

# 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.

## 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 examples, 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.