

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 III: The basis for our judgments about our own feelings and behaviour; the sense of duty

Chapter 1: The principle of self-approval and self-disapproval

Up to here I have chiefly considered the origin and foundation of our judgments concerning the sentiments and conduct of others. I now turn to the origin of our judgments concerning our own sentiments and conduct.

The principle by which we naturally either approve or disapprove of our own conduct seems to be exactly the one by which we make such judgments about the conduct of other people. We approve (or disapprove) of another man's conduct according to whether, when we bring his case home to ourselves, we feel that we can (or cannot) entirely sympathize with the sentiments and motives that directed it. And in the same way we approve (or disapprove) of our own conduct according to whether, when we adopt the situation of a spectator, viewing our conduct with his eyes (so to speak) and from his standpoint, we feel that we can (or cannot) entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives that influenced it. The only way we can survey our own •sentiments and motives, and the only way we can form any judgment about them, is to remove ourselves (so to speak) from our own natural station and try to view •them as from a certain distance; and our only way of doing *that* is by trying to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them. Thus, any judgment we form about our own conduct tacitly refers to what others

- do judge concerning them,
- would judge concerning them if certain conditions were satisfied, or
- ought to judge concerning them.

We try to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. If when we place ourselves in his situation we thoroughly enter into all the passions and motives that influenced it, we approve of it by sympathy with the approval of this supposed fair judge. If otherwise, we enter into his disapproval, and condemn the conduct. I'll restate the 'approval' side of this story in different terms, just to make sure that it's clear to you. My judgment that my conduct is morally proper involves *two* exercises of sympathy: **(1)** the imagined spectator's sympathy with my actual motives and feelings, which leads to *his* having such feelings; then **(2)** my sympathy with those feelings of the spectator's. So I can *enter into* the mind-set that led me to act as I did by entering into an imagined mind-set that enters into the actual mind-set that led me to act.

If it were possible for a human creature to grow to adulthood without any communication with other humans, he couldn't have thoughts about •his own character, about the propriety or demerit of •his own sentiments and conduct, about •the beauty or ugliness of his own mind, any more than he could think about •the beauty or ugliness of his own face. These are all things that he can't easily see and naturally doesn't look at, and he isn't equipped with any mirror that

can present them to his view. But now bring him into society, and he immediately has the mirror that he lacked before. It is placed in the faces and behaviour of those he lives with, which always signal when those people enter into his sentiments and when they disapprove of them; and that is what gives him his first view of the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and ugliness of his own mind. I have been talking about how **hard** it would be for a solitary man to think about his own motives and conduct, but as well as being hard it would be **uninteresting** for him to do so. If a man had been from his birth a stranger to society, his whole attention would be focussed on the objects of his passions, the external bodies that either pleased or harmed him. As for those passions themselves. . . ., although they would be more immediately present to him than anything else, he would hardly ever think *about* them. The idea of them couldn't interest him enough to call on his attentive consideration. The thought of his joy couldn't cause any new joy, or the idea of his sorrow any new sorrow, although thoughts about the *causes* of those passions might often arouse both. But then, bring him into society and all his own passions will immediately become the causes of new passions. He will observe that mankind approve of some of them, and this will elate him; and that they are disgusted by others, which will cast him down. His desires and aversions, his joys and sorrows, will now often cause new desires and new aversions, new joys and new sorrows; so they will now interest him deeply, and often call on his most attentive consideration. [In this paragraph, the notion of what will 'interest' the man may be partly the notion of what will *be in his interests*.]

[Smith now compares that with our thoughts about our own physical beauty or ugliness, summing up thus:] It's obvious that we are concerned about our own beauty and ugliness only because of its effect on others. If we had no

connection with society, we would be altogether indifferent about both.

In the same way our first moral criticisms are directed at the characters and conduct of other people; and we are all conscious of how each of these affects us. But we soon learn that other people are equally frank about our own character and conduct. We become concerned to know how far we deserve their censure or applause. . . . So we start to examine our own passions and conduct, and to think about how these must appear to them by thinking about how they would appear to us if we were in the situation of the others. We suppose ourselves to be the spectators of our own behaviour, and try to imagine what effect our conduct would have on us when seen in this light. That's the only mirror in which we can, with the eyes of other people, have some kind of view of the propriety of our own conduct. . . .

Whenever I try to examine my own conduct—whenever I try to pass sentence on it, and either approve or condemn it—it's obvious that I divide myself into two persons (so to speak), and that in my role as examiner and judge I represent a different character [Smith's exact phrase] from that of myself as the person whose conduct is examined and judged. One is the **spectator**, whose sentiments concerning my own conduct I try to enter into by placing myself in his situation and considering how it would appear to me when seen from that particular point of view. The other is the **agent**, the person whom I properly call 'myself', the person about whose conduct I as spectator was trying to form some opinion. The first is the judge, the second the person judged. But the judge can't be in every respect the same as the person judged of, any more than a cause can be in every respect the same as the effect.

To be likeable and to be praiseworthy—i.e. to deserve love and to deserve reward—are the great characters [Smith's

word] of virtue; and to be odious and punishable are the great characters of vice. But all these characters immediately bring in the sentiments of others. Virtue is said to be likeable or praiseworthy not •because it is an object of *its own* love or gratitude but •because it arouses those sentiments in other men. The inward tranquillity and self-satisfaction that naturally accompany virtue are caused by the awareness of being an object of such favourable regards, just as the inner torment that naturally accompanies vice results from the suspicion that one is viewed with disfavour. What can be a greater happiness than to be beloved, and to know that we deserve to be beloved? What can be a greater misery than to be hated, and to know that we deserve to be hated?

Chapter 2: The love of praise and of praiseworthiness; the dread of blame and of blameworthiness

Man naturally desire, not only to be loved but to be lovely, i.e. to be a natural and proper object of love. He naturally fears not only to be hated but to be hateful, i.e. a natural and proper object of hatred. [That used to be the only standard meaning of 'hateful'; is still is standard except in the USA where a 'hateful' person is one who is full of hate.] He wants not only praise but praiseworthiness, i.e. to be a natural and proper object of praise, whether or not anyone actually praises him. He fears not only blame but blameworthiness, i.e. to be a natural and proper object of blame, whether or not anyone actually blames him.

The love of praiseworthiness is emphatically *not* derived solely from the love of praise. Those two drives resemble one another, are connected, and often blend with one another, but they are in many respects distinct and independent of one another.

The love and admiration that we naturally have for those

whose character and conduct we approve of necessarily lead us to want to become, ourselves, objects of such agreeable sentiments, and to be as likeable and admirable as those whom we love and admire the most. Our intense desire to excel is based on our admiration of the excellence of others. And we aren't satisfied with being merely admired for qualities that get other people to be •admired; we have to at least *believe* that we are admirable for qualities that make other people •admirable. But to satisfy this desire we must become the impartial spectators of our own character and conduct, trying to view them with other peoples' eyes, or as other people are likely to view them. If our character and conduct when seen in this light appear to us as we wish, we are happy and contented. But this happiness and contentment are greatly confirmed if we find that other people, when they view our character and conduct with the actual eyes that we were only imagining ourselves viewing them with, see them in precisely the way we had imagined ourselves seeing them. This approval from other people necessarily confirms our own self-approval. Their praise necessarily strengthens our own sense of our praiseworthiness. In this case, far from the love of praiseworthiness being derived solely from the love of praise, the love of praise seems to a large extent to be derived from the love of praiseworthiness.

The most sincere praise can't give us much pleasure when it can't be regarded as evidence that we are praiseworthy. It won't satisfy us to have esteem and admiration bestowed on us through some kind of ignorance or mistake. . . . The man who applauds us either for actions that we didn't perform or for motives that had no influence on our conduct is really applauding not us but someone else. We can get no satisfaction from that. That kind of praise should be more humiliating than any blame, and should perpetually bring to our minds the most humbling of all reflections, namely the thought of

what we ought to be but are not. . . . To be pleased with such groundless applause is a proof of the most superficial levity and weakness. It is what is properly called 'vanity', and is the basis for the most ridiculous and contemptible vices, namely the vices of affectation and common lying. [Smith scornfully presents two examples: a fool who tries to attract admiration by telling lying stories about adventures he has come through, and the self-important idiot who parades himself as someone with 'rank and distinction' that he knows he doesn't have. Smith continues with an acute psychological account of such people:] They look on themselves not in the light in which they know they ought to appear to their companions, but in the light in which they believe their companions actually look on them. Their superficial weakness and trivial folly prevent them from ever looking *into* themselves, seeing themselves in the way (their consciences must tell them) that everyone would see them if the real truth were known.

Matching the fact that ignorant and groundless praise can give no solid joy, no satisfaction that will bear serious examination, is the fact that

it is often really comforting to reflect that although no praise has been actually bestowed on us, our conduct has deserved praise, having entirely conformed to the measures and rules by which praise and approval are naturally and commonly bestowed.

We are pleased not only with praise but also with having acted in a praiseworthy way. We are pleased to think that we have made ourselves natural objects of approval, even if no approval has ever actually been bestowed on us; just as we are humiliated by the thought that we have deserved the blame of those we live with, even if we have never been actually blamed. The man who is aware of having behaved in exactly the ways that experience tells him are generally

agreeable reflects with satisfaction on the propriety of his own behaviour. When he views it in the light in which the impartial spectator would view it, he thoroughly enters into all the motives that influenced it. He looks back on every part of it with pleasure and approval, and even if mankind are never acquainted with what he has done, he looks at himself not as they *do* regard him but as they *would* regard him if they were better informed. . . . Men have voluntarily thrown away life to acquire after death a renown that they could no longer enjoy. While they still lived they imaginatively anticipated the fame that was in future times to be bestowed on them. The applause that they were never to hear rang in their ears; and the thoughts of the admiration whose effects they were never to feel played about their hearts, banished from their breasts the strongest of all natural fears, and led them to perform actions that seem almost beyond the reach of human nature. But in point of reality there is surely no great difference between the approval that won't be given until we can no longer enjoy it and the approval that won't ever be given but would be if the world ever came to understand properly the facts about how we have behaved. If the former often produces such violent effects, it's not surprising that the other should always be highly regarded.

When Nature formed man for society, she endowed him with **(1)** a basic desire to please his brethren and a basic aversion to offending them. She taught him to feel pleasure in their favourable regard and pain in their unfavourable regard. She made their approval most flattering and most agreeable to him for its own sake, and their disapproval most humiliating and most offensive.

But this alone wouldn't have equipped him for the society for which he was made. So Nature endowed him not only with a desire to be approved of but also with **(2)** a desire to

be something that *ought* to be approved of, or a desire to be what he himself approves of in other men. Desire (1) could only have made him wish to *appear to be* fit for society; to be concerned about really *being* fit, he needed desire (2). . . . In every well-formed mind desire (2) seems to be the stronger of the two. Only the weakest and most superficial of mankind can be much delighted with praise that they themselves know to be altogether unmerited. [Smith goes on at some length about the attitude of ‘a wise man’, to whom what matters above all is to deserve approval, whether or not he actually gets it from anyone.]

To want praise when none is due—or even to *accept* praise when it is not due—can only be the effect of the most contemptible vanity. To want it when it is really due is to want merely that a most essential act of justice should be done to us. The love of just fame or true glory, even for its own sake and independently of any advantage one might get from it, is not unworthy even of a wise man. But such a man sometimes neglects and even despises fame of that kind; and he is most likely to do so when he is absolutely confident of the perfect propriety of every part of his own conduct. When this is so, his self-approval doesn’t need to be confirmed by the approval of other men. It is sufficient on its own, and he is contented with it. This self-approval is the principal object (if not indeed the only one) about which he can or ought to be concerned. The love of it is the love of virtue.

Just as the love and admiration that we naturally have for some others dispose us to want to become ourselves the proper objects of such agreeable sentiments, so also the hatred and contempt that we equally naturally have for some others dispose us, perhaps even more strongly, to dread the very thought of resembling them in any respect. And here again what we fear is less the thought of being hated and despised than the thought of being hateful and

despicable. . . . The man who has broken through all the measures of conduct that could make him agreeable to mankind may have the most perfect assurance that what he has done will for ever be concealed from every human eye; but that won’t do him any good. When he looks back on his behaviour and views with the eyes of an impartial spectator, he finds that he can’t enter into any of the motives that influenced it. He. . . feels a high degree of the shame that he would be exposed to if his actions were ever to be generally known. . . . And if what he has been guilty of is not merely wrong actions that would be objects of simple disapproval, but an enormous crime that would arouse detestation and resentment, he can never think of it. . . .without feeling all the agony of horror and remorse. [Smith adds colourful detail about the ‘natural pangs of an affrighted conscience’ that can’t be allayed by convincing oneself that there is no God. He says that some terrible criminals have confessed to their crimes when they were not under suspicion. He continues with this theme:] They hoped by their death •to reconcile themselves, at least in their own imagination, to the natural sentiments of mankind; •to be able to consider themselves as less worthy of hatred and resentment; •to atone in some measure for their crimes, and by thus becoming objects of compassion rather than of horror, if possible •to die in peace and with the forgiveness of all their fellow-creatures. Compared to what they felt before the discovery, even the thought of this, it seems, was happiness. . . .

Only the most frivolous and superficial of mankind can be much delighted with praise that they know they don’t in the least deserve. But undeserved reproach is often capable of humiliating even men of more than ordinary constancy. . . . Such a man is humbled to find that anyone should have such a low view of his character as to suppose him capable of being guilty of whatever it is he is accused of. Though he is

perfectly conscious of his innocence, the very accusation often seems to throw—even in his own imagination—a shadow of disgrace and dishonour on his character. . . . An innocent man who is brought to the scaffold by the false accusation of an odious crime suffers the cruelest misfortune that it is possible for innocence to suffer. . . .

[For someone to whom this happens, Smith says, religion offers some consolation: the only thing that can ‘strike terror into triumphant vice’ is also the only thing that offers ‘consolation to disgraced and insulted innocence’. There is not much consolation to be drawn from ‘the humble philosophy that confines its views to this life’.]

[Continuing with this enormously long chapter [25 book-pages], Smith now presents two pages of details of how various kinds of people handle **(1)** unmerited applause and **(2)** unmerited disapproval. Its main point is that a good person won’t get pleasure from **(1)** but will get pain from **(2)**. If he tries to shrug either of these off by telling the world ‘I didn’t do it’, he is more likely to be believed in **(1)** than in **(2)**. And there’s something else that makes unmerited disapproval hard for a good man to take:] He knows perfectly what he has done, but perhaps no-one can know for sure what he himself is capable of doing. . . . He may be confident that the unfavourable judgment of his neighbours is wrong, but his confidence can’t often be strong enough to block his neighbours’ judgment from making some impression upon him. . . .

I should point out that •how much importance we attach to the agreement or disagreement of other people’s sentiments and judgments with our own is always exactly proportional to •how *unsure* we are about the propriety of our own sentiments and the accuracy of our own judgments.

A morally sensitive man may sometimes feel great uneasiness at the thought that he may have yielded too much to a

certain passion—even an ‘honourable passion’, so to speak, such as his indignation at an injury that he or a friend has sustained. He is anxiously afraid that while meaning only to act in a spirited and just way he may have been led by an unduly intense emotion to do a real injury to some other person who, though not innocent, may have been less guilty than he at first seemed to be. In this situation the opinion of other people comes to have the utmost importance for him. Their approval is the most healing ointment that can be poured into his uneasy mind; their disapproval the bitterest and most tormenting poison. When he is perfectly satisfied with every part of his own conduct, the judgment of other people is often of less importance to him.

There are some noble and beautiful **(1)** arts in which the degree of excellence can be determined only by a certain nicety of taste, the decisions of which seem always to be somewhat uncertain. There are **(2)** others in which success can be rigorously demonstrated or at least strongly argued for. Among the candidates for excellence in those different arts, a concern for public opinion is always much greater in **(1)** than in **(2)**.

[Smith elaborates this through a couple of book-pages. He puts poetry into class **(1)**, and reports cases in which fine poets have been crushed by public disapproval of their work. Mathematics is assigned to class **(2)**, because mathematical results are so certain that there’s no room for wrong dissent.]

Sometimes the morals of those different classes of learned men are somewhat affected by this great difference in how they stand with relation to the public.

Because mathematicians and natural philosophers are independent of public opinion, they aren’t much tempted to form themselves into factions and cliques, whether for the support of their own reputation or for lowering the reputation of their rivals. They are nearly all men of the most

likeable simplicity of manners, who live in good harmony with one another, are the friends of one another's reputation, and don't enter into intrigues in order to secure the public applause. They are pleased when their works are approved of, but not much vexed or angry when they are neglected.

It's not always like that with poets, or with those who pride themselves on what is called fine writing. They are apt to divide themselves into a sort of literary factions, with each gang being. . . .the mortal enemy of the reputation of every other, and employing all the mean arts of intrigue and persuasion to get public opinion to side with the works of its own members and against those of its enemies and rivals. [Smith gives examples from France and England, remarking that 'the likeable Mr Addison didn't think it unworthy of his gentle and modest character' to take the lead in a conspiracy 'to keep down the rising reputation of Mr Pope'. He contrasts this with the more selfless characters and conduct of 'mathematicians and natural philosophers'.]

It is natural that our uncertainty concerning our own merit, and our concern to think favorably of it, should combine to make us •want to know the opinion of other people regarding it and •to be more than ordinarily elevated when that opinion is favourable (and more than ordinarily humiliated when it is unfavourable). [Smith goes on to say that we shouldn't be willing to plot and scheme to get the favourable opinion or avoid the unfavourable one. Praise that one gets by unfair means is deprived of what mature and decent people regard as the main value of praise—namely its value as evidence that one is praiseworthy. He continues:]

The man who performs a praiseworthy action may also want the praise that is due to it—perhaps even more than is due to it. The two motivations—to be praiseworthy and to be praised—are in this case blended together. Even the man himself may not know how far his conduct was influenced by

each of them, and it's hardly ever possible for the rest of us to know. [What we'll say about that, Smith says, will depend on how much we like the man in question and perhaps on what general view we have of human nature. He'll return later to the topic of 'splenic' views of human nature. Then:]

Very few men can be satisfied with their own private sense that their qualities and conduct are of the kinds they admire and think praiseworthy in other people, unless they actually receive praise for those qualities and that conduct. In this respect, though, men differ considerably from one another. Some men when they are perfectly satisfied in their own minds that they are praiseworthy seem not to care whether they are praised; others seem to care much less about praiseworthiness than about praise.

Unless a man avoids being actually blamed or reproached, he can't be completely sure—he can't even be *fairly* sure—that nothing in his conduct has been blameworthy. A wise man may often neglect praise [i.e. not give any thought to whether he is being praised], even when he has best deserved it; but in any seriously important matter he will try hard to act in such a way as to avoid not only •blameworthiness but also—as much as possible—every •plausible imputation of blame. . . . To show much concern about praise, even for praiseworthy actions, is usually a mark not of great wisdom but of some degree of weakness; whereas in a concern to avoid the shadow of blame or reproach there may be no weakness but the most praiseworthy prudence. . . .

The all-wise Author of Nature has in this way taught man to respect the sentiments and judgments of his brethren—to be more or less pleased when they approve of his conduct and hurt when they disapprove of it. We could put this by saying that God has appointed man to be the immediate judge of mankind, this being one of the many respects in which he has created man after his own image. . . . Each

man is taught by nature to acknowledge the power and jurisdiction that has thus been conferred on his fellow-men, to be more or less humbled and humiliated when he has drawn their censure, and to be more or less elated when he has obtained their applause.

But although men have in this way been appointed as the immediate judges of mankind, they are judges only in a lower court. Any sentence that they pass, ·i.e. any sentence of **the man without**·, can be appealed to a much higher court, namely to the tribunal of

their own consciences, the supposed impartial and well-informed spectator, **the man within** the breast, the great judge and arbiter of their conduct.

The jurisdictions of those two tribunals are based on principles that are in reality different and distinct, though in some respects they are alike. . . . The jurisdiction of **the man without** is wholly based on the desire for actual praise, and aversion to actual blame. That of **the man within** is wholly based on the desire for praiseworthiness and aversion to blameworthiness, i.e.

the desire to have the qualities and perform the actions that we love and admire in other people, and the fear of having the qualities and performing the actions that we hate and despise in other people.

If the man without should applaud us for actions we haven't performed or motives that didn't influence us, the man within can immediately humble the pride and elation that such groundless acclamations might otherwise cause, by telling us that when we accept them we make ourselves despicable because we know that we don't deserve them. And on the other side, if the man without should reproach us for actions we haven't performed or motives that didn't influence us, the man within can immediately correct this false judgment and assure us that we are *not* proper objects of

the censure that has so unjustly been laid on us. But. . . the man within seems sometimes to be astonished and confused by the noisy vigour of the man without. The violence and loudness with which blame is sometimes poured out on us seems to stupefy and numb our natural sense of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness; and the judgments of the man within, even if not absolutely altered or perverted, are so much *shaken* in the steadiness and firmness of their decision that they lose much of their natural effect of securing the tranquillity of the mind. We hardly dare find ourselves not guilty when all our brethren appear to condemn us loudly. The •supposed impartial spectator of our conduct seems fearful and hesitating when he gives his opinion in our favour, whereas all the •real spectators. . . are unanimous and violent in giving their judgment against us. [Smith calls the man within a 'demigod', partly mortal and partly immortal and divine. He continues:] When the judgments of the man within are steadily and firmly directed by the sense of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, he seems to act suitably to his divine birth; but when he allows himself to be astonished and confused by the judgments of ignorant and weak man, he reveals his connection with mortality and seems to act in line with the human rather than the divine part of his origin.

When this happens, the only effective consolation for a humbled and afflicted man lies in an appeal to a still higher tribunal, namely that of the all-seeing Judge of the world, whose eye can never be deceived and whose judgments can never be perverted. Our man was supplied by nature with the man within his breast, who was to act in this life as the great guardian of his innocence and of his tranquillity; but this man within has been disturbed and astonished ·by the clamour of public disapproval·, so that our man's mind has become weak and despondent; and now the only support he

can find is in a firm confidence in the unerring rightness of the judgments of God's tribunal, before which his innocence will eventually be declared and his virtue rewarded. So our happiness in this life often depends on the humble hope and expectation of a life to come. This hope and expectation is deeply rooted in human nature, which needs

- to support its lofty ideas of its own dignity,
- to brighten the dreary prospect of continually approaching •death, and
- to maintain its cheerfulness under all the heaviest calamities to which the disorders of this life sometimes expose it.

[Smith wrote 'continually approaching •mortality'—obviously a slip.] That there is a world to come, in which. . . every man will be ranked with those who really are his equals in moral and intellectual qualities. . . is a doctrine that is in every respect so venerable, and so comfortable to the weakness of human nature and so flattering to its grandeur, that any virtuous man who has the misfortune to doubt it can't help earnestly wishing to believe it. It wouldn't have been exposed to the derision of the scoffers if it weren't for the fact that some of its most zealous supporters have described the distribution of rewards and punishments to be made in that world to come in a way that has too often been in direct opposition to all our moral sentiments.

A complaint that we have all heard from many a venerable but discontented old officer is that

- an assiduous courtier is often more favoured than a faithful and active servant, that
- attending and applauding are often shorter and surer roads to promotion than merit or service, and that
- a 'campaign' of hanging around as a courtier at the court of Versailles or St James's is often worth two •military campaigns in Germany or Flanders.

But what is considered as the greatest reproach even to the weakness of earthly sovereigns has been ascribed to divine perfection as an act of justice! The duties of devotion—the public and private worship of God—have been represented, even by able and virtuous men, as the only virtues that can either entitle us to reward or exempt us from punishment in the life to come. . . . The philosophically inclined Bishop Massillon, in a ceremony of blessing the flags of a military regiment of Catinat, said this to the officers:

'The most deplorable thing in your situation, gentlemen, is that in a hard and painful life in which your duties sometimes go beyond the rigour and severity of the most austere cloisters, your sufferings won't help you in the life to come or—in many cases—in this present life. Alas! the solitary monk in his cell, obliged to mortify the flesh [= 'to semi-starve and inflict physical pain on himself'] and to subject it to the spirit, is supported by the hope of an assured reward and by the secret support of the grace that softens the yoke of the Lord. But can you on your death-bed dare to represent to God the wearying daily hardships of your employment? can you dare to ask him for any reward?. . . . Alas! my brother, if one single day of those sufferings were consecrated to the Lord, it might have brought you eternal happiness. Offering up to God one single action that was painful to nature might have secured for you the inheritance of the saints. And you have done all this, and in vain, for *this world!*'

This comparison between •the futile mortifications of a monastery and •the ennobling hardships and hazards of war, this supposition that one day—one *hour*—employed in •the former should in God's eyes have more merit than a whole life spent honourably in •the latter, is surely contrary

to all our moral sentiments, contrary to all the principles by which nature has taught us to regulate our contempt or admiration. But this is the spirit that has

- reserved the Heavenly regions for monks and friars, and for people whose conduct and conversation resembled those of monks and friars,

while at the same time

- condemning to Hell all the heroes, all the statesmen and lawgivers, all the poets and philosophers of former ages; all those who have invented, improved, or excelled in the arts that contribute to the survival, convenience, or ornament of human life; all the great protectors, instructors, and benefactors of mankind; all those to whom our natural sense of praiseworthiness forces us to ascribe the highest merit and most exalted virtue.

It's no wonder that such a strange application of this most respectable doctrine should sometimes have exposed it to contempt and derision—at least from people who didn't themselves have any taste for or skill in the devout and contemplative virtues.

Chapter 3: The influences and authority of conscience

The approval of a man's own conscience is in some special cases barely enough to content him; the testimony of the supposed impartial spectator, that great inmate of the breast, can't always give him all the support he needs. Still, the influence and authority of this principle [see note on page 164] is always very great, and it's only by consulting this inner judge that we can ever see our own character and conduct in its proper shape and dimensions, or make any proper comparison between our own interests and other people's.

We all know that to **the eye of the body** objects appear great or small not so much according to their real sizes as according to how far away they are. Well, the same is true for what may be called **the natural eye of the mind**, and we make up for the defects of both these 'eyes' in pretty much the same way. From where I am now sitting, an immense landscape of lawns, woods, and distant mountains seems to have barely the width of the little window that I write by. . . . My only way of soundly comparing those mountains etc. with the little objects in my study is to transport myself in imagination to a different viewpoint from which I can see both at nearly equal distances. . . . Habit and experience have taught me to do this so easily and smoothly that I am hardly aware of doing it at all; and it takes some knowledge of optics for a man to be thoroughly convinced of how small those distant objects would appear to the eye if the imagination didn't, knowing what their real sizes are, puff them up.

In the same way, to the selfish and basic passions of human nature the loss or gain of a very small interest of our own appears to be vastly more important than the greatest concern of someone else with whom we have no particular connection—arousing a more passionate joy or sorrow, a more ardent desire or aversion. As long as the other person's interests are surveyed from this viewpoint, they can never be put into the balance with our own, can never hold us back from doing whatever favours our interests, however ruinous to his. To make a proper comparison between his interests and ours, we must change our position. We must view both lots of interests not from our own place or from his, and not with our own eyes or with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person who has no particular connection with either of us, and who judges impartially between us. Here, too, habit and experience have taught us to do this so easily and smoothly that we are

hardly aware of doing it at all; and in this case too it takes some reflection—and even some philosophy—for a man to be convinced regarding how little interest he would take in his neighbour's greatest concerns. . . .if the sense of propriety and justice didn't correct the otherwise natural inequality of our sentiments.

Let us suppose that the great and populous empire of China was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a humane man in Europe—one with no sort of connection with China—would be affected when he heard about this dreadful calamity. I imagine that he would first strongly express his sorrow for the misfortune of that unhappy people, and would make many melancholy reflections on the precariousness of human life, and the pointlessness of all the labours of man, which could thus be annihilated in a moment. He might also, if he were given to this sort of thing, think about how this disaster might affect the commerce of Europe and the trade and business of the world in general. [This was written 17 years before the appearance of Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.] And when all this fine philosophy was over, and all these humane sentiments had been expressed, he would go about his business or his pleasure. . . .with the same ease and tranquillity as if no such accident had happened. The most trivial 'disaster' that could befall *him* would disturb him more. If he was due to lose his little finger tomorrow, he wouldn't sleep to-night; but he will snore contentedly over the ruin of a hundred million of his brethren, *provided he never saw them*; so the destruction of that immense multitude seems clearly to be of less concern to him than this paltry misfortune of his own. Well, then:

Would a humane man be willing to avoid this paltry misfortune to himself—this loss of a little finger—by sacrificing the lives of a hundred million of his brethren, *provided he had never seen them*?

Human nature jumps back with horror at the thought. The world in its greatest depravity and corruption never produced a villain who could *think of* behaving in such a way. But what makes this difference? When our passive feelings are almost always so sordid and selfish, how does it happen that our active drives are often so generous and so noble? Given that we're always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves than by whatever concerns other people, what is it that prompts generous people always (and mean people sometimes) to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interests of others? It's not •the soft power of humaneness, •that feeble spark of benevolence that Nature has kindled in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting •the strongest impulses of self-love. What comes into play in these cases is a stronger power, a more forcible motive. It is *reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within*, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. It is *he* who, whenever we are about to act in some way that will affect the happiness of others, calls to us with a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions! What he tells us is that

- we are only one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other, and that
- when we prefer ourselves so shamefully and so blindly to others we become proper objects of resentment, abhorrence, and cursing.

It's only from *him* that we learn the real littleness of ourselves and of whatever relates to ourselves; and the natural misrepresentations of self-love can be corrected only by the eye of this impartial spectator. It is *he* who shows us

- the propriety of generosity and the ugliness of injustice,
- the propriety of forgoing our own greatest interests in favour of the still greater interests of others, and

•the ugliness of doing the smallest injury to someone else in order to get the greatest benefit to ourselves.

It is not the love of our neighbour, the love of mankind, that often prompts us to practice those divine virtues. What usually comes into play on such occasions is a stronger love, a more powerful affection—the love of what is honourable and noble, of the grandeur and dignity and superiority of our own characters.

When the happiness or misery of others depends in any way on how we behave, we dare not follow self-love's hint and prefer the interest of one to that of many. ·If we start to move in that direction·, the man within immediately tells us •that we are valuing ourselves too much and other people too little, and •that by doing this we make ourselves the proper object of other people's contempt and indignation. And this sentiment isn't confined to men of extraordinary magnanimity and virtue. It is deeply impressed on every reasonably good soldier, who feels that his companions would despise him if they thought him capable of shrinking from danger, or of hesitating to risk—or even to throw away—his life when the good of the service required it.

If I could bring myself a large benefit by doing you a small harm, is it all right for me to prefer myself over you to that extent? No! The poor man mustn't defraud or steal from the rich, even if the benefit the acquisition would bring him would be much larger than the harm it would do to the rich man. ·If a poor man starts to plan such a theft·, the man within immediately tells him that he is no better than his neighbour, and that by this unjust preference ·for himself over the rich man· he makes himself a proper object •of the contempt and indignation of mankind and •of the punishment that their contempt and indignation will naturally dispose them to inflict. Punishment? Yes!—for having violated one of the sacred rules that must be mainly

observed if human society is to continue in security and peace. Any ordinarily honest man will dread •the inward disgrace of such an action, stamping an indelible stain on his own mind, more than •the greatest external calamity that could possibly befall him. . . .

When the happiness or misery of others in no way depends on our conduct, when our interests are altogether separated and detached from theirs so that there's neither connection nor competition between them, we don't always think it so necessary to restrain •our natural and perhaps improper anxiety about our own affairs, or •our natural and perhaps equally improper indifference about those of other men. The most ordinary education teaches us to act on all important occasions with some sort of impartiality between ourselves and others, and even the ordinary commerce of the world is capable of adjusting our **active drives** so that they conform to some degree of propriety. But a highly developed and refined education has been said to be needed to correct the inequalities of our **passive feelings**. For this purpose, it has been claimed, we must resort to philosophical investigations that are extremely severe and extremely deep.

Two different sets of philosophers have tried to teach us this hardest of all the lessons of morality.

- (1) Some have worked to increase our sensitivity to the interests of others; they want us to feel for others as we naturally feel for ourselves.
- (2) The other group have worked to lessen our awareness of our own interests; they want us to feel for ourselves as we naturally feel for others.

It may be that both have carried their doctrines a good distance beyond the just standard of nature and propriety.

(1) The first group are the whining and melancholy moralists who are perpetually reproaching us for being happy when so many of our brethren are in misery, who regard

as impious the natural joy of prosperity that doesn't think of the many wretches who are labouring under all sorts of calamities—poverty, disease, horrors of death, the insults and oppression of their enemies. In their opinion,

commiseration for miseries that we never saw and never heard of, but that we can be sure are at all times infesting large numbers of our fellow-creatures, ought to damp the pleasures of people who are fortunate, and to make a certain melancholy dejection habitual to all men.

·There are three things wrong with this·. •This extreme sympathy with misfortunes that we know nothing about seems altogether absurd and unreasonable. Taking the world as a whole, for each man who suffers pain or misery there are twenty in prosperity and joy, or at least in tolerable circumstances. Surely no reason can be given why we should weep with the one rather than rejoice with the twenty. •Also, this artificial commiseration is not only absurd but seems altogether impossible for us. Those who act as though this was their frame of mind usually have nothing but a certain artificial and sentimental sadness that makes their faces and conversation irrelevantly dismal and disagreeable without reaching their heart. •And, lastly, even if this disposition of mind could be achieved it would be perfectly useless, serving merely to make miserable the person who had it. . . . All men, however distant, are no doubt entitled to our good wishes, and our good wishes we naturally give them. But if they should be unfortunate, it's no part of our duty to give ourselves any anxiety about that. . . .

(2) The moralists who try to correct the natural inequality of our passive feelings by making us less sensitive to what specially concerns ourselves include all the ancient sects of philosophers and especially the ancient Stoics. According to them a man ought to regard himself not as something

separated and detached but as a citizen of the world, a member of the vast commonwealth of nature. He ought at all times to be willing that his own little interests should be sacrificed to the interests of this great community. Whatever concerns him personally ought to affect him no more than whatever concerns any other equally important part of this immense system—e.g. any other *one* person·. We should view ourselves not in the light that our own selfish passions are apt to throw, but in the light in which any other citizen of the world would view us. . . .

[Preparing the ground for discussing this, Smith distinguishes private misfortunes into (a) ones that affect us by affecting our near and dear—parents, offspring, and so on; and (b) ones that affect us immediately and directly. There is a great variety of possible misfortunes of either kind—pain, sickness, approaching death, poverty, disgrace, and so on.]

(a) In misfortunes of the first kind our emotions may go far beyond what exact propriety will accept, but they may likewise fall short of that—and they often do. A man who felt no more for the death or distress of his own father or son than for the death or distress of someone else's father or son would strike us as being neither a good son nor a good father. Such unnatural indifference, far from arousing our applause, would draw our highest disapproval. But these domestic affections ·fall into two groups for our present purposes·: we are apt to have some of them more strongly than is proper, and to have others less strongly than we should. Nature in its wisdom has, in most and perhaps all men, installed a much stronger drive towards •parental tenderness than towards •filial respect. The continuance and propagation of the species depend entirely on •the former, and not at all on •the latter. The existence and survival of the child usually depends altogether on the care of the parents, whereas parents' existence and survival seldom

depend on the care of the child. That's why Nature has made the former affection so strong that it generally requires not to be aroused but to be moderated. . . . But moralists do urge us to an affectionate attention to our parents, and to make a proper return to them in their old age for the kindness that they showed us in our youth. In the Ten Commandments we are commanded to honour our fathers and mothers; and nothing is said about our love for our children, ·because· Nature had sufficiently prepared us for the performance of this latter duty. Men are seldom accused of pretending to be fonder of their children than they really are, but they have sometimes been suspected of putting too much *show* into their displays of piety towards their parents. The ostentatious sorrow of widows has, for a like reason, been suspected of insincerity. We would respect even excessive affections [see note on page 116] of that kind if we believed them to be sincere; and even if we didn't perfectly approve, we wouldn't severely condemn either. . . .

Although the excess of affections of this sort appears to be blameworthy, it never appears to be odious. We blame a parent's excessive fondness and concern as something that may eventually be harmful to the child, and is in the meantime excessively inconvenient to the parent; but we easily pardon it and never regard it with hatred and detestation. But when a parent has •too little of this parental affection of which most parents have •too much, that always strikes us as especially odious. The man who seems to feel nothing for his own children, treating them on all occasions with undeserved severity and harshness, seems the most detestable of all brutes. Our sense of propriety, so far from requiring us to eradicate altogether the special sensitivity that we naturally have for the misfortunes of our near and dear, is always much more offended by someone's having too little of that sensitivity than it ever is by someone's having

too much. When it comes to feelings and attitudes towards one's parents, one's offspring, and the like, the apathy recommended by the Stoics is never agreeable, and all the metaphysical trick-arguments by which it is supported can seldom achieve anything except to work on a coxcomb [here = 'moral idiot'], making his hard unfeelingness ten times worse than it would have been if he had been left to himself. . . .

•That moderated sensitivity to the misfortunes of others, which doesn't disqualify us for the performance of any duty; •the melancholy and affectionate remembrance of our departed friends; what ·the poet· Gray calls •'the pang, to secret sorrow dear', are by no means unpleasant sensations. Though they outwardly wear the features of pain and grief, they are all inwardly stamped with the ennobling characters of virtue and self-approval.

(b) When it comes to the misfortunes that affect us immediately and directly—in our body, our fortune, or our reputation—the sense of propriety is much more apt to be offended by someone's having too much sensitivity to these than by someone's having too little of it. There are few cases where we can come too near to the apathy and indifference recommended by the Stoics.

[Smith now offers a couple of pages of remarks about how our sympathy with others' misfortunes varies in intensity, in tone, and in resultant behaviour, depending on whether the misfortune in question is bodily pain, financial loss, or loss of reputation. This material is book-ended between two occurrences of the remark that although such sympathy is a kind of sadness there is also something agreeable about it. Then:]

If we examine the different shades and gradations of weakness and self-control that we meet with in everyday life, we'll see that this control of our passive feelings must be acquired not from •the abstruse syllogisms of a quibbling

dialectic but from •the great discipline that Nature has established as a means for acquiring this and every other virtue, namely a regard for the sentiments of the real or supposed spectator of our conduct.

A very young child has no self-control. Whether it is suffering fear or grief or anger, it always does its best by the violence of its outcries to alarm the attention of its nurse or its parents. While it remains under the custody of such •partial protectors [= 'protectors who are biased in its favour'], its anger is the first and perhaps the only passion it is taught to moderate. In defence of their own peace of mind, the protectors are often obliged to use noise and threatening of their own to frighten the child into a good mood, and the passion that incites it to attack is restrained by the passion that teaches it to look to its own safety. When it is old enough to go to school or to mix with its equals, the child soon finds that *they* have no such indulgent •partiality. It naturally wants to gain their favour and to avoid their hatred or contempt—indeed, regard for its own safety teaches it to do so—and it soon finds that the only way to do that is to moderate not only its anger but all its other passions, toning them down to a level that the child's playmates and companions are likely to be pleased with. It thus enters into the great school of self-control, studies to be more and more master of itself, and begins to discipline its own feelings—a task that few people bring to completion in the course of a lifetime!

[Smith now presents a long account of how someone who is suffering conducts himself in relation to friends and acquaintances, depending on whether the sufferer is **(i)** 'the weakest man', **(ii)** 'a man of a little more firmness', or **(iii)** a 'man of real constancy and firmness'. The differences are what you might expect. Notable in the account of **(i)** is Smith's remark that this weak man tries to get more

sympathy from others by upping his expressions of pain and sorrow, behaving 'like a child that has not yet gone to school'. The man in **(ii)** does better: he stays calm, feels the approval that his friends and acquaintances have for his restraint, and is thus encouraged to keep it up, silently 'applauding himself'. There is much more about this, but it doesn't add significantly to the philosophical content. Then there is the man in **(iii)**:]

[This paragraph down to * is almost exactly as Smith wrote it.] The man of real constancy and firmness, the wise and just man who has been thoroughly bred in the great school of self-control, in the bustle and business of the world, exposed perhaps to the violence and injustice of faction and to the hardships and hazards of war, maintains this control of his passive feelings on all occasions; and whether in solitude or in society he wears nearly the same countenance and is affected in nearly the same manner. In success and in disappointment, in prosperity and in adversity, before friends and before enemies, he has often had to maintain this manliness. He has never dared to forget for one moment the judgment that the impartial spectator would pass on his sentiments and conduct. He has never dared to allow •the man within the breast to be absent from his attention for one moment. He has always been accustomed to look at anything relating to him with the eyes of •this great inmate. This habit has become perfectly familiar to him.* What he has constantly done and indeed constantly needed to do is to model—or try to model—not only what he does and how he does it, but even his inward sentiments and feelings on those of •this awe-inspiring and respectable judge. [Here and in a few other places, the phrase 'what he does and how he does it' replaces Smith's 'his outward conduct and behaviour'. It is a guess about what he meant.] He doesn't merely *portray* the sentiments of the impartial spectator—he really *adopts* them. He almost

identifies himself with—he almost *becomes*—that impartial spectator, and almost never feels anything that this great judge of his conduct doesn't direct him to feel.

[Then a paragraph in which Smith says that a man's approval of himself for doing A is proportional to how hard it was for him to do A. He continues:] A man who has had a leg shot off and who in the next moment speaks and acts with his usual coolness and tranquillity shows a high degree of self-control, so he naturally feels a high degree of self-approval. With most men to whom this happened, their own natural view of their misfortune would force itself on them with such a vivacity and strength of colouring that it would entirely wipe out all thought of any other way of looking at it. They wouldn't feel anything—couldn't attend to anything—except their own pain and fear; they would entirely disregard not only the judgment of the ideal man within the breast but also that of any real spectators who happened to be present.

Given that a man behaves well in face of misfortune, *how* well he counts as behaving depends on how great the misfortune is; and Nature's reward for good behaviour under misfortune is exactly proportioned to how good the behaviour is. The more self-control that is needed for us to conquer our natural sensibility—which includes our natural inclination to whine and complain—the greater are our pleasure and pride in achieving the conquest. And this pleasure and pride over having won a moral victory are so great that no-one who has *them* can be altogether unhappy. Misery and wretchedness can't enter the breast in which complete self-satisfaction dwells. The Stoics say that a wise man who has his leg shot off will be as happy as he would have been if this hadn't happened; that may be going too far, but we do have to agree that the man's complete enjoyment of his own self-applause will greatly alleviate his sense of his own

sufferings, even if it doesn't altogether extinguish it.

In such paroxysms of distress, even the wisest and firmest man presumably won't be able to stay calm without a considerable and even a painful exertion. He is hard-pressed by his natural feeling of his own distress, **(1)** his natural view of his own situation, and will need a great effort to fix his attention on **(2)** the view that the impartial spectator has of his situation. Both views present themselves to him at the same time. His sense of honour, his regard for his own dignity, directs him to fix his whole attention on **(2)**, while his natural—untaught and undisciplined—feelings are continually calling it away to **(1)**. On this occasion he doesn't perfectly identify himself with the ideal man within the breast; he doesn't himself *become* the impartial spectator of his own conduct. The two views both exist in his mind separate and distinct from one another, directing his behaviour in different directions. When he follows **(2)** the view that honour and dignity point out to him, Nature gives him some reward—the enjoyment of his own complete self-approval and of the applause of every honest and impartial spectator. But this isn't enough to compensate completely for the real sufferings that he undergoes through Nature's unalterable laws. (And it's good that it doesn't! If it did *completely* make up for them, his self-interest would give him no motive for avoiding such events as the loss of a leg, which would lessen his utility both to himself and to society. . . .) So he does suffer. In the agony of the paroxysm he maintains the manhood of his countenance and the steadiness of his judgment, but it requires his utmost and most fatiguing exertions to do so.

By the constitution of human nature, however, agony can never be permanent; and if our man survives the paroxysm he soon arrives at an easy enjoyment of his ordinary tranquillity. There's no doubt that a man with a wooden leg is

burdened with a considerable inconvenience, and foresees that he'll have this for the rest of his life. But he soon comes to view it in exactly the way every impartial spectator views it—as an inconvenience under which he can enjoy all the ordinary pleasures both of solitude and of society. He soon identifies himself with the ideal man within the breast, becoming himself the impartial spectator of his own situation. He no longer weeps, laments, or grieves over it as a weak man might do in the beginning. The view of the impartial spectator becomes so perfectly habitual to him that without putting any effort or exertion into this he never thinks of surveying his misfortune in any other way.

The never-failing certainty with which all men eventually adjust themselves to fit whatever becomes their permanent situation may lead us to think that the Stoics were nearly right, to this extent:

Between one permanent situation and another there is, with regard to real happiness, no essential difference. Or if there is, it's a difference that suffices •to support a preference for some of them, but only a simple preference, not an earnest or anxious desire; and •to support a simple rejection of others, but not an earnest or anxious aversion.

Happiness consists in tranquillity and enjoyment. Without tranquillity there can be no enjoyment; and where there is perfect tranquillity almost anything can be amusing. But in every permanent situation where there's no expectation of change, the mind of every man returns, sooner or later, to its natural and usual state of tranquillity. In prosperity it eventually falls back to that state; in adversity it eventually rises up to it. . . .

The great source of the misery and the disorders of human life seems to be men's over-rating of the difference between one permanent situation and another—the over-rating

- by avarice of the difference between poverty and riches,
- by ambition of the difference between a private and a public station,
- by vain-glory of the difference between obscurity and extensive reputation.

Someone under the influence of any of those extravagant passions is not only miserable in his actual situation but is often disposed to disturb the peace of society in order to arrive at whatever it is that he so foolishly admires. [Smith now embarks on a rather preachy page and a half of reasons why behaviour in the service of any one of those ambitions is almost certain to be pointless—too much chance of failure, and too little chance of real satisfaction if one does succeed. Then:]

It may seem •strange but I think it is •true that in the misfortunes that can be somewhat remedied most men don't recover their natural and usual tranquillity as readily as they do in misfortunes that clearly can't be remedied. With misfortunes of the latter kind, .i.e. irremediable ones., the wise man's sentiments and behaviour don't differ noticeably from those of the weak man except in what may be called 'the paroxysm', the first attack. In the end, Time, the great and universal comforter, gradually soothes the weak man till he reaches the degree of tranquillity that the wise man, having a concern for his own dignity and manhood, assumes at the beginning. The case of the man with the wooden leg is an obvious example of this. In the irreparable misfortunes occasioned by the death of children, or of friends and relatives, even a wise man may for a while permit himself some moderate degree sorrow. An affectionate but weak woman is often on such occasions almost perfectly distracted; but Time eventually calms even her down. . . .

Our sensitivity to the feelings of others, far from being inconsistent with •the manliness of self-control, is the very

source of •it. The very same drive or instinct that •prompts us to compassion for our neighbour's sorrow in his the misfortune also •prompts us in our own misfortune to restrain the abject and miserable lamentations of our own sorrow. The same drive or instinct that •prompts us to rejoice in our neighbour's joy over his prosperity and success also •prompts us to restrain the rowdy light-heartedness of our own joy. In both cases, the propriety of our own sentiments and feelings seems to be exactly in proportion to the liveliness and force with which we enter into and come to have his sentiments and feelings.

[Smith now embarks on two not *very* interesting book-pages presenting two theses about the relation between

- (1) the 'gentle virtue' of sensitivity to the feelings of others in their misfortunes, and
- (2) the 'great and awe-inspiring virtue' of self-control and moderation in the expression of one's own feelings in one's own misfortunes.

[He *states* the theses as though they held also for the versions of (1) and (2) that concern joy in good fortune; but his reason for the second of them is confined to (1) and (2) as stated above.] One thesis is that 'the person best fitted by nature for acquiring (1) is also best fitted for acquiring (2)'. The second thesis is that we don't often encounter anyone who has both of these virtues, for a reason that Smith gives. Each of those virtues, he says, requires not merely •natural fitness but also practice, and a life in which a man has plenty of opportunity to exercise (2) is an arduous rough-and-tumble affair, full of hardships and reverses, in which (1) is apt to be shouldered aside. He continues:] Hardships, dangers, injuries, misfortunes are the only masters under whom we can learn the exercise of (2) this virtue. But these are all masters to whom no-one willingly puts himself to school! [Smith develops this topic at some length, and then switches to a new train of thought:]

In solitude we're apt to feel *too strongly* anything relating to ourselves; we are apt to

- over-rate the help we have given to others, to
- over-rate injuries we have suffered, to
- be too much elated by our own good fortune, and to
- be too much dejected by our own bad fortune.

The conversation of a friend brings us into a better frame of mind, and the conversation of a stranger does this even more. The man within the breast, the abstract and ideal spectator of our sentiments and conduct, often needs to be awakened and reminded of his duty by the presence of a real spectator; and the spectator from whom we can expect the least sympathy and indulgence is likely to be the one who can give us the most complete lesson in self-control.

Are you in adversity? Don't mourn in the darkness of solitude, don't regulate your sorrow according to the indulgent sympathy of your intimate friends; as soon as you can, get out into the day-light of the world and of society. Live with strangers who don't know or don't care about your misfortune. . . .

Are you in prosperity? Don't confine the enjoyment of your good fortune to your own household, to the company of your own friends and (perhaps) of your flatterers, of the company of people who hope to mend their fortunes by building on yours; spend time with people who are independent of you, and value you only for your character and conduct rather than for your fortune. . . .

The propriety of our moral sentiments is never so apt to be corrupted as when an indulgent and partial spectator is right here while the nearest unbiased and impartial one is a long way off.

The only unbiased and impartial spectators of the conduct of independent nations towards one another are neutral nations. But they are so far away as to be almost out of

sight. When two nations are at odds with one another, a citizen in either of them pays little regard to the sentiments that foreign nations may have regarding his conduct. All he wants is to have the approval of his fellow-citizens; and as they are all driven by the same hostile passions that drive him, his best way of pleasing them is to enrage and offend their enemies. So the partial spectator is *here*, the impartial one *far away*. That is why in war and negotiation the laws of justice are seldom observed: truth and fair dealing are almost totally disregarded; treaties are violated; and if a violation brings some advantage, it brings almost no dishonour on the violator. . . . In war, not only are the so-called 'laws of nations' often violated. . . .but most of those 'laws' themselves are laid down with little regard for the plainest and most obvious rules of justice. One of the plainest and most obvious rules of justice is this:

Innocent people should not suffer or be punished because they are somehow connected with or dependent on the guilty (a connection that they may be unable to avoid).

Yet in the most unjust war it is often only the sovereign or the rulers who are guilty, their subjects being perfectly innocent. Whenever it suits the convenience of a public enemy, however, the goods of the peaceable citizens are seized, their lands laid waste, their houses burnt, and they themselves, if they dare to resist, are murdered or led into captivity—all this in perfect conformity with the 'laws of nations'!

[Smith goes on to say that the moral level of conflicts between 'hostile factions' within a nation is even lower than the moral level of wars between nations. No-one doubts that in wars between nations one *ought to* 'keep faith' with the enemy nation, i.e. keep promises given to it, keep contracts made with it, and so on. Whereas when factions are at

war people seriously discuss whether faith ought to be kept with rebels, or with heretics. Smith remarks acidly that 'rebels and heretics are unlucky people who, when things have reached a certain level of violence, have the misfortune to belong to the weaker party'. He continues:] In a nation distracted by faction there are always a few, but *only* a few, who preserve their judgment untainted by the general contagion. Such people have no influence on the course of events, because the parties to the conflict won't listen to them. . . . All such people are held in contempt and derision, often in detestation, by the furious zealots of both parties. A true party-man hates and despises fair-mindedness, and the fact is that no *vice* could disqualify him for the trade of a party-man as effectually as that single *virtue*, fair-mindedness, would. Thus, the real, revered, and impartial spectator is never further off than amidst the violence and rage of contending parties. To *them*, it may be said, such a spectator hardly exists anywhere in the universe. Even to the great Judge of the universe they attribute all their own prejudices, and often view that Divine Being as driven by all their own vindictive and implacable passions. Of all the corrupters of moral sentiments, faction and fanaticism have always been by far the greatest.

[In a final pair of paragraphs Smith returns to the topic of self-control in adversity, not adding much to what he has already said.]

Chapter 4: The nature of self-deceit, and the origin and use of general rules

To pervert our own judgments about the propriety of our own conduct, it isn't always necessary for the real impartial spectator to be at a great distance. Even when he is present, the violence and injustice of our own selfish passions are

sometimes sufficient to induce the man within the breast to make a report very different from what the facts of the case would authorise.

When do we examine our own conduct and try to see it in the light in which the impartial spectator would see it? **(1)** When we are about to act. **(2)** After we have acted. Our views are apt to be biased in both cases; but they are apt to be most biased when it is of most importance that they should be balanced and fair.

(1) When we are about to act, the eagerness of passion seldom allows us to consider what we are doing with the fair-mindedness of an unbiased person. The violent emotions that are agitating us then serve to discolour our views of things, even when we are *trying* to place ourselves in the situation of the impartial spectator and to see objects that concern us in the light in which they will naturally appear to him. The fury of our own passions constantly calls us back to our own viewpoint, from which everything appears magnified and misrepresented by self-love. As for how those objects would appear to someone else, the view that *he* would have of them, we get only flickering little glimpses that vanish in a moment—and aren't entirely right even while they last! We can't even for that moment rid ourselves of all the heat and eagerness with which our particular situation inspires us, or consider what we are about to do with the complete impartiality of a fair-minded judge. As Malebranche says, •the passions all seem reasonable and proportioned to their objects for as long as we continue to feel •them.

(2) When the action is over and the passions that prompted it have subsided, we can enter more coolly into the sentiments of •the unbiased spectator. What concerned us before •we acted• now matters to us almost as little as it always did to •him, and we can now examine our own conduct as honestly and impartially as he does. The man

of today is no longer agitated by the same passions that distracted the man of yesterday; and when the •paroxysm of emotion is thoroughly over, we can identify ourselves with the ideal man within the breast, and look at our own •conduct with the severe eyes of the most impartial spectator. (This echoes what I said earlier [page 77] about how, when the •paroxysm of distress is over, we can look objectively and impartially at our own •situation.) But now that the action is over, our judgments are often nothing like as important as they were before; they can often produce nothing but pointless regret and useless repentance, without always securing us from similar errors in future. And even in this after-the-action situation, our judgments on our own conduct are seldom entirely fair-minded. •That is because• our opinion of our own •character depends entirely on our judgments regarding our past •conduct. It is so disagreeable to think ill of ourselves that we often deliberately avert our eyes from facts that might make that judgment unfavourable. He is a bold surgeon (they say) whose hand doesn't tremble when he operates on himself; and it's an equally bold person who doesn't hesitate to pull off the veil of self-delusion that hides from his view the ugly parts of his own conduct [see note on 'ugly' on page 8]. Rather than having such a disagreeable view of our own behaviour, we too often—foolishly and weakly—try to revive the unjust passions that had misled us; we work to awaken our old hatreds and stir up again our almost forgotten resentments; we even *act* on them again, persevering in injustice merely because we were once unjust and are ashamed and afraid to see that we were so.

That is how biased men's views are regarding the propriety of their own conduct, both at the time of action and after it, and how hard it is for them to see it in the light in which any impartial spectator would see it. •The most basic question of moral epistemology comes into play here•. Some

theorists hold that men judge their own conduct through a special faculty, a 'moral sense', a special power of moral-perception that picks out the beauty or ugliness of passions and affections. But if that were right, men's own passions would be more immediately exposed to the view of this faculty, and it would judge them with more accuracy than it judged the passions of other men, which it could view only from a distance.

This self-deceit, this fatal weakness of mankind, is the source of half the disorders of human life. If we saw ourselves in the light in which others see us, or in which they would see us if they knew all the facts, we couldn't endure the sight unless we immediately set about reforming ourselves.

But Nature hasn't left us with absolutely no remedy for this important weakness—she hasn't abandoned us entirely to the delusions of self-love. Our continual observations of the conduct of others lead us unconsciously to construct general rules about what is fit and proper to do or to avoid. Some of their actions shock all our natural sentiments. We hear everyone around expressing the same detestation of them, which confirms and even increases our natural sense of the actions' ugliness. We're satisfied that we are viewing them in the proper light when we see other people viewing them in the same light. We resolve never to be guilty of such actions, and never to do *anything* that would in this way make us objects of universal disapproval. In this natural way we lay down for ourselves a general *rule* that all such actions are to be avoided because they tend to make us odious, contemptible, or punishable—i.e. objects of the sentiments for which we have the greatest dread and aversion. On the other side, other actions call forth our approval, and we hear everyone around us express the same favourable opinion about them. Everyone is eager to honour and reward them; they arouse all the sentiments for which we have by nature

the strongest desire—the love, the gratitude, the admiration of mankind. We come to want to act in those ways, and thus naturally lay down for ourselves a rule of another kind, that we should always be on the watch for opportunities to act in this way.

That is how the general rules of morality are formed. They are ultimately based on experience of what our moral faculties—our natural sense of merit and propriety—approve or disapprove of in particular instances. What happens is **not** this:

(a) When we approve (or condemn) particular actions, that is always because on examination those actions appear to be agreeable to (or inconsistent with) a certain general rule.

The real order is the opposite of that, namely:

(b) We find from experience that all actions of a certain kind. . . .are approved of or disapproved of, and on that basis we form a general rule against all such actions.

As an aid to seeing how wrong and unreal **(a)** is, as a general account of how our particular moral judgments relate to our general moral rules, suppose the following:

You see an inhuman murder, committed out of greed, envy, or misplaced resentment. The victim is someone who had loved and trusted the murderer. You saw the last agonies of the dying person, and heard him with his expiring breath complain more of the treachery and ingratitude of his false friend than of the violence that had been done to him.

To arrive at a moral judgment on this horrible action you won't apply to it a general rule prohibiting the killing of innocent people! Obviously you would arrive instantaneously at your detestation of this crime, before you get to any thought about a general rule that might apply to it. If you do eventually form such a general rule, it will be based on

the detestation that you felt unstopably arising in your own breast at the thought of this action and any other of the same kind.

[Smith now offers two paragraphs repeating and faintly illustrating what he has just said. Then:]

Once these general rules have been formed, once they are universally accepted and established by the concurring sentiments of mankind, we often appeal to them as to standards of judgment when we are debating the degree of praise or blame that is appropriate for certain actions of a complicated and dubious nature. *On these occasions* the rules are commonly cited as the ultimate foundations of what is just and unjust in human conduct; and this fact seems to have misled several eminent authors into constructing systems that seem to presuppose that mankind's *basic* moral judgments were formed in the way a law-court reaches its decisions, namely by •first considering the general rule and •then deciding whether the particular action in question comes within its scope.

When someone is wondering what it is fit and proper for him to do at a particular moment, his self-love may give him a wrong answer; and in this situation he can be greatly helped by general rules of conduct that have been fixed in his mind by habitual reflection. A man who is furiously resentful of what someone has done to him might, if he listened to the dictates of his resentment, regard his enemy's death as a small compensation for •the wrong he thinks has been done to him—though it may in fact be merely •a slight provocation. But what he has seen of the conduct of others has taught him how horrible all such bloody revenges appear •to people in general. Unless he has been brought up in a *very* strange way, he has imposed on himself an inviolable rule telling him *never* to act in that way. This rule preserves its authority over him, making him incapable of being guilty

of such a violent act. If this had been the first time he ever considered such an action, the fury of his resentment might have led him to think that killing his enemy was quite just and proper, something that every impartial spectator would approve of. But his reverence for the rule that past experience has impressed on him holds back the onward rush of his passion. . . . If he does allow himself to be carried by his passion to the point where he will violate this rule, he still can't entirely throw off the awe and respect with which he has been accustomed to regard it. At the very time of acting, at the moment when passion reaches its highest pitch, he hesitates and trembles at the thought of what he is about to do; he is secretly aware that he is breaking a rule which in all his cool hours he has resolved never to break, which he has never seen broken by others without the highest disapproval •from himself and from people in general, and the breaking of which will (he expects) soon render him an object of the same disagreeable sentiments. Before he can make the last fatal decision, he is tormented with all the agonies of doubt and uncertainty, terrified at the thought of violating such a sacred rule, and at the same time urged to violate it by the fury of his desires. He keeps wavering. Sometimes he resolves to keep to his principle, and not give way to a passion that could spoil the rest of his life with the horrors of shame and repentance; and then a momentary calm takes possession of his breast. . . . But immediately the passion arises anew and with fresh fury drives him on to perform the action that he had a moment ago resolved to abstain from. Wearied and distracted by this continual indecision, he finally takes the last fatal and irrecoverable step of killing his enemy, doing this from a sort of despair; but doing it with the kind of terror and bewilderment experienced by someone who, flying from an enemy, throws himself over a precipice—thus making his

destruction more certain than it would be if he had only his enemy to reckon with. Such are his sentiments even at the time of acting; . . . and then later, when his passion has been gratified and has calmed down, he begins to see what he has done in the light in which others are apt to see it; and he feels the stings of remorse and repentance beginning to agitate and torment him.

Chapter 5: The influence and authority of the general rules of morality, and why they are rightly regarded as the laws of the Deity

A person's regard for those general rules of conduct is his *sense of duty*, a driver [Smith writes 'principle'; see note on page 164] of the greatest importance in human life, and the *only* driver that most people have to direct their actions. Many men behave decently, and don't do anything very wrong all through their lives, yet base their conduct only on a regard for what they see to be the established rules of behaviour. (That means that when we approve of their conduct on the grounds that 'The sentiment that led him to act was a proper one', we're relying on sentiments that such a person never has!) Here is an example:

A man has received great benefits from someone else, but because of the natural coldness of his temperament he feels only a small degree of the sentiment of gratitude. But he has been virtuously educated, so that he'll often have been made to notice how odious ungrateful actions appear and how likeable grateful ones. So, although his heart is not warmed with any grateful affection, he will make an effort to act as if it were, and will try to pay to his benefactor all the regards and attentions that the liveliest gratitude could suggest.

[Smith details some of the actions this might involve. Then:] He can do all this without any hypocrisy or blameworthy deceit, without any selfish intention of obtaining new favours, and without any wish to impose on his benefactor or on the public. It may be that these grateful-seeming actions of his arise purely from •his reverence for the established rule of duty, •his serious and earnest wish to behave strictly in accordance with the law of gratitude. And again:

A wife doesn't always feel •the tender regard for her husband that is suitable to their married state. But she has been virtuously educated, and will try to act as if she did feel •it—to be careful, dutiful, faithful, and sincere, and not to fall short in any of the attentions that the sentiment of conjugal affection would (if she had it) prompt her to perform.

Neither of these people—the friend and the wife—is the best of his or her kind. Both of them have the most serious and earnest desire to fulfill every part of their duty, but they will fail in many subtle details of conduct, miss many opportunities of obliging, which they wouldn't have overlooked if they had had the sentiment that is proper to their situation. Still, without being the very best of their kinds they are perhaps second-best; and if respect for the general rules of conduct has been strongly impressed on them, neither of them will fail in any essential part of their duty. Only people with perfect characters can adjust their sentiments and behaviour so that they stay *exactly* in tune with the smallest differences in their situation, acting on all occasions with the most delicate and accurate propriety. The coarse clay of which most of us are made can't be brought to such perfection. But almost any man can, by discipline, education, and example, be so impressed with a respect for general rules that he will act on almost every occasion with tolerable decency, and through the whole of his life avoid

doing anything considerably blameworthy.

Without •this sacred regard for general rules, no-one's conduct can be much depended on. •It is what constitutes the most essential difference between a man of principle and honour and a worthless fellow. The man of principle keeps steadily and resolutely to his maxims on all occasions, preserving through the whole of his life one even tenor of conduct. [Smith uses 'tenor' several times, in a sense that the word still has though it isn't now much employed. The 'tenor' of someone's conduct is its general *style* or *feel* or *tone* or *over-all shape*.] The worthless fellow acts variously and accidentally, depending on whether mood, inclination, or self-interest happens to be uppermost. Indeed, men are subject to such variations of mood that without this respect for general rules a man who in all his cool hours was delicately sensitive to the propriety of conduct might often be led to act absurdly on the most trivial occasions, ones in which it was hardly possible to think of any serious motive he could have for behaving in this manner. Your friend visits you when you happen to be in a mood that makes it disagreeable to receive him; in your present mood his civility is apt to appear an impertinent intrusion; and if you gave way to that way of viewing things you would behave toward him with coldness and lack of interest. What makes you incapable of such rudeness is just your respect for the general rules of civility and hospitality, which prohibit it. . . . Now consider: if without regard to these general rules

even the duties of politeness, which are so easily observed and which one can hardly have any serious motive to violate,

would often be violated, what would become of

the duties of justice, truth, chastity, fidelity, which are often hard to observe, and which there can be many strong motives to violate?

A reasonable level of observance of these latter duties is required for the very existence of human society, which would crumble into nothing if mankind were not generally impressed with a reverence for those important rules of conduct.

This reverence is still further enhanced by the belief—first impressed by nature, later confirmed by reasoning and philosophy—that those important rules of morality are the commands and laws of the Deity, who will eventually reward those who obey them and punish those who don't.

Imprinted by nature: Men are naturally led to ascribe all their own sentiments and passions to whatever mysterious beings happen to be the objects of religious fear in their country. They attribute *their own* sentiments and passions to the gods because they can't conceive of any others. The unknown intelligences that they imagine but don't see *must* have some sort of resemblance to intelligences of which they have experience. During the ignorance and darkness of pagan superstition, mankind seem to have formed the ideas of their divinities so crudely that they ascribed to them, indiscriminately, *all* the passions of human nature, including the ones that do the least honour to our species—lust, hunger, greed, envy, revenge. So they were bound also to attribute to those beings (for whose excellence they still had the highest admiration) the sentiments and qualities that are the great ornaments of humanity, seeming to raise it to a resemblance of divine perfection—the love of virtue and beneficence, and the hatred of vice and injustice. A man who was harmed by someone else called on Jupiter to be witness of the wrong that had been done to him, and he couldn't doubt that Jupiter would behold it with the same indignation that fills *even* the meanest human being who sees injustice being committed. The man who had harmed him felt himself to be a proper object of the detestation and resentment of mankind;

and his natural fears led him to impute the same sentiments to those awe-inspiring ·divine· beings whose presence he couldn't avoid and whose power he couldn't resist. These natural hopes and fears and suspicions were propagated by sympathy, and confirmed by education; and the gods were universally represented as, and believed to be, the rewarders of humaneness and mercy and the avengers of treachery and injustice. And so it came about that religion, even in its crudest form, gave support to the rules of morality long before the age of disciplined reasoning and philosophy. It was *important* for the happiness of mankind that the terrors of religion should in this way enforce the natural sense of duty—too important for nature to let it depend on the slowness and uncertainty of philosophical researches.

Confirmed by reasoning and philosophy: When these researches did take place, they confirmed the basic work that nature had done. Whatever we believe about the basis for our moral faculties—•certain work by reason, •a basic instinct called a 'moral sense' or •some other source in our nature—it can't be doubted that those faculties were given to us for the direction of our conduct in this life. They bring with them the most obvious badges of this authority, signifying that they were set up within us •to be the supreme deciders in all our actions, •to superintend all our senses, passions, and appetites, and •to judge how far each of them should be indulged or restrained. Some writers have claimed that our moral faculties are in this respect on a level with the other faculties and appetites of our nature, having no more right to restrain these others than the others have to restrain *them*; but this is completely wrong. No other faculty or source of action passes judgment on any other. Love doesn't judge regarding resentment, nor does resentment judge regarding love. Those two passions may be opposite to one another, but can't properly be said to 'approve' or

'disapprove' of one another. Whereas the moral faculties which are my present topic have as their special role the bestowing of censure or applause on all the other drives in our nature. They may be considered as a sort of *sense*, of which those drives are the objects. Every sense is supreme over its own objects. There is no appeal from the eye with regard to the beauty of colours, or from the ear with regard to the harmony of sounds, or from the sense of taste with regard to the agreeableness of flavours. Each of those senses is the final judge of its own objects. Whatever gratifies the sense of taste is sweet, whatever pleases the eye is beautiful, whatever soothes the ear is harmonious. The very *essence* of each of those qualities consists in its fitness to please the sense to which it is addressed. Well, the role of our moral faculties is, in the same way, to decide when the ear *ought* to be soothed, when the eye *ought* to be indulged, when the sense of taste *ought* to be gratified, when and to what extent any other drive in our nature ought to be indulged or restrained. Whatever is agreeable to our moral faculties is fit, right, and proper to be done; whatever is disagreeable to them is wrong, unfit, and improper. The sentiments that they approve of are graceful and appropriate, the ones they disapprove of are ungraceful and inappropriate. The whole *meaning* of the words 'right', 'wrong', 'fit', 'improper', 'graceful', 'inappropriate' etc. has to do only with what pleases or displeases those faculties.

Since these faculties were plainly intended to be the governing drives in human nature, the rules that they prescribe should be regarded as the commands and laws of the Deity, passed on to us by the deputies that he has set up within us. All general rules are commonly called 'laws'—e.g. the general rules that bodies conform to in collisions are called the 'laws of motion'. But the label 'laws' is much more suitable for the general rules that our moral faculties conform to in approving or condemning sentiments or actions. Those

rules are much more like laws *properly* so called, namely the general rules that a sovereign lays down to direct the conduct of his subjects. Like them, moral rules

- are rules to direct the free actions of men,
- are prescribed most surely by a lawful superior, and
- are associated with rewards and punishments.

[The middle one of those three is exactly as Smith wrote it.] God's deputies within us always punish any violation of the rules that our moral faculties lay down, by the torments of inward shame and self-condemnation; and they always reward obedience with tranquillity of mind, contentment, self-satisfaction.

There are countless other considerations that confirm this conclusion. Here is a two-premise argument for it:

- The happiness of mankind and of all other rational creatures seems to have been the original purpose of the Author of nature when he brought them into existence.

No other end seems worthy of the supreme wisdom and divine benevolence that we necessarily ascribe to him; and this opinion that we are led to by abstract thought about his infinite perfections is further confirmed when we consider the works of nature, which all seem to be intended to promote happiness and guard against misery.

- In acting according to the dictates of our moral faculties, we necessarily pursue the most efficient means for promoting the happiness of mankind.

Therefore:

- When we act in accordance with the dictates of our moral faculties, we are in a sense co-operating with the Deity and advancing as far as we can the plan of Providence.

And, by a comparable argument, when we defy the dictates of our moral faculties we seem to obstruct somewhat the scheme that the Author of nature has established for the

happiness and perfection of the world, and to declare ourselves to be in some measure the enemies of God. So we are naturally encouraged to hope for his extraordinary favour and reward in the one case, and to fear his vengeance and punishment in the other.

There are many other reasons. . . .tending to confirm and teach the same salutary doctrine. Consider the general rules by which external prosperity and adversity are commonly distributed in this life. If you do, you'll find—despite the disorder that everything seems to be in—that even here in this world every virtue naturally gets its proper reward, the one that is most fit to encourage and promote it; and it's only when there's a very unusual combination of factors that virtuous behaviour goes *entirely* unrewarded. •What reward is best for encouraging hard work, prudence, and reasonable caution? Success in every sort of business. And is it possible that someone with these virtues should go through his whole life without any such success? Wealth and external honours are the proper reward for those virtues, and they nearly always produce it. •What reward is best for promoting the practice of truth, justice, and humaneness? The confidence, respect, and love of those we live with. Humaneness doesn't want to be great; it wants to be beloved. Truth and justice don't rejoice in being wealthy but in being believed and trusted, and those are rewards that those virtues must almost always acquire. A good man may by some extraordinary and unlucky circumstances come to be suspected of a crime of which he is entirely incapable, and on that account be unjustly exposed for the rest of his life to the horror and aversion of mankind. By an accident of this kind he may be said to lose his all, despite his integrity and justice; just as a cautious and prudent man may be ruined by an earthquake or a flood. Accidents of the first (unjust life-long suspicion) kind are perhaps even rarer—more contrary to the

general run of events—than those of the second (earthquake or flood); and it's still true that the practice of truth, justice, and humanity is an *almost* infallible method of acquiring what those virtues chiefly aim at, namely the confidence and love of those we live with. [Smith points out that an unjust suspicion will be less likely to stick if the victim of it is known to be in general a good man, and makes similar remarks about the chances of someone's getting away with a bad action if he habitually behaves badly.]

So the general rules by which prosperity and adversity are commonly distributed, when considered in this cool and philosophical light, appear to be perfectly suited to the situation of mankind in this life; but they are by no means suited to some of our natural sentiments. •We have so much natural love and admiration for some virtues that we would like them to be rewarded with all sorts of honours and rewards, including ones that we know to be proper rewards for other qualities that don't always accompany the virtues in question. Magnanimity, generosity, and justice command so much admiration that we want to see them crowned with wealth, power, honours of every kind, these rewards being the natural consequences of prudence, hard work, and persistence—qualities that don't necessarily accompany magnanimity etc. •And we loathe some vices so much that we would like to heap onto them every sort of disgrace and disaster, including ones that are the natural consequences of different qualities. Fraud, falsehood, brutality, and violence arouse in every human breast such scorn and hatred that our indignation flares up when we see them possess advantages that they may in some sense be said to have merited by the diligence and hard work with which they are sometimes attended.

The hard-working knave cultivates the soil; the lazy good man leaves it uncultivated. Who ought to reap

the harvest? which of them should starve, and which should live in plenty?

The natural course of things decides this in favour of the knave; the natural sentiments of mankind decide in favour of the man of virtue. We judge that the good qualities of the knave are greatly overpaid by the advantages that they tend to bring him, and that the omissions of the good man are much too severely punished by the distress that they naturally bring on him. And human laws, which are consequences of human sentiments, take the life and the estate of the hard-working and careful •traitor, and provide extraordinary rewards for the fidelity and public spirit of the imprudent and careless •good citizen. ·I have stated this in terms of •Nature versus •human sentiments, but of course those sentiments are themselves parts of Nature·. So what is happening here is that man is directed *by* •Nature to correct somewhat the distribution of things that •she herself would otherwise have made. The rules she prompts him to follow for this purpose are different from the ones that she herself observes. She bestows on every virtue (and every vice) the precise reward (or punishment) that is best fitted to encourage (or restrain) it. That is all she aims to do; she doesn't attend to the different degrees of merit (or demerit) that actions seem to have when viewed from the standpoint of human sentiments and passions. Man, on the other hand, attends *only* to this; he would like every virtue (or vice) to be rewarded (or punished) to a degree that exactly matches the degree of love and esteem (or contempt and abhorrence) that he himself has for it. The rules that Nature follows are fit for her, and those that man follows are fit for him; but both are calculated to promote the same great end, the order of the world and the perfection and happiness of human nature.

In his work of altering the distribution of things that natural events would make if they were left to themselves, man

is like the gods of the poets: he is perpetually intervening by extraordinary means in favour of virtue and in opposition to vice, trying to turn away the arrow aimed at the head of the righteous and to accelerate the sword of destruction lifted up against the wicked. But he can't make the fortune of either the righteous or the wicked perfectly suitable to his own sentiments and wishes. •The natural course of events can't be entirely controlled by man's weak endeavours; the current is too rapid and too strong for him to stop it; and though the ·natural· rules that direct •it seem to have been established for the wisest and best purposes, they sometimes produce effects that shock all man's natural sentiments. These rules:

- A large body of men will prevail over a small one,

- Those who launch a project with forethought and all necessary preparation will prevail over those who oppose them without any forethought or preparation;

·are special cases of the more general rule, which is my present topic·,

- No end can be achieved except by means that Nature has established for achieving it.

This rule seems to be not only necessary and unavoidable in itself, but even useful for getting men to pay attention and get to work. But when as a result of this rule violence and trickery prevail over sincerity and justice, what indignation it arouses in the breast of every human spectator! What sorrow and compassion for the sufferings of the innocent, and what furious resentment against the success of the oppressor! We are equally •grieved and •enraged at the wrong that is done, but we often find that we have no power to set it right. When this happens—when we despair of finding any force on earth that can check the triumph of injustice—we naturally appeal to heaven, in the hope that in the after-life the great Author of our nature •will himself carry out the things that we have tried to carry out in this life under prompting by

the principles that he has given us for the direction of our conduct; •will complete the plan that he has taught us to begin; and •will treat each person according to the works he has performed in this world. And so we are led to believe in a future state not only by the weaknesses of human nature and its hopes and fears, but also by the noblest and best action-drivers that it has—the love of virtue and hatred of vice and injustice. . . .

When the general rules that determine the merit and demerit of actions come in this way to be regarded as the •laws of an all-powerful Being who watches over our conduct and who will in a life to come reward the observance of •them and punish the breach of •them, this endows them with a new sacredness. Nobody who believes that there is a Deity can doubt that the supreme rule of our conduct ought to be **respect for the will of the Deity**. The very thought of disobedience seems to have the most shocking wrongness built into it. How pointless and absurd it would be for man to oppose or neglect the commands laid on him by ·God's· infinite wisdom and infinite power. How impiously ungrateful, not to reverence the laws that were prescribed to him by the infinite goodness of his Creator, even if there weren't to be any punishment for violating them. The sense of propriety is also backed by the strongest motives of self-interest. The idea that. . . we are *always* acting under the eye of God, always exposed to the punishments of that great avenger of injustice, is a motive capable of restraining the most headstrong passions in anyone who has constantly thought about divine punishment and thus become familiar with the idea of it.

That is how religion reinforces the natural sense of duty; and it's the reason why mankind are generally disposed to trust the honesty of those who seem deeply impressed with religious sentiments. . . . Mankind assume that the religious

man is influenced as everyone else is by

- a concern for the propriety of action,
- a concern for reputation, and
- a desire for the applause of his own breast as well as for the applause of others,

but they think that the religious man is subject to another restraint as well, and never knowingly does anything that he wouldn't do in the presence of ·God·, that great superior who will eventually reward or punish him according to his deeds. . . . People undoubtedly judge rightly on this matter, and are right to place a double confidence in the rightness of the religious man's behaviour in any context where the first duty that religion requires is to fulfill all the obligations of morality. But this extra confidence of theirs is *not* justified in any context where •the natural principles of religion are corrupted by the quarrelsome and partisan zeal of some worthless clique or sect, or where •men are taught to regard trivial ceremonies as more immediate duties of religion than acts of justice and beneficence, and to imagine that by sacrifices and ceremonies and pointless begging they can bargain with the Deity for ·permission to engage in· fraud, perfidy, and violence!

Chapter 6: When should the sense of duty be the sole driver of our conduct? and when should it co-operate with other motives?

Religion provides such strong motives for the practice of virtue, and guards us by such powerful restraints from the temptations of vice, that many writers have thought that religious principles are the sole praiseworthy motives for action. Their view has been this:

- We ought not to reward from •gratitude or punish from •resentment; and we ought not to protect the helpless-

ness of our children, or support the infirmities of our parents, from •natural affection. We should cleanse our breasts of all affections for particular objects, replacing them by one great affection, namely the love of God, the desire •to make ourselves agreeable to him and •to direct every detail of our conduct according to his will. We ought not to be grateful from gratitude, charitable from humaneness, public-spirited from the love of our country, or generous and just from the love of mankind. The sole driver and motive of our conduct in performing all those duties ought to be a sense that God has commanded us to perform them.

I shan't stop now to examine this position in detail, and will only remark that it's surprising to find it accepted by any sect who claim to belong to a religion in which, after the first precept, •to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, has as its second precept •to love our neighbour as we love ourselves—because we love ourselves, surely, for our own sakes and not merely because we are commanded to do so! Christianity doesn't teach that the sense of duty should be the *only* driver of our conduct, but only that it should be the *dominant* one, which is also said by philosophy and indeed by common sense. Still, questions can arise about what distinguishes •cases where our actions ought to arise chiefly or entirely from a sense of duty or regard to general rules from •cases where some other sentiment or affection ought to join in and have a principal influence.

This distinction (which perhaps can't be made very precise) depends on two things: **(1)** the natural agreeableness or ugliness of the sentiment or affection that would prompt us to act without any regard for general rules; and **(2)** the precision and exactness, or the looseness and imprecision, of the general rules themselves.

(1) I repeat, how far our actions ought to arise from a given affection rather than being based entirely on regard for a general rule depends on the natural agreeableness or ugliness of the affection itself.

All the graceful and admired actions to which the benevolent affections would prompt us ought to be based as much on the passions themselves as on any concern with general rules of conduct. A benefactor will think he has been poorly repaid if the beneficiary, in acknowledging the help he has been given, is acting merely from a cold sense of duty, with no affection towards the benefactor personally. A husband is dissatisfied with the most obedient wife when he imagines that her conduct is driven by nothing except her regard for what the marriage relation requires. A parent whose son, though not failing in any part of filial duty, isn't acting from the affectionate reverence that would be so appropriate, can fairly complain of his indifference. And a son couldn't be quite satisfied with a parent who, while performing all the duties of his ·parental· situation, has none of the fatherly fondness that might have been expected from him. With regard to all such benevolent and social affections, it is agreeable to see the sense of duty coming into play as a restraint rather than as a driver, •stopping us from doing too much rather than to •prompting us to do what we ought. It gives us pleasure to see a father obliged to restrain his own fondness, a friend obliged to set limits to his natural generosity, a person who has received a benefit obliged to restrain the naively enthusiastic gratitude arising from his own frame of mind.

When it comes to the malevolent and unsocial passions the contrary maxim holds. Whereas we ought

to reward from the gratitude and generosity of our own hearts, without reluctance and without being obliged to think about how *right* rewarding is,

we ought always

to punish with reluctance, more from a sense of the rightness of punishing than from any savage disposition to get revenge.

Nothing is more graceful than the behaviour of someone who seems to resent the greatest injuries more from a sense that they deserve resentment, are *proper* objects of it, than from himself feeling the furies of that disagreeable passion. That is someone •who (like a judge) considers only the general rule that settles what vengeance is due for each particular offence; •who in acting on that rule feels less for what *he* has suffered than for what the offender is going to suffer; •who, though he is angry, remembers mercy and is disposed to interpret the rule in the gentlest and most merciful way that fair-minded humaneness could permit, consistently with good sense.

I remarked at the start of I.ii.5 [page 22] that the selfish passions occupy a sort of middle place, between the social affections and the unsocial ones. They're in the middle in our present context also. In all **small and ordinary** cases the pursuit of objects of individual self-interest ought to flow from a regard for the general rules that prescribe such conduct, rather than from any passion for the objects themselves. Even the most ordinary tradesman would be lowered in the opinion of his neighbours if he *earnestly plotted* to gain or to save a shilling. However poor he is, he shouldn't let his conduct express any attention to any such small matters for the sake of the things themselves. His situation may require him to be severely economical and carefully exact about money, but each particular exercise of that economy and care must come not so much from •a concern for that particular saving or gain as from •respect for the general rule that rigorously commands such a tenor of conduct. His parsimony today mustn't come from a desire

for the particular threepence that he will save by it; and his attendance in his shop mustn't come from a passion for the particular tenpence he will acquire by it. Rather, both of these ought to come purely from a regard for the general rule, which prescribes with unrelenting severity this plan of conduct to every tradesman. That is how the character of a •miser differs from the character of a •person who works hard and is careful with money. •One is anxious about small matters for their own sake; •the other attends to them only in consequence of the scheme of life that he has laid down to himself.

It is quite otherwise with regard to the more **extraordinary and important objects** of self-interest. A person who doesn't pursue these with some earnestness for their own sake appears mean-spirited. We would despise a prince who wasn't anxious about conquering or defending a province. We would have little respect for a private gentleman who didn't make an effort to gain an estate or a considerable position in government, when he could get them without doing anything mean or wrong. A member of parliament who shows no keenness about getting re-elected is abandoned by his friends as altogether unworthy of their support. Even a tradesman is thought a poor-spirited fellow among his neighbours if he doesn't bestir himself to get a special job or some uncommon advantage. This spirit and keenness constitutes the difference between an enterprising man and a dully regular one. . . .

(2) I also repeat: how far our actions ought to arise from a given affection rather than being based entirely on regard for a general rule will depend partly on what the relevant general rule is like—where it comes on the scale from •precise and exact through to •loose and imprecise.

The general rules of most of the virtues—the rules that fix how we are to behave in matters of prudence, charity,

generosity, gratitude, friendship—are in many respects loose and imprecise, admitting of so many exceptions and needing so many riders and qualifications that it's hardly *possible* to regulate our conduct entirely in terms of them. Because the common proverbial maxims of •prudence are based on everyone's experience, they are perhaps the best general rules that can be given about •it. But it would be obvious and ridiculous pedantry to make a show of strictly and literally abiding by them. Of the virtues I have just listed, gratitude may be the one whose rules are the most precise and admit of the fewest exceptions. Thus:

As soon as we can, we should give to our benefactor something that is at least as valuable as what he has given us

—that seems to be a pretty plain rule, and one that admits of hardly any exceptions. But look into this rule just a little and you'll see that it is extremely loose and imprecise, and admits of ten thousand exceptions. If your benefactor attended you in your sickness, ought you to attend him in his? or can you fulfill the obligation of gratitude by repaying him in some other way? If you ought to attend him, for how long ought you to do so? For the same time that he attended you, or longer, and how much longer? If your friend lent you money in your distress, ought you to lend him money in his? How much ought you to lend him? When ought you to lend it to him? Now, or tomorrow, or next month? And for how long a time? Obviously no general rule can be laid down that will give a precise answer to any of these questions. The difference between his character and yours, between his circumstances and yours, may be such that this could be the case:

He lends you money, for which you are perfectly grateful; you refuse to lend him a halfpenny; and you are quite right to do so;

or this:

He lends you money; you are willing to lend or even to give him ten times as much as he lent you; and this shows you to be guilty of the blackest ingratitude, not having fulfilled the hundredth part of your obligation to him.

Yet the general rules governing the duties of gratitude—which may be the most sacred of all the duties that the beneficent virtues prescribe to us—are the most precise. The rules setting out the actions required by friendship, humaneness, hospitality, generosity, are even more vague and indeterminate.

But there is one virtue whose general rules determine with the greatest exactness every action that it requires. This virtue is **justice**. The rules of justice are enormously precise, and don't allow for any exceptions or modifications other than ones that can be ascertained as precisely as the rules themselves (in fact most of them follow from the same principles as the rules of justice do). If I owe a man ten pounds, justice requires that I should pay him precisely ten pounds, either at the time agreed on or when he demands it. What I ought to perform, how much I ought to perform, when and where I ought to perform it, the whole nature and circumstances of the action prescribed, are all precisely fixed and determined. It may be clumsy and pedantic to make a show of too strictly keeping to the common rules of prudence or generosity, but no pedantry is involved in holding firmly to the rules of justice. Quite the contrary! The most sacred respect is due to them; and the actions that justice requires are *most* properly performed when the chief motive for performing them is a reverential and religious respect for the general rules that require them. In the exercise of any of the other virtues, our conduct should be directed by a certain idea of rightness, a certain taste

for a particular tenor of conduct, rather than by obedience to a precise maxim or rule; and when a rule does come into it, we should attend less to the rule itself than to what it is for and what it is based on. But that's not how things stand with justice. Faced with the question 'What does justice require me to do in this situation?', the man who does least in the way of hair-splitting and who adheres with the most obstinate steadfastness to the general rules of justice themselves is the most commendable man and the one who can most be depended on. What the rules of justice are *for* is to stop us from harming our neighbour; but it can often be a crime to break them in cases where we could make some sort of case for the view that this particular breach couldn't harm anyone. A man often becomes a villain the moment he begins, even in his own heart, to chicanery in this manner [i.e. to engage in tricky, hair-splitting, special pleading]. The moment he *thinks of* departing from the most staunch and positive adherence to what those unbreakable rules tell him to do, he is no longer to be trusted, and there's no telling how far down the path of guilt he may go. The thief imagines that he does nothing wrong when he steals from the rich, stealing things that (he supposes) they can easily do without, things that they may indeed never even know to have been stolen from them. The adulterer imagines that he does nothing wrong when he corrupts his friend's wife, provided he hides his affair from the suspicion of the husband and doesn't disturb the peace of the family. Once we *begin* to give way to such subtleties, there is no wickedness so gross that we couldn't be capable of it.

We can compare the rules of justice to the rules of grammar, and compare the rules of the other virtues to the rules that critics lay down for achieving sublimity and elegance in writing. One lot of rules are precise, detailed, and indispensable. The other lot are loose, vague, and

indeterminate, and give us only a general idea of the perfection we ought to aim at, rather than giving us any certain and infallible directions for achieving it. . . .

It can happen that we seriously and earnestly want to act so as to deserve approval, but mistake the proper rules of conduct and are thus misled by the very principle that ought to direct us. Although our conduct here is in a way *conscientious*, it's no use expecting people entirely to approve of our behaviour. They can't enter into the absurd idea of duty that influenced us, or go along with any of the actions that followed from it. But there is something respectable in the character and behaviour of someone who is in this way betrayed into vice by a wrong sense of duty, or by what is called 'an erroneous conscience'. However bad the upshot of his mistake, generous and humane people will view him more with pity than with hatred or resentment. They will lament the weakness of human nature, which exposes us to such unfortunate delusions even while we are sincerely working to achieve perfection and trying to act in accordance with the best principle that can possibly direct us. What causes such gross perversions of our natural sentiments? The culprit is nearly always some false notion of religion. There is a reason for that: the source of the greatest authority of the rules of duty is the only one that can distort our ideas of them to any considerable extent. In all other cases common sense is sufficient to direct us to something that is not far from the most exact rightness of conduct; and as long as we earnestly want to do well, our behaviour will always be praiseworthy on the whole. Everyone agrees that the first rule of duty is to obey the will of God. But when it comes to the specific commandments that God's will may impose on us, men differ widely from one another. So this is a matter requiring the greatest restraint and mutual toleration; and although the defence of

society requires that crimes should be punished, whatever the motives for them were, a good man will always punish them reluctantly when they have clearly come from false notions of religious duty. He will regret and sometimes even admire the unfortunate firmness and conscientiousness of the deluded criminals at the very time that he punishes their crime; he won't have against them the indignation that he feels against other criminals. In Voltaire's fine tragedy *Mahomet* [full title: *Mahomet, or Fanaticism*] there is a good presentation of what ought to be our sentiments for crimes that come from such motives. (This is one of the most interesting spectacles that was ever presented on any stage, and perhaps the most instructive one.) In Voltaire's tragedy two innocent and virtuous young people. . . .are driven by the strongest motives of a false religion to commit a horrible murder, one that shocks all the principles of human nature. A venerable old man is pointed out to them as a sacrifice that God has explicitly demanded from them, and they are ordered to kill him. (The old man has expressed the most tender affection for them both; they have both felt the highest reverence and esteem for him, although he is an open enemy of their religion; and he is their father, though they don't know this—they don't even know that they are brother and sister.) Facing the prospect of committing this crime, they are tortured with all the agonies that can arise from the struggle between

- the idea of the indispensableness of religious duty on one side and
- compassion, gratitude, reverence for the age, and love for the humanity and virtue of the person they are going to destroy

on the other. But the sense of duty eventually prevails over all the likeable weaknesses of human nature. They carry out the crime that was demanded of them, then immediately

learn their error and the fraud that had deceived them, and are driven wild with horror, remorse, and resentment. The way we *do* feel towards this unhappy pair is how we *ought to* feel for anyone who is in this manner misled by religion—provided we are sure that it really *is* religion that misleads him, and not the pretence of it that has been used to cover some of the worst human passions.

Just as a person may act wrongly by following a wrong sense of duty, so nature may lead him to act rightly in opposition to such a wrong sense. When this happens, we can't be displeased to see the victory go to the motive that we think ought to prevail, though the person himself is so misguided as to think otherwise. But because his conduct is an effect of weakness and not of principle, we are far from giving it our complete approval. [Smith wrote 'so weak as to think otherwise', but this was surely a slip. The phrase 'an effect of weakness' is all right; it can refer to the person's 'weakness' in not doing what he thinks to be his duty.] Take the case of a bigoted Roman Catholic who is present at the massacre of St Bartholomew, and is so overcome by compassion that he saves some unhappy Protestants whom he thinks it his

duty to destroy. He doesn't seem to be entitled to the high applause that we would have given him if he had exerted that same generosity with complete self-approval. We might be pleased with the humaneness of his feelings, but we would still regard him with a sort of •pity that is flatly inconsistent with the •admiration that is owed to perfect virtue. It's the same case with all the other passions. We don't dislike seeing them lead the person to behave rightly, even when his false notion of duty directs him to restrain them. Suppose that a devout Quaker is struck on one cheek and instead of turning up the other he so completely forgets his literal interpretation of our Saviour's precept and bestows some good discipline on the brute who hit him. We wouldn't find this disagreeable! We would laugh and enjoy his spirit, liking him all the better because of it. But we wouldn't regard him with anything close to the respect and esteem that would seem to be owing to someone who on such an occasion had acted rightly from a just sense of what was the right thing to do. No action can properly be called virtuous unless it is accompanied with the sentiment of self-approval.

Part IV: The effect of utility on the sentiment of approval

Chapter 1: The beauty that the appearance of utility gives to all the productions of art, and the widespread influence of this type of beauty

Everyone who has thought hard about what constitutes the nature of beauty has seen that one of its principal sources is *utility*. Someone looking over a house gets pleasure from its convenience as well as from its formal regularity [and, Smith adds with a rather obscure example, he is as much displeased when he sees features of the house that interfere with its function as when he sees features that are aesthetically displeasing. Then:] The fitness of any system or machine to produce the end for which it was intended confers a certain rightness and beauty on the whole thing, making it a pleasure to think about—and this is so obvious that nobody has overlooked it.

Why is utility so pleasing? This has been answered by Hume [whom Smith doesn't name, but identifies through a series of compliments to his thought and writing]. According to him, a thing's utility pleases its owner by continually suggesting to him the pleasure or convenience that it is fitted to promote. Every time he looks at it he is reminded of this pleasure, so that the object in question becomes a source of continual satisfaction and enjoyment. The spectator's sympathy leads him to have the sentiments of the owner, making him view the object in that same agreeable light. When we visit the palaces of the great, we can't help feeling the satisfaction that *we* would enjoy if we were the owners of so much ingeniously contrived accommodation. And he gives a similar account of why the appearance of *inconvenience* should make an object disagreeable to the owner and to the spectator.

But there's another fact about utility and beauty that hasn't previously been noticed by anyone, so far as I know. It is this:

An artifact's being skillfully designed so as to be suitable for some purpose is often valued more than is the purpose itself; exact adjustment of the means for attaining some convenience or pleasure is often valued more highly than the convenience or pleasure itself, though *they* would seem to be the sole source of the artifact's merit.

Although this phenomenon hasn't been noticed before, it is quite common, and can be observed in a thousand instances, both in the most trivial and in the most important concerns of human life.

A man comes into his chamber and finds the chairs all standing in the middle of the room; he is angry with his servant; and rather than see the chairs stay there he takes the trouble himself to put them all in their proper places with their backs to the wall. The whole propriety of this new state of affairs comes from its greater convenience in leaving the floor free and disengaged. To get this convenience he gives himself more trouble than he could have suffered from the lack of it; because he could easily have sat down on one of the chairs, which is probably what he does when his work is finished. So it seems that what he wanted was not so much this convenience as an arrangement of things that promotes it. Yet this convenience is what ultimately recommends that arrangement, giving it all its propriety and beauty.

Another example: A watch that loses two minutes a day is despised by its owner, who cares about watches. He sells

it for a couple of guineas and spends fifty guineas on a new watch that won't lose more than thirty seconds a week. Now, the only use of watches is to tell us what the time is, to save us from missing an appointment or suffering some other inconvenience through not knowing the time; but the person who is so choosy about his watch won't always be found to be more scrupulously punctual than other men, or more anxiously concerned for any other reason to know precisely what time of day it is. What interests him is not so much •the acquiring of this piece of knowledge as •the perfection of the machine that enables him to acquire it.

It's common for people to ruin themselves by spending money on trinkets that are useful in some trivial way. What pleases these lovers of toys is not so much •the use they make of their little machines as •the machines' fitness to be used. Their pockets are stuffed with little conveniences; they have new pockets, unknown in the clothes of other people, in order to carry a greater number •of 'useful' gadgets. They walk around about loaded with a multitude of baubles, . . . some of which may sometimes be of some little use, but all of which might at all times be well done without. The whole use that is made of them is certainly not worth the fatigue of bearing the burden!

And it's not only with regard to such trivial objects that our conduct is influenced by this motive—•this liking for things because of what they *could* do, without much interest in having them actual *do* those things. It is often the secret motive of very serious and important pursuits in both private and public life.

Consider the case of a poor man's son whom heaven in its anger has infected with ambition. When he begins to look around him, he admires the condition of the rich. [Smith goes into details: the convenience of larger home, the ease of riding on horseback and of having servants to do everything,

and so on; and his idea that with all these conveniences of wealth he would be contentedly idle. Then:] He devotes himself for ever to the pursuit of wealth and greatness. To get the conveniences that these provide, he *works*, giving himself in the first year—indeed in the first *month*—of his work more fatigue of body and more anxiety of mind than he would have suffered through the whole of his life from the lack of wealth. He works to distinguish himself in some laborious profession, labouring night and day to acquire talents superior to those of his competitors. He then tries to bring those talents into public view, taking every chance to get employment. For this purpose he makes himself pleasant to everyone, serves people whom he hates, and is deferential to people he despises. Throughout his life he pursues the idea of a certain artificial and elegant *repose* •which he may never arrive at, •for which he sacrifices a real tranquillity that is always in his power, and •which, if in old age he at last achieves it, he will find to be in no way preferable to the humble security and contentment that he had gave up in order to pursue wealth and greatness. *Then*. . . he will start to learn that wealth and greatness are only trivially useful, mere trinkets, no more fit for procuring ease of body or tranquillity of mind than the tweezer-cases of the lover of toys; and, also like them, giving trouble to the person who carries them around with him that far outweighs any advantages they can provide him with. [Smith develops this comparison at great length. The useful little 'toys', he says, may actually be as useful as a grand house or a retinue of servants, he says, but the owner of the 'toys' won't be admired and envied as much as the owner of the things that wealth and greatness procure. The only real advantage of the latter is the attitude of other people to the wealthy great man. But that (Smith continues) throws our attention onto the admiring spectators: why do *they* so much admire the condition of the wealthy man? It's not that

they think he is happier than other people; the object of their admiration is the wealthy man's ownership of so many things that are *fitted to* produce ease and happiness. Having thus brought the wheel full circle, Smith returns to the state of the wealthy man in old age:] In his heart he curses ambition, and vainly pines for the ease and idleness of youth, pleasures that are gone for ever, having been foolishly sacrificed for something that can't give him real satisfaction now that he has it. That's how things look to every wealthy man who is led by depression or disease to *attend* to his own situation and to think about why he is actually so unhappy. Power and riches appear then to be what they actually are. . . . They are immense structures

- which it takes a lifetime's work to build,
- which are constantly threatening to collapse and overwhelm the person who lives in them, and
- which, while they stand, may save him from some smaller inconveniences but can't protect him from any of the severer harshnesses of the season.

They keep off the summer shower (·to continue the metaphor·) but not the winter storm. They always leave the rich man as much—sometimes even *more*—exposed to anxiety, fear, and sorrow; to diseases, danger, and death.

Any of us when ill or depressed may have this view of things, entirely depreciating the great objects of human desire; but when we're in better health and a better mood we always see them in a more favourable light. When we are in pain and sorrow our imagination seems to be confined and cooped up within our own persons, but in times of ease and prosperity it expands itself to everything around us. *Then* we are charmed by the beauty of the accommodation that palaces provide, and the living arrangements of the great; and we admire how everything is fitted to promoting their ease, anticipating their wants, gratifying their wishes, and

entertaining their most trivial desires. If we take the real satisfaction that any of these things is capable providing, and consider it *in itself*, independently of the beauty of the arrangement that is fitted to promote it, it will always appear to be enormously negligible and trivial. But we don't often look at it in this abstract and philosophical way. We naturally run it together in our imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement, of the system or machine. . . .that produces it. The pleasures of wealth and greatness, when considered in this complex view, strike the imagination as something grand and beautiful and noble, the attainment of which is well worth all the toil and anxiety that we are so apt to bestow on it. [By 'this complex view' Smith means the way of looking at the thing that runs together •the thing's fitness to produce a certain result and •the pleasures of that result.]

[From here to the end of this chapter, Smith goes on at undue length about matters that aren't central to his announced main topic in the chapter. That material won't be much abbreviated here, because it's a notable precursor of ideas that Smith was to present 17 years later in *The Wealth of Nations*, widely regarded as the first work in theoretical economics. We find here the phrase 'invisible hand', which was made famous by the later work.]

It's just as well that nature deceives us in this way. This deception is what starts men working and keeps them at it. It is what first prompted men to cultivate the soil, to build houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts that make human life noble and glorious, having entirely changed the whole face of the globe, turning the nature's primitive forests into agreeable and fertile plains, and making the trackless and barren ocean a new source of food and the great high road of communication to the different nations of the earth. These human labours have required the earth to redouble her natural fertility, and to maintain a greater

number of inhabitants. The proud and unfeeling landlord views his extensive fields and—without a thought for the wants of anyone else—imaginatively consumes himself the whole harvest that grows on them; but what of it? The homely and common proverb *The eye is larger than the belly* is exactly true of this landlord. The capacity of his stomach bears no proportion to the vastness of his desires, and won't receive any more food than does the stomach of the lowest peasant. He has to distribute the rest among

- those who elegantly prepare the little that he himself makes use of,
- those who manage the palace in which this little is to be consumed, and
- those who provide and service all the baubles and trinkets that have a role in the great man's way of life.

[Smith isn't talking about the great man's tweezers and nail-clippers! He is implying, through a metaphor, that a carriage and a grand kitchen and servants' uniforms etc. are—from a serious and mature point of view—on a par with such 'baubles and trinkets'.] Thus, all these people get •through his luxury and caprice the share of the necessities of life that they would never have received •through his humaneness or his justice. The produce of the soil always maintains just about as many inhabitants as it is capable of maintaining. All the rich do is to select from the heap the most precious and agreeable portions. They consume little more than the poor; and in spite of their natural selfishness and greed, and despite the fact that

they are guided only by their own convenience, and all they want to get from the labours of their thousands of employees is the gratification of their own empty and insatiable desires,

they do share with the poor the produce of all their improvements [meaning: their well-cultivated land, their up-to-date ploughs,

their state of the art milking sheds, etc.]. They are **led by an invisible hand** to share out life's necessities in just about the same way that they would have been shared out if the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants. And so without intending it, without knowing it, they advance the interests of the society as a whole, and provide means for the survival of the species. When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it didn't forget or abandon those who seemed to have been left out in the distribution—these too enjoy their share of all that the earth produces. In terms of the *real* happiness of human life, they are in no respect inferior to those who seem to be so far above them. In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly on a level; the beggar sitting in the sun beside the highway *has* the security that kings *fight for*.

•There are also other motivations that lead to conduct serving the public good although they don't involve any thought of doing such a thing. Institutions that tend to promote the public welfare often arise not from a wish for *that* but from a love of system, a regard for the beauty of order, of art and contrivance. [In Smith's day any activity could be called an 'art' if it involved general techniques needing skill to implement. So clock-making and plumbing would be 'arts'. The arts in *our* narrower sense of the word are specifically referred to on page 113 as 'the superior arts' and on page 131 as 'the liberal and ingenious arts'.] When a patriot makes efforts to improve any part of the nation's public life, his conduct doesn't always arise from pure sympathy with the happiness of those who are to get the benefit of it. When a public-spirited man encourages the mending of highways, it's not usually from a fellow-feeling with those who earn their living driving carts or carriages. When a legislature establishes premiums and other encouragements to advance the manufacture of linen or woollen garments, its conduct seldom comes from pure sympathy with the wearer of cheap

or fine cloth, let alone sympathy with the manufacturer or merchant. The perfection of policy, the extension of trade and manufacturing, are noble and magnificent objectives. The thought of them pleases us, and we have a concern with anything that can tend to advance them. They are part of the great system of government, and the wheels of the political machine seem to turn more smoothly by means of them. We do take pleasure in seeing the perfection of such a beautiful and grand system, and we're uneasy until we can remove anything that might in any way disturb or overload the regularity of its motions. But no constitution of government is valued except in proportion as it tends to promote the happiness of those who live under it. That is its sole use and end—it's all it *does* and all it *is for*. And yet we have certain spirit of system, a certain love of art and contrivance, that leads us sometimes to seem to value the means more than the end, and to be eager to promote the happiness of our fellow-creatures not so much from •any immediate sense of what they either suffer or enjoy as from •a desire to perfect and improve a certain beautiful and orderly •political• system. Some public-spirited men have shown themselves to be in other respects not very sensitive to the feelings of humaneness. And there have been men of the greatest humaneness who seem to have been entirely devoid of public spirit. You'll probably find in the circle of your acquaintance instances both these kinds. . . . If you want to implant public virtue in the breast of someone who seems not to care about his country's interests, it will often be no use telling him about the advantages people get from living in a well-governed state—that they are better housed, better clothed, better fed. These considerations make no great impression on many people. You'll have a better chance of persuading your man if you describe the great system of public policy that procures these advantages, if you explain

the inter-connections of its various parts, the subordination of some of them to others, and the subservience of all of them to the happiness of the society; if you show

- how this system might be introduced into his own country,
- what is obstructing it from existing there at present,
- how those obstructions might be removed, and all the wheels of the machine of government be made to move with more harmony and smoothness, without grating on one another or retarding one another's motions.

It's hardly possible that someone should listen to all that without feeling some degree of public spirit coming to life within him. He will, at least for the moment, feel some desire to remove those obstructions and to put into motion that beautiful and orderly machine. Nothing tends to promote public spirit as much as the study of politics does—the study of •the various systems of civil government, their advantages and disadvantages, of •the constitution of our own country, its situation and interests in relation to foreign nations, its commerce, its defence, the disadvantages it struggles with, the dangers to which it may be exposed, how to remove the disadvantages and guard against the dangers. . . .

Chapter 2: How the characters and actions of men are made beautiful by their appearance of utility. Is our perception of this beauty one of the *basic sources of approval*?

The characters of men, as well as the institutions of civil government that they construct, can be fit to promote or to disturb the happiness of individuals and of the society. The prudent, equitable, active, resolute, and sober character promises prosperity and satisfaction to the person himself and to everyone connected with him. The rash, insolent,

slothful, effeminate, and voluptuous character points to ruin for the individual and misfortune for everyone who has anything to do with him. The first turn of mind has at least all the beauty that can belong to the most perfect machine that was ever invented for promoting the most agreeable purpose; and the second has all the ugliness [Smith: 'deformity'; see note on page 8] of the most awkward and clumsy contraption. What other institution of government could have as much tendency to promote the happiness of mankind as the general prevalence of wisdom and virtue? What government *is* is merely an imperfect remedy for the shortage of wisdom and virtue. So any beauty that a civil government can have because of its utility must in a much higher degree be a beauty of wisdom and virtue. And on the other side, no public policy can be as ruinous and destructive as the vices of individual men. When bad government has terrible consequences, the way it does so—*always*—is by not sufficiently guarding against the mischiefs arising from human wickedness.

This beauty and ugliness that characters seem to derive from their usefulness or inconvenience are apt to make their greatest impression on people who are thinking about the actions and conduct of mankind in an abstract and philosophical way. When a philosopher sets out to examine why humaneness is approved of, or why cruelty condemned, he doesn't always form a clear and distinct conception of any one particular action either of cruelty or of humaneness; he is likely to be contented with the vague and indeterminate idea that the general names of those qualities suggest to him. But the propriety or impropriety, the merit or demerit, of actions stands out clearly only in particular instances. It's only when particular examples are given that we get a clear idea of the concord or disagreement between our own affections and those of the agent, or feel a social gratitude

towards him in one case and a sympathetic resentment in the other. When we think about virtue and vice in an abstract and general manner, the qualities by which they arouse these various sentiments seem to a large extent to disappear, and the sentiments themselves become less obvious and noticeable. Instead, