# The Theory of Moral Sentiments

Adam Smith

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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.—In Adam Smith's day a 'sentiment' could be anything on a spectrum with feelings at one end and opinions at the other. This work of his is strongly tilted in the 'feeling' direction [see especially the chapter starting on page 168), but throughout the present version the word 'sentiment' will be left untouched. First launched: July 2008

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# Part I: The Propriety of Action

## Section 1: The Sense of Propriety

### Chapter 1: Sympathy

No matter how selfish you think man is, it's obvious that there are some principles [here = 'drives', 'sources of energy'; see note on page 164] in his nature that give him an interest in the welfare of others, and make *their* happiness necessary to *him*, even if he gets nothing from it but the pleasure of seeing it. That's what is involved in pity or compassion, the emotion we feel for the misery of others, when we see it or are made to think about it in a vivid way. The sorrow of others often makes us sad—that's an obvious matter of fact that doesn't need to be argued for by giving examples. This sentiment, like all the other basic passions of human nature, is not confined to virtuous and humane people, though they may feel it more intensely than others do. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened criminal, has something of it.

We have ·of course· no immediate experience of what other men feel; so the only way we can get an idea of what someone else is feeling is by thinking about what *we* would feel if we were in *his* situation. . . . Our imagination comes into this, but only by representing to us the feelings we would have if etc. We see or think about a man being tortured on the rack; we think of ourselves enduring all the same torments, entering into his body (so to speak) and becoming in a way the same person as he is. In this manner we form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something that somewhat resembles them, though it is less intense. When his agonies are brought home to us in this way, when we have adopted them and made them our own, they start to affect us and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. Just as *being* in pain or distress of any kind arouses the most excessive sorrow, so *conceiving or imagining being* in pain or distress arouses some degree of the same emotion, the degree being large or small depending on how lively or dull the conception is. [Notice Smith's talk of 'bringing home to us' someone's emotional state; he often uses that turn of phrase to express the idea of imaginatively putting oneself in someone else's position.]

So my thesis is that our fellow-feeling for the misery of others comes from our imaginatively changing places with the sufferer, thereby coming to •conceive what he feels or even to •feel what he feels. If this doesn't seem to you obvious enough, just as it stands, there is plenty of empirical evidence for it. When we see someone poised to smash a stick down on the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and pull back our own leg or arm; and when the stick connects, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it along with the sufferer. When a crowd are gazing at a dancer on a slack rope, they naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies, as they see *him* do, and as they feel *they* would have to do if they were up on the rope where he is. . . . Men notice that when they look at sore eyes they often *feel* soreness in their own eyes. . . .

It's not only in situations of pain or sorrow that this fellow-feeling of ours is evoked. When someone has *any* passion about *any* object, the thought of his situation creates an analogous emotion in the breast of every attentive spectator. [In Smith's day it was normal to use 'the breast' to mean something like 'the emotional part or aspect of the person'. It will be

retained sometimes in this version, always with that meaning.] Our joy over the deliverance of the heroes of tragedy or romance is as sincere as our grief for their distress. . . . We enter into their gratitude towards the faithful friends who stayed with them in their difficulties; and we heartily go along with their resentment against the perfidious traitors who injured, abandoned, or deceived them. [The phrase 'go along with', though it sounds *late* modern, is Smith's; he uses it about 30 times in this work.] In every passion of which the mind of man is capable, the emotions of the bystander always correspond to what he imagines must be the feelings of the sufferer, which he does by bringing the case home to himself, ·i.e. imagining being himself in the sufferer's situation·.

'Pity' and 'compassion' are labels for our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. 'Sympathy', though its meaning may originally have been the same, can now fairly properly be used to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever. [Since Smith's time, 'sympathy' has moved back to what he says was its original meaning: we don't say 'She had great sympathy for his joy'. In the present version the word will be retained; his broadened meaning for it needs to be remembered.]

We sometimes see sympathy arise merely from the view of a certain emotion in another person: the passions sometimes seem to be passed from one man to another instantaneously, without the second man's having any knowledge of what aroused them in the first man. When grief or joy, for example, are strongly expressed in someone's look and gestures, they immediately affect the spectator with some degree of a similar painful or agreeable emotion. A smiling face is a cheerful object to everyone who sees it, and a sorrowful face is a melancholy one.

But this doesn't hold for every passion. There are some passions the expressions of which arouse no sort of sympathy; they serve rather to disgust and provoke us against them, before we know what gave rise to them. The furious behaviour of an angry man is more likely to exasperate us against •him than against •his enemies. Because we don't know what provoked him, we can't bring his case home to ourselves, imaginatively putting ourselves in his position. But we can put ourselves in the position of those with whom he is angry; we can see what violence they may be exposed to from such an enraged adversary. So we readily sympathize with their fear or resentment, and are immediately inclined to side with them against the man from whom they appear to be in so much danger.

·There's a very general point underlying the difference between our reaction to someone else's grief or joy and our reaction to someone's rage·. The mere appearances of grief or joy inspire us with some level of a similar emotion, because they suggest to us the general idea of some **good or bad fortune** that has come to the person in whom we observe them; and with grief and joy this is sufficient to have some little influence on us. Grief and joy don't have effects that go beyond •the person who has the grief or joy; expressions of those passions don't suggest to us—in the way that expressions of resentment do—the idea of some other person for whom we are concerned and whose interests are opposite to •his. So the general idea of **good or bad fortune** creates some concern for the person who has met with it, but the general idea of **provocation** arouses no sympathy with the anger of the man who has been provoked. It seems that nature teaches us •to be more averse to entering into this passion and •to be inclined to take sides against it until we are informed of its cause.

Even our sympathy with someone else's grief or joy is incomplete until we know the cause of his state. General lamentations that express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer don't cause in us any •actual strongly-felt sympathy;

what they do is to make us want to inquire into the person's situation, and to make us •disposed to sympathize with him. The first question we ask is 'What has happened?' Until this is answered, our fellow-feeling is not very considerable. We do feel unhappy, ·but that is from sources different from sympathy; it is· because of the vague idea we have of his misfortune, and still more from our torturing ourselves with guesses about what the source of his misery may be.

So the main source of sympathy is not the view of the other person's passion but rather the situation that arouses the passion. Sometimes we feel for someone else a passion that he ·doesn't have and· apparently isn't capable of having; because that passion arises in •our breast just from •imagining ourselves as being in his situation, though it doesn't arise in •his breast from •really being in that situation. When we blush for someone's impudence and rudeness, though he seems to have no sense of how badly he is behaving, that is because we can't help feeling how utterly embarrassed we would be if we had behaved in such an absurd manner.

Of all the calamities to which mankind can be subject, the loss of reason appears to be by far the most dreadful, in the mind of anyone who has the least spark of humanity. We behold that last stage of human wretchedness with deeper pity than any other. But the poor wretch who is in that condition may laugh and sing, having no sense of his own misery. The anguish that the rest of us feel at the sight of such a person can't be a reflection of any sentiment that *he* has. The spectator's compassion must arise purely from the thought of what he himself would feel if he were reduced to that same unhappy condition while also (this may well be impossible) regarding it with his present reason and judgment.

What are the pangs of a mother when she hears the moanings of her infant who can't express what it feels during the agony of disease? In her idea of what it suffers, she brings together

- •her child's real helplessness,
- •her own consciousness of that helplessness, and
- •her own terrors for the unknown consequences of the child's illness,

and out of all these she forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete image of misery and distress. [The phrase 'for her own sorrow' is Smith's, as is 'for our own misery' in the next paragraph.] But the infant feels only the unpleasantness of the present instant, which can never be great. With regard to the future, the infant is perfectly secure. Its lack of thoughtfulness and of foresight gives it an antidote against •fear and •anxiety—those great tormentors of the human breast, from which reason and philosophy will in vain try to defend the child when it grows up to be a man.

We sympathize even with the dead. Ignoring what is of real importance in their situation, namely the awe-inspiring question of what future is in store for them ·in the after-life·, we are mainly affected by factors that strike *our* senses but can't have any influence on *their* happiness. It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave, a prey to corruption and worms; to be no more thought of in this world, but to be quite soon obliterated from the affections, and almost from the memory, of their dearest friends and relatives. Surely, we imagine, we can never feel too much for those who have suffered such dreadful calamity! The tribute of our fellow-feeling seems to be doubly due to them now, when they are in danger of being forgotten by everyone; and in paying vain honours to their memory we are trying, for our own misery, artificially to keep alive our sad remembrance

of their misfortune. The fact that our sympathy can't bring them any consolation seems to add to their calamity; and our own sense of their misery is sharpened by the thought that anything we can do ·for them· is unavailing, and that the regret, the love, and the lamentations of their friends, which alleviate every other kind of distress, can't bring them any comfort. But it is absolutely certain that the welfare of the dead isn't affected by any of this; the profound security of their repose can't be disturbed by the thought of any of these things. The idea of the dreary and endless melancholy that our imagination naturally ascribes to their condition is purely a result of putting together

- the change that they have undergone,
- our own consciousness of that change,
- our putting ourselves in their situation—inserting our living souls into their dead bodies (so to speak), and conceiving what our emotions would be in that situation.

It is just •*this* illusion of the imagination that makes the thought of our own dissolution so terrible to us. It's because of •*it* that the thought of circumstances that undoubtedly can't give us pain when we are dead makes us miserable while we are alive. That is the source of one of the most important action-drivers in human nature, namely the dread of death, which is the great poison to happiness but the great restraint on the injustice of mankind; it afflicts and humiliates the individual, while guarding and protecting society.

## Chapter 2: Pleasure of mutual sympathy

Whatever the cause of sympathy may be, and however it may be aroused, nothing pleases us more than to observe in others a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast, and nothing shocks us more than the seeming absence of such fellow-feeling. Those who are fond of deriving all our sentiments from certain refinements of self-love think they can explain this pleasure and this pain consistently with their own principles. Their explanation goes like this:

> Man is conscious of his own weakness, and of his need for the assistance of others; so he rejoices when he sees that they *do* adopt his own passions, because this assures him of that assistance; and he grieves when he sees that they *don't*, because that assures him of their opposition.

But both the pleasure and the pain are always felt so instantaneously, and often on such minor issues, that it seems evident that neither of them can come from any such self-interested consideration. A man is cast down when, after having tried to be amusing, he looks around and sees that no-one else laughs at his jokes; and when his jokes do succeed, he gets great pleasure from the amusement of the people he is with, and regards this match between their sentiments and his own as the greatest applause. ·It's not plausible to suggest that what's going on here is rapid calculation about whether he will be helped in times of need·.

[Smith's next paragraph is not unclear but is very compressed. What follows here is a more fully spelled-out statement of its content. Our immediate topic is (let's say) the pleasure I get from seeing that my companions are enjoying my jokes. Smith has been expounding this explanation of the pleasure:

> **(1)** I enjoy the jokes, and I want others to sympathize with my frame of mind by enjoying them too; and I suffer disappointment if this doesn't happen.

This, Smith holds, is an instance of the natural universal human **desire for others to show sympathy**. In our present paragraph he mentions a different possible explanation:

> **(2)** I enjoy the jokes; if others also enjoy them, then by sympathetically taking in their pleasure I increase my own; and if they don't enjoy them, I suffer from the absence of a hoped-for extra pleasure.

This has nothing to do with a desire to be sympathised with; it is simply an instance of **sympathy**. This may be a part of the story, Smith says, but isn't all of it. Now let him take over:] When we have read a book or poem so often that we can no longer enjoy reading it by ourselves, we can still take pleasure in reading it to a companion. To him it has all the graces of novelty; we enter into the surprise and admiration that it naturally arouses in him but can no longer arouse in us; we consider the ideas that it presents in the light in which they appear to him rather than in the light in which they appear to ourselves, and we enjoy by sympathy his enjoyment that thus enlivens our own. If he seemed not to be entertained by the book, we would be annoyed and could no longer take pleasure in reading it to him. It's like that with our attempts to amuse others. The company's merriment no doubt enlivens our own, and their silence no doubt disappoints us. But though this may *contribute* both to the pleasure we get from success and the pain we feel if we fail, it is far from being the *only* cause of either the pleasure or the pain; it can't account for the pleasure we get when our sentiments are matched by the sentiments of others, or the pain that comes from a failure of such a match. [The main thing Smith says about why that's not the whole story is that it can't be *any* of the grief or pain side of the story.] I hope my friends will feel sad when I am sad, but not because I want their feelings to reflect back on me and increase my sadness! I do want their sympathy; if they show that they sympathize, this alleviates grief by insinuating into the heart almost the only agreeable sensation that it is capable of receiving at that time. ·The pattern here is that of **(1)** and not **(2)**·.

So it's important to notice ·that the grief and pain side is more important to us than the joy side·. We're more concerned to communicate to our friends our disagreeable passions than our agreeable ones; and it's in connection with the disagreeable passions that we get more satisfaction from their sympathy and are more upset when they don't sympathize.

When an unfortunate person finds others to whom he can communicate the cause of his sorrow, *how* does this bring him relief? Their sympathy seems to unload some of his burden of distress; it's not wrong to say that they *share* it with him. . . . Yet by recounting his misfortunes he to some extent renews his grief. They awaken in his memory the remembrance of the circumstances that brought about his affliction. His tears accordingly flow faster than before, and he is apt to abandon himself to all the weakness of sorrow. But he takes pleasure in all this, and can be seen to be relieved by it, because the sweetness of their sympathy more than compensates for the bitterness of his sorrow—the sorrow that he had thus enlivened and renewed in order to arouse this sympathy. The cruelest insult that can be offered to the unfortunate is to appear to make light of their calamities. To seem not to be affected with the joy of our companions is mere •impoliteness; but not to have a serious expression when they tell us their afflictions is real and gross •inhumanity.

Love is an agreeable passion, resentment a disagreeable one; and accordingly we're not half so anxious that our friends should adopt our friendships as that they should enter into our resentments. We can forgive them for seeming not to be much affected when some favour comes our way, but we lose all patience if they seem not to care about injuries that have been done to us; and we aren't half as angry with them for not entering into our gratitude as for

not sympathizing with our resentment. They can easily avoid being friends to our friends, but can hardly avoid being enemies to those with whom we are at odds. We may sometimes make a gesture towards an awkward quarrel with them if they are at enmity with any of our friends, but we don't usually outright resent this; whereas we seriously quarrel with them if they live in friendship with any of our enemies. The agreeable passions of love and joy can satisfy and support the heart without any supplementary pleasure, but the bitter and painful emotions of grief and resentment strongly require the healing consolation of sympathy.

Just as the person who is primarily concerned in any event is pleased with our sympathy and hurt by the lack of it, so also we seem to be pleased when we can sympathize with him and upset when we can't. We run not only to congratulate the successful but also to condole with the afflicted; and the •pleasure we get from contact with someone with whom we can entirely sympathize in all the passions of his heart seems to do more than compensate for the •painfulness of the sorrow that our knowledge of his situation gives us. When we find that we can't sympathize with a friend's sorrow, that spares us sympathetic pain; but there's no pleasure in that. If we hear someone loudly lamenting his misfortunes, and find that when we bring his case home to ourselves it has no such violent effect on us, we are shocked at his grief; and because we can't enter into it we call it pusillanimity and weakness. [English still contains 'pusillanimous', from Latin meaning 'small mind'; here it means something like 'weak-spirited, lacking in gumption'.] And on the other side, if we see someone being too happy or too much elevated (we think) over some little piece of good fortune, this irritates us. . . . We are even annoyed if our companion laughs louder or longer at a joke than we think it deserves—i.e. longer than we feel that *we* could laugh at it.

## Chapter 3: Judging others' affections

[•Smith uses 'affection' about 200 times, usually in a meaning that sprawls across feelings and mental attitudes of all kinds; on page 117 and a *few* other places it express the idea of someone's being 'affectionate' in our sense. There is no satisfactory way to sort this out; you'll have to be guided by the context of each use. As for the cognate verb: when Smith writes of our being 'differently affected' by something he means that it causes us to have different 'affections' in the very broad sense. •In Smith's day 'propriety' meant 'correctness', 'rightness'; it was a very general term to cover one side of the right/wrong line. It won't be replaced by anything else in this version; but remember that it does *not* mean here what it tends to mean today, namely 'conformity to conventional standards of behaviour'. •Smith often uses 'concord' as a musical metaphor, to express the idea of a satisfactory *match* between your sentiments and mine, in contrast to a discord or 'dissonance'. We'll see in due course that he uses musical metaphors a lot. e.g. on page 10 where we find 'flatten' (♭). 'sharpness' (♯), 'tone', 'harmony', and 'concord' in one short sentence.]

When someone's passions are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily strike the spectator as being just and proper, and suitable to their •objects; and if on the other hand the spectator finds that when he brings the case home to himself those passions don't coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the •causes that arouse them. Expressing approval of someone's passions as suitable to their •objects is the same thing as saying that we entirely sympathize with them; and disapproving them as not suitable to their •objects is the same thing as saying that we don't entirely sympathize with them. [Smith does not distinguish a passion's 'object' from its 'cause'.] The man who resents the injuries that have been done to me, and sees that I resent them precisely as he does, necessarily

approves of my resentment. . . . He who admires a picture or poem in the way I do must surely admit the justness of my admiration. He who laughs along with me at a joke can't very well deny the propriety of my laughter. And on the other hand, someone who in such cases either feels no emotion such as I feel, or feels none that have a level of intensity anywhere near to mine, can't avoid disapproving my sentiments because of their dissonance with his own. . . . If my grief exceeds what his most tender compassion can go along with, if my admiration is either too high or too low to fit with his, if I laugh heartily when he only smiles, or I only smile when he laughs heartily—in all these cases, as soon as he moves from considering the object to seeing how I am affected by it, I must incur some degree of his disapproval depending on how much disproportion there is between his sentiments and mine. On all occasions his own sentiments are the standards and measures by which he judges mine.

Approving of another man's opinions—adopting those opinions—they are the same thing! If the arguments that convince you convince me too, I necessarily approve of your conviction; and if they don't, I necessarily disapprove of it. . . . Everyone accepts that approving or disapproving of the **opinions** of others is observing the agreement or disagreement of those opinions with our own. Well, this is equally the case with regard to our approval or disapproval of the sentiments or passions of others.

[Smith mentions a class of counter-examples. •I see that the joke is funny and that I would ordinarily laugh at it, but right now I'm not in the mood for jokes. •Someone is pointed out to me on the street as grieving for the recent death of his father; I can't share in his grief, because I don't know him or his father; but I don't doubt that if I were fully informed of all the details of his situation I would fully and sincerely sympathize with him. Smith continues:] The basis for my approval of his sorrow is my consciousness of this *conditional* sympathy, although the actual sympathy doesn't take place. . . .

The sentiment or affection of the heart that leads to some action can be considered in two different relations: **(1)** in relation to the cause that arouses it, or the motive that gives rise to it; **(2)** in relation to the end that it proposes, or the effect that it tends to produce. [Smith builds into this one-sentence paragraph a striking clause saying that the 'whole virtue or vice' of the action 'must ultimately depend' on the sentiment or affection of the heart that leads to it. And in the next paragraph he says it again:]

The propriety or impropriety. . . .of the consequent action consists in the suitableness or unsuitableness, the proportion or disproportion, that the affection seems to bear to the cause or object that arouses it.

The merit or demerit of the action, the qualities by which it is entitled to reward or deserving of punishment, consists in the beneficial or harmful nature of the effects that the affection aims at or tends to produce.

In recent years philosophers have focussed on the •behavioural upshots of affections, to the neglect of an affection's relation to the •cause that arouses it. But in everyday life when we judge someone's conduct and the sentiments that directed it we constantly consider them under both these aspects. When we blame someone's excesses of love, of grief, of resentment, we consider not only the ruinous effects that they tend to produce but also the slightness of their causes. 'The merit of his favourite', we say, 'is not so great, his misfortune is not so dreadful, his provocation is not so extraordinary, as to justify such violent passion. We would have approved or at least indulged the violence of his emotion if its cause had been anything like proportional to it.'

When in this way we judge any affection to be or not be proportional to the cause that arouses it, we are judging by the corresponding affection in ourselves when we bring the case home to our own breast—what other criterion could we possibly use?. . . .

A man uses each of his faculties as the standard by which he judges the same faculty in someone else. I judge your sight by my sight, your ear by my ear, your reason by my reason, your resentment by my resentment, your love by my love. I don't have—I *can't* have—any other way of judging them.

## Chapter 4: The same continued

There are two different classes of cases in which we judge the propriety or impropriety of someone else's sentiments by their correspondence or disagreement with our own. **(1)** In one class, the objects that arouse the sentiments are considered without any special relation to ourselves or to the person whose sentiments we are judging. **(2)** In the other, those objects ·or causes· are considered as specially affecting one or other of us.

**(1)** With regard to objects that are considered without any special relation either to ourselves or to the person whose sentiments we are judging: wherever his sentiments entirely correspond with our own, we credit him with having taste and good judgment.

