combined with reflection and good sense, will make him appreciate humility in the person he loves. Well, just as the various temperaments of men make various temperaments of others agreeable to them, so they must differ in their likings for beauty according to whether it indicates the qualities most agreeable to themselves.

This also shows us how in virtuous love there can be the greatest beauty without the least charm [= ‘the least prettiness’] to draw in a rival. Love itself gives a beauty to the lover in the eyes of the person who is beloved, a beauty that no other mortal is much affected by. And this is perhaps the strongest charm possible, and the one that will have the greatest power unless there is some very great counter-balance from worldly interest, vice, or gross ugliness.

#### **Manner, motion, gestures**

(4) This same consideration can be extended to the whole manner and motion of any person. Everything we find agreeable somehow indicates cheerfulness, ease, a friendly willingness to oblige, a love of company, with a freedom and boldness that always accompanies an honest straightforward heart. On the other side, what is shocking in manner or motion is roughness, ill-nature, a disregard for others, or a foolish shame-facedness that shows that the person is not experienced in society or in offices of humanity.

Considering the different ceremonies and ways of showing respect that are practised in different nations, we can probably conclude that these manners, motions and gestures are not *naturally* connected with the affections of mind that they are *by custom* made to express. But when custom has made any of them count as expressions of such affections, that will create an association of ideas through which some

will become agreeable and lovely and others extremely offensive, although they are both in their own nature perfectly indifferent.

### **The spring of love between the sexes**

(5) Let us look at how nature leads mankind to the continuance of their race, and by its strongest power •pulls them into something that occasions the greatest toil and anxiety of life, and yet •supports them under it with an inexpressible delight. We might have been •so constructed by nature that we were• aroused to the propagation of our species by an uneasy sensation that determined us to it without any great prospect of happiness; as we see hunger and thirst determine us to preserve our bodies though few of us regard eating and drinking as any considerable happiness. The sexes might have been brought together, as we imagine the lower animals are, by desire alone or by a love of sensual pleasure. But how dull and insipid life would have been if that were all there is to marriage! Who would have had enough resolution to bear all the cares of a family and education of children? Who would, from the general motive of benevolence alone, have chosen to subject himself to natural affection towards an offspring when he could so easily foresee what troubles it might occasion?

So this inclination of the sexes is based on something stronger—something more effective and joyful—than •the solicitations of uneasiness or the •mere desire for sensual pleasure. Beauty creates a favourable presumption of good moral dispositions, and acquaintance **confirms this into** a real love of esteem [see note on page 12]; and where there is little beauty to begin with, a presumption of moral goodness **creates** a love of esteem. This raises an expectation of the greatest moral pleasures along with the sensual ones, and a thousand tender sentiments of humanity and generosity; and it makes us impatient for a society that we imagine full of

unspeakable moral pleasures—a society where nothing is indifferent, and every little service, being evidence of this strong love of esteem, is mutually received with the rapture and gratitude of the greatest benefit and of the most substantial obligation. And when prudence and good-nature influence both sides, this society—this marriage—may fulfill all their expectations.

•And we can see this moral mechanism at work outside marriage also•. When we examine men whose conduct with relation to the fair sex is looser, we'll find that love of sensual pleasure is not the chief motive of debauchery or false gallantry. If it were, the meanest prostitutes would please as much as any. But we know well enough that men are fond of good-nature, faith, pleasantness of temperament, wit, and many other moral qualities, even in a mistress. And this may provide a reason for something that at first seems quite inexplicable, namely that chastity itself has a powerful charm in the eyes of the dissolute man who is trying to destroy it.

This powerful determination to benevolence and other moral sentiments—even if only to limited forms of them—can be seen to bias our minds strongly towards a universal goodness, tenderness, humanity, generosity, and contempt [see Glossary] of private good in our whole conduct; besides the obvious improvement it produces in our external deportment, and in our liking for beauty, order, and harmony. When a hard and obdurate heart is softened in this flame, we'll see it at the same time acquiring a love of poetry, music, the beauty of nature in rural scenes, a contempt of other selfish pleasures of the external senses, neat dress, humane behaviour, and a delight in everything that is gallant, generous and friendly.

### **Society and friendships come from our moral sense**

In the same way we are determined to •engage in• common

friendships and acquaintanceships, not by a sullen grasp of what we need, nor by prospects of self-interest, but by an incredible variety of little agreeable engaging evidences of love, good-nature, and other morally amiable qualities in those we converse with. Not the least of these is an inclination to cheerfulness, a delight in amusing others, which procures approval and gratitude towards the person who puts us in such an agreeable, innocent, good-natured, and easy state of mind. . . .

**The power of oratory is based on it**

(6) This moral sense is the basis for all the orator's power. The various figures of speech are the various devices that a lively intellect, warmed with passions suitable to the occasion, naturally runs into. . . . They move the hearers only by giving a lively representation of the passions of the speaker, which are communicated to the hearers in the way I earlier described for one passion, namely pity.

The passions that the orator tries to arouse are all based on moral qualities. All the bold metaphors or descriptions, all the cunning methods of expostulation, arguing, and addressing the audience, all the appeals to mankind, are simply livelier ways of giving the audience a stronger impression of the moral qualities of the person accused or defended, of the action advised or dissuaded; and all the antitheses, witticisms, fine-sounding cadences—whatever inferior kind of beauty they may have, considered in themselves—won't persuade anyone of anything unless they move the passions by some species of morality. They may raise a little admiration for the speaker among those who are already on his side, but they will more often raise contempt in his adversaries. But when you display the beneficence of an action, the good effect it will have on the public in promoting the welfare of the innocent and relieving the unjustly distressed, if you prove your claims you'll make every hearer come over to your

side. When you want to recommended a person, display his humanity, his generosity, his care for the public good and capacity to promote it, his contempt of dangers, and his private pleasures; do all that and you're sure to procure him love and esteem. If at the same time you show his distress, or the injuries he has suffered, you arouse pity and every tender affection.

On the other side, represent the barbarity or cruelty of an action, the misery it will bring to the kind, the faithful, the generous (or merely to the innocent), and you create an abhorrence of it in the breasts of the audience, even if *they* wouldn't have suffered from the action in question. Similarly, if you want to make a person infamous, despised and hated, represent him as cruel, inhuman, or treacherous towards some people (it doesn't matter how remote they are from your audience); or show him merely to be selfish and given to solitary luxury, without regard to any friend or the interests of others; and you have gained your point as soon as you show that your claims are true. Think how our admiration for any celebrated action is stopped by the thought: 'He was no fool; he knew it would turn to his own advantage.'

Are such speeches effective only when the members of audience are learned and socially polished? Must men know the theories of the moralists and politicians, or the art of rhetoric, to be persuadable? Must they be familiar in detail with all the methods of promoting self-interest? No! On the contrary, the rough undisciplined multitude are the most affected. Oratory has never had anywhere else as much power as it did in popular states, and that too before the sciences were completed. When men have some knowledge of the various topics of argument and find themselves under fire from them, reflection and study may make them suspect that a speaker is *up to something* and make them, cautious

about agreeing with what is said; but rough untutored people are still open to every moral impression, and are carried furiously along without caution or hesitation. . . .

### **Poetry pleases because of this moral sense**

(7) We shall find this ·moral· sense to be the basis also of the chief pleasures of poetry. In my *Inquiry concerning Beauty* etc. I said something about the basis for delight in numbers, measures, metaphors, similes. But just as the contemplation of •moral objects, either of vice or virtue, affects us more strongly—and moves our passions in a quite different and more powerful way—than the contemplation of •natural beauty or so-called ugliness, so also the beauties that move us most are those that are related to our moral sense; they affect us more intensely than the representation of natural objects, even in the liveliest descriptions. Dramatic and epic poetry are entirely addressed to this ·moral· sense, and raise our passions through the fortunes of characters that are clearly represented as morally good or morally evil. We could see this more fully if we considered the passions separately.

When we are working to create a desire for, or admiration of, a really beautiful object, we aren't content with a bare narration; rather, we try to present the object itself if we can, or the most lively image of it. That is why an epic poem or ·theatrical· tragedy gives a vastly greater pleasure than the writings of philosophers, though both aim at recommending virtue. If the representation of an action is judicious, natural, and lively, it will make us admire the good and detest the vicious. . . .by means of our moral sense, without being prodded by any thoughts of the poet's. [Hutcheson then quotes the Latin poet Horace on the need for good writing to be based on moral knowledge and a good grasp of how things go in everyday life.]

### **Imagery in poetry is based on the moral sense**

This same ·moral· sense is the basis for the power of that great beauty in poetry, the rhetorical device through which every affection is made a person, every natural event or cause or object is animated by moral epithets. ·When this device is at work·, we combine •natural objects with the contemplation of moral circumstances and qualities, so as to increase •their beauty or ugliness; and we affect the hearer in a more lively manner with the affections described, by representing them as persons. Thus

- a shady wood must have its solemn venerable presiding spirit, and its own rural gods;
- every clear fountain has its sacred chaste nymph;
- every river its bountiful god with his urn, and perhaps with a cornucopia spreading good things along its banks.
- The day-light is holy, benign, and powerful to banish the pernicious spirits of the night.
- The morning is a kind, busy goddess, skipping over the dewy mountains and ushering in light to gods and men.
- War is an impetuous, cruel, indiscriminate monster, whom no virtue, no call for compassion, can move from his bloody purposes.
- The steel is unrelenting; the arrow and spear are impatient to destroy, and carry death on their points.
- Our modern engines of war are also frightful personages, imitating with their rude throats the thunder of Jove.
- The moral imagery of death is everywhere known: his insensibility to pity, his inflexibility, and universal impartial empire.
- No-one could match Horace's portrayal of Fortune, with all her retinue and devotees, and with her rigidly

severe servant *Necessity*.

Qualities of mind also become persons.

- Love becomes a Venus, or a Cupid;
- Courage becomes a Mars or a Pallas Athene protecting and assisting the hero;
- before them march Terror and Dread, Flight and Pursuit, shouts and amazement.

Indeed even the most sacred poets are often led into this imagery, and represent Justice and Judgment as supporting the Almighty's throne, and Mercy and Truth going before his face; they show us Peace as springing up from the earth, and Mercy looking down from heaven

Everyone perceives a greater beauty in this manner of representation, this imagery, this conjunction of moral ideas,

than in the fullest narration or the most lively natural description. When one reads the fourth book of Homer's *Iliad*, and is prepared to imagine the bloody sequel to the council of the gods, amidst the most beautiful description that ever was imagined of shooting an arrow one meets with its moral epithet, 'the source of blackest woes', and is more moved by this detail than by all the profusion of natural description that man could imagine.

### History

(8) History derives its chief excellence from representing people's manners and characters; the contemplation of which in nature being very affecting, they must necessarily give pleasure when well related. . . .

## **7: A deduction of some complex moral ideas —of obligation and of right (perfect/imperfect/external), (alienable/inalienable)— from this moral sense**

(1) To conclude this subject, we see from what I have said what the true origin of moral ideas is, namely this moral *sense* of excellence in every appearance or evidence of benevolence. It remains to be explained how we acquire more specific ideas of virtue and vice, abstracting from any human or divine law.

### Obligation

Can we have any sense of obligation that doesn't involve the laws of a superior? We must answer according to the

different senses of the word 'obligation'. I shall distinguish two of them.

**A:** By 'obligation' we may mean: a determination, without regard to our own self-interest, to approve actions and to perform them; a determination that will make us uneasy and displeased with ourselves if we act contrary to it.

In this meaning of the word all men have a natural obligation to be benevolent; and they are still under its influence even

when through errors about the natural tendency of their actions this moral sense leads them to evil—unless by long inveterate ·bad· habits the determination is greatly weakened. ·I only say ‘weakened’· because it seems hardly possible to extinguish it entirely. Here is another way of saying essentially the same thing:

This internal sense and instinct towards benevolence [Hutcheson’s phrase] will either •influence our actions or else •make us very uneasy and dissatisfied; and ·in the latter case· we’ll be aware that we are in a base unhappy state—knowing this without considering any law whatsoever, or any external advantages lost or disadvantages impending. . . .

We get indications of what is over-all beneficent and what is not—enough of them to give us a good chance of discovering the true tendency of every action, letting us see, sooner or later, the evil tendency of actions that at first looked good. And if we have no friends so faithful as to criticise us, the persons we have harmed won’t fail to upbraid us. Thus, the only way anyone—*anyone*—can secure for himself a perpetual serenity, satisfaction, and self-approval is through a serious inquiry into the tendency of his actions, and a perpetual concern for universal good according to the soundest notions of it.

Alternatively,

**B:** We can use ‘obligation’ to mean: a motive from self-interest, sufficient to determine to a certain course of actions all those who duly consider it and pursue their own advantage wisely.

We may have a sense of such an obligation by reflecting on the determination of our nature to approve virtue, to be •pleased and happy when we reflect upon our having acted virtuously, and •uneasy when we are conscious of having acted otherwise; and also by considering how much

more highly we value the happiness of virtue to any other enjoyment. We can also get a sense of this sort of obligation by considering the reasons showing that a constant course of benevolent and social actions is the most promising means of furthering the natural good of every individual (as Cumberland and Pufendorf have shown); and all this without bringing in any law.

But if **(i)** our moral sense becomes greatly weakened and the selfish passions grow strong either through •some general corruption of nature or •deeply rooted ·bad· habits; or if **(ii)** our understanding is weak and we are often in danger of being hurried by our passions into rash judgments that malicious actions will be more in our interests than beneficence; the question then arises as to what is necessary to **(ii)** engage men to beneficent actions or **(i)** induce ·in them· a steady sense of an obligation to act for the public good. *Then* no doubt a law with sanctions, given by a superior being with enough power to make us happy or miserable, is needed to counter-balance those apparent motives of ·self-interest, to calm our passions, and to make room for •the recovery of our moral sense or at least for •a sound view of where our interests lie.

#### **How far virtue can be taught**

**(2)** The moral philosopher’s principal business is to show, from solid reasons, the following:

Universal benevolence tends to the happiness of the benevolent person, either •from the pleasures of reflection, honour, and the natural tendency to perform good offices for men upon whose aid we must depend for our happiness in this world; or •from the sanctions of divine laws made known to us by the constitution of the universe;

·the last clause being there· so that no apparent views of ·self-interest will counteract this natural inclination. But it

is not part of his business to try to show that prospects of our own advantage of any kind can raise in us real love to others.

Remove the obstacles from self-love and nature itself will incline us to benevolence. Let the misery of excessive selfishness and all its passions be explained just once, so that self-love stops counteracting •our natural propensity to benevolence, and when •this noble disposition gets loose from these bonds of ignorance and false views of •self-interest, it will be assisted *even by self-love* and grow strong enough to make a noble virtuous character. The moral philosopher's next task is to enquire, by reflection on human affairs, what course of action most effectively promotes the universal good, what universal rules or maxims are to be observed, and in what circumstances the reason for them alters so as to admit exceptions. All this is aimed at having our good inclinations directed by reason and a sound knowledge of the interests of mankind. But virtue itself, i.e. good dispositions of mind, are not directly taught, are not produced by instruction; they must be originally implanted in our nature by its great Author, and then strengthened and confirmed by our own cultivation.

### Objection

(3) We are often told that there's no need to suppose that such a sense of morality has been given to men, because reflection and instruction would •recommend the same actions on the basis of arguments of self-interest, and •engage us from the acknowledged principle of self-love to practice them—all without this 'unintelligible determination' to benevolence or the 'occult [see Glossary] quality' of a moral sense.

### The moral sense doesn't come from reflection

It is perhaps true that reflection and reason might lead us to approve as advantageous to us the same actions •that

benevolence calls for. But wouldn't reflection and reason generally recommend to us •as healthy• the same foods that our taste represents as pleasant? Are we to infer from this that we have no sense of taste? or that such a sense is useless? No! It is obvious what the use is of the moral sense and the sense of taste: despite the mighty *reason* that we boast of as marking us out from other animals, its processes are too slow, too full of doubt and hesitation, to serve us whenever speed is necessary. Reason won't always show us how to survive, without the external senses; and it won't always direct our actions for the good of the whole, without this moral sense. And we couldn't be so strongly determined at all times to do what is most conducive to either of these ends—our survival, the public good—without these expeditious monitors and importunate sollicitors

[= 'instant warning-system [the outer senses] and forceful guide [the moral sense]]. Also, when we act vigorously in pursuit of these ends we can't be as nobly rewarded by the calm dull reflections of self-interest as we would be by those delightful sensations—the outputs of our sense of taste and of our moral sense.

This natural determination to approve and admire actions, or to hate and dislike them, is no doubt an occult quality. But is it any more mysterious that

the idea of an action should raise esteem or contempt, than that

the motion or tearing of flesh should give pleasure or pain, or that

the act of volition should move flesh and bones?

In the latter case, we get the •explanatory• burden to be carried by the brain, elastic fibres, animal spirits and elastic fluids, like the Indian's elephant and tortoise; but go one step further •by asking what makes the animal spirits move•, and you'll find the whole problem as difficult as it was at

first, and just as much a mystery as this determination to love and approve (or hate and despise) actions and agents, without bringing ·self·-interest into it at all, depending on whether they appear benevolent (or the contrary). [Locke tells a story of an Indian philosopher who •said that the world was carried by an elephant, which was carried by a tortoise, but who •didn't know what carried the tortoise.]

**Hutcheson's next half-sentence:** When they offer it as a presumption that there can be no such sense, antecedent to all prospect of interest, that these actions for the most part are really advantageous. . .

**what he seems to have meant:** The people whose views I am discussing announce confidently that there can't be a moral sense such as I am defending—one that is independent of any thoughts of one's own interests—and their reason for this seems to be that one's own interests *are* always involved: most of these actions that I say are approved by the moral sense are really advantageous. . .

. . . in one way or another, to the agent, the approver, or mankind in general by whose happiness our own state may be some way made better. Faced with this, we should ask some questions:

Supposing the Deity intended to impress such a sense of something amiable in actions (as he well may have), what sort of actions would a good god determine us to approve? Must we say that such a determination is possible only if it leads us to admire actions that bring no advantage to mankind, or to love agents for their being eminent triflers?

·It's utterly obvious that the answer to the second question is No·. The actions that a wise and good god will determine us to approve if he gives us any such sense at all must be ones that are useful to the public. So the fact that we approve

such actions can't be taken as evidence that God has *not* given us such a sense! The line of thought I am opposing is on a par with this:

No genuine revelation teaches us good sense, humanity, justice, and a rational worship, because reason and ·self·-interest confirm and recommend such principles [see Glossary] and services, ·thus putting revelation out of business·. So we should ·reject good sense, humanity and the rest and· greedily take in every contradiction, foppery, and pageantry, as a truly divine institution without anything humane or useful to mankind.

#### **The moral sense judges laws**

**(4)** Authors who defend rival theories—derive all ideas of good and evil from •the private advantage of the agent, or from •relation to a law and its sanctions, known either from reason or through revelation—are perpetually relying on this moral sense that they say doesn't exist! They do this not only

by calling the laws of the Deity 'just' and 'good', and affirming the justice and rightness of the Deity's governing us,

but also

by using a set of words that actually convey something different from what these writers claim to be their only meaning.

For them, 'x has an obligation to do A' means only that some set-up—of nature or of some governing power—makes it advantageous for x to do A'. ·And they have corresponding accounts of the meanings of the other main moral words·. If these definitions are substituted wherever we meet with the words 'ought', 'should', 'must' used in a moral sense, many of their sentences would seem very strange—e.g. that the Deity must act rationally, ought not to punish the innocent,

must make the state of the virtuous better than that of the wicked, must observe promises. Substituting the proposed definitions of the words ‘must’, ‘ought’, ‘should’ etc. would make these sentences very disputable or outright ridiculous.

(5) Our basic ideas of moral good don’t depend on laws; that is made obvious by our constant inquiries into the justice of laws themselves, and not only human but also divine laws. What can be the meaning of the universal opinion that God’s laws are just, and holy, and good? Human laws can be called good because of their conformity to divine law. But to call the laws of the supreme Deity good, or holy, or just—if all goodness, holiness, and justice is constituted by laws, or the will of a superior—must be an empty tautology, amounting to ‘God wills what he wills’.

If we are to do better than that, we must first suppose that there is something in actions that is taken to be absolutely good; that this is benevolence, i.e. a desire for the public natural happiness of thinking agents; and that our moral sense perceives this excellence. Then we can contentfully, non-tautologically call the laws of the Deity ‘good’, when we think they are contrived to promote the public good in the most effectual and impartial manner. And the Deity himself is called good ‘in a moral sense’ when we think that his whole providence tends to the universal happiness of his creatures. . . .

Some writers say that the *goodness* of the divine laws consists in their conformity to some ‘essential rectitude’ of God’s nature. But they must excuse us from assenting to this until they make us understand the meaning of this metaphor, ‘essential rectitude’, enabling us to tell whether it means anything more than ‘perfectly wise, uniform, impartial benevolence’.

### How constraint differs from obligation

This lets us see how constraint differs from obligation. You don’t need me to tell you that by ‘constraint’ I don’t mean an external force moving our limbs without our consent, because when that happens we aren’t *agents* at all; whatever results from those movements of our limbs is not anything that we *did*. My topic is not that, but rather the constraint that makes us act in a certain way because we are afraid of some evil upshot if we don’t. There is in fact no difference between this sort of constraint and *obligation* in the second sense of the word reported in (4) above, in which ‘x has an obligation to do A’ means that x is so constituted that doing A is in his interests (meaning *external* interests; not including the delightful consciousness that arises from the moral sense). And it seems that everyone distinguishes even this sort of constraint from obligation.

- If we regard a certain action of ours as base, we’ll never say we were ‘obliged’, but may claim to have been ‘constrained’, to perform it.
- We don’t say that God’s laws, through the rewards and punishments associated with them, ‘constrain’ us; we say that they ‘oblige’ us.
- We don’t call obedience to the Deity ‘constraint’ except as a metaphor, though many people admit that they are influenced by fear of punishments.

But if an almighty evil being required us, under grievous penalties, acts of treachery, cruelty and ingratitude, we would call *this* ‘constraint’. The difference is plainly this: when any sanctions co-operate with our moral sense in driving us to perform actions that we count as morally good, we say we are ‘obliged’ to perform them; but when rewards or punishments oppose our moral sense we say we are ‘bribed’ or ‘constrained’. In the former case we call the lawgiver good, because he intends the public happiness; in

the latter case we call him evil or unjust because he has the contrary intention. If all our ideas of moral good and evil were derived solely from beliefs about private advantage or loss in actions, I don't see how any distinction could be made in the meanings of 'constraint' and 'obligation'.

### Rights

(6) This moral sense also gives us our ideas of rights. Whenever it appears to us that it would over-all tend to the general good for anyone in circumstances C to be allowed to do or demand or possess something x, we say that anyone in C has a *right* to do or possess or demand x. This right is greater or less depending on whether the tendency to the public good is greater or less.

### Perfect rights

The rights that are called 'perfect' are *necessary* to the public good in such a way that •the universal violation of them would make human life intolerable, and •any individual violation of them brings misery to the person whose rights are thus violated. And on the other hand fulfilling these rights in every instance tends to the public good, either •directly or •by promoting the innocent advantage of a part of the public. This obviously leads to a two-part consequence regarding the state of affairs in the state of nature, i.e. before civil government has been constituted: (i) any **particular** use of violence to defend or enforce •such rights can't be more harmful to the public than the violation of •them with impunity; and (ii) the **universal** use of force on behalf of perfect rights is exceedingly advantageous to the public as a whole, by making everyone dread any attempts against the perfect rights of others.

### Right of war, and punishment

The moral effect of the violation of the perfect rights of others is a right to •war and to •any violence that is necessary to

oblige the perpetrators to repair the damage and give security against such offences in the future. In a state of nature this is the only basis for the right to punish criminals and to use violence to enforce our rights, and the right belongs to the persons who have been harmed or to their aides or representatives. In a civil state, however, the injured parties have consented to the transfer of the right of punishment to the magistrate [see Glossary]. Perfect rights include our rights

- to our lives,
- to the fruits of our labours,
- to insist on the fulfillment of contracts when the contractors are capable of fulfilling them,
- to direct our own actions—either for public good or for innocent private good—without submitting them to any kind of direction by others,

and many others of a similar sort.

### Imperfect rights

An imperfect right is one that could be universally violated without necessarily making men miserable. They include the rights that

- the poor have to the charity of the wealthy,
- all men have to get help that wouldn't involve the helper in any trouble or expense,
- benefactors have to expressions of gratitude,

and such like. Such rights tend to the improvement and increase of positive good in any society, but are not absolutely necessary to prevent universal misery. A violation of them merely blocks men from receiving some happiness they had expected from the humanity or gratitude of others; but it doesn't deprive them of any good that they had before. From this description it appears that a violent enforcement of such rights would generally occasion greater evil than the violation of them. Besides, allowing force in such cases would deprive men of the greatest pleasure in actions of kindness,

humanity, gratitude—actions that would stop appearing amiable when men could be constrained to perform them.

When someone violates someone else's •imperfect rights, he only shows that his benevolence is not strong enough to make him care about the positive good of others when this is in the least opposite to his own; but someone who violates someone else's •perfect rights shows himself to be positively evil or cruel, or at least so immoderately selfish as not to care about the positive misery and ruin of others when he thinks there is something in it for him. In violating imperfect rights we show a weak desire for public happiness, a desire that is outweighed by every small view of private ·self·-interest; but in violating perfect rights we show to be ourselves so entirely negligent regarding the misery of others that every prospect of increasing our own good overcomes all our compassion towards their sufferings. Now, just as the absence of good is easier to bear than the presence of misery, so our good wishes towards the positive good of others are weaker than our compassion towards their misery. So he who violates imperfect rights shows that his self-love overcomes only the ·relatively weak· desire for positive good for others; whereas he who violates perfect rights reveals a desire to advance his own positive good that is so selfish that it overcomes all ·relatively strong· compassion towards the misery of others.

### External rights

Beside these two sorts of rights, there is a third—namely *external* rights. Here are some examples:

- a wealthy miser's right to recall his loan from an industrious poor tradesman at any time;
- x's right to demand that y perform the covenant that he made with x, even if the covenant was unfairly loaded against y's interests;
- a wealthy heir's right to refuse to pay any debts that were contracted by him when he was under age,

although there was no fraud on the lender's part.

[Hutcheson adds a fourth item which is rather obscure. It boils down to this:]

- anyone's right to get advantage from legitimate legal technicalities, even if they cut across what had been intended or expected by the other parties to the deal in question.

**how Hutcheson characterizes these, verbatim:** [i] When the doing, possessing, or demanding of any thing is really detrimental to the public in any particular instance, as being contrary to the imperfect right of another; but yet [ii] the universally denying men this faculty of doing, possessing, or demanding that thing, or of using force in pursuance of it, would do more mischief than all the evils to be feared from the use of this faculty.

**two possible readings of (i):** (ia) *every* exercise of an external right conflicts with an imperfect right of someone else; (ib) *some* exercises of external rights conflict with an imperfect right of someone else.

**two possible readings of (ii):** (iia) things would be over-all worse if *all* exercises of external rights were forbidden; (iib) things would be over-all worse if *even one* exercise of an external right were forbidden.

[It seems clear that Hutcheson must have intended either (ia)-and-(iib) or else (ib)-and-(iia); but it isn't clear which of these is right.]

And this shows that there can be no right to use force in opposition even to external rights, because it tends to the universal good to allow force in support of them.

### What rights can conflict with one another

No action, demand, or possession can be necessary or conducive to the public good if its contrary is necessary or conducive to the same end; so there can't be any conflict between

two perfect rights,  
 two imperfect rights, or  
 one perfect right and one imperfect right.

But it may often tend to the public good to allow a right to •do or possess or demand something and •to use force in pursuance of it, although it would have been more humane and kind for the right-holder to have acted otherwise and not claimed his right. But yet a violent opposition to [= 'any use of force against'] these rights would have been vastly more pernicious than all the inhumanity in the use of them. And therefore, although there can't be any conflict between

two external rights,

there can be a conflict between

one external right and one imperfect right.

Still, there is no right to use force to support an imperfect right, even when it has been violated. What emerges from all this, therefore, is that there can never be a conflict between two rights in which each side is entitled to take up arms; there can never be a symmetrically just war [Hutcheson's words were 'a just war on both sides at the same time'].

#### **Alienable and inalienable rights**

(7) There is another important classification of rights, into alienable and inalienable. A right is alienable only if these two conditions are satisfied:

- (a) It is actually naturally *possible* for the right-holder to transfer the right to someone else;
- (b) We can see that some valuable purpose may be served by the transferring of such rights.

By (a) it appears that the right of private judgment—i.e. of our inward sentiments—is inalienable, because we can't •effectively• command ourselves to think whatever we (or others) want us to think. Also inalienable are our internal affections, which necessarily flow from our opinions of their objects. From (b) it follows that our right to serve God in

the way that we think acceptable is not alienable; because it can't ever serve any valuable purpose, to make men worship God in a way that they think is displeasing to him. In the same way, a direct right over our lives and limbs can't be transferred to anyone else, making him entitled to put us to death or maim us as he pleases. But our right to life and limb is alienable in a certain limited way: we *do* have a right to risk our lives in any good action that is of importance to the public; and it may often be very useful for such perilous actions to be directed by the prudence of others in pursuing a public good; as soldiers are directed by their general or by a council of war. These examples •may serve to show the use of the two conditions which must both obtain if a right is to be alienable, and •will explain the manner of applying them in other cases.

#### **The foundation of property**

(8) As a start on seeing what some of the more important rights of mankind are based on, notice this: Probably 90% or more of the things that are useful to mankind come from their labour and industry [see Glossary]; and consequently when men become so numerous that the natural product of the earth isn't sufficient to provide everyone with what they need for subsistence—let alone leisure and innocent entertainment—there comes to be a need for production to be increased, and thus a need for men to •behave in ways that most effectively promote industry and •refrain from actions that would have the contrary effect. We all know that general benevolence alone isn't a strong enough motive for industry to get people to subject themselves •to the burden and toil of it or •to the many other aspects of it that our self-love makes us dislike. To strengthen our motives for industry, therefore, we have the strongest attractions of blood, of friendship, of gratitude, and the additional motives of honour and even of external interest. Self-love is really

as necessary to the good of the whole as benevolence is. . . . Without these additional motives, self-love would generally oppose the pulls of benevolence and take the side of malice, i.e. get us to behave in the same way that malice would lead us to. Any course of action that would banish from our minds the stronger ties of benevolence, or the additional motives of honour and advantage—and so hinder us from pursuing industriously the course of action that really increases the good of the whole—is evil; and we are obliged to avoid it.

First, then, depriving any person of the fruits of his own innocent labour takes away all motives to industry from self-love or the nearer ties, leaving us with general benevolence as our only motive for industry; indeed, it leaves industrious people open to predation by lazy people, and sets self-love *against* industry. This is the basis for our right of control and ownership of the fruits of our labours. If we lacked that right

we could hardly hope for any industry, or anything beyond the product of uncultivated nature. Industry would be confined to our present needs, and would stop when those needs were provided for; or at most it would continue only as far as the weak motive of general benevolence could drive it.

That's what will happen if aren't allowed to store up beyond present needs, and to dispose of anything we don't need either in barter for other kinds of necessities or for the service of our friends or families. Out of this comes the right that men have

- to lay up for the future the goods that won't be spoiled by the passage of time,
- to barter them away in trade,
- to give them to friends, children, relations.

Without that right, we would deprive industry of all the motives of self-love, friendship, gratitude, natural affection. . . .

The miser's external right to his useless hoards has the same basis, namely that allowing persons by violence or without the acquirer's consent to take the use of his acquisitions would discourage industry, and take away all the pleasures of generosity, honour, charity, which cease when men can be forced to these actions. Besides, in many cases there is no way to decide who is a miser and who isn't.

#### **The right of marriage**

Marriage must be structured in such a way as let us know who the father is of each child; otherwise we deprive the males of one of the strongest motives to public good, namely natural affection, and we discourage industry, as I have shown above.

#### **Commerce**

No individual man's labour can provide him with everything he needs, though it may provide him with an unneeded abundance of one sort of produce. Hence the right of commerce, and of selling or bartering away our goods; and also the rights from contracts and promises, either to supply goods or to supply labour.

#### **The right of civil government**

Mankind get great advantages from having unprejudiced arbitrators who are empowered to decide the controversies that routinely arise among neighbours through the partiality of self-love; and also from having prudent directors to instruct the multitude in the best methods of promoting the public good and of defending themselves against one another and against foreigners—these directors being armed with sufficient force to make their decrees and orders effective at home and to make the society formidable abroad. These advantages show well enough the right men have to establish civil government and to subject their alienable rights to the disposal of their governors, within such limits as men's

prudence suggests. Those limits bind the governors. They have at least an external right to dispose of people's rights as the governors' prudence shall direct, for achieving the purposes for which they were put in that position in the first place; but the scope of that external right is *strictly* determined by the limits on what rights the people transferred to the governors.

#### **Corollaries for comparing the degrees of virtue and vice in actions**

(9) These examples may show how our moral sense, by a little reflection on the tendencies of actions, may get the rights of mankind properly related to one another. Let us now apply the general canon laid down above for comparing the degrees of virtue and vice in actions, in a few corollaries besides the one that I have already deduced.

#### **The origin of government**

(10) From (7) it follows that all human power or authority must consist in a right transferred to some person or council, to dispose of the **alienable** rights of others; and that consequently no government can be so absolute that it has a right to do or command anything it likes. 'Perhaps a merely external right to do anything it likes?'—no, not even that. Wherever an invasion is made upon **inalienable** rights, there must arise a right—either perfect or external—to resistance. When that happens, there are only two situations where the subjects' right to resist is morally constrained:

- When the subjects foresee that because of their lack of power their resistance will probably bring greater evils to the public than the ones they want to remove; and
- When they find that the governors, who are mainly very useful to the public, have been led by some unwise passion to do an injury too small to overbal-

ance •the advantages of their administration or •the evils that resistance would probably cause—especially when the injury is of a private nature and not likely to be a precedent leading to the ruin of others.

Inalienable rights are essential limitations in all governments.

#### **Absolute government**

By 'absolute government'—whether of a prince [see Glossary] or a council or both jointly—we understand a right to dispose of the natural force and goods of a whole people, as far as they are naturally alienable, according to the prudence of the prince/council/both, for the public good of the state, i.e. the whole people; without any set limitation on •the quantity of the goods, •the manner of getting them, or •the proportion of the subjects' labours that they shall demand. But in all states there is a silently presupposed trust that the power conferred will be employed according to the best judgment of the rulers *for the public good*. Thus, if the governors openly declare their intention to destroy the state, or act in a way that is certain to have that effect, the essential trust presupposed in all conveyance of civil power is violated, and the grant of the people's rights is thereby made void. [This paragraph comes closer than its predecessor to saying that civil government is based on a *contract* between subject and governors; and the next paragraph edges closer still; but the word 'contract' doesn't appear anywhere in Hutcheson's discussions of government.]

#### **Limited government**

A prince or council or both jointly may be limited in various ways. It may be that the consent of the prince (or the council) is needed for acts of the council (or the prince) to be valid. Or it may be that in the very constitution of this supreme power certain affairs are explicitly excluded from the jurisdiction of the prince (or of the council, or of both). An example of that

would be this:

Several independent states jointly form a general council, and build into the constitution they give it in launching it an explicit statement of things that it is not to be allowed to do.

Here is another:

In the very constitution of a state, a certain method for electing the prince or of the members of the supreme council is fixed on, and the purpose of their assembling is declared.

In cases like this, it's not in the power of the prince/council/both to alter the very form of government, or to take away the right that the people have to be governed in such-and-such a manner by a prince or council elected by such-and-such a procedure, unless they have the universal consent [Hutcheson's phrase] of the very people who have subjected themselves to this form of government. So there can be a very regular state—a very stable and disciplined state—where no universal absolute power is possessed by a prince or a council or any other assembly, apart from the assembly of the whole people who are drawn together into that state. If the supreme power in such a state tries to alter the very form of government, the people may have no remedy according to the constitution itself; but that doesn't imply that the supreme power *does* have such a right; unless we muddle up all ideas of *right* with those of *external force*. In a case like this, the citizens' only remedy is a universal insurrection against such perfidious trustees.

### **The nature of despotic power**

Despotic power is a power that x has over y in either of two situations. The first is this:

- y has criminally harmed x in some way, and
- it is consistent with public safety for x to allow y to go on living.

In such a case, x has the power to require that y by his labours repair the damages he has done. The second situation is this:

- y is indebted to x for more than he can possibly pay out of his resources.

In this case, x has the power to require that y works solely towards paying off the debt, until it is entirely discharged. In each case, the power is limited to the goods and labours of the criminal or the debtor; it includes no right to inflict torture or prostitution, or . . .to do anything that isn't significantly related to repairing the damage, paying the debt, or providing security against future offences. The characteristic of despotic **power** is that it is solely intended for the good of the power-holder and not for the good of person over whom the power is held; so we can say that the characteristic of despotic **government** is that it is solely intended for the good of the governors, without any tacit trust of consulting the good of the governed. Despotic government, in this sense, is directly inconsistent with the notion of civil government.

From the idea of *right* as I have explained it, it rigorously follows that there can be no right, and no limitation of right, that is inconsistent with or opposed to the greatest public good. Therefore, in cases of extreme necessity when the state can't otherwise be preserved from ruin, it must certainly be just and good for **governors**. . .to use the force of the state for its own preservation, beyond the limits fixed by the constitution. These will be isolated acts that are not to be made precedents. And on the other side of the situation, when the state's survival requires it the **subjects** may justly take back the powers ordinarily given to their governors, or may counteract them. We all allow this privilege of *utter necessity* in defence of ·infringements of· the most perfect private rights—for example, condoning the theft of food by someone who otherwise would starve to death·. It may

be true that public rights are even more important, but so also are public necessities! These necessities must be very grievous and flagrant; otherwise they can't outweigh the evils of ·on the **governors'** side· violating a tolerable constitution by an arbitrary act of power, or ·on the **subjects'** side· by an insurrection or civil war. No person or state can be happy unless they think their important rights are secured against the cruelty, avarice, ambition, or caprice of their governors. And no magistracy [see Glossary] can be safe or effective in doing what it was set up to do if there are frequent fears of insurrections. Thus, whatever temporary acts may be allowed in extraordinary cases; whatever may be lawful in the one-time act of a bold legislator who without previous consent rescues a slavish •people and puts their affairs in the hands of a person or council elected or limited by •themselves, so that they'll soon have confidence in their own safety and in the wisdom of the administration. . . . nevertheless, no human being's superior wisdom or goodness or any other quality give him a right to impose laws on others without their explicit or tacit consent, or to dispose of the fruits of their labours or of any other right whatsoever. Why not? Because. . . no-one who *takes* the governing role can demonstrate his superior wisdom or goodness well enough to make his subjects satisfied and secure in the way that is necessary for them to be happy. Thus, superior wisdom or goodness gives no right to men to govern others.

#### **Divine government is based on wisdom and goodness**

But now consider the Deity, whom we take to be omniscient and benevolent and free from any of the *needs* that are the usual cause of injuries towards others. It must be amiable [see Glossary] in such a being to take on the governing of weak, inconstant creatures who are often misled by selfishness, and to give them laws. Every mortal should be led by his public love—his universal benevolence—to submit to these

laws, because they are designed for the good of the whole and for the greatest private good that is consistent with that; and everyone can be sure that he'll be better directed towards these ends by the divine laws than by his own greatest prudence and circumspection. And so we think that a good and wise god must have a perfect right to govern the universe, and that all mortals are obliged to obey him in everything.

#### **What divine justice is**

The Deity's justice is only a conception of his universal impartial benevolence, influencing him if he gives any laws •to make them fitting for the universal good and •to enforce them with the most effective sanctions of rewards and punishments.

#### **Creation is not the basis for God's dominion**

**(11)** Some people think that the Creator's *ownership* of all his works must be the real basis for his right to govern. It's true that among men we find it necessary for the public good that no-one should have at his disposal goods that were acquired by the labour of someone else—goods that we say the latter 'owns'; and this leads ·some of· us to think that creation is the only basis for God's dominion over us. But if the reason for establishing property-rights ·among men· doesn't hold for a perfectly wise and benevolent being, I see no reason why property should be necessary for his dominion. And the reason *doesn't* hold, for an infinitely wise and good being could never employ his authority to act against the universal good. Remembering that the tie of gratitude is stronger than bare benevolence, ·try this thought-experiment·:

- (i)** Suppose there are two equally wise and good beings, one our creator and the other not; and
- (ii)** Suppose that our creator is malicious, and that a good being has the kindness to rescue us—to govern

us better—and has enough power to accomplish his kind intentions.

In case (i) we would think we were more obliged to obey our creator. But in case (ii) the non-creator's right to govern would be perfectly good. However, this theoretical question has no practical import, because as far as we can know the titles 'benevolent' and 'owner' both fit the one and only true Deity, joined with infinite wisdom and power.

**Our moral sense is an effect of God's goodness**

(12) This question might arise: 'Could the Deity have given us a different or even contrary set of mind, determining us to approve actions on some basis other than their benevolence?' Well, there's certainly nothing in this that surpasses the natural power of the Deity. But just as in my first treatise about Beauty I traced the constitution of our present sense of beauty back to God's goodness, so with much more obvious reason we can ascribe the present constitution of our moral sense to his goodness. For if the Deity is really benevolent, i.e. really delights in the happiness of others, he couldn't rationally act otherwise, giving us a moral sense with some other basis, without counteracting his own benevolent intentions. To see why this is so, consider:

- Even if we had a contrary moral sense, every rational being would still have cared to some extent about his own external happiness;
- reflection on how mankind is placed in this world would have suggested that universal benevolence and a social temperament and the corresponding actions would most effectively promote everyone's external good (according to the reasonings of Cumberland and Pufendorf);
- but our perverted sense of morality would have made us uneasy in such a course of action, and would have inclined us to go in the dead-opposite direction,

namely into barbarity, cruelty, and fraud; so that our natural state was what Hobbes said it is, namely one of universal war.

Thus, in every action we would have been distracted by two contrary principles, and perpetually miserable and dissatisfied when following the directions of either.

**Where this universal opinion of the divine goodness comes from**

(13) It has often been taken for granted in this work that the Deity is morally good, though I haven't presented any arguments that have that as a premise. *Why* is the opinion of God's goodness so widely accepted by mankind? We may be unable to answer this by a demonstrative argument going from *independent being* to *good being*. But God's goodness is highly probable given the whole frame of nature, which seems clearly to be contrived for the good of the whole; and the incidental evils seem to be inevitable by-products of some mechanism designed for vastly predominating good. Indeed, this very moral sense of ours, leading us to delight in and admire whatever actions flow from concern for the good of others, is one of the strongest evidences of goodness in the Author of nature.

But this probabilistic line of thought is nothing like as widespread as the opinion of God's goodness, and it's not often that anyone presents it to others. What is more likely to have led mankind into that opinion is the following. The obvious frame of the world gives us ideas of boundless wisdom and power in its author. We can't conceive of such a being as having unmet needs, and we must think of him as being happy and in the best state possible, since he can still gratify himself. We are forced to the conclusion that the best state for rational agents, and their greatest and most worthy happiness, consists in universal effective benevolence; so we conclude that the Deity is benevolent in the most universal

impartial manner. We can't imagine what else might deserve the name of 'perfection' except benevolence and the abilities that are necessary to make it effective, such as wisdom and

power. We can at least have no other worthwhile conception of it.