> The beauty of a plain,
> the greatness of a mountain,
> the ornaments of a building,
> the expression of a picture,
> the composition of a speech,
> the conduct of a third person,
> the proportions of different quantities and numbers,
> the various appearances that the great machine of the universe is perpetually exhibiting, with their secret causes

—all the general subjects of science and taste are what we and the other person regard as having no special relation to either of us. We both look at them from the same point of view, and we can produce the most perfect harmony of sentiments and affections without any help from sympathy or the imaginary switch of situations from which sympathy arises. If despite this our affections are often different, this is either because •our different habits of life lead us to give different degrees of attention to the various parts of those complex objects, or •we differ in the natural acuteness of the mental faculties to which the objects are addressed.

When our companion's sentiments coincide with our own over things like this—things that are obvious and easy, things that everyone would respond to in the same way—we do of course approve of his sentiments, but they don't entitle him to praise or admiration. But when they don't just coincide with our own but lead and direct our own; when in forming them he appears to have attended to many things that we had overlooked, and to have made them responsive to all the various details of their objects; we not only approve of his sentiments but wonder and are surprised at their uncommon and unexpected acuteness and comprehensiveness. In this case he appears to deserve a high degree of •admiration and •applause. For approval heightened by wonder and surprise constitutes the sentiment that is properly called •'admiration', the natural expression of it being •applause. [In this next sentence and in many further places, 'ugliness' replaces Smith's 'deformity', and similarly with 'ugly' and 'deformed'. That clearly *is* what he means by 'deformed' and 'deformity'; like some other writers of his time he seems to have preferred those two words over 'ugly' and 'ugliness', which occur only once each

in this entire work.] The verdict of the man who judges that exquisite beauty is preferable to gross ugliness, or that twice two are equal to four, must certainly be *approved* of by us all but surely we won't much *admire* it. What arouses our admiration, and seems to deserve our applause is

- •the acute and delicate discernment of the man of taste, who distinguishes the tiny barely perceptible differences of beauty and ugliness; and
- •the comprehensive accuracy of the experienced mathematician, who easily unravels the most intricate and puzzling proportions.

In short, the greater part of the praise we give to what are called 'the intellectual virtues' goes to the great leader in science and taste, the man who directs and leads our own sentiments, and fills us with astonished wonder and surprise by the extent and superior soundness of his talents.

You may think that what first recommend those talents to us is their utility; and no doubt the thought of their utility does give them a new value, once we get around to it. But at the start we approve of another man's judgment not as •useful but as •right, precise, agreeable to truth and reality; and it's obvious that we attribute those qualities to his judgment simply because it agrees with our own. In the same way, taste is initially approved of not as •useful but as •just, delicate, and precisely suited to its object. The thought that such qualities as these are useful is clearly an after-thought, not what first recommends them to our approval.

[We are about to meet the word 'injury'. Its meaning in Smith's day was in one way •broader and in another •narrower than its meaning today. •It wasn't even slightly restricted to physical injury; it covered every kind of harm, though only when •the harm was caused by a person.]

**(2)** With regard to objects that affect in some special way either ourselves or the person whose sentiments we are judging, it's •harder to preserve this matching of sentiments and also •vastly more important to do so. ·**Harder**·: When I suffer some misfortune or am done some injury, my companion doesn't *naturally* take the same view of this as I do. It affects me much more nearly. He and I don't see it from the same vantage-point, as we do a picture, a poem, or a scientific theory, so we are apt to be differently affected by it. ·**More important**·: A lack of correspondence of our sentiments with regard to objects that don't concern either me or my companion is easier for me to take than such a lack with regard to something that concerns me as much as the misfortune that I have encountered or the injury that has been done to me. There's not much danger that you and I will quarrel over a picture, a poem, or even a scientific theory that I admire and you despise. Neither of us can reasonably care very much about them. They ought all of them to be matters of little significance to us both, so that although our opinions may be opposite we may still have friendly feelings towards one another. But it's quite otherwise with regard to objects by which one of us is especially affected. Though your judgments in matters of theory or your sentiments in matters of taste are quite opposite to mine, I can easily overlook this opposition; and if I'm not temperamentally angry and quarrelsome I may still enjoy conversation with you, even on those very subjects. But if you have no fellow-feeling for the misfortunes I have met with, or none that bears any proportion to the grief that is consuming me, or if you have no indignation at the injuries I have suffered, or none that bears any proportion to the resentment that is taking me over, the two of us can't talk together about this subject. We become intolerable to one another. . . . You are bewildered by my violence and passion,

and I am enraged by your cold lack of feeling.

In any such case, what is needed for there to be some correspondence of sentiments between the spectator and his companion is for the spectator to try his hardest to put himself in the other man's situation and to bring home to himself every little detail of distress that could possibly have occurred to the sufferer. He must adopt the situation of his companion with all its tiniest details, and try to make as perfect as possible the imaginary change of situation on which his sympathy is based.

Even after all this, the spectator's emotions won't be as violent as the sufferer's. Although people are naturally sympathetic, they never respond to what has happened to another person with the level of passion that naturally animates that person himself. [A couple of dozen times Smith refers to the latter as 'the person principally concerned'. This will usually be replaced by the shorter 'the sufferer', a label that Smith also uses quite often.] The imaginary change of situation on which their sympathy is based is only momentary. The thought of their own safety, the thought that *they* aren't really the sufferers, continually pushes into their minds; and though this doesn't prevent them from having a passion somewhat analogous to what the sufferer feels, it does prevent them from coming anywhere near to matching the level of intensity of his passion. The sufferer is aware of this, while passionately wanting a more complete sympathy. He longs for the relief that he can only get from the perfect concord of the spectators' affections with his own. . . . But his only chance of getting this is to lower his passion to a level at which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten (if I may put it this way) the sharpness of his passion's natural tone so as to bring it into harmony and concord with the emotions of the people he is with. What they feel will always be in some respects different from what he feels. Compassion can never be exactly the same as original sorrow, because the sympathizer's secret awareness that he is only *imagining* being in the sufferer's position doesn't just lower the **degree** ·of intensity· of his sympathetic sentiment but also makes it somewhat different in **kind**. Still, it's clear that these two sentiments correspond with one another well enough for the harmony of society. They won't ever be unisons, but they can be concords, and this is all that is wanted or required.

In order to produce this concord, nature teaches the spectators to take on the situation of the sufferer, and teaches the sufferer to go some way in taking on the situation of the spectators. Just as they are continually placing themselves in his situation and thereby experiencing emotions similar to his, so he is as constantly placing himself in their situation and thereby experiencing some degree of the coolness that he's aware they will have regarding his fortune. They constantly think about what they would feel if they actually were the sufferers, and he is constantly led to imagine how he would be affected if he were one of the spectators. . . . The effect of this is to lower the violence of his passion, especially when he is in their presence and under their observation.

A result of this is that the mind is rarely so disturbed that the company of a friend won't restore it to some degree of tranquillity. The breast is somewhat calmed and composed the moment we come into our friend's presence. . . . We expect less sympathy from an ordinary acquaintance than from a friend; we can't share with the acquaintance all the little details that we can unfold to a friend; so when we are with the acquaintance we calm down and try to fix our thoughts on the general outlines of our situation that he is willing to consider. We expect still less sympathy from a gathering of strangers, so in their presence we calm down even further, trying—as we always do—to bring down

our passion to a pitch that the people we are with may be expected to go along with. We don't just *seem to* calm down. If we are at all masters of ourselves, the presence of a mere acquaintance really will compose us more than that of a friend; and the presence of a gathering of strangers will compose us even more.

So, at any time when the mind has lost its tranquillity, the best **cures** are •society and •conversation. They are also the best **preservatives** of the balanced and happy frame of mind that is so necessary for self-satisfaction and enjoyment. Scholarly recluses who are apt to sit at home brooding over either grief or resentment, though they may have more humaneness, more generosity, and a more delicate sense of honour, seldom possess the evenness of temperament that is so common among men of the world.

## Chapter 5: Likeable and respectworthy virtues

We have here two different efforts—**(1)** the spectator's effort to enter into the sentiments of the sufferer, and **(2)** the sufferer's efforts to bring his emotions down to a level where the spectator can go along with them. These are the bases for two different sets of virtues. **(1)** One is the basis for the soft, gentle, likeable virtues, the virtues of openness to others and indulgent humaneness. **(2)** The other is the source of the great, awe-inspiring and respectworthy virtues, the virtues of self-denial and self-control—i.e. the command of our passions that subjects all the movements of our nature to the requirements of our own dignity and honour, and the propriety of our own conduct. [Smith's words are 'amiable' and 'respectable', but their present meanings—especially of 'respectable'—would make them too distracting. Regarding 'propriety': remind yourself of the note on page 116.]

**(1)** Someone whose sympathetic heart seems to echo all the sentiments of those he is in contact with, who grieves for their calamities, resents their injuries, and rejoices at their good fortune—how *likeable* he seems to be! When we bring home to ourselves the situation of his companions, we enter into their gratitude and feel what consolation they must get from the tender sympathy of such an affectionate friend. As for someone whose hard and stubborn heart feels for no-one but himself, and who has no sense of the happiness or misery of others—how disagreeable he seems to be! Here again we enter into the pain that his presence must give to everyone who has anything to do with him, and especially to those with whom we are most apt to sympathize, the unfortunate and the injured.

**(2)** Now consider someone who, in his own case, exerts the togetherness and self-control that constitute the dignity of every passion, bringing it down to what others can enter into—what noble propriety and grace do we feel in his conduct! We're disgusted with the clamorous grief that bluntly calls on our compassion with sighs and tears and begging lamentations. But we reverence the reserved, silent, majestic sorrow that reveals itself only in the swelling of the eyes, in the quivering of the lips and cheeks, and in the distant yet touching coolness of the whole behaviour. It imposes the same silence on us. We regard it with respectful attention, and keep a cautious watch on our own behaviour lest we should do anything to disturb the over-all tranquillity that it takes such an effort to maintain.

On the other side, there is nothing more detestable than the insolence and brutality of the anger of someone who indulges its fury without check or restraint. [We are about to meet the word 'generous', used—as it often is by Smith—in a sense that it doesn't often have today: 'noble-minded, magnanimous, free from meanness or prejudice'.] But we admire the noble and generous

resentment that •governs its pursuit of ·the author of· great injuries not by the rage that such injuries are apt to arouse in the breast of the sufferer, but by the indignation that they naturally call forth in the breast of an impartial spectator; that •allows no word or gesture to escape it that wouldn't be dictated by this more equitable sentiment [i.e. by the feelings of an impartial spectator]; that •never, even in thought, attempts any greater vengeance or wants to inflict any greater punishment than what every person who isn't directly involved would be happy to see inflicted.

·Putting those two sets of virtues together· we get the result that to feel much for others and little for ourselves, to restrain our selfish affections and indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature. It is only through this that men can have the harmony of sentiments and passions that constitutes their whole grace and propriety. The great law of Christianity is

Love your neighbour as you love yourself;

and the great precept of nature is

Love yourself only as you love your neighbour

—or, what comes to the same thing, as your neighbour is capable of loving you.

Just as taste and good judgment, when considered as qualities that deserve praise and admiration, are supposed to imply an uncommon delicacy of sentiment and acuteness of understanding, so the virtues of sensitivity and self-control are thought of as consisting in uncommon degrees of those qualities. The likeable virtue of humaneness requires, surely, a level of sensitivity far higher than is possessed by crude ordinary people. The great and exalted virtue of magnanimity undoubtedly demands a much higher degree of self-control than the weakest of mortals could exert. Just as the common level of intellect doesn't involve any notable talents, so the common level of moral qualities doesn't involve any virtues. Virtue is *excellence*—something uncommonly great and beautiful, rising far above what is vulgar and ordinary. The likeable virtues consist in a degree of sensitivity that surprises us by its exquisite and unexpected delicacy and tenderness. The awe-inspiring and respectworthy virtues consist in a degree of self-control that astonishes us by its amazing superiority over the most ungovernable passions of human nature.

We here encounter the considerable difference between •virtue and mere •propriety; between the qualities and actions that deserve to be •admired and celebrated, and the qualities that merely deserve to be •approved of. To act with the most perfect propriety often requires no more than the common and ordinary degree of sensitivity or self-control that even the most worthless of mankind have, and sometimes not even *that* is needed. To give a humdrum example: in ordinary circumstances if you are hungry it is perfectly right and proper for you to eat, and everyone would agree about that; but no-one would call your eating virtuous!

·Thus, there can be perfect propriety without virtue. And there can also be virtue without perfect propriety·. Actions that fall short of perfect propriety often have a good deal of virtue in them, because they are nearer to perfection than could well be expected in a context where perfection of conduct would be extremely difficult to attain; this is often the case in situations calling for the greatest efforts of self-control. Some situations put so much pressure on human nature that none of us, imperfect creatures that we are, is capable of the degree of self-control that is ·called for. I mean: the degree that is needed· to silence the voice of human weakness, or reduce the violence of the passions to a level where the impartial spectator can entirely share them. In such a case, though the sufferer's behaviour falls short of the most perfect propriety, it may deserve some applause

and even qualify as (in a certain sense) 'virtuous', because it shows an effort of high-mindedness and magnanimity that most men are not capable of. . . .

In cases of this kind, when we are settling how much blame or applause an action deserves, we often use two different standards. **(1)** One standard is the idea of complete propriety and perfection, which in these difficult situations no human conduct could ever achieve. . . . **(2)** The other standard is the idea of the nearness to this complete perfection that the actions of most men commonly achieve. Whatever goes beyond this seems to deserve applause, and whatever falls short of it to deserve blame.

[Smith adds a paragraph about a similar double standard in judging works of art that 'address themselves to the imagination': •the idea of complete but not humanly attainable perfection that the critic has in his mind, and •the idea of how near to complete perfection most works of art get.]

# Section 2: Allowable degrees of passions

### Introduction

For a passion aroused by an object that is specially related to oneself, the proper level of intensity—the level at which the spectator can go along with it—is clearly somewhere in the middle [Smith: '. . . must lie in a certain mediocrity']. If the passion is too high, or too low, the spectator can't enter into it. Grief and resentment for private misfortunes and injuries can easily be too high, and in most people they are. They aren't often too low, but this can happen. We call too-high passion 'weakness' and 'fury', and we call too-low passion 'stupidity', 'insensibility', and 'lack of spirit'. We can't enter into either of them, and are astonished and confused to see them.

This middling level that is needed for propriety is different for different passions. It is high for some, low for others. **(1)** There are some passions that it is indecent to •express very strongly, even when it is acknowledged that we can't avoid •feeling them in the highest degree. **(2)** And there are others of which the strongest •expressions are often ·so proper as to count as· extremely graceful, even though the passions themselves aren't necessarily •felt so strongly. The **(1)** passions are the ones with which, for certain reasons, there is little or no sympathy; the **(2)** passions are those with which, for other reasons, there is the greatest sympathy. And if we consider the whole range of passions that human nature is capable of, we'll find that they are regarded as decent (or indecent) exactly in proportion as mankind are more (or less) disposed to sympathize with them.

### Chapter 1: The passions that originate in the body

**(1)** It is indecent to express any strong degree of •the passions that arise from a certain situation or disposition of one's body, because the people one is with aren't in that bodily state and so can't be expected to sympathize with •them. Violent hunger, for example, though on many occasions it's

not only natural but unavoidable, is always indecent, and to eat voraciously is universally regarded as a piece of ill manners. Still, there is some level of sympathy even with hunger. It is agreeable to see our companions eat with a •good appetite; any expression of •loathing for the food one has tasted is offensive. A healthy man's normal bodily state makes his stomach easily keep time (forgive the coarseness!) with •one and not with •the other. We can sympathize with the distress of excessive hunger when we read the description of a siege or sea-voyage. Imagining ourselves in the situation of the sufferers, we can easily conceive the •grief, fear and consternation that must necessarily distract them. We ourselves feel some degree of •those passions, and therefore sympathize with them; but reading the description doesn't make us hungry, so it's not strictly accurate to say that we sympathize with their hunger.

It's the same with the passion by which Nature unites the sexes. Though it is naturally the most furious of all the passions, strong expressions of it are *always* indecent, even between persons who are totally allowed, by human and divine laws, to indulge this passion together. Still, there seems to be some degree of sympathy even with this passion. It is not proper to talk to a woman as we would to a man; it is expected that their company should inspire us with more gaiety, more pleasantry, and more attention; and an entire insensibility to the fair sex makes a man somewhat contemptible even to men. [This paragraph seems to run together •sympathy with my female companion's sexual feelings with •sensitivity to the fact that my companion is female. This oddity is present in the original; it's not an artifact of this version.]

We have such an aversion for all the appetites that originate in the body that we find all strong expressions of them loathsome and disagreeable. Some ancient philosophers held that these are the passions that we share with the lower animals, so that they are beneath our dignity because they have no connection with the characteristic qualities of *human* nature. But there are many other passions that we have in common with the lower animals—e.g. resentment, natural affection, even gratitude—that don't strike us as animal-like. The real cause of the special disgust we have for the body's appetites when we see them in other men is that we can't enter into them, ·can't sympathize with them·. To the person who has such a passion, as soon as it is gratified the object that aroused it ceases to be agreeable; even its presence often becomes offensive to him; he looks in vain for the charm that swept him away the moment before, and he can't now enter into his own passion any more than anyone else can. After we have dined, we order the table to be cleared; and we would treat in the same manner the objects of the most ardent and passionate desires if they were the objects *only* of passions that originate in the body.

The virtue of temperance, properly so-called, is the command of the body's appetites. •Prudence involves keeping those appetites within the limits required by •a concern for one's health and fortune. But •temperance keeps them within the limits required by •grace, propriety, delicacy, and modesty.

**(2)** It's for that same reason that it always seems unmanly and unbecoming to cry out with bodily pain, however intolerable it is. Yet there is a good deal of sympathy even with bodily pain. I remarked earlier that if I see a truncheon about to come down on someone else's arm, I naturally shrink and draw back my own arm; and when the blow falls I feel it in some measure, and I am hurt by it as well as the sufferer. But *my* hurt is very slight, so that if he makes a violent outcry I will despise him because I can't go along with him. That's how it is with all the passions that originate in the body; they arouse ·in the spectator· either no sympathy

at all or such a low level of sympathy that it is altogether disproportionate to the violence of what the sufferer feels.

It is quite otherwise with passions that originate in the imagination. The state of my •body can't be much affected by changes that are brought about in my companion's body; but my •imagination is more pliable, and (so to speak) more readily takes on the shape and lay-out of the imaginations of people I have contact with. That's why a disappointment in love or ambition will evoke more sympathy than the greatest bodily evil. Those passions arise purely from the imagination. The person who has lost his whole fortune, if he is in good health, feels nothing in his body. What he suffers comes entirely from his imagination, which represents to him the rapid approach of the loss of his dignity, neglect by his friends, contempt from his enemies, dependency, poverty and misery; and we sympathize with him more strongly on account of this misfortune ·than we do for any physical pain he is suffering· because it's easier for our imaginations to mould themselves on his imagination than for our bodies to mould themselves on his body.

The loss of a leg may generally be regarded as a more real calamity than the loss of a mistress. Yet it would be a ridiculous ·dramatic· tragedy of which the ·central· catastrophe was to concern the loss of a leg; whereas a misfortune of the other kind, however trivial it may appear to be, has given occasion to many a fine tragic drama.

Nothing is as quickly forgotten as pain. The moment it is gone the whole agony of it is over, and the thought of it can no longer give us any sort of disturbance. After the pain is over, we ourselves can't enter into the anxiety and anguish that we had during it. An unguarded word from a friend will cause a more durable unhappiness—the agony it creates is by no means over once the word has gone. What at first disturbs us is not the object of the senses (·the sound of the word·) but the idea of the imagination (·the meaning of the word·); and just because it is an idea, the thought of it continues to fret and ruffle the imagination until time and other episodes in some measure erase it from our memory, .

Pain never evokes any lively sympathy unless danger comes with it. We sympathize with sufferer's fear but not with his agony. Fear is a passion derived entirely from the imagination, which represents not what we really now feel but what we *may* suffer later on. (It represents this in an uncertain and fluctuating way, but that only makes it worse.) The gout or the tooth-ache, though intensely painful, arouse little sympathy; more dangerous diseases, even when accompanied by little pain, arouse sympathy in the highest degree.

Some people faint and grow sick at the sight of a surgical operation; the bodily pain caused by tearing the flesh seems to arouse the most excessive sympathy in them. We do conceive in a much more lively and distinct manner the pain that comes from an external cause than pain coming from an internal disorder. I can hardly form an idea of my neighbour's agonies when he is tortured by gout or a gallstone; but I have the clearest conception of what he must suffer from an incision, a wound, or a fracture. But the main reason why such objects produce such violent effects on us ·as spectators· is that we aren't used to them. Someone who has seen a dozen dissections and as many amputations will from then on see all operations of this kind with great calmness and often with no feeling at all for the sufferer. . . .

Some of the Greek tragedies try to arouse compassion by representing the agonies of bodily pain. Philoctetes cries out and faints from the extremity of his sufferings. Hippolytus and Hercules are both introduced as dying from the severest tortures—ones that seem to have been more than even the fortitude of Hercules could bear. But in all these cases,

what concerns us is not the pain but other features of the situation. What affects us is not Philoctetes's sore foot but his solitude, which diffuses over that charming tragedy the romantic wildness that is so agreeable to the imagination. The agonies of Hercules and Hippolytus are interesting only because we foresee that death will result from them. If those heroes recovered, we would think the representation of their sufferings to have been perfectly ridiculous. . . . These attempts to arouse compassion by the representation of bodily pain may be regarded as among the Greek theatre's greatest failures of good manners.

The propriety of constancy and patience in enduring bodily pain is based on the fact that we feel little sympathy with such pain. The man who under the severest tortures allows no weakness to escape him, who doesn't utter a groan or give way to any passion that we ·spectators· don't entirely enter into, commands our highest admiration. His firmness enables him to keep time with our indifference and insensibility. We admire and entirely go along with the magnanimous effort that he makes for this purpose. We •approve of his behaviour, and our experience of the common weakness of human nature makes us •surprised by it, and we wonder what enabled him to act so as to deserve approval. Approval, mixed with an enlivening input of wonder and surprise, constitutes the sentiment that is properly called 'admiration', of which applause—I repeat—is the natural expression.

## Chapter 2: The passions that originate in a particular turn or habit of the imagination

Even some of the passions derived from the imagination get little sympathy, although they may be acknowledged to be perfectly natural. I'm talking about passions that originate in a special turn or habit that the imagination has acquired. The imaginations of people in general, not having acquired that particular turn, can't enter into these passions. The passions in question, though they may be allowed to be almost unavoidable in some part of life, are always somewhat ridiculous. An example is the strong attachment that naturally grows up between two persons of different sexes who have long fixed their thoughts on one another. Because our imagination hasn't run in the same channel as the lover's, we can't enter into the eagerness of his emotions. •If our friend has been injured, we readily sympathize with his resentment and grow angry with the person with whom he is angry. •If he has received a benefit, we readily enter into his gratitude and have a high sense of the merit of his benefactor. But •if he is in love, even though we may think his passion is just as reasonable as any of that kind, we don't think ourselves bound to develop a passion of the same kind and for the same person that he is in love with. To everyone but the lover himself his passion seems entirely disproportionate to the value of its object; and love, though it is •pardoned. . . .because we know it is natural, is always •laughed at because we can't enter into it. All serious and strong expressions of it appear ridiculous to a third person; and a lover isn't good company to anyone else except his mistress. He himself is aware of this, and during his periods of being in his sober senses he tries to treat his own passion with mockery and ridicule. That is the only style in which we care to •hear of it, because it's the only style in which we ourselves are disposed to •talk of it. We grow weary of the solemn, pedantic, long-winded lovers of Cowley and of Petrarch, who go on *and on* exaggerating the violence of their attachments; but the gaiety of Ovid and the gallantry of Horace are always agreeable.

But though we feel no proper sympathy with an attachment of this kind, though we never get close to *imagining* ourselves as in love with that particular person, ·we aren't entirely cut off from the lover's situation·. We have ourselves fallen in love in that way, or are disposed to do so; and that lets us readily enter into the high hopes of happiness that the lover expects from his love's gratification, as well as into the intense distress that he fears from its disappointment. It concerns us not as a passion but as a situation that gives rise to other passions that concern us—to hope, fear, and distress of every kind. (Similarly, when we read about a sea voyage, our concern is not with the hunger but with the distress that the hunger causes.) Without properly entering into the lover's attachment, we readily go along with the expectations of romantic happiness that he gets from it. We feel how natural it is for the mind, at a time when it is lazily relaxed and fatigued with the violence of desire,

> to long for serenity and quiet, to hope to find them in the gratification of the passion that distracts it, and to form for itself the idea of a life of pastoral tranquillity and retirement of the sort that the elegant, tender, and passionate ·Latin poet· Tibullus takes so much pleasure in describing—a life like the one the ·ancient· poets describe in the Fortunate Islands, a life of friendship, liberty, and repose; free from labour, from care, and from all the turbulent passions that accompany them.

Even scenes of this kind engage us most when they are depicted as •hoped for rather than •actually enjoyed. The grossness of the passion that is mixed in with love and is perhaps its foundation disappears when its gratification is far off and at a distance; but when it is described as what is immediately possessed it makes the whole description offensive. For this reason [he means: because of the grossness of lust] we are less drawn into the lover's happy passion than we are to the fearful and the melancholy ·aspects of it·. We tremble for whatever can disappoint such natural and agreeable hopes, and thus enter into all the anxiety, concern, and distress of the lover.

[Smith now has a paragraph applying this line of thought to the presentation of romantic love 'in some modern tragedies and romances'. Then:]

The reserve that the laws of society impose on the female sex with regard to this weakness [i.e. with regard to romantic love] makes it especially stressful for them; and for just that reason we are more deeply concerned with their part in a love situation. We are charmed with the •love of Phaedra as it is expressed in Racine's *Phèdre*, despite all the extravagance and guilt that come with it. That very extravagance and guilt are part of what recommends •it to us. Her fear, shame, remorse, horror, despair, become thereby more natural and engaging. All the secondary passions (if I may be allowed to call them that) that arise from the situation of love become necessarily more furious and violent, and it's only with these secondary passions that we can properly be said to sympathize.

However, of all the passions that are so extravagantly disproportionate to the value of their objects, love is the only one that appears to have anything in it that is either graceful or agreeable. (None of the others do, even to the weakest minds!) ·It has three things going for it·:

- •Although it may be ridiculous, it isn't naturally odious.
- •Although its consequences are often fatal and dreadful its intentions are seldom bad.
- •Although there is little propriety in the passion itself, there's a good deal of propriety in some of the passions that always accompany it.

There is in love a strong mixture of humaneness, generosity, kindness, friendship, esteem. And *these* are the passions that we are most disposed to sympathize with, even when we're aware that they are somewhat excessive. The sympathy that we feel with them makes the passion that they accompany less disagreeable and supports it in our imagination, despite all the vices that commonly go along with it: always eventual ruin and infamy for the woman; and for the man—though he is supposed to come off more lightly—it usually causes inability to work, neglect of duty, disregard of ·lost· reputation. [In the original, as in this version, Smith doesn't signal where he is switching from romantic love generally to what he is evidently thinking of here—consummated romantic love between two people who are not married to one another.] Despite all this, the degree of sensibility and generosity that is supposed to accompany such love makes it something that some people are vain about—they like to appear to be capable of a feeling that would do them no honour if they really did have it.

It's for this kind of reason that a certain reserve is necessary when we talk of our own friends, our own studies, our own professions. We can't expect our companions to be as interested in these topics as we are. And it's because of a lack of this reserve that one half of mankind make bad company for the other half. A philosopher is good company only to another philosopher; the member of a club is good company only to his own little knot of companions.

## Chapter 3: The unsocial passions

There is another set of passions which, though derived from the imagination, have to be scaled down if we are to be able to enter into them or regard them as graceful or becoming; I mean scaled down to a much lower level than undisciplined nature gives them. These are •hatred and •resentment, with all their varieties. With all such passions our sympathy is divided between the person who feels them and the person who is the object of them. The interests of these two are directly opposite. What our sympathy with the person who feels the passion would prompt us to •wish for is something that our fellow-feeling with the other person would lead us to •fear. Because they are both human we are concerned for both, and our fear for what one may suffer damps our resentment for what the other has suffered. So our sympathy with the man who has received the provocation has to fall short of the passion that naturally animates him, not only for the general reason that all sympathetic passions are inferior to the original ones, but also for the special reason that in this case we also have an opposite sympathy towards someone else. That is why resentment, more than almost any other passion, can't become graceful and agreeable unless it is humbled and brought down below the pitch to which it would naturally rise.

Any human being has a strong sense of the injuries that are done to anyone else; the villain in a tragedy or romance is as much an object of our indignation as the hero is an object of our sympathy and affection. We detest Iago as much as we esteem Othello; and we delight as much in Iago's punishment as we grieve over Othello's distress. But although we have such a strong fellow-feeling with the injuries that are done to our brethren, it's not always the case that our resentment grows if the sufferer's grows. ·On the contrary·, the •greater his patience, mildness, and humaneness, the •greater our resentment against the person who injured him—provided that his patience etc. doesn't seem to show that he is afraid or that he lacks spirit. The likeableness of the sufferer's character intensifies our sense of the atrocity of the injury.

However, those passions are regarded as necessary elements in human nature. A person becomes contemptible if

he tamely sits still and submits to insults without trying to repel or revenge them. We can't enter into his indifference and insensibility. We regard his behaviour as mean-spirited, and are really provoked by it, just as much as we are by the insolence of his adversary. Even the mob are enraged to see any man submit patiently to insults and bullying. They want to see this insolence resented *by the person who suffers from it*. They angrily cry to him to defend or revenge himself. If his indignation eventually bubbles up, they heartily applaud, and sympathize with it. It enlivens their own indignation against his enemy, whom they rejoice to see him attack in his turn; and provided his revenge is not immoderate, they are as really gratified by it as they would be if the injury had been done to themselves.

•Those passions are useful to the individual, because they make it dangerous to insult or injure him; and, as I'll show later, •they are useful to the public as guardians of justice and of the equality of its administration; and yet •they have in themselves something disagreeable that makes it natural for us to dislike seeing them in other people. Suppose that we are in company, and someone insults me; if I express anger that goes beyond merely indicating that I noted the insult, that is regarded not only as an insult to him but also as a rudeness to the whole company. Respect for *them* ought to have restrained me from giving way to such a rowdy and offensive emotion. It's the •remote effects of these passions that are agreeable; the •immediate effects are mischief to the person against whom they are directed [Smith's phrase]. But what makes an object—·a passion or anything else·—agreeable or disagreeable to the imagination is its •immediate effect, not its •remote ones. A prison is certainly more useful to the public than a palace; and someone who establishes a prison is generally directed by a much sounder spirit of patriotism than someone who builds a palace. But the immediate effect of a prison—namely, the confinement of the wretches shut up in it—is disagreeable; and the imagination either doesn't bother to trace out the remote consequences, or sees them from too great a distance to be much affected by them. So a prison will always be a disagreeable object; and the fitter it is for its intended purpose the *more* disagreeable it will be. A palace, on the other hand, will always be agreeable; and yet its remote effects may often be thoroughly bad for the public—e.g. promoting luxury, and setting an example of the dissolution of manners. [In Smith's day, 'luxury' stood for *very excessive* indulgence in physical comforts; see note on page 162.]. . . . Paintings or models of the instruments of music or of agriculture make a common and an agreeable ornament of our halls and dining-rooms. A display of that kind composed of the instruments of surgery—dissecting and amputation-knives, saws for cutting the bones, trepanning instruments, etc.—would be absurd and shocking. Yet instruments of surgery are always more finely polished, and usually more exactly adapted to their intended purpose, than instruments of agriculture. And their •remote effect—the health of the patient—is agreeable. But because their •immediate effect is pain and suffering, the sight of them always displeases us. [Smith adds that swords and such are liked, associated with courage etc., and even wanted as fashion accessories. It's true that their immediate effects are pain and suffering, but only for 'our enemies, with whom we have no sympathy'. He continues:] It is the same with the qualities of the mind. The ancient stoics held that because the world was governed by the all-ruling providence of a wise, powerful, and good God, every single event ought to be regarded as a necessary part of the plan of the universe, and as tending to promote the general order and happiness of the whole; so that men's vices and follies were as necessary a part of this plan as their wisdom or

their virtue. . . . No theory of this sort, however, no matter how deeply it might be rooted in the mind, could lessen our natural abhorrence for vice, whose immediate effects are so destructive and whose remote ones are too distant to be traced by the imagination.

It's the same with hatred and resentment. Their immediate effects are so disagreeable that even when the sufferer is absolutely entitled to them there's still something about them that disgusts us. That's why these are the only passions that we aren't inclined to sympathize with until we learn about the cause that arouses them. ·In contrast with that·, the plaintive •voice of misery, when heard at a distance, won't let us be indifferent about the person from whom it comes; as soon as we hear •it we are concerned about his fortune, and if •it continues it almost *forces* us to rush to his assistance. The sight of a smiling face elevates even a brooding person into a cheerful and airy mood that disposes him to sympathize with the joy it expresses; and he feels his heart, which just then had been shrunk and depressed by thought and care, instantly expanded and elated. [Smith goes on at colourful length about the different effect on us of expressions of hatred and resentment. He concludes:] Grief powerfully •engages and attracts us to the person who is grieving; and hatred and resentment, while we are ignorant of their cause, equally powerfully •disgust and detach us from the person who has *them*. It seems to have been Nature's intention that the rougher and more dislikeable emotions that drive men apart should be less easily and more rarely passed on from man to man.

When music imitates the modulations of grief or joy, it inspires *us* with those passions, or at least puts us in a mood that disposes us to have them. But when it imitates the notes of anger, it inspires us ·not with anger but· with fear. Joy, grief, love, admiration, devotion, are all *naturally musical* passions. Their natural tones are all soft, clear, and melodious; and they naturally express themselves in phrases that are separated by regular pauses, which makes it easy to adapt them to them to the words of a song. In contrast with this, the voice of anger and of all the passions like it is harsh and discordant. Its phrases are all irregular, some long and others short, and not marked off by regular pauses. So it is hard for music to imitate any of those passions; and music that does so isn't the most agreeable. There would be no impropriety in making a complete concert out of imitations of the social and agreeable passions. It would be a strange entertainment that consisted of nothing but imitations of hatred and resentment!

Those passions are as disagreeable to the person who feels them as they are to the spectator. •Hatred and •anger are the greatest poison to the happiness of a good mind. In the very *feel* of them there is something harsh, jarring, and convulsive, something that tears and distracts the breast and is altogether destructive of the calmness of mind that is so necessary to happiness and is best promoted by the contrary passions of •gratitude and •love. What generous and humane people are most apt to regret ·when they are injured· is *not* the value of what they lose by the perfidy and ingratitude of those they live with. Whatever they may have lost, they can generally be happy without it. What disturbs them most is the idea of perfidy and ingratitude exercised towards themselves; and they regard the discordant and disagreeable passions that *this* arouses as constituting the chief part of the injury that they suffer.

What does it take for the gratification of resentment to be completely agreeable, and to make the spectator thoroughly sympathize with our revenge? Well, the first thing is that the provocation must be such that if we didn't somewhat resent it we would be making ourselves contemptible and

exposing ourselves to perpetual insults. Smaller offences are always better neglected; and there's nothing more despicable than the quarrelsome temperament that takes fire under the slightest provocation. ·Secondly·, we should resent more from a sense of the propriety of resentment—·i.e.· from a sense that mankind expect and require it of us—than because we feel in ourselves the furies of that disagreeable passion. With the passion of resentment—more than any other of which the human mind is capable—we ought to ask ourselves sceptically 'Is it all right for me to feel this?', letting our indulgence in it be subject to careful consultation with our natural sense of propriety, i.e. to diligent consideration of what will be the sentiments of the cool and impartial spectator. The only motive that can ennoble the expressions of this disagreeable passion is *magnanimity*, i.e. a concern to maintain our own rank and dignity in society. This motive must characterize our whole style and deportment. These must be plain, open, and direct; determined but not domineering, and elevated without insolence; not only free from petulance and low abusiveness, but generous, fair-minded, and full of all proper regard even for the person who has offended us. [In that sentence 'fair-minded' replaces Smith's 'candid'. He always uses it with that meaning, which is quite remote from what it means today.] In short, it must appear from our whole manner—without our laboriously making a special point of it—that our passion hasn't extinguished our humaneness, and that if we answer the call to get revenge we do so with reluctance, from necessity, and in consequence of great and repeated provocations. When resentment is guarded and qualified in this manner it can even count as generous [see note on page 11] and noble.

## Chapter 4: The social passions

I have just been discussing a set of passions that are on most occasions ungraceful and disagreeable, being made so ·in large measure· by the •divided sympathy that they evoke. Now we come to an opposite set of passions—ones that are nearly always especially agreeable and becoming, being made so by the •redoubled sympathy that they evoke. Generosity, humaneness, kindness, compassion, mutual friendship and esteem—*all* the social and benevolent affections—when expressed in someone's face or behaviour, even towards people who aren't specially connected with ourselves, please us on almost every occasion. The impartial spectator's sympathy with the person x who feels those passions exactly coincides with his concern for the person y who is the object of them. Just by being a man, the spectator is obliged to have a concern for y's happiness, and this concern enlivens his fellow-feeling with x's sentiments, which also aim at y's happiness. So we always have the strongest disposition to sympathize with the benevolent affections. They strike us as in every respect agreeable. We enter into the satisfaction of the person who feels them *and* of the person who is the object of them. Just as

> being an object of hatred and indignation gives more pain than all the evil that a brave man can fear from his enemies,

so also

> for a person with fine and sensitive feelings, the awareness that he is loved brings a satisfaction that does more for his happiness than any ·practical· advantage he can expect to derive from being loved.

The most detestable character is that of the person who takes pleasure in sowing dissension among friends, turning their most tender love into mortal hatred. But what makes this so

atrocious? Is it that it deprives them of the trivial good turns they might have expected from one another if friendship had continued? ·Of course not·! It's the fact that it deprives them of *that friendship itself*, robbing them of each other's affections, from which both derived so much satisfaction; disturbing the harmony of their hearts and ending the happy relations that had previously held between them. •These affections, that harmony, these inter-relations, are felt—not only by tender and delicate people but also by the roughest ordinary folk—to be more important for happiness than all the little services that could be expected to flow from •them.

The sentiment of love is in itself agreeable to the person who feels it. It soothes and calms his breast, and seems. . . .to promote the healthy state of his constitution; and it is made still more delightful by his awareness of the gratitude and satisfaction that his love must arouse in the person who is the object of it. Their mutual regard makes them happy with one another, and this mutual regard, added to sympathy, makes them agreeable to everyone else. Take the case of

> a family where mutual love and esteem hold sway throughout; where the parents and children are companions for one another, with no differences except what come from the children's respectful affection and the parents' kind indulgence; where freedom and fondness, mutual teasing and mutual kindness, show that the brothers are not divided by any opposition of their interests, or the sisters by any rivalry for parental favour; and where everything presents us with the idea of peace, cheerfulness, harmony, and contentment.

What pleasure we get from seeing a family like that! Then consider being a visitor to

> a household in which jarring contention sets half of the members against the other half; where, along with the surface appearance of smoothness and good temper, suspicious looks and sudden flashes of passion reveal the mutual jealousies that burn within them, ready at any moment to burst out through all the restraints that the presence of visitors imposes.

What an unpleasant experience that is!

The likeable passions, even when they are clearly excessive, are never regarded with aversion. There's something agreeable even in the *excess* of friendship and humaneness. The too tender mother, the too indulgent father, the too generous and affectionate friend, may be looked on with a sort of pity, though there's love mixed in with it; and they can never be regarded with hatred and aversion, or even with contempt, except by the most brutal and worthless of mankind. When we blame them for the extravagance of their attachment, we always do it with concern, with sympathy and kindness. [Smith goes on to say that our only regret regarding any extreme case of the social passions is 'that it is unfit for the world because the world is unworthy of it', so that the person in question is too open to abuse and ingratitude that he doesn't deserve and couldn't easily bear. He contrasts this with our much more robust disapproval of extreme hatred and resentment.]

## Chapter 5: The selfish passions

Besides those two opposite sets of passions, the social and the unsocial, there's a third that occupies a sort of middle place between them: it's a kind of passion that is never as graceful as the social passions sometimes are, or as odious as the unsocial passions sometimes are. This third set of passions consists of *grief and joy that people have on account of their own private good or bad fortune*. Even when excessive, these passions are never as disagreeable as

excessive resentment,

•because no **opposing** sympathy can ever make us want to oppose them,

and even when they are most suitable to their objects, these passions are never as agreeable as impartial humanity and just benevolence, because

•no **double** sympathy can ever make us want to support them.

There's this difference between grief and joy: we are generally most disposed to sympathize with small joys and great sorrows. A man who by some sudden stroke of luck is instantly raised into a condition of life far above what he had formerly lived in can be sure that the congratulations of his best friends aren't all perfectly sincere. An upstart—even if he is of the greatest merit—is generally disagreeable to us, and a sentiment of envy commonly prevents us from heartily sympathizing with his joy. If he has any judgment he is aware of this, ·and conducts himself accordingly·. Instead of appearing to be elated with his good fortune, he does his best to smother his joy, and keep down the mental *lift* he is getting, naturally, from his new circumstances. He dresses as plainly as ever, and displays the same modesty of behaviour that was suitable to him in his former station. He redoubles his attention to his old friends, and tries more than ever to be humble, attentive, and obliging. And this is the behaviour that we most approve of in someone in his situation—apparently because we look to him to have more •sympathy with our envy and aversion to his happiness than we have •sympathy with his happiness! He hardly ever succeeds in all this. We suspect the sincerity of his humility, and he grows weary of this constraint. Before long, he leaves all his old friends behind him, except perhaps some of the poorest of them, who are willing to lower themselves to the level of becoming his dependents. And he doesn't always acquire new friends; the pride of his new acquaintances is as much offended at finding him their equal as the pride of his old ones had been offended by his becoming their superior; and he'll have to put up the most obstinate and persevering ·show of· modesty to atone for either offence. He generally grows weary too soon, and is provoked by the sullen and suspicious pride of his old friends to treat them with neglect, by the saucy contempt of his new acquaintances to treat them with petulance, until eventually he forms a habit of insolence, and isn't respected by anyone. If the chief part of human happiness comes from the consciousness of being beloved, as I think it does, these *sudden* changes of fortune seldom contribute much to happiness. The happiest man is one who advances more gradually to greatness, whose every step upwards is widely predicted before he reaches it, so that when his success comes it can't arouse extravagant •joy in himself, and can't reasonably create •jealousy in those he overtakes or •envy in those he leaves behind.

We are more apt to sympathize with smaller joys flowing from less imposing causes. It is decent to be humble amidst great prosperity; but we can hardly overdo our expressions of satisfaction in all the little occurrences of common life—the company we had yesterday evening, the entertainment that was provided for us, what was said and what was done, all the little incidents of the present conversation, and all the trivial nothings that fill up the void of human life. Nothing is more graceful than habitual cheerfulness, which is always based on a special liking for all the little pleasures that everyday events provide. We readily sympathize with it; it inspires us with the same joy, and makes every trifle present to us the same agreeable aspect that it presents to the person endowed with this happy disposition. That is why youth, the time of gaiety, so easily engages our affections. The propensity for joy that seems. . . .to sparkle from the eyes of

youth and beauty—even in a person of the same sex—raises even elderly people to a more joyous mood than ordinary. They forget their infirmities for a while, and give themselves over to agreeable ideas and emotions to which they have long been strangers, but which return to their breast when the presence of so much happiness calls them back—like old acquaintances from whom they are sorry to have ever been parted, and whom they embrace all the more heartily because of this long separation.

[Several occurrences of 'teasing' that we are about to meet—like one on page 22—are replacements for Smith's 'raillery', which means something like 'lighted-hearted unaggressive mockery'.] It is quite otherwise with grief. Small vexations arouse no sympathy, but deep affliction calls forth the greatest. The man who is made uneasy by every little disagreeable incident. . . .will seldom meet with much sympathy. [Smith builds into that sentence sketches of *eight* such trivial incidents.] Joy is a pleasant emotion, and we gladly give ourselves over to it on the slightest occasion. So we readily sympathize with it in others except when we are prejudiced by envy. But grief is painful, and the mind naturally resists and recoils from it—and that includes resisting being grieved by one's own misfortunes. We try either not to be grieved at all, or to shake our grief off as soon as it comes over us. It's true that our aversion to grief won't *always* stop us from grieving over trifling troubles that we meet, but it *constantly* prevents us from sympathizing with the grief that others have because of similar trivial causes. ·How can there be that difference?· It's because our •sympathetic passions are always easier to resist than our •original ones. Also, human nature includes a malice that not only •prevents all sympathy with little unhappinesses but •makes them somewhat amusing. Hence the delight we all take in teasing, and in the small vexation that we observe in our companion when he is pushed, and urged, and teased on all sides. [Smith adds details about how such matters are managed in society. A 'man who lives in the world', he says, stays in tune with his social surroundings by teasing *himself* regarding trivial calamities [Smith calls them 'frivolous calamities'] that befall him.]

On the other side, our sympathy with deep distress is strong and sincere. You don't need me to give examples. We weep even at the representation of a tragedy on the stage. So if you are labouring under some notable calamity, if through some extraordinary misfortune you have fallen into poverty, disease, disgrace or ·major· disappointment, you can generally depend on the sincerest sympathy of all your friends, and on their kindest assistance too as far as their interests and honour will permit; and that holds even if the trouble was partly your own fault. But if your misfortune is not of this dreadful kind, if you have merely been a little blocked in your ambition, if you have only been jilted by your mistress, or are only hen-pecked by your wife, you can reckon on being teased by everyone you know!

# Section 3: How prosperity and adversity affect our judgments about the rightness of actions; and why it is easier to win our approval in prosperity than in adversity

## Chapter 1: The intensity-difference between joy and sympathy with joy is less than the intensity-difference between sorrow and sympathy with sorrow

Our sympathy with sorrow has been more taken notice of than our sympathy with joy, though it's no more real than that. The word 'sympathy', in its most strict and basic meaning, denotes our fellow-feeling with the sufferings of others, not with their enjoyments. . . .

Our sympathy with sorrow is in some sense more universal than our sympathy with joy. Even when sorrow is excessive, we may still have some fellow-feeling with it. What we feel then doesn't amount to the complete sympathy, the perfect harmony and matching of sentiments, that constitutes *approval*. We don't weep and exclaim and lament with the sufferer. We're conscious of his weakness and of the extravagance of his passion, and yet we often have a definite feeling of concern on his account. But if we don't *entirely* enter into and go along with a person's joy, we have *no* sort of regard or fellow-feeling for it. We have contempt and indignation for the man who dances about with an intemperate and senseless joy that we can't accompany him in.

It's also relevant that pain, whether of mind or body, is a more *forceful* [Smith: 'pungent'] sensation than pleasure; and our sympathy with pain, though it falls well short of what is naturally felt by the sufferer, is usually a more lively and distinct perception than our sympathy with pleasure, despite the fact that our sympathy with pleasure often comes close to the natural vivacity of the original passion.

Over and above all this, we often struggle to keep down our sympathy with the sorrow of others. When we aren't in the presence of the sufferer we try for our own sakes to suppress it as much as we can. We don't always succeed, ·because· the opposition that we put up to sympathetic sorrow and the reluctance with which we give in to it force us to be more explicitly aware of it. In contrast, we never have occasion to put up such opposition to our sympathy with joy. Whenever there's any envy in the case, we don't feel the slightest propensity towards joy; but if there's no envy we give way to joy without any reluctance. When we are envious we are always ashamed of being so, which is why we often *say* that we sympathize with someone's joy (and perhaps even *wish* we could do so) when we are really disqualified from doing so by that disagreeable sentiment, envy. We are glad about our neighbour's good fortune, we say, when in our hearts we may be really sorry. We often feel sympathy with sorrow when we would prefer not to; and we often *don't* sympathize with joy when we would be glad to do so. Given all these facts, it is natural to be led to the conclusion that our propensity to sympathize with sorrow must be very strong, and our inclination to sympathize with joy very weak.

Despite this snap judgment, however, I venture to say that when no envy is involved our propensity to sympathize with joy is much stronger than our propensity to sympathize with sorrow; and that our fellow-feeling for the agreeable emotion

comes much closer to the liveliness of what is naturally felt by rejoicing person than our fellow-feeling for someone's sorrow comes to his own sorrow.

We somewhat indulge excessive grief that we can't entirely go along with. We know what an enormous effort it takes for the sufferer to bring his emotion down to a level of complete harmony with what the spectator feels. So if he fails in that, it's easy for us to pardon him. But we have no such indulgence for intemperate joy, because we have no sense that any such vast effort is needed to bring *that* down to what we ·spectators· can entirely enter into. The man who can command his sorrow under the greatest calamities seems worthy of the highest admiration; but someone who can master his joy in the fullness of prosperity seems hardly to deserve any praise. The gap between •what is naturally felt by the person principally concerned and •what the spectator can entirely go along with is much wider with sorrow than with joy; and we're aware of that.

If a man has good health, is out of debt, and has a clear conscience, what can he *added* to his happiness? All increases of fortune for such a man can properly be said to be superfluous, and if he is much elated by them that must be an effect of the most frivolous levity. Yet •this situation may well be called the natural and ordinary state of mankind. Despite the present misery and depravity of the world, so rightly lamented, •this really is the state of the majority of men. So we get the result: most men can't find any great difficulty in raising themselves ·sympathetically· to the level of joy that someone else has through having come into this happy state.

But though little can be added to this state (·of good health, freedom from debt, and possession of a clear conscience·), much can be taken from it. There's only a trivial gap between this condition and the highest pitch of human prosperity, but between it and the lowest depth of misery the distance is immense. Thus, adversity depresses the sufferer's mind much further below its natural state than prosperity can raise it above that state. So the spectator must •find it much harder to sympathize entirely with his sorrow, keeping perfect time with it, than to enter thoroughly into his joy, and must •depart much further from his own natural and ordinary state of mind in the one case than in the other. That's why our sympathy with sorrow, despite being a more forceful sensation than our sympathy with joy, always falls further short than the latter does of the intensity of what is naturally felt by the person principally concerned.

Sympathy with joy is a pleasure, and as long as envy doesn't oppose it our heart is glad to abandon itself to the highest transports of that delightful sentiment. But it is painful to go along with grief, and we always enter into that with reluctance. When we are watching a dramatic tragedy, we struggle as long as we can against the sympathetic sorrow that the entertainment inspires, and eventually give way to it only when we can no longer avoid it. And even then we try to cover our concern from those we are with; if we shed any tears we carefully conceal them, for fear that the others, not entering into this excessive tenderness themselves, might regard it as effeminacy and weakness. . . .

Why should we be more ashamed to weep than to laugh when we are in company? We may often have as much reason to weep as to laugh, but we always feel that the spectators are more likely to go along with us in the agreeable emotion than in the painful one. . . .

How hearty are the acclamations of the mob, who are never envious of their superiors, at a triumphal parade! And how sedate and moderate, usually, is their grief at an execution! Our sorrow at a funeral generally amounts to nothing but a pretended gravity, but our happiness at a

christening or a marriage is always from the heart, with no pretence. On all such joyous occasions our satisfaction is often as lively as that of the persons principally concerned, though perhaps not as durable. [Smith adds details about our physical appearance during such bouts of sympathetic pleasure.]

Whereas when we condole with our friends in their afflictions, how little we feel in comparison with what *they* feel! [Smith adds details, including the remark that our relative lack of real sympathy may produce guilt, which makes us] work ourselves up into an artificial sympathy;. . . .but as soon as we have left the room this vanishes and is gone for ever. It seems that when Nature loaded us with our own sorrows, she thought that they were enough, and therefore didn't command us to take any share other people's sorrows except for what is necessary to prompt us to help them.

[There follow two long rapturous paragraphs in praise of 'magnanimity amidst great distress', with poetic praise for the serene suicides of Cato and Socrates. Then:]

In contrast with this, anyone who is sunk in sorrow and dejection because of some calamity that has befallen him always appears somewhat mean and despicable. We can't bring ourselves to feel for him what he feels for himself, even though we might feel it for ourselves if we were in his situation. So perhaps it is unjust of us to despise him, if any sentiment can regarded as unjust when nature compels us to have it. There's never anything agreeable about the weakness of sorrow, except when it arises from what we feel for others more than from what we feel for ourselves. A son whose kindly and respectworthy father has died may give way to sorrow without much blame. His sorrow is mainly based on a sort of sympathy with his departed parent, and we readily enter into this humane emotion. But if he were to indulge the same weakness on account of a misfortune that affected only himself, we would no longer be patient with him. If he were reduced to beggary and ruin, if he were exposed to the most dreadful dangers, indeed if he were led out to a public execution and there shed one single tear on the scaffold, he would disgrace himself for ever in the minds of all the gallant and generous part of mankind. [Re 'generous', see note on page 11.] Their compassion for him would be strong and sincere; but because it would still fall short of his excessive weakness they would not pardon his thus exposing himself in the eyes of the world. His behaviour would affect them with shame rather than with sorrow; and the dishonour that he had thus [i.e. by weeping on the scaffold] brought on himself would appear to them the most lamentable circumstance in his misfortune. . . .

## Chapter 2: The origin of ambition, and differences of rank

It is because mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow that we parade our riches and conceal our poverty. Nothing is so humiliating as having to expose our distress to the public view, and to feel that although our situation is there for everyone to see, *no-one* feels for us a half of what we feel. Indeed, this concern for the sentiments of everyone else is the main reason why we pursue riches and avoid poverty. Consider: what *is* the purpose of all the toil and bustle of this world? What is the purpose of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, power, and pre-eminence? Is it to supply the necessities of nature? The wages of the poorest labourer can supply them: his means afford him food and clothing, and the comfort of a house and of a family. If we strictly examined his personal budget we would find that he spends a great part of his income on conveniences that can be regarded as

luxuries. . . . Why, then, are we so concerned to avoid being in his situation, and why should those who have grown up in the higher ranks of life regard it as worse than death to be reduced to live—even without his labour—on the same simple food as he eats, to dwell under the same lowly roof, and to be dressed in the same humble clothes? Do they imagine that their stomach is better or their sleep sounder in a palace than in a cottage? The contrary of this has often been pointed out, and anyway it is so obvious that everyone would know it even if no-one had pointed it out! Well, then, what *is* the source of that emulation—·that *trying-to-copy*·—that runs through all the different ranks of men? What advantages do we expect from that great purpose of human life that we call 'bettering our condition'? The only advantages we can aim to derive from it are being noticed, attended to, regarded with sympathy, acceptance, and approval. It is the vanity—not the ease or the pleasure—that draws us. But vanity is always based on our thinking we are the object of attention and approval. The rich man glories in his riches because he feels that •they naturally attract the world's attention to him, and that •mankind are disposed to go along with him in all the agreeable emotions that the advantages of his situation so readily inspire in him. At the thought of *this* his heart seems to swell within him, and he is fonder of his wealth on *this* account than for all the other advantages it brings him. The poor man, on the other hand, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that either •it places him out of everyone's sight or •if people do take any notice of him it's with almost no fellow-feeling for the misery and distress that he suffers. He is humiliated on both accounts. **Being disapproved of** is entirely different from being overlooked, ·but being overlooked is essentially tied to **not being approved of**·: the obscurity of the overlooked poor man also shuts out the daylight of honour and approval; so that his feeling of not being taken notice of necessarily damps the most agreeable hope and disappoints the most ardent desire of human nature, ·namely, the desire for the approval of one's fellow-men·. The poor man comes and goes unheeded, and is no more noticed in the middle of a crowd than he is when shut up in his own hovel. The humble cares and earnest work that occupy people in his situation don't entertain the dissipated and the cheerful. They avert their eyes from him, or if his distress is so extreme that they have to look at him, it's only to keep themselves at a distance from such a disagreeable object. Those who are fortunate and proud are amazed that human wretchedness should dare to present itself before them, having the insolence to disturb the serenity of their happiness with the loathsome view of its misery. The man of rank and distinction, on the other hand, is observed by all the world. Everyone is eager to look at him, and to have, if only through sympathy, the joy and exultation that his circumstances naturally inspire in him. The public *care* about what he does—about his every word, every gesture. In a large assembly he is the person everyone looks at, waiting for him to start and direct their passions; and if his behaviour isn't altogether absurd, every moment gives him an opportunity to interest mankind, and to make himself an object of the observation and fellow-feeling of everyone around him. This •attention imposes restraints on him—greatness always brings a certain loss of liberty—and yet •it makes greatness an object of envy, and everyone thinks that it compensates for all the toil and anxiety involved in the pursuit of it, and (even more significant) all the leisure, ease, and carefree security that are lost for ever by the acquisition of greatness.

When we consider the condition of the great in the delusive colours in which the imagination is apt to paint it, it seems to be almost the abstract idea of a perfect and

happy state. It is exactly the state that we in our daydreams had sketched out to ourselves as the ultimate object of all our desires. That gives us a special sympathy with the satisfaction of those who are in that state. We favour all their inclinations, and support all their wishes. What a pity it would be (we think) if anything were to spoil and corrupt such an agreeable situation! We could even wish them to be immortal; and it seems hard to us that death should at last put an end to such perfect enjoyment. . . . *Great King, live for ever!* is the Asian compliment that we would readily offer them if experience didn't teach us its absurdity. [In the original, as well as in this version, the preceding sentence has the first occurrence of 'king' in this work.] Every calamity that befalls them, every injury that is done them, arouses in the breast of the spectator ten times more compassion and resentment than he would have felt if the same things had happened to other men. The only proper subjects for tragedy are the misfortunes of *kings*. In this respect they resemble the misfortunes of *lovers*. Those two situations are the ones that chiefly interest us in the theatre; because, in spite of everything that reason and experience can tell us to the contrary, the prejudices of the imagination attach to these two states a happiness superior to any other. To disturb or to put an end to such perfect enjoyment seems to be the most atrocious of all injuries. . . . All the innocent blood that was shed in the civil wars provoked less indignation than the death of Charles I. A stranger to human nature who saw •men's indifference to the misery of their inferiors and •the regret and indignation they feel for the misfortunes of those above them might well think that pain must be more agonizing, and the convulsions of death more terrible, for persons of higher rank than for those lower down in the scale.

Mankind's disposition to go along with all the passions of the rich and the powerful is the basis for the ordering of society into different *ranks*. Our fawning deference to our superiors comes from our admiration for the advantages of their situation more often than it comes from any individual's expecting benefit from their good-will. Their benefits can extend to only a few, but their fortunes are a matter of concern to almost everyone. We're eager to help them to complete a system of happiness that comes so near to perfection; and we want to serve them for their own sake, without any reward but the honour of obliging them. Nor is our deference to the wishes of people of high rank primarily based on a concern for the usefulness of •such submission, a concern for the social order that is best supported by •it. Even when the order of society seems to require that we should *oppose* the high-ranking people, we can hardly bring ourselves to do it. Consider the doctrine that

> kings are the servants of the people, who are to be obeyed, resisted, deposed, or punished as the public convenience may require;

—that is the doctrine of reason and philosophy, but it isn't the doctrine of Nature! Nature would teach us to submit to kings for their own sake, to tremble and bow down before their high station, to regard their smile as a sufficient reward for any services, and to dread their displeasure—even if no other evil were to follow from it—as the severest of all humiliations. To treat them in any way as men, to reason and argue with them on ordinary occasions, requires a strength of character that few men have. . . . The strongest motives—the most furious •passions of fear, hatred, and resentment—are hardly enough to outweigh this natural disposition to respect them. For the bulk of the people to be willing to oppose a king with violence, or to want to see him punished or deposed, he'll have to have aroused in them—innocently or not—the

highest degree of all •those passions. Even when the people have been brought this far, they are still apt to relent at any moment; they easily relapse into their habitual deference towards someone they have been accustomed to look on as their natural superior. They can't bear seeing their monarch humiliated. Resentment gives way to compassion; they forget all past provocations, their old drives towards loyalty start up again, and they run to re-establish the ruined authority of their old masters with the same violence with which they had opposed it. The death ·by beheading· of Charles I ( ·after the civil war of the 1640s·) brought about the restoration of the royal family. Compassion for James II when he was seized by the populace in making his escape on ship-board nearly prevented the revolution ·of 1688·, and did slow it down.

Do the great seem unaware of how easily they can get the admiration of the public? or do they seem to think that, for them as for anyone else, their rank must have been purchased either by sweat or by blood? If the young nobleman is instructed in how to support the dignity of his rank, and to make himself worthy of the superiority over his fellow-citizens that he has acquired through the virtue of his ancestors, *what* accomplishments is he told to acquire for this purpose? Is he to make himself worthy of his rank by knowledge, hard work, patience, self-denial, or any other kind of virtue? Because his least move is *noticed*, he acquires a habit of care over every detail of ordinary behaviour, and tries to perform all those small duties with the most exact propriety. Being conscious of how much he is observed, and of how much people are disposed to allow him to have whatever he wants, he acts—even in utterly ordinary situations—with the freedom and loftiness that are naturally inspired by the thought of how the populace view him. Everything about his conduct marks an elegant and graceful sense of his own superiority—something that those who are born lower down the social scale can hardly ever achieve. *These* are the arts [here = 'the devices' or even 'the tricks'] by which he proposes to make mankind more easily submit to his authority and govern *their* inclinations according to *his* wishes; and in this he usually succeeds. . . . During most of his reign Louis XIV ·of France· was widely regarded as the most perfect model of a great prince. What were the talents and virtues by which he acquired this great reputation? The scrupulous and inflexible rightness—the danger and difficulty—the tireless energy—of everything he did? His broad knowledge, his exquisite judgment, his heroic valour? It was none of these. What he *did* have was the status of the most *powerful* prince in Europe, which gave him the highest rank among kings; and then, says his historian. . . [and Smith gives a long quotation about Louis XIV's grand and imposing personal manner, his fine voice, his handsomeness, and so on. Then:] These trivial accomplishments—supported by his rank and no doubt by a degree of other talents and virtues, though not an outstanding degree—established this prince in the esteem of his own age and later generations' respect for his memory. Compared with this kingly manner, no other virtue appeared to have any merit. . . .

But a man of lower rank can't hope to distinguish himself in any such way as that. *Polish* [Smith's word is 'politeness'] is so much a virtue of the great that it won't bring much honour to anyone else. The fool who imitates their manner, pretending to be eminent by the extreme *properness* of his ordinary behaviour, is rewarded with a double share of contempt for his •folly and •presumption. [Smith goes on a bit about the absurdity of pretentious behaviour in ordinary low-ranked people. Then:] The behaviour of a private man *ought to be* marked by perfect modesty and plainness, along with as much casualness as is consistent with the respect due to

the people he is with. If he hopes ever to distinguish himself, it will have to be by more important virtues. He'll have to acquire dependents to match the dependents of the great; and because his only access to funds from which to support them will be through the labour of his body and the activity of his mind, he'll have to cultivate these. So he'll need to acquire superior knowledge in his profession, and to work unusually hard in the exercise of it. He must be patient in labour, resolute in danger, and firm in distress. He'll have bring these talents into public view by the difficulty and importance of his undertakings, by the good judgment and the severe and unrelenting application with which he pursues them. His behaviour in all ordinary circumstances must be marked by honesty and prudence, generosity and frankness; and he must give priority to activities in which it requires the greatest talents and virtues to act properly, but in which the greatest applause goes to those who can acquit themselves with honour. ·Consider these two portraits·:

**(1)** When the man of spirit and ambition is depressed by his situation, how impatiently he looks around for some great opportunity to distinguish himself! He won't turn down anything that can provide him with this. He even looks forward with satisfaction to the prospect of foreign war, or civil war ·in his own country·; with secret delight he sees—through all the confusion and bloodshed that wars bring—the probability of getting into some of those wished-for occasions in which he can attract the attention and admiration of mankind.

**(2)** The man of rank and distinction, •whose whole glory consists in the propriety of his ordinary behaviour, •who is contented with the humble renown that this can bring him, and •who has no talents to acquire any other ·distinction·, is unwilling to risk embarrassing himself in any activity that might turn out to be difficult or distressing. To cut a fine figure at a ball is his great triumph, and to succeed in a romantic intrigue is his highest exploit. He hates all public confusions, not •because he loves mankind (the great never look on their inferiors as fellow-men) and not •because he lacks courage (for he usually doesn't), but •because he is aware that he doesn't have any of the virtues that are required in such situations, and that the public attention will certainly be drawn away from him towards by others. He may be willing to expose himself to some small danger, or to conduct a military campaign when that happens to be the fashion. But he shudders with horror at the thought of any situation that would demand the continual and long exertion of patience, industry, strength, and application of thought.

Those virtues are hardly ever to be found in men who are born to high ranks. That is why in all governments—even in monarchies—the highest administrative positions are generally occupied, and the detailed administrative work done, by men who were brought up in the middle and lower social ranks, who have advanced through their own hard work and abilities, although they are loaded with the jealousy and opposed by the resentment of all those who were born their superiors. The great—·those with the very highest social rank·—at first regard these administrators as negligible, then they come to envy them, and eventually they are contented to knuckle under to them in the same abjectly *low* manner that they want the rest of mankind to adopt towards themselves.

It's the loss of this easy command over the affections of mankind that makes the fall from greatness so unbearable. [Smith gives a rather full account of one example, the family

of the defeated king of Macedon who were led in triumph through Rome. The crowd, he reports, were deeply moved by the sight of the children, but were contemptuous of the king because he had chosen to stay alive and endure this disgrace. The disgrace, Smith says sharply, was to spend the rest of his life in comfort and safety, on a generous pension. What he had lost was 'the admiring mob of fools, flatterers, and dependents who had formerly been accustomed to attend to everything he did'.]

'Love', says Rochefoucauld, 'is often followed by ambition, but ambition is hardly ever followed by love.' Once the passion of ambition has taken possession of the breast, it won't allow any rival or any successor. To those who have been accustomed to having or even *hoping for* public admiration, all other pleasures sicken and die. Some fallen statesmen have tried to become happier by working to overcome their ambition, and to despise the honours that they could no longer have; but how few have been able to succeed! Most of them have spent their time in listless and insipid laziness, •angry at the thought of their own insignificance, •unable to take an interest in the occupations of private life, •enjoying nothing but talk about their former greatness, •satisfied in no activity except pointless attempts to recover that. Are *you* sincerely determined never to barter your liberty for the lordly servitude of a court, but to live free, fearless, and independent? Here is one way to keep to that virtuous resolution, and it may be the only one: Never enter the place from which so few have been able to return, never come within the circle of ambition, and never compare yourself with those masters of the earth who have already occupied the attention of half of mankind before you.

[Smith's next paragraph starts with some rather obscure remarks about people's attitude to 'place', which he distinguishes from 'rank'. He continues:] But no-one despises rank, distinction, pre-eminence, unless he is either vastly •better than the human average or vastly •worse, i.e. unless he is either

> •so confirmed in wisdom and real philosophy that he is convinced that as long as the propriety of his conduct *entitles* him to approval it doesn't matter much whether people notice him or approve of him,

or else

> •so habituated to the idea of his own low condition, so sunk in slothful and sottish indifference, that he has entirely forgotten the desire. . . .for superiority.

What gives to prosperity all its dazzling splendour is the prospect of being a natural object of the joyous congratulations and sympathetic attention of mankind; and, correspondingly, what makes the gloom of adversity so horribly dark is the feeling that our misfortunes are objects (not of the fellow-feeling, but) of the contempt and aversion of our brethren. It's because of this that the most dreadful calamities aren't always the ones that it is hardest to bear. It is often more humiliating to appear in public under small disasters than under great misfortunes. The small ones arouse no sympathy, whereas the great calamities evoke a lively compassion. Although in the latter case the spectators' sympathetic feelings aren't as lively as the anguish of the sufferer, the gap between sufferer and spectator is smaller in those cases than in the case of small misfortunes, so that the spectator's imperfect fellow-feeling does give the sufferer some help in bearing his misery. It would be more humiliating for a gentleman to appear at a social event covered with filth and rags than to appear with blood and wounds. The latter situation would draw people's pity, whereas the other would make them laugh. The judge who orders a criminal to be set in the pillory dishonours him more than if he had condemned him to the scaffold. [Smith adds some

remarks about (dis)honour, apparently connecting it with the (un)likelihood of attracting pity. Then:] That's why persons of high rank are never subjected to lesser punishments: the law often takes their life, but it almost always respects their honour. To flog such a person or to set him in the pillory, on account of any crime whatever, is a brutality of which no European government is capable—except Russia's.

A brave man isn't made contemptible by being brought to the scaffold; he is, by being set in the pillory. His behaviour on the scaffold may gain him universal esteem and admiration, whereas nothing he can do in the pillory can make him agreeable. The sympathy of the spectators supports him on the scaffold, saving him from the most unbearable of all sentiments, namely the shameful sense that his misery is felt by no-one but himself. There is no sympathy for the man in the pillory; or if there *is* any it's not sympathy with •his pain, which is a trifle, but sympathy with •his awareness of not getting any sympathy because of his pain. Those who pity him blush and hang down their heads for him. He droops in the same way, and feels himself irrecoverably degraded by the punishment, though not by the crime. In contrast with this, the man who dies with resolution is naturally regarded with esteem and approval by spectators who have their heads up, and he keeps *his* head up too; and if the crime doesn't deprive him of the respect of others, the punishment never will. He has no suspicion that his situation is an object of contempt or derision to anyone, and he is entitled to assume the air not only of perfect calmness but of triumph and exultation. . . .

## Chapter 3: The corruption of our moral sentiments that comes from this disposition to admire the rich and the great, and to despise or neglect the downtrodden and poor

This disposition to admire—and almost to *worship*—the rich and the powerful, and to despise or at least neglect persons of poor and mean condition, is (on one hand) necessary to establish and maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, and (on the other) the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments. Moralists all down the centuries have complained that wealth and greatness are often given the respect and admiration that only wisdom and virtue should receive, and that poverty and weakness are quite wrongly treated with the contempt that should be reserved for vice and folly.

We want to be respected and to be worthy of respect. We're afraid of being contemned and of being contemptible. But as we move into the world we soon find that wisdom and virtue are by no means the only objects of respect, and that vice and folly aren't the only objects of contempt. We often see the world's respectful attentions directed more strongly towards the rich and great than towards the wise and virtuous. We often see the vices and follies of the powerful much less despised than the poverty and weakness of the innocent. For us to further our great ambition to enjoy the respect and admiration of mankind, two different roads are presented to us, each leading to the desired goal: **(1)** the acquisition of wealth and greatness, and **(2)** the study of wisdom and the practice of virtue. Two different characters are presented for us to try to achieve: **(1)** proud ambition and ostentatious greed, and **(2)** humble modesty and fairness of conduct. Two different pictures are held out to us as models on which we can try to shape our own character and behaviour: **(1)** one

is gaudy and glittering in its colouring, **(2)** the other is more correct and more exquisitely beautiful in its outline; **(1)** one forces itself on the notice of every wandering eye, **(2)** the other doesn't attract much attention from anyone but the most studious and careful observer. **(1)** The admirers and worshippers of wealth and greatness are the great mob of mankind (and how odd it seems that most of them aren't in this camp because they hope to get anything out of it). **(2)** The real and steady admirers of wisdom and virtue are mostly wise and virtuous themselves; they're a select group, but not a large one, I'm afraid. The two •objects of respect produce two •kinds of respect; it's not hard to tell them apart, and yet they have a great deal in common, so that inattentive observers are apt to mistake the one for the other, i.e. to observe a case of respect for wealth and greatness and to mistake it for a case of respect for wisdom and virtue.

Almost everyone respects the rich and great more than the poor and the humble. [Smith starts that sentence with 'In equal degrees of merit...', which suggests that his point might be: If a rich man is morally on a par with a poor one, nearly everyone will give the rich one more respect. But the rest of the paragraph doesn't suggest any concern with moral equality across differences of rank.] With most men the presumption and vanity of the rich are much more admired than the real and solid merit of the poor. It is hardly agreeable to good morals, indeed it seems like an abuse of language, to say

> 'Mere wealth and greatness, abstracted from merit and virtue, deserve our respect.'

But we have to admit that wealth and greatness so constantly *get* respect that they can be considered as in some ways the *natural* objects of it. The status of someone who is wealthy and great can be completely degraded by vice and folly, but it takes an enormous intensity of vice and folly to do this. The extravagance of a man of fashion is looked on with much less contempt and aversion than that of a man lower down the social scale. One breach of the rules of temperance and propriety by a poor man is commonly more resented than the constant and open disregard of those rules ever is in a rich man.

In the middling and lower stations of life, the road to virtue is happily pretty much the same as the road to fortune, in most cases; I'm talking here about the kind of fortune that men in such ·lower· stations can reasonably expect to acquire. In all the middling and lower professions, it's nearly always possible to succeed through real and solid professional abilities combined with prudent, just, firm, and temperate conduct. And sometimes abilities will bring success even when the conduct is far from correct. But habitual imprudence will always cloud and sometimes submerge the most splendid professional abilities, and so can injustice, weakness, and extravagance. ·That's one consideration that tends to keep· men who are in the lower or middling stations of life ·behaving properly. And there are two others: •Such men· can never be great enough to be above the law, and that inevitably overawes them into some sort of respect for the rules of justice, or at least the more important of them. •And the success of such people nearly always depends on the favour and good opinion of their neighbours and equals, and that can seldom be had unless their conduct is tolerably regular [i.e. pretty much in accordance with the rules]. So the good old proverb that *honesty is the best policy* holds true here; and we can generally expect a considerable degree of virtue in such situations, which are (fortunately for the good morals of society!) the situations that the vast majority of mankind are in.

In the upper stations of life the case is not, unfortunately, always like that. In the courts of princes and in the drawing-rooms of the great, success and advancement depend not

on the esteem of intelligent and well-informed equals but on the fanciful and foolish favour of ignorant, presumptuous, and proud superiors; and flattery and falsehood too often prevail over merit and abilities. In such societies the ability to please is valued above the ability to serve. In times of peace a prince or great man wishes only to be amused, and is even apt to imagine •that he has almost no need for service from anyone, or •that those who amuse him are sufficiently able to serve him. The trivial accomplishments of. . . .a man of fashion are commonly more admired than the solid and masculine virtues of a warrior, a statesman, a philosopher, or a legislator. All the great and awe-inspiring virtues—the ones that can equip a man for the council, the senate, or the battlefield—are regarded with the utmost contempt and derision by the insolent and insignificant flatterers who commonly loom largest in such corrupted societies. When the duke of Sully was called on by Louis XIII to give his advice in a great emergency, he noticed the courtiers giggling to one another about his unfashionable appearance. 'Whenever your majesty's father', said the old warrior and statesman, 'did me the honour to consult me, he ordered the buffoons of the court to leave the room.'

It's because of our disposition to admire and therefore to imitate the rich and the great that they are able to set *fashions*—in dress, language, deportment. Even their vices and follies are fashionable, and most men are proud to imitate and resemble them in the very qualities that dishonour and degrade them. [Some people, Smith says, act as though they had •the vices and follies of the rich and great, wanting to be admired for this, even when they don't approve of •them and perhaps don't even have •them. 'There are hypocrites of wealth and greatness, as well as of religion and virtue.' He is sharply critical of the not-very-rich man who tries to pass himself off as rich without thinking about the fact that if he really adopts the way of life of a rich man he will soon reduce himself 'to beggary'. Then:]

To attain to this envied situation the candidates for fortune too often abandon the path of virtue, which unfortunately sometimes goes in the exact opposite direction from the path to wealth, status, fame. The ambitious man comforts himself with the thought that in the splendid situation that he is aiming at he'll have so many ways to draw the respect and admiration of mankind, and will be able to act with such superior propriety and grace that the glow of his future conduct will entirely cover or erase the foulness of the steps by which he got there. In many governments the candidates for the highest stations are above the law [that clause is verbatim Smith]; and if they can attain the object of their ambition they have no fear of being indicted for anything they did to get there. So they often try to supplant and destroy those who oppose or stand in the way of their greatness—not only by fraud and falsehood (the ordinary and vulgar arts of intrigue and plotting), but also sometimes by committing the most enormous crimes, by murder and assassination, by rebellion and civil war. They fail more often than they succeed, and usually gain nothing but the disgraceful punishment that their crimes deserve. And even when they *do* attain that wished-for greatness, they find nothing like the happiness that they had expected to enjoy in it. What the ambitious man is really after is not ease or pleasure but always some kind of honour (though often an honour that he doesn't understand well); and the honour of his exalted station seems to him and to other people to be polluted and defiled by the baseness of his way of achieving it. [Smith continues with a colourful account of the ambitious man who reaches the top by disgusting means, tries every trick to get •others and •himself to forget how he got there, and fails in •both attempts. 'He is still secretly pursued by the avenging furies of shame and remorse.']

# Part II: Merit and demerit: the objects of reward and punishment

## Section 1: The sense of merit and demerit

### Introduction

The actions and conduct of mankind can be brought within range of approval/disapproval in two different ways: one is through their being proper or improper, decent or graceless, ·*right* or *wrong*·; the other is through their having merit or demerit, the qualities of deserving reward and of deserving punishment.

I have already remarked that the sentiment or affection of the heart [Smith's phrase; see note on page 116 about 'affection'] from which an action comes, and on which its whole virtue or vice depends, can be considered under two different aspects or in two different relations:

**(1)** It can be considered in relation to the cause or object that arouses it. The affection's (un)suitableness or (dis)proportion to the cause or object that arouses it is what determines the (im)propriety, ·the rightness or wrongness·, of the consequent action.

**(2)** It can be considered in relation to the end at which it aims or the effect that it is likely to produce. The affection's tendency to produce beneficial or harmful effects is what determines the merit or demerit, the good or ill desert, of the action to which it gives rise.

In Part I of this work I have explained what our sense of **(1)** the propriety or impropriety of actions consists in. I now start to consider what **(2)** the good or ill desert of actions consists in.

### Chapter 1: Whatever appears to be the proper object of gratitude (resentment) appears to deserve reward (punishment)

[Smith's first paragraph repeats, at greater length but with no more content, the proposition that is the chapter-title. Then:]

The sentiment that most immediately and directly prompts us to reward ·someone· is gratitude, and what most immediately and directly prompts us to punish ·someone· is resentment. So it's bound to be the case that any action that appears to be a proper and approved object of gratitude will seem to us to *deserve* reward, and any action that appears to be a proper and approved object of resentment will seem to us to *deserve* punishment.

Rewarding is recompensing or repaying, returning good for good received. Punishing is also recompensing or repaying, though in a different manner; it is returning evil for evil that has been done.

Gratitude and resentment are not the only passions that interest us in the happiness or misery of other people; but they are the ones that most directly arouse us to cause such happiness or misery. If habitual approval of someone gives us love and esteem for him, we are of course pleased that he should have good fortune, and so we're willing to lend a hand to promote that. But our •love for him is fully satisfied if his good fortune comes about without help from us. All this passion wants is to *see him happy*, without regard for who is

the author of his prosperity. But •gratitude can't be satisfied in this way. If someone to whom we owe many obligations is made happy without our assistance, though this pleases our love it doesn't satisfy our gratitude. Until *we* have repaid him, till we ourselves have been contributed to promoting his happiness, we feel ourselves still loaded with the debt that his past services have laid upon us.

Similarly, if habitual disapproval of someone makes us hate and dislike him, that will often lead us to take a malicious pleasure in his misfortune. But although •dislike and hatred harden us against all sympathy, and sometimes even dispose us to rejoice at the person's distress, if no resentment is involved—if neither we nor our friends have received any great personal provocation—•these passions wouldn't naturally lead us to want to be instrumental in causing such distress. Even if there was no risk of punishment for having a hand in it, we would rather that his distress should happen by some other means. To someone dominated by violent hatred, it might be agreeable to hear that the person he loathes and detests has been killed in an accident. But if he has the least spark of justice (which he *might* have, though violent hatred isn't favourable to virtue), he would be tremendously upset to have been the •unintentional cause of the accident; and immeasurably more shocked by the thought of having •voluntarily contributed to it. . . . But it's not like that with resentment. If someone who has done us some great injury—murdered our father or our brother, for example—dies of a fever soon afterwards, or is executed for some other crime, this might soothe our hatred but it wouldn't fully gratify our resentment. What our resentment makes us want is not merely for

•him to be punished,

but also for

•him to be punished by us,

and for

•him to be punished for the particular injury that he did to us.

Resentment can't be fully satisfied unless the offender is not only made to grieve in his turn, but to grieve for the particular wrong we have suffered from him. He must be made to repent and be sorry for *that particular action*. And the natural gratification of this passion tends automatically to produce all the political ends of punishment—the correction of the criminal, and the example to the public (who, through fear of such punishment, will be scared off from being guilty of a similar offence). So gratitude and resentment are the sentiments that most immediately and directly prompt us to reward and to punish; that is why anyone who seems to us to be the proper and approved object of gratitude also seems to us to *deserve* reward, and anyone who seems to us to be the proper and approved object of resentment also seems to us to *deserve* punishment..

## Chapter 2: The proper objects of gratitude and resentment

All it can mean to say that someone is 'the proper and approved object of gratitude (or resentment)' is that he is an object of gratitude (or resentment) that naturally seems proper and is approved of. And what does it mean to say that a given instance of gratitude or resentment 'seems proper and is approved of'? The same as it means to say this about any other human passion, namely that the heart of every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes with the passion in question, i.e. that every unbiased bystander entirely enters into the passion and goes along with it.

Therefore, a person appears to deserve reward if he is the natural object of someone's gratitude, this being an instance

of gratitude that every human heart is disposed to beat time to [Smith's phrase], and thereby applaud. And a person appears to deserve punishment if he is the natural object of someone's resentment, this being an instance of resentment that the breast of every reasonable man is ready to adopt and sympathize with. It is surely right to say that an action appears to *deserve* reward if everyone who knows of it will *want* it to be rewarded, and appears to *deserve* punishment if everyone who hears of it is angry about it and for that reason is happy to see it punished. ·I shall now put flesh on these two lots of bones·.

[The words 'benefactor' and 'beneficiary' will be used quite a lot in this version, though Smith doesn't use 'benefactor' so much and never uses 'beneficiary'. The aim is brevity—sparing us Smith's 'the person who receives the benefit' and 'the person who bestows the benefit'.]

**(1)** Just as we sympathize with the joy of our companions when they prosper, so also we join with them in their contented and satisfied attitude to whatever is the cause of their good fortune. We •enter into the love and affection that they have for that cause, and •begin to love it too. We would be sorry for their sakes if it were destroyed, or even if it were placed too far away from them, out of the reach of their care and protection, even if that distance wouldn't deprive them of anything except the pleasure of seeing it. And this holds in a quite special way if the cause of our brethren's happiness is another *person*. When we see one man being assisted, protected, and relieved by another, our sympathy with the joy of the beneficiary serves to enliven our fellow-feeling with his gratitude towards his benefactor. We look on the benefactor in the way we imagine the beneficiary must look on him; the benefactor seems to stand before us in the most attractive and amiable light. So we find it easy to sympathize with the beneficiary's grateful affection for the person to whom he has been so much obliged; and that leads us to applaud the good things that he is disposed to do in return for the good that has been done for him. As we entirely enter into the affection that produces these return-benefits, they necessarily seem to be in every way proper and suitable to their object.

**(2)** In the same way that we sympathize with the sorrow of our fellow-creature when we see his distress, we enter into his abhorrence and aversion towards whatever has caused it. As our heart adopts •his grief and beats time to it, so it is filled with the spirit by which he tries to drive away or destroy the cause of •it. The slack and passive fellow-feeling with which we accompany him in •his sufferings gives way to the more vigorous and active sentiment with which we go along with him in his effort either to repel •them or to gratify his aversion to whatever it was that caused •them. This is especially the case when the cause of his sufferings is a human person. When we see one man oppressed or injured by another, our sympathy with the distress of the sufferer animates our fellow-feeling with his resentment against the offender. We rejoice to see him hit back at his adversary, and are eager and ready to help him whenever he exerts himself •in self-defence or even (within limits) •in getting revenge. If the sufferer dies in the quarrel, we sympathize not only with the real resentment of his friends and relatives but also with the resentment that we imagine to be felt by the dead man, who in fact can no longer feel that or any other human sentiment. . . . The sympathetic tears that we shed for the immense and irretrievable loss that we imagine him to have sustained seems like only a small part of the duty we owe him. The injury he has suffered demands, we think, a principal part of our attention. We feel the resentment that we imagine he. . . .would feel if his cold and lifeless body retained any awareness of what happens on earth. His blood, we think, calls aloud for vengeance. . . . The horrors that

are supposed to haunt the bed of the murderer, the ghosts that (superstition imagines) rise from their graves to demand vengeance on those who cut their lives short, all arise from this natural sympathy with the imaginary resentment of the murdered person. At least with this most dreadful of all crimes, nature has in this way stamped on the human heart, in the strongest and most indelible characters, an immediate and instinctive approval of the sacred and necessary law of retaliation, this being something that comes into play before any thoughts about the utility of punishment.

### Chapter 3: Where there's no approval of the benefactor's conduct, there's not much sympathy with the beneficiary's gratitude; and where there's no disapproval of the motives of the person who does someone harm, there's absolutely no sympathy with the victim's resentment

[The first paragraph of this chapter repeats, without significant additions, what is said in the chapter's heading. Then:]

**(1)** When we can't sympathize with the affections of the benefactor, when there seems to be no propriety in his reasons for acting as he did, we're less disposed to enter into the gratitude of the beneficiary. A *very* small return seems enough to reward the foolish and profuse generosity that confers great benefits for trivial reasons—e.g. giving a man an estate merely because he has the same personal name and family name as the giver. . . . In a case like that, our contempt for the folly of the benefactor hinders us from thoroughly entering into the gratitude of the beneficiary; the benefactor seems unworthy of it. . . . Monarchs who have heaped wealth, power, and honours onto their favourites haven't often aroused the degree of attachment to their persons that has often been experienced by those who were less lavish in handing out favours. The good-natured but unwise lavishness of James I of Great Britain doesn't seem to have brought him anyone's personal loyalty; despite his social and harmless disposition, he appears to have lived and died without a friend. Whereas the whole gentry and nobility of England risked their lives and fortunes in the cause of his more frugal and discriminating son, ·Charles I·, despite the coldness and distant severity of his ordinary behaviour.

**(2)** When one person suffers at the hands of another, and the agent's conduct appears to have been entirely directed by motives and affections that we thoroughly enter into and approve of, we can't have any sort of sympathy with the sufferer's resentment, no matter how great the harm that has been done to him. When two people quarrel, if we sympathize with and entirely adopt the resentment of one of them, we can't possibly enter into the other's. Our sympathy with the person whose motives we go along with, and whom we therefore look on as in the right, is bound to harden us against all fellow-feeling with the other ·party to the quarrel·, whom we necessarily regard as being in the wrong. Whatever *he* has suffered, while it is no more than what we ourselves would have wanted him to suffer, no more than what our own sympathetic indignation would have prompted us to inflict on him, it can't either displease or provoke us. When an inhuman murderer is brought to the scaffold, though we have some compassion for his misery we can't have any sort of fellow-feeling with any resentment that he is absurd enough to express any against his prosecutor or his judge. The natural outcome of *their* just indignation is indeed most fatal and ruinous to him; but we can't be displeased with the consequences of a sentiment that we feel that *we* cannot avoid adopting when we bring the case home to ourselves.

## Chapter 4: Recapitulation of the preceding chapters

[This short chapter is what its title says it is, and no more.]

## Chapter 5: Analysing the sense of merit and demerit

**(1)** So it comes down to this: When one person x acts upon another person y (if I may put it like that; ·I mean when x acts in some way that has consequences affecting y·), our sense of the **propriety** of x's conduct arises from what I'll call a •direct sympathy with x's affections and motives; and our sense of the **merit** of x's conduct arises from what I'll call an •indirect sympathy with y's gratitude. [Strictly speaking, there is nothing indirect about the latter sympathy; what is indirect is that sympathy's relationship to x.]

On this account,. . . .the sense of merit seems to be a compound sentiment, made up of two distinct emotions—a direct sympathy with the sentiments of the benefactor and an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of his beneficiaries.

[Smith now offers a fairly long paragraph applying this account to our emotions as we read works of history. This doesn't add anything to the account, except for the remark that 'we are shocked beyond all measure if beneficiaries seem by their conduct to have little sense of the obligations conferred on them'.]

**(2)** In the same way that our sense of the **impropriety** of the conduct of a person x arises from our lack of sympathy for (or even an outright antipathy to) x's affections and motives, so also our sense of its **demerit** arises from what I'll again call an indirect sympathy with the person y who has suffered from x's conduct.

So it seems that the sense of demerit is like the sense of merit in being a compounded sentiment, made up of two distinct emotions; a direct antipathy to x's sentiments and an indirect sympathy with y's resentment.

[Again Smith applies this to the varying emotional states of a reader of history. This colourful account reaches a climax here:] Our sense of the horror and dreadful atrocity of such conduct, the delight we get from hearing that it was properly punished, the indignation we feel when it escapes this due retaliation, in short our whole sense and feeling of what that conduct deserves—of the propriety and fitness of inflicting evil on the person who is guilty of it and making him grieve in his turn—arises from the sympathetic indignation that naturally boils up in the breast of the spectator whenever he thoroughly brings home to himself the situation of the sufferer.

[The rest of this chapter was originally a long footnote.]

I have attributed our natural •sense of the ill desert of human actions to our sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer; and many people—perhaps most—will see this as a degradation of •that sentiment. Resentment is commonly regarded as so odious they they'll tend to think it impossible that something as praiseworthy as the sense of the ill desert of vice should be in any way based on it. They may be more willing to admit that our sense of the merit of good actions is based on our sympathy with the gratitude of the beneficiaries, because gratitude—along with all the other benevolent passions—is regarded as a likeable motive that can't detract from the value of whatever is based on it. ·But that immediately puts them in a difficulty, because· gratitude and resentment are obviously in every respect counterparts to one another; if our sense of merit arises from a sympathy with the one, our sense of demerit can hardly *not* come from a fellow-feeling with the other.

And here is another point. Resentment at the level at which we too often see it *is* indeed just about the most odious of all the passions, but it isn't disapproved of when it doesn't fly so high and is brought right down to the level of the spectator's sympathetic indignation. When we bystanders feel that the sufferer's resentment doesn't in any way go beyond our own, when no word or gesture escapes him that indicates an emotion more violent than what we can keep time to, and when he never aims at inflicting any punishment beyond what we would rejoice to see inflicted. . . ., it is impossible that we won't entirely approve of his sentiments. Our own emotion in this case is bound to strike us as clearly justifying his. And as we learn from experience *how* incapable most people are of this moderation, and how great an effort it would take them to bring the rough undisciplined impulse of resentment down to this suitable level, we can't help having a considerable degree of esteem and admiration for anyone who manages to do so. When the sufferer's animosity exceeds (as it nearly always does) anything that *we* can go along with, we can't enter into it and so, inevitably, we disapprove of it. [Smith says that our disapproval of excessive resentment is greater than our disapproval of any other excess of passion, amounts of excess being equal. Then:] That is why revenge, the excess of resentment, appears to be the most detestable of all the passions and is an object of everyone's horror and indignation. And because excessive instances of this passion outnumber moderate ones a hundred to one, we're much inclined to regard it as odious and detestable right across the board. (Depraved as we are, Nature hasn't built into us any drive or motive that is wholly evil in every way, i.e. that can't be properly praised and approved of whatever its intensity level and direction of aim.) On some occasions we have a sense that this usually-too-strong passion is too weak. [Smith elaborates that along the lines of page 21 above.]

The writers ·in the Old Testament· wouldn't have talked so often or so strongly of God's wrath and anger if they had regarded every degree of those passions as vicious and evil, even in so weak and imperfect a creature as man.

Please bear in mind that this inquiry is about a matter not of •right but of •fact. We're concerned here with principles ·or criteria· to guide approval of the punishment of bad actions; the topic isn't the principles on the basis of which **a perfect being would** arrive at such approvals but rather the ones by which **weak and imperfect men actually do** arrive at them. It's obvious that the principles I have mentioned have a great effect on a man's sentiments; and it seems wisely ordered that they should do so. The very existence of society requires that undeserved and unprovoked malice should be restrained by proper punishments, and thus that inflicting those punishments should be regarded as a proper and laudable action. And men are naturally endowed with a desire for •the welfare and preservation of society; but the Author of nature hasn't left it to men to use their reason to work out what kinds and levels of punishment are right for •this purpose; rather, he has endowed men with an immediate and instinctive approval of just precisely the kind and level of punishment that is most proper to attain •it. The arrangement that nature has made here is like what it has done in many other contexts. With regard to all the specially important purposes—the ones that we might call nature's favourites—she has endowed mankind not only with an appetite for the end that she proposes, but also with an appetite for the only means by which this end can be brought about. (I mean: an appetite for them for their own sakes, independently of any thought about what they might lead to.) Thus self-preservation and the propagation of the species seem to be the great ends that Nature has proposed in the formation of all animals; and men are endowed with a desire

for those ends, and an aversion to the contrary. . . . But it hasn't been left to the slow and uncertain conclusions of our reason to discover how to bring those ends about. Nature has directed us to most of them by basic immediate instincts:

hunger,
thirst,
sexual passion,
the love of pleasure,
the fear of pain.

We seek all these for their own sakes, and not because they are conducive to survival and the propagation of our species; but they *are* conducive to them, and they are what the great Director of nature intended as a means to them.

[The enormous footnote concludes with an extremely difficult, confusing, and probably confused paragraph about a certain 'difference between the approval of propriety and the approval of merit'.]

# Section 2: Justice and beneficence

## Chapter I: Comparing those two virtues

The only actions that seem to require reward are ones that •tend to do good and •come from proper motives, because they're the only ones that are approved objects of gratitude, i.e. that arouse the sympathetic gratitude of the spectator.

The only actions that seem to seem to deserve punishment are ones that •tend to do harm and •come from improper motives, because they're the only ones that are approved objects of resentment, i.e. arouse the sympathetic resentment of the spectator.

Beneficence is always free, it can't be extorted by force, and merely not giving doesn't expose one to punishment, because the mere lack of beneficence doesn't tend to produce real positive evil. It may disappoint someone who had reasonably expected some benefit, and on that account it may justly arouse dislike and disapproval; but it can't provoke any resentment that mankind will go along with. The man who doesn't recompense his benefactor when he has it in his power to do so, and when his benefactor needs his help, is no doubt guilty of black ingratitude. No impartial spectator will have any fellow-feeling with the selfishness of his motives, and he is the proper object of the highest disapproval. But still he does no positive harm to anyone. [Smith presumably means 'he doesn't positively do harm'.] He merely doesn't do the good that in propriety he ought to have done. He is an object of •hatred, a passion naturally aroused by impropriety of sentiment and behaviour. but not of •resentment, a passion that is properly aroused only by actions that tend to do real positive harm to some particular persons. So this person's lack of gratitude can't be punished. To oblige him by force to do what gratitude should lead him to do, and what every impartial spectator would approve of him for doing, would be even more improper than his neglecting to do it. His benefactor would dishonour himself if he tried by violence to force him into gratitude, and it would be mere meddling for any third person to intervene unless he was the superior of

one of the other two [‘superior’ here means ‘employer or commanding officer or. . . ’]. But of all the duties of beneficence, those that are recommended by gratitude come closest to what is called a perfect and complete obligation—·i.e. come closest to the status of ‘You deserve to be punished if you don’t’·. What we are prompted to do by friendship, by generosity, by charity, meeting with universal approval when we do so, is even more free than the duties of gratitude, even further from being extortable by force. We have the phrase ‘a debt of gratitude’; we do not speak of ‘a debt of charity’ or ‘. . . of generosity’ or even ‘. . . of friendship’ except when the friendship relation has bases for gratitude mixed in with it.

It seems that nature gave us resentment for our own defence and *only* for that. It is the safeguard of justice and the security of innocence. It prompts us to beat off harm that others are trying to do to us, and to retaliate for harm already done, so that •the offender may be caused to be sorry for what he did, and so that •others, through fear of similar punishment, may be frightened off from similar offences. So resentment must be reserved for these purposes; the spectator will never go along with it when it is exerted for any other purpose. And the mere lack of the beneficent virtues doesn’t (and doesn’t try to) do any harm from which we can have occasion to defend ourselves.

But there’s another virtue the observance of •which is not left to the freedom of our own wills, •which may be extorted by force, and •the violation of which exposes the agent to resentment and thus to punishment. This virtue is *justice*; the violation of justice is injury; it does real positive harm to some particular persons, from motives that are naturally disapproved of. So it is a proper object of resentment, and of the natural consequence of resentment, namely punishment. Mankind go along with and approve of the violence employed to avenge the harm that is done by injustice, and to an even greater extent they go along with and approve of the violence that is used •to prevent and beat off the injury and •to restrain the offender from harming his neighbours. Someone who is thinking of committing an injustice is aware of this, and feels that force may properly be used, both by his intended victim and by others, either to stop him from committing his crime or to punish him when he has committed it. This is the basis for the remarkable distinction between •justice and •all the other social virtues that was recently emphasized by an author of great and original genius, namely:

> We feel ourselves to be under a stricter obligation to act according to •justice than to act in ways that fit with •friendship, •charity, or •generosity. Whether we perform these last three virtues seems to be left somewhat to our own choice; but we feel somehow that we are in a special way tied, bound, and obliged to conform to justice ·in our conduct·. We feel that force may, with the utmost propriety and with the approval of all mankind, be used to make us conform to justice, but not to follow the precepts of the other social virtues.

But we must always carefully distinguish •what is only blamable or a proper object of disapproval from •what may be either punished or prevented by force. Something seems blamable if it **falls short of** the ordinary degree of proper beneficence that experience teaches us to expect of everybody; and something seems praiseworthy if it **goes beyond** that degree of beneficence. Conduct that **is at** the ordinary degree of beneficence seems neither blameworthy nor praiseworthy. Someone who behaves towards his son, his father, his brother, in a manner that is neither better nor worse than the conduct of most men, seems properly to deserve neither praise nor blame. . . .

But even the most ordinary degree of kindness or beneficence can't, among equals, be extorted by force. Among equals each individual is—•naturally, and •independently of the institution of civil government—regarded as having a right to defend himself from injuries *and* to exact a certain degree of punishment for injuries that have been done to him. Every generous spectator not only •approves of his conduct when he does this, but •enters so far into his sentiments that he is often willing to help him in this. . . . But when

- •a father falls short of the ordinary degree of parental affection towards a son, or
- •a son's attitude to his father seems to lack the filial reverence that might be expected, or
- •brothers are without the usual degree of brotherly affection, or
- •a man shuts out compassion and refuses to relieve the misery of his fellow-creatures though he could easily do so

—in all these cases, though everyone blames the conduct, no-one imagines that those who might have reason to expect more kindness have any right to extort it by force. The sufferer can only complain, and the spectator can't interfere except advising and persuading. In all such cases it would be thought the highest degree of insolence and presumption for equals to use force against one another.

A superior may sometimes require people under his jurisdiction to behave, in this respect, with a certain degree of propriety towards one another; and no-one will find fault with his doing this. The laws of all civilized nations •oblige parents to support their children, and ·adult· children to support their ·aged· parents, and •impose on men many other duties of beneficence. [The phrase 'the civil magistrate', which we are about to meet, referred to any official whose job is to *apply* and *enforce* the laws; but Smith and some other writers extended it to cover also anyone who *makes* the civil laws.] The civil magistrate is entrusted with the power not only of •preserving the public peace by restraining injustice, but also of •promoting the prosperity of the commonwealth by establishing good discipline and discouraging every sort of vice and impropriety. So it is all right for him to prescribe rules that don't just prohibit citizens from harming one another but also command that they help one another to a certain degree. If the sovereign commands the citizens to do A, from then on not-doing-A is disobedience and is not only blameworthy but punishable. That holds even if before the sovereign's command there had been no blame attached to not-doing-A, and it holds more strongly still if not-doing-A had been highly blameworthy even before the sovereign commanded the doing of A. Of all the duties of a law-giver, however, this may be the one that needs the greatest delicacy and caution to perform with propriety and judgment. To neglect it altogether exposes the commonwealth to many gross disorders and shocking crimes, and to push it too far is destructive of all liberty, security, and justice.

Though the lack of beneficence doesn't seem to deserve punishment among equals, the greater efforts of that virtue do appear to deserve the highest reward. By producing the greatest good they become natural and approved objects of the liveliest gratitude. On the other hand, a man's •breach of justice exposes him to punishment, whereas his •observing the rules of that virtue hardly seem to deserve any reward. There is certainly a propriety in behaving justly, so that such conduct deserves all the approval that is due to propriety. But because it does no real positive good it isn't entitled to much gratitude. If the best we can say of someone is that he *doesn't* violate the persons or estates or reputations of his neighbours, he surely doesn't have much positive merit. But he does fulfill all the rules of justice, strictly so-called, and

does everything that his equals can properly •force him to do or •punish him for not doing. We can often fulfill all the rules of justice by sitting still and doing nothing!

As you treat others, so they will treat you; and *retaliation* seems to be the great law that Nature dictates to us. We think of beneficence and generosity as being owed to those who are themselves generous and beneficent. As for those who never open up their hearts to the feelings of humanity, we think that *they* should be correspondingly •shut out from the affections of all their fellow-creatures and •allowed to live in the midst of society as though in a great desert where there's nobody to care for them. . . . Someone who violates the laws of justice ought to be made to feel for himself the evil that he has done to someone else; and because he can't be •restrained by his brethren's sufferings, he ought to be •over-awed by the fear of his own! The man who is merely innocent—observing the laws of justice with regard to others, abstaining from harming his neighbours, but doing no more than that—can deserve only that his neighbours should respect his innocence in return, and that the same laws should be scrupulously observed with regard to him.

## Chapter 2: The sense of justice, of remorse, and of the consciousness of merit

The only proper motive for harming our neighbour—the only incitement to do evil to someone else that mankind will go along with—is just indignation for evil that the other person has done to us. To disturb his happiness merely because it stands in the way of our own, to take from him what is of real use to him merely because it may be of equal or of more use to us, or in this way to act on the natural preference that every man has for his own happiness above that of other people, is something that no impartial spectator can go along with. There's no doubt that nature gives to each man the primary responsibility for his own care; and it's fit and right that this should be so, because each man is better able to take care of himself than anyone else is. It follows from this that each man is much more deeply concerned •with whatever is immediately connected with himself than •with what has to do with anyone else. Hearing about the death of someone with whom we have no particular connection will probably give us less concern—will do less in the way of putting us off our food or disturbing our sleep—than would a very insignificant disaster that has befallen ourselves. But although the ruin of our neighbour may affect us much less than a small misfortune of our own, we mustn't ruin him in order to prevent that small misfortune—or even to prevent our own ruin. In all cases like this we must see ourselves not in the light in which we naturally appear to •ourselves but rather in the light in which we naturally appear to •others. . . . Though each man's happiness may matter to him more than the happiness of the rest of the world, to every other person it doesn't matter any more than anyone else's. So although it may be true that every individual, in his own breast, naturally prefers himself to all mankind, he won't dare to look mankind in the face and declare that he acts according to this principle. He feels that they can never go along with him in this preference, and that however natural it may be to him it must always appear excessive and extravagant to them. When he views himself in the light in which he's aware that others will view him, he sees that to them he's merely one of the multitude and in no way better than any of the others. If he wants to act in such a way that an impartial spectator can may enter into the motives of his conduct—that being what he wants most of all—he must now and always humble the arrogance of his self-love, bringing it down to something that other men can

go along with. They will accept his self-love far enough to allow him to care about his own happiness more than anyone else's—to care about it more and to work more intently on its behalf. When they place themselves in his situation, they'll readily go along with him to that extent. In the race for wealth, honours, and promotions he may run as hard as he can, straining every nerve and muscle in order to outstrip all his competitors. But if he should jostle or trip any of them, the allowance of the spectators is entirely at an end—that is a violation of fair play that they can't allow. . . . They now sympathize with the natural resentment of the person who was shouldered aside or tripped, and the offender becomes an object of their hatred and indignation. He is aware of this, and feels that those sentiments are ready to burst out from all sides against him.

The greater and more irreparable the evil that is done, the greater is

- •the resentment of the sufferer,
- •the sympathetic indignation of the spectator, and
- •the sense of guilt in the agent.

Death is the greatest evil that one man can inflict on another, and it arouses the highest degree of resentment in those who are immediately connected with the person who has been killed. Thus, of all the crimes that affect only individuals *murder* is the most atrocious—in the sight of mankind, and in the sight of the murderer. Being •deprived of something that we now possess is a greater evil than being •disappointed in some expectation of receiving a certain good. That is why theft and robbery (which take our possessions) are greater crimes than breach of contract (which merely disappoints our expectations). So the most sacred laws of justice—the ones the violation of which seems to call loudest for vengeance and punishment—are the laws that guard our neighbour's •life and person; next in line come those that guard his •property and possessions; and lastly those that guard what are called his •personal rights, or what is due to him from the promises of others.

If someone who violates the more sacred laws of justice ever thinks about the sentiments that mankind must have regarding him, he has to feel all the agonies of shame, horror, and consternation. When his passion—·i.e. the passion that caused him to act so badly in the first place·—is gratified, and he starts to think coolly about his past conduct, he can't enter into ·or sympathize with· any of the motives that influenced it. They now appear as detestable to him as they always did to other people. By sympathizing with the hatred and abhorrence that other men must have towards him, he now to some extent hates and abhors himself. The situation of the person who has suffered from his injustice now draws pity from him. He is grieved at the thought of it, and regrets •the unhappy effects of his conduct, feeling that •they have made him the proper object of mankind's resentment and indignation of mankind, and of the vengeance and punishment that naturally flow from such resentment. . . . His fellow-creatures' memory of his crimes shuts out from their hearts all fellow-feeling with him; the sentiments that they *do* have regarding him are just what he is most afraid of. Everything seems hostile; he would like to escape to some inhospitable desert where he would never have to confront any human creature, never have to read in mankind's countenance the condemnation of his crimes. But solitude is even more dreadful than society. His own thoughts can present him with nothing but what is black, unfortunate, and disastrous, the miserable expectation of incomprehensible misery and ruin. The horror of solitude drives him back into society, and he returns—bewildered, ashamed, and terrified—into the presence of mankind, in order to beg for some little protection from the those very judges who he knows have

already unanimously condemned him! Such is the nature of the sentiment of *remorse*, properly so-called; it is the most dreadful sentiment that human beings are capable of. It is compounded out of •shame from the sense of the impropriety of past conduct; •grief for the effects of it; •pity for those who have suffered through it; and, because of the justly provoked resentment of all rational creatures, •the dread and terror of punishment.

The opposite behaviour naturally inspires the opposite sentiment. Take the case of a man who has performed a generous action, not as a frivolous whim but from proper motives. When *he* looks forward to those whom he has served, he feels himself to be the natural object of their love and gratitude and, by sympathy with them, of the esteem and approval of all mankind. And when he looks back to •the motive from which he acted, viewing it in the light in which the unbiased spectator will survey it, he still enters into •it and, by sympathy with the approval of this supposed impartial judge, he applauds himself. In both these points of view, ·forward and backward·, his own conduct appears to him every way agreeable. The thought of it fills his mind with cheerfulness, serenity, and composure. He is in friendship and harmony with all mankind, and looks on his fellow-creatures with confidence and benevolent satisfaction, knowing that he has made himself worthy of their most favourable regards. The combination of all these sentiments constitute the consciousness of merit, i.e. the consciousness of deserving to be rewarded.

## Chapter 3: The utility of this constitution of nature

That is how man, who can't survive except in society, was equipped by nature for the situation for which he was made. Each member of the human society needs help from the others, and is vulnerable to harm from them. When the needed help is given and returned from love, gratitude, friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. Its different members are all bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection. . . .

But even if the needed help is not given from such generous and disinterested motives, even if the different members of the society don't have love and affection for one another, the society won't necessarily fall apart, though it will be less happy and agreeable. Society can stay alive among different men, as it can among different merchants, from a sense of its utility, without any mutual love or affection. Even if no-one has any obligations or debts of gratitude to anyone else, society can still be held together by a *trade* [Smith says 'mercenary exchange'] in benefits, on the basis of agreed valuation for each benefit.

What society *can't* do is to survive among those who are constantly ready to harm and injure one another. The moment that injury begins, the moment that mutual resentment and hostility kick in, all society's bands are snapped and its different members are (so to speak) dissipated and scattered around by the violence and opposition of their discordant affections [see page 116 note on 'affection']. (If there is any society among robbers and murderers, they must at least. . . .abstain from robbing and murdering one another.) So beneficence is less essential than justice is to the existence of society; a lack of beneficence will make a society uncomfortable, but the prevalence of injustice will utterly destroy it.

That is why Nature, while urging mankind to acts of beneficence by the pleasing awareness of deserved reward, hasn't thought it necessary to guard and enforce beneficent conduct by the terrors of deserved punishment in case it should be neglected. Beneficence is an ornament that makes the building more beautiful, not the foundation that holds

it up; so it's good that it should be •recommended, but it doesn't have to be •imposed. In contrast with that, justice is the main pillar that holds up the entire building. If it is removed, the whole of human society—

> the great, the *immense* structure whose creation and support seems to have been Nature's special care, her cherished project

—must in a moment crumble into atoms. In order to enforce the maintenance of justice, therefore, Nature has implanted in mankind the awareness of guilt, the terrors of deserved punishment that come with its violation, as the great safeguards of human society, to protect the weak, curb the violent, and punish the guilty. Although men are naturally sympathetic,

- •they feel so little for anyone with whom they have no special connection, compared with what they feel for themselves,
- •the misery of someone who is merely their fellow-creature matters so little to them in comparison with even a small convenience of their own, and
- •they have it so much in their power to harm their fellow-creature and may have so many temptations to do so,

that if this fear-of-punishment mechanism didn't go to work within them in the fellow-creature's defence, aweing them into a respect for his innocence, they would like wild beasts be ready at all times to attack him, and a man would enter an assembly of men as he enters a den of lions.

All through the universe we see means delicately adjusted to the ends they are intended to produce. In the mechanism of a plant or animal body we admire how everything is contrived for advancing the two great purposes of nature—•the support of the individual and •the propagation of the species. But in everything like this we still distinguish the *cause* of the various motions and structures from their *purpose*. [Smith calls this distinguishing their 'efficient cause' from their 'final cause'.] The digestion of the food, the circulation of the blood,. . . .and so on are all operations that are necessary for the great purposes of animal life. But we don't try to *explain* them in terms of those purposes in the way one might explain them in terms of their efficient causes. We don't imagine that the blood circulates or the food digests of its own accord, *intending* to achieve the purposes of circulation or digestion. The wheels of a watch are admirably adjusted to the purpose for which it was made, telling the time. All their various motions work together in the most precise way to produce this effect. If they *wanted* and *intended* to tell the time, they couldn't do it better! But we attribute that desire and intention not to the wheels but to the watch-maker, and we know that what makes them move is a spring, which doesn't *intend* to produce its effect any more than they do. ·This is standard stuff·: When we are explaining the operations of **bodies**, we always in this way distinguish the cause from the purpose ['the efficient from the final cause']. Yet when we are explaining the operations of **minds**, we are apt to run these two different things together. When natural forces lead us to pursue purposes that a refined and enlightened reason would recommend to us, we're apt to think of that enlightened reason as though it were the efficient cause of the sentiments and actions by which we pursue our purpose. . . . On a superficial view, this cause seems sufficient to produce the effects that we credit it with, and the system of human nature seems to be simpler and more agreeable when all its different operations are in this way explained in terms of a single cause, ·namely *reason*·.

As society •cannot survive unless the laws of justice are mainly observed, and as social interactions •cannot take place among men who don't generally abstain from injuring

one another; it has been thought that our awareness of this •necessity is what led us to approve of the enforcement of the laws of justice by the punishment of those who violated them. Here in more detail is how this line of thought goes:

> Man has a natural love for society, and wants the union of mankind to be preserved for its own sake, independently of whether he himself would get any benefit from it. The orderly and flourishing state of society is agreeable to him, and he loves the thought of it. He dislikes social disorder and confusion, and is upset by anything that tends to produce it. He does also realize that his own welfare is connected with the prosperity of society, and that its preservation is needed for his happiness and perhaps for his survival. So he has every reason to hate anything that can tend to destroy society, and is willing to use every possible means to hinder such a hated and dreadful event. Injustice necessarily tends to destroy society. So every appearance of injustice alarms him, and he rushes to stop the progress of anything that would quickly put an end to all that is dear to him if it were allowed to continue unchecked. If he can't restrain it by gentle and fair means he must beat it down by force and violence—he must *somehow* put a stop to its further progress. That is why he often approves of the enforcement of the laws of justice through the punishment of those who violate them—even their *capital* punishment, which removes the disturber of the public peace from the world, and terrifies others by the example it sets.

That's what people commonly say about our approval of the punishment of injustice. And there is truth in it: we often have occasion to *confirm* our natural sense of the propriety and fitness of punishment by thinking about how necessary it is for preserving the order of society. When

- the guilty man is about to suffer the retaliation that mankind's natural indignation declares to be due to his crimes, and
- the insolence of his injustice is broken and humbled by his terror of the approaching punishment, and
- he is no longer someone to be feared, and for generous and humane people begins to be someone to be pitied,

the thought of what he is about to suffer extinguishes people's resentment towards him—resentment arising from the sufferings of his victims. They are disposed to pardon and forgive him, and to save him from the punishment that they had in their cool hours regarded as the proper retribution for such crimes. So here they look for help to considerations of the general interests of society. They counterbalance the impulse of this weak and partial humaneness by the dictates of a humanity that is more comprehensive. They reflect that mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent, and they counter the emotions of compassion that they feel for a particular person by a broader compassion that they feel for mankind.

Sometimes too we find it appropriate to use the 'It's necessary for the support of society' defence ·not merely of punishment for injustice but also· of the propriety of observing the general rules of justice in the first place. We often hear the young and the restless ridiculing the most sacred rules of morality, and proclaiming the most abominable maxims of conduct—sometimes because they have become morally rotten but more often because of the emptiness of their hearts. Our indignation rises, and we are eager to refute and expose such detestable principles. Now, what initially inflames us against these principles is their intrinsic detestableness. [Smith then presents in a rather tangled form two lines of thought involving the claims that

the principles in question

**(a)** are natural and proper objects of hatred and detestation,

**(b)** are ones that we hate and detest,

**(c)** ought to be condemned.

Defending **(c)** purely on the basis of **(b)** wouldn't appear to be conclusive (Smith says we think). It might be better to base **(c)** on **(b)** if that were based on **(a)**. But the fact is that when we are confronted by people who reject the basic principles of justice, it's not going to do any good to talk about actual or legitimate hatred and detestation because, Smith continues:] when we are asked 'Why shouldn't we do A?' the very question seems to show that doing A doesn't appear to the questioner to be ·in itself· a natural and proper object of hatred. So we must show him that A ought to be done for the sake of something else. And that is what starts us looking around for other arguments, and then what we come up with first is the disorder and confusion of society that would result from everyone's behaving unjustly. We seldom fail, therefore, to insist on this topic.

But although it's usually obvious that the welfare of society is put at risk by •licentious practices, that thought is seldom what first arouses us against •them. **All** men, even the most stupid and unthinking ones, loathe fraud, perfidy, and injustice, and are delighted to see them punished. But although it is obvious that justice is necessary for the existence of society, that's something that **few** men have ever thought about.

·I am contending that· what basically puts us in favour of the punishment of crimes against individuals is not our concern for the preservation of society. There are many obvious reasons for this. **(1)** Our concern for the fortune and happiness of •individuals doesn't ordinarily arise from our concern for the fortune and happiness of •society. This thought—

> 'I am concerned for the destruction of that man, because he is a member or part of society,'

when said by someone who really cares about society as a whole, is as silly as this—

> 'I am concerned for the loss of a single guinea, because it is a part of a thousand guineas'

when said by someone who really cares about a thousand guineas. In neither case does our concern for the individuals arise from our concern for the multitude; in each case our concern for the multitude is composed out of the particular concerns that we feel for the different individuals that make it up. When someone steals money from me, what motivates my prosecution of him is not a concern for the preservation of my whole fortune, but rather my concern for the particular sum that was stolen; and, similarly, when one man is harmed or destroyed, what motivates our demand that the perpetrator be punished is not our concern for the general interest of society, but rather our concern for that one individual person who has been harmed. [Smith goes on to distinguish *this* concern-for-the-individual from the delicately detailed concern that we might have for an individual friend, lover, mentor or the like. All we have here is a concern for someone because he is our fellow-creature. How we feel about him personally doesn't come into it; or anyway it shouldn't, though Smith admits that it is likely to do so, damping down our resentment of someone who has unjustly harmed a nasty victim.]

Sometimes indeed we both punish and approve of punishment purely on the grounds of the general interests of society, interests that we think can't be secured without the punishment in question. All the punishments inflicted for breaches of. . . .military discipline are examples of this. Such crimes don't immediately or directly harm any particular person;

but it is thought that their remote consequences will or might included great harm to society. A sentinel who falls asleep on his watch suffers death by the laws of war, because such carelessness might endanger the whole army. This severity may often seem to be necessary, and therefore to be just and proper. . . . Yet this punishment, however necessary it may be, always appears to be excessively severe—a punishment so great for a crime seemingly so small. . . . A humane person must gather his thoughts, make an effort, and exert his whole firmness and resolution before he can bring himself either to inflict such a punishment or to go along with its being inflicted by others. This is different from his view of just punishment of an ungrateful murderer or parricide, where his heart vigorously—even joyfully—applauds the just retaliation that seems right for such detestable crimes. . . . The very different sentiments with which the spectator views those different punishments shows that his approvals in the two cases are not based on the same principles. The spectator looks on the sentinel as an unfortunate victim, who indeed ought to be devoted to the safety of numbers, but whom still in his heart he would be glad to save; and he is only sorry that the interest of the many should oppose his being let off. But if the murderer escaped punishment, this would arouse the spectator's highest indignation, and he would call on God to avenge in another world the crime that mankind had wrongly neglected to punish on earth.

·A propos of that last point·: Notice that we're so far from imagining that injustice ought to be punished in this life merely in the interests of social order that can't otherwise be maintained, that •Nature teaches us to hope, and •religion (we suppose) authorises us to expect, that it will be punished even in a life to come. One might say that our sense of its ill desert pursues it beyond the grave, though the example of its punishment *there* can't serve to deter the rest of mankind—who don't see it, and don't know it—from being guilty of similar conduct *here*. But we think that the God's justice requires that he should hereafter avenge the injuries of the widow and the fatherless, who are so often harmed with impunity in this life. . . .

# Section 3: The influence of luck on mankind's sentiments regarding the merit or demerit of actions

Whatever praise or blame can be due to any action must be based on

**(1)** the intention or affection of the heart from which the action comes,
**(2)** the external action or movement of the body which this affection causes, or
**(3)** the good or bad consequences that actually come from it.

These three constitute the whole nature and circumstances of the action, and must be the basis for any quality that belongs to it.

It is abundantly evident that **(2)** and **(3)** can't be a basis for any praise or blame, and no-one has ever said that they could. The **(2)** external action or movement of the body is often the same in the most innocent and in the most blameworthy actions. •Shooting a bird, •shooting a man—these are the same external movement, pulling the trigger of a gun. And **(3)** the consequences that actually happen to come from an action are as irrelevant to praise and blame as is the external movement of the body—even *more* irrelevant if that is possible! The consequences of the action depend not on the agent but on luck [Smith's word, here and throughout, is 'fortune'], so they can't be the proper basis for any sentiment of which the agent's character and conduct are the objects.

The only consequences for which he is accountable, or by which he can deserve either approval or disapproval of any kind, are ones that were in some way *intended*, or ·if not outright intended, then· at least show some agreeable or disagreeable quality in the intention from which the agent acted. So there we have it: any judgment of the action's rightness or wrongness, its beneficence or harmfulness of design, any praise or blame for it, any approval or disapproval, is just only if it is based on the intention or affection of the heart from which the action arose.

Everyone agrees with this thesis when it is stated, as here, in abstract and general terms; its obvious rightness is acknowledged by all the world, with no dissenting voice among all mankind. Everyone accepts that the accidental, unintended and unforeseen consequences of an action, however good they are, don't make the action a suitable object of gratitude if the intention or affection was malevolent; and however bad they are, they don't make the action a suitable object of resentment if the intention or affection was good.

But however sure we are about this, stated in the abstract, when we get down to particular cases our sentiments concerning the merit or demerit of an action *are* in fact greatly affected—in one direction or the other—by what actual consequences happened to come from it. We all accept the rule that actual consequences are irrelevant to an action's moral status, and yet it hardly ever happens that our ·moral· sentiments are entirely regulated by it. This is an irregularity of sentiment that

everyone feels,
hardly anyone is sufficiently aware of, and
nobody is willing to acknowledge.

I now proceed to explain it, ·in three chapters, in which· I shall discuss **(1)** the cause of this irregularity, **(2)** the extent of its influence, and **(3)** the end purpose that ·God·, the Author of nature, seems to have intended by it.

## Chapter 1: The causes of this influence of luck

All causes of pain and pleasure—*all* of them—seem to immediately arouse gratitude and resentment in all animals. Those passions are aroused by inanimate as well as by animate objects. We are briefly angry even with the stone that hurts us; a child beats it, a dog barks at it, a bad-tempered man is apt to curse it. A moment's thought corrects this sentiment, making us realize that something that has no feeling is a very improper object of revenge! But when great harm has been done by an inanimate object, that object becomes disagreeable to us ever after, and we take pleasure in burning or destroying it. That is how we would treat something that had accidentally been the cause of the death of a friend, and we would often think ourselves guilty of a sort of inhumanity if we *didn't* vent this absurd sort of vengeance on it.

In the same way we have a sort of gratitude for inanimate objects that have caused great pleasure or frequent pleasure. The sailor escapes from a shipwreck with the help of a plank; if as soon as he gets back to land he uses the plank as firewood, he will strike us as being guilty of an unnatural action. We would have expected him to preserve the plank with care and affection, as a monument that was dear to him. After years of using a snuff-box, a pen-knife, and a walking-stick, a man grows fond of them and feels something like a real love and affection for them. If he breaks or loses them, he is upset out of all proportion to the value of the damage. The house that we have long lived in, and the tree whose green shade we have long enjoyed, are both looked on with a sort of respect that such benefactors seem to be owed. The decay of the house or the death of the tree affects us with a kind of melancholy, even though it doesn't bring any loss to us. . . .

But for something to be a *proper* object of gratitude or resentment it must not only •cause pleasure or pain but must also •be capable of feeling them. If it doesn't have this capacity, there's no way for gratitude or resentment to be *satisfied* in relation to it. Having been aroused by the causes of pleasure and pain, those passions can be satisfied only by retaliating those sensations on what caused them; and there's no point in trying to do that with an object that isn't sentient. So animals are less improper objects of gratitude and resentment than inanimate objects. The dog that bites, the ox that gores, are both of them punished. If an animal causes someone's death, neither that person's relatives or the public in general will be satisfied unless the animal is put to death in its turn; not merely for •the security of the living, but also to some extent to •revenge the injury of the dead. On the other hand, animals that have been remarkably serviceable to their masters become objects of a lively gratitude. . . .

But. . . .animals are still far from being complete and perfect objects of gratitude or resentment. What gratitude wants most is not only •to make the benefactor feel pleasure in his turn, but •to make him aware that he is being rewarded for his past conduct, to make him pleased with that conduct, and to convince him that the person he helped was worth helping. What charms us most about our benefactor is the match between his sentiments and ours concerning the worth of our own character and the respect that is due to us. We are delighted to find someone who values us as we value ourselves, and picks us out from the rest of mankind in somewhat the way in which we pick out ourselves! One of our main purposes in rewarding him is to maintain in him these agreeable and flattering sentiments (though the best of us won't pursue this with the further purpose of getting new favours from the benefactor). And this is the reason

for something that I pointed out earlier, namely that when we can't enter into the motives of our benefactor, when his conduct and character appear unworthy of our approval, our gratitude for his services to us—however great they have been—is significantly lessened. We are less flattered by his picking us out for special favour; and keeping the respect of such a weak or worthless patron seems not to be something worth pursuing for its own sake.

On the other hand, the chief purpose of resentment is not merely to make our enemy feel pain in his turn, but to make him aware that he is feeling pain because of his past conduct, to make him repent of that conduct, and to make him feel that the person he injured didn't deserve to be treated in that manner. What chiefly enrages us against the man who injures or insults us is his writing us off as insignificant, his unreasonable preference for himself over us, and the absurd self-love that apparently leads him to imagine that other people may be sacrificed at any time for his convenience or at his whim. The glaring impropriety of this conduct, the gross insolence and injustice that it seems to involve, often shock and exasperate us more than all the harm that we have suffered. To bring him back to a better sense of what is due to other people, to make him aware of what he owes us and of the wrong that he has done to us, is often the main purpose of our revenge, which is always incomplete when it can't accomplish this. . . .

Thus, before anything can be a complete and proper object of either gratitude or resentment it must possess three different qualifications. **(1)** It must be the cause of pleasure in one case, of pain in the other. **(2)** It must be capable of feeling those sensations. **(3)** It must not merely have produced those sensations but must have done so from design—a design that is approved of in one case and disapproved of in the other. It's **(1)** that makes an object capable of arousing gratitude and resentment; it's because of **(2)** that these passions can in some way be satisfied; and **(3)** is not only needed for the gratitude or resentment to be complete, but also provides an extra cause of those passions because of the special and intense pleasure or pain that it involves.

The sole arousing cause of gratitude is something that gives pleasure; so that even when a person's intentions are utterly proper and beneficent, if he has failed actually to produce the good that he intended, less gratitude seems to be due to him because one of the arousing causes is lacking. And the sole arousing cause of resentment is something that gives pain; so that even when a person's intentions are utterly improper and malevolent, if he has failed actually to produce the evil that he intended, less resentment seems to be due to him because one of the arousing causes is lacking. [Smith really does move from 'the sole cause' to 'one of the causes', a move that he needs for his conclusion about 'less' gratitude or resentment rather than *none*.] On the other hand, even when a person's intentions don't have any laudable degree of benevolence, if his actions *happen* to produce great good, because one of the arousing causes has occurred some gratitude is apt to arise towards him—a shadow of merit seems to fall on him. And when a person's intentions don't have any blameworthy degree of malice, if his actions should *happen* to produce great evil, because one of the arousing causes has occurred some resentment is apt to arise towards him—a shadow of demerit seems to fall on him. And, as the consequences of actions are entirely under the dominance of luck [remember that Smith's word throughout is 'fortune'], what I have been describing is the source of luck's influence on the sentiments of mankind regarding merit and demerit.

## Chapter 2: The extent of this influence of luck

The effect of this influence of luck is **(1)** to lessen our sense of the merit or demerit of actions that arose from praiseworthy or blameworthy intentions but failed to produce their intended effects; and **(2)** to increase our sense of the merit or demerit of actions, beyond what is due to the motives or affections that they come from, when they accidentally give rise to either extraordinary pleasure or extraordinary pain. ·This chapter will be devoted to discussions of these two effects·.

**(1)** To repeat the point: however proper and beneficent (or improper and malevolent) a person's intentions in acting are, if the intended effect doesn't happen his merit seems imperfect (or his demerit seems incomplete). This irregularity of sentiment is felt not only •by those who are immediately affected by the consequences of the action in question but also to some extent even •by the impartial spectator. ·In discussing this matter, I shall start with failed •good intentions and then turn to failed •bad ones·.

**(1a)**. . . .It is often said that we are equally obliged to •a man who has tried to help us and to •one who actually did so. That's the speech that we regularly make after every unsuccessful attempt of this kind; but like all other fine speeches it mustn't be taken too strictly. The sentiments that a generous-minded man has for the friend who fails ·to help him· may often be nearly the same as what he feels for the one who succeeds; and the more generous he is the nearer his sentiments will come to that level. [For 'generous' see note on page 11.] A truly generous-minded man will get more pleasure from—and be more grateful for—•the love and respect he gets from people he thinks to be worthy of respect than for all the •advantages he can ever expect to flow from that love and respect. So when he loses those advantages he seems to be losing only a trifle that is hardly worth thinking about. But still he does lose *something*, so that his pleasure and gratitude are not perfectly complete. Therefore, as between the friend who fails and the friend who succeeds, other things being equal, the noblest and best mind will have some little difference of affection in favour of the one who succeeds. Indeed, people are so unjust about this that even when the intended benefit is procured, they are apt to think that less gratitude is due to the benefactor if he wasn't the sole producer of the benefit. . . .

Even the merit of talents and abilities that some accident has prevented from producing their effects seems somewhat imperfect, even to people who are fully convinced that the person does have the capacity to produce those effects. [Smith gives the example of a general whose battle plans were excellent but who is robbed of victory by political interference from his own side:] Although he might deserve all the approval that is due to a great military plan, he still lacks the actual merit of having performed a great action. . . . It angers an architect when his plans are either not carried out at all, or carried out with so many alterations that the effect of the building is spoiled. The only thing that depends on the architect is *the plan*; and good judges can see his genius being revealed in that as completely as in the actual building. But even to those who know most about such things a •plan doesn't give the same pleasure as does a •noble and magnificent building. . . . There may be many men of whom we believe 'He is more talented than Caesar and Alexander; placed in the situations they were in, he would perform still greater feats'. But in the mean time, however, we don't view such a man with the wonder and admiration with which those two heroes have been regarded in all ages and nations. The calm judgments of the mind may approve of him more, but the mind isn't dazzled and

carried away by the splendour of great actions. . . .

**(1b)** Just as the merit of an unsuccessful attempt to do good seems to ungrateful mankind to be lessened if the attempt fails, so also does the demerit of an unsuccessful attempt to do evil. The plan to commit a crime, however clearly it is proved to exist, is hardly ever punished with the same severity as the actual commission of the crime. The only exception to this may be the crime of *treason*. Because that crime immediately affects the existence of the government itself, the government is naturally more touchy about it than about any other. When the sovereign punishes •other crimes, he is acting on the resentment that he feels through sympathy with the victims of the crimes. But when he punishes •treason, he is acting on *his own* resentment of harm done to *himself*. So that here he is judging in his own cause, which makes him apt to be more violent and bloody in his punishments than the impartial spectator can approve of. Also, when treason is involved, it takes less to trigger the sovereign's resentment, which doesn't always wait for the committing of the crime or even for the attempt to commit it. A treasonable conspiracy, though nothing has been done or even attempted as a result of it—indeed a mere treasonable *conversation*—is in many countries punished in the same way as the actual commission of treason. With any other crime, the mere design—with no attempt to carry it through—is seldom punished at all, and is never punished severely. This may be said:

> 'A criminal •design doesn't necessarily involve the same degree of depravity as a criminal •action, and therefore shouldn't be subjected to the same punishment. We are capable of •deciding, and even of taking steps towards performing, many things that—when it comes to the point—we feel ourselves entirely incapable of •doing.'

But this line of thought doesn't apply when the design has been carried through to the last attempt. Yet there is hardly any country where the man who fires a pistol at his enemy but misses him is punished with death. . . . But mankind's resentment against the crime of murder is so intense, and their fear of the man who shows himself capable of committing it is so great, that the mere attempt to commit it ought in all countries to be a capital offence. The attempt to commit smaller crimes is almost always punished lightly, and sometimes is not punished at all. The thief whose hand has been caught in his neighbour's pocket before he had taken anything out of it is punished only with the disgrace of being exposed as a thief; if he'd had time to steal a handkerchief, he would have been put to death. The burglar who has been found setting a ladder to his neighbour's window but hasn't gone through the window is not exposed to capital punishment. The attempt to ravish a woman is not punished as a rape. The attempt to seduce a married woman is not punished at all, though ·successful· seduction is punished severely. Our resentment against someone who tried and failed to commit a crime is seldom strong enough to lead us to punishment in the way we would have thought proper if he had succeeded. In the failure case, our joy at being spared the actual crime alleviates •our sense of the atrocity of his conduct; in the success case, the grief of our misfortune increases •it. Yet his real demerit is undoubtedly the same in both cases, since his intentions were equally criminal; and there is in this respect, therefore, an irregularity in the sentiments of all men, and a consequent relaxation of discipline in the laws of, I believe, all nations the most civilized as well as the most barbarous. [The 'irregularity' Smith speaks of is just the phenomenon of our accepting a general rule—Latin *regula*—and then having sentiments that don't conform to it. We'll meet the term again.]. . . .

[Smith next writes about the fundamentally decent person who somehow gets involved in planning a crime, and is prevented from succeeding by some accident. He must think that this was a lucky rescue, saving him from spending 'the rest of his life in horror, remorse, and repentance'. He knows that his heart is as guilty as it would have been if he had succeeded, but his failure to commit the crime eases his conscience so that he 'considers himself as less deserving of punishment and resentment' than he would have been if he has succeeded.]

**(2)** The second effect of this influence of luck is to increase our sense of the merit (or demerit) of actions beyond what is due to the motives or feelings that produce them, when they happen to cause extraordinary pleasure (or pain). . . . For example, a messenger who brings bad news is disagreeable to us, whereas we feel a sort of gratitude to the man who brings us good news. For a moment we regard them as the authors of our good fortune (in one case) and of our bad fortune (in the other), looking at them rather as though they had really *brought about* the events that they only report to us. [Smith goes into some details about this, concluding thus:] King Tigranes of Armenia struck off the head of the man who brought him the first account of the approach of a formidable enemy. To punish the bringer of bad news in this way seems barbarous and inhuman; but rewarding the messenger bringing good news is not disagreeable to us—we think it suitable to the generosity of kings. Why do we make this distinction when if there's no fault in the one there's no merit in the other? It is because any sort of reason seems sufficient to authorize the expressing of the social and benevolent affections, whereas it requires the most solid and substantial reasons to make us sympathetic to the expression of unsocial and malevolent ones.

. . . .There is a class of exceptions to this general rule that no-one should be punished for conduct that wasn't based on malicious and unjust intentions. When someone's *negligence* has caused unintended harm to someone else, we generally enter into the sufferer's resentment far enough to approve of his punishing the offender far more than his offence would have appeared to deserve if no such unlucky consequence had followed from it.

There is a level of negligence that would appear to deserve some punishment even if it didn't harm anyone, Suppose someone threw a large stone over a wall into a public street, without warning anyone and without considering where it was likely to fall. *He* would undoubtedly deserve some punishment. A really precise penal law would punish this absurd action even if it did no harm. The person who is guilty of it shows that he insolently regards the happiness and safety of others as negligible. There is real injustice in his conduct. He recklessly exposes his neighbour to a risk that no man in his senses would choose to expose himself to, and evidently lacks the sense of what is due to his fellow-creatures that is the basis of justice and of society. Gross negligence therefore is said in the law to be almost equal to malicious design. When such carelessness happens to have bad consequences, the guilty person is often punished as if he had really *intended* those consequences; and his conduct, which was really only •thoughtless and insolent and deserving of *some* punishment, is considered as •atrocious and as liable to the severest punishment. If the stone-throwing action that I have mentioned should accidentally kill a man, the laws of many countries—particularly by the old law of Scotland—will condemn the stone-thrower to death. This is no doubt too severe, but it's not altogether inconsistent with our natural sentiments. Our just indignation against the folly and inhumanity of the man's conduct

is intensified by our sympathy with the unfortunate sufferer. But nothing would appear more shocking to our natural sense of fairness than to bring a man to the scaffold merely for having thrown a stone carelessly into the street without harming any body. The folly and inhumanity of his conduct would be the same in this case ·as in the case where a passer-by is killed by the stone·, but our sentiments would be different. Thinking about this difference can show us how much the indignation of the spectator is apt to be worked up by the actual consequences of the action. In cases of this kind. I think, there is a great degree of severity in the laws of almost all nations. . . .

There's another degree of negligence that doesn't involve in it any sort of injustice. The person who is guilty of it treats his neighbours as he treats himself, means no harm to anyone, and is far from having an insolent disregard for the safety and happiness of others. But he isn't as careful and circumspect in his conduct as he ought to be, and for that reason he deserves some kind of blame and censure, but no sort of punishment. However, if by a negligence of this kind he causes harm to another person, the laws of every country (I believe) will require him to pay compensation. No doubt this is a real punishment, and no-one would have thought of inflicting it on him if it hadn't been for the unlucky accident that his conduct caused; yet this decision of the law is approved of by the natural sentiments of all mankind. Nothing, we think, can be more just than that one man should not suffer through someone else's carelessness, and that the damage caused by culpable negligence should be paid for by the person who was guilty of it.

[Smith now gives us a whole page about a still lower level of negligence, which consists in not acting with 'the most anxious timidity and circumspection', i.e. with a kind of caution that would be a fault, not a virtue—a fault because life can't satisfactorily be lived with *that* much concern for possible bad consequences. If one person hurts another through this kind of 'negligence', it is usual and natural for him to apologize and express his concern for the sufferer's welfare, and (if he is a decent person) he will offer compensation for the damage he has done and do what he can to soothe the resentment that the sufferer is likely to feel. Smith continues:] To make no apology, to offer no atonement, is regarded ·by us all· as the highest brutality. Yet why should he apologize more than anyone else? Why should he, since he was as innocent as any other bystander, be thus singled out from among all mankind to make up for someone else's bad luck? This task wouldn't have been imposed on him if it weren't for the fact that the impartial spectator feels some indulgence for what may be regarded as the unjust resentment of the sufferer. [Here and in one other place, Smith speaks of 'animal resentment', evidently meaning 'resentment that is *natural* but not defensible through any acceptable general moral principles'.]

## Chapter 3: The purpose of this irregularity of sentiments

That is how the good or bad consequences of an action affect the sentiments both of the agent and of others; so that is how luck ['fortune'], which governs the world, has influence in the area where we should be least willing to allow it any, and partly directs the sentiments of mankind regarding the character and conduct both of themselves and of others. *Everyone judges by the outcome, and not by the design*—that has been the complaint down through the ages, and is the great discouragement of virtue. Everyone agrees to the •general maxim that because the outcome doesn't depend on the agent it oughtn't to influence our sentiments

regarding the merit or propriety of his conduct. But our sentiments in •particular cases almost never exactly conform to what this reasonable maxim would require. The happy or unprosperous outcome of any action not only •is apt to give us a good or bad opinion of the prudence with which it was conducted, but nearly always also •sparks our gratitude or resentment, our sense of the merit or demerit of the design.

But when Nature planted the seeds of this irregularity in the human breast, she seems to have intended—as she always does—the happiness and perfection of our species. If the *only* causes of our •resentment were the harmfulness of the design and the malevolence of the affection, we would feel all the furies of •that passion against anyone whom we suspected of having such designs or affections, even if they had never broken out into any action. Sentiments, thoughts, intentions, would become objects of punishment; and if the indignation of mankind ran as high against them as against actions—if the baseness of a •thought that didn't lead to any action seemed to us all to call as loudly for vengeance as the baseness of the •action—every court of law would become a real inquisition. There would be no safety for the most innocent and cautious conduct. Bad wishes, bad views, bad designs, might still be suspected. . . .and would expose the person to punishment and resentment just as bad actions do. So the Author of nature has seen to it that the only proper and approved objects of human punishment and resentment are *actions*—actions that either •produce actual evil or •try to produce it and thereby put us in the immediate fear of it. According to cool reason, human actions derive their whole merit or demerit from •sentiments, designs, affections; but ·God·, the great Judge of hearts has placed •these outside the scope of every human jurisdiction, reserving them to be considered in his own unerring tribunal. This salutary and useful irregularity in human sentiments regarding merit or demerit, which at first sight appears so absurd and indefensible, is the basis for the necessary rule of justice that men in this life are liable to punishment only for their actions and not for their designs and intentions. In fact, when we look carefully into any part of nature we find this sort of evidence of the providential care of its Author—we can admire the wisdom and goodness of God even in the weakness and folly of man.

Here's another irregularity of sentiments that has some utility: the merit of an unsuccessful attempt to do something good appears to be imperfect; and the merit of mere good inclinations and kind wishes is even more so. Man was made for action—to exercise his faculties to promote changes in the external circumstances both of himself and others in ways that seem most favourable to the happiness of all. He mustn't be satisfied with slack benevolence, or see himself as the friend of mankind because in his heart he wishes well to the prosperity of the world! The purpose of his existence is to produce certain states of affairs; Nature wants him to call forth the whole vigour of his soul and to strain every nerve to produce them; so she has taught him that neither he nor anyone else can whole-heartedly applaud or be fully satisfied with his conduct unless he actually produces them. . . . The man who hasn't performed a single action of importance, but whose whole conversation and manner express the justest, the noblest, and most generous sentiments, isn't entitled to demand any high reward even if his inutility is purely due to his having had no opportunity to serve. . . . We can still ask him: 'What have you done? What actual service can you point to that entitles you to such a large reward? We respect you and love you, but we don't owe you anything.' It would take •the most divine benevolence to reward the virtue that has been useless only because there has been no opportunity to serve, giving it the honours and preferments that it may

be said to deserve but wasn't entitled to insist on. On the other hand, to punish mere affections of the heart where no crime has been committed is •insolent and barbarous tyranny. The benevolent affections seem to deserve most praise when they are acted on quickly (rather than being delayed until it becomes almost a crime not to act on them!); whereas it's almost impossible for a malevolent affection to be too tardy, too slow, or deliberate in being acted on.

It is important that the evil that is done without design should be regarded as a misfortune to the doer as well as to the sufferer. By having that attitude, man is taught to reverence the happiness of his brethren, to tremble lest he should unknowingly do anything that can harm them, and to fear the animal resentment that he feels is ready to burst out against him if he should unintentionally be the unhappy instrument of their calamity. ·Here is a kind of model or metaphor for the point I want to make·:

> In the ancient heathen religion, holy ground that had been consecrated to some god was not to be walked on except on solemn and necessary occasions. Someone who violated this, even if he did it in ignorance, became piacular from that moment, and until proper atonement was made he was vulnerable to the vengeance of the powerful and invisible being for whom that ground had been set apart.

[To be 'piacular' is to be in a state in which one needs to make atonement, to expiate, for something one has done.] Now compare that with this:

> By the wisdom of Nature the happiness of every innocent man is made holy, consecrated, hedged round against the approach of every other man; not to be wantonly walked on, and not even to be in any way violated, even ignorantly and unintentionally, without requiring some expiation, some atonement in proportion to the magnitude of the unintended violation.

A humane man who accidentally and with absolutely *no* blameworthy negligence has been the cause of the death of another man feels that he is •piacular, though not •guilty. During his whole life he regards this accident as one of the greatest misfortunes that could have befallen him. If the family of the slain man is poor and he himself is fairly well off, he immediately takes them under his protection. . . .and thinks them entitled to every degree of favour and kindness. If they are wealthier than he is, he tries by every submission, by every expression of sorrow, by giving them any service that he can devise and they will accept, to atone for what has happened and to placate as much as possible their resentment for the great though unintended offence that he has given them. (Their resentment is certainly most unjust, but it is also natural.)

[Smith adds a paragraph about the role of this aspect of the human condition—'this fallacious sense of guilt'—in theatrical drama. Of Oedipus and Jocasta he says that they are both 'in the highest degree piacular' though neither is 'in the smallest degree guilty'.]

Despite all these seeming irregularities of sentiment, if a man has the bad luck to cause evils that he didn't intend, or to fail in producing good that he did intend, Nature hasn't left his innocence with no consolation or his virtue with no reward. What the man does is to get help from that just and equitable maxim: *Outcomes that didn't depend on our conduct ought not to lessen the respect that is due to us.* He summons up his whole magnanimity and firmness of soul, and works to regard himself not in the light in which he does at present appear, but in the light

- in which he ought to appear,
- in which he would have appeared if his generous plans had met with success, and
- in which he would be appearing now, despite the plans' failure, if mankind's sentiments were entirely just and fair, or even entirely consistent with themselves.

The more just and humane part of mankind entirely go along with this effort he is making to support himself in his own opinion. They exert their whole generosity of mind to correct in themselves this irregularity of human nature, and try to regard his unlucky good intention in the light in which, if it had been successful, they would have been naturally disposed to consider it, without any such moral effort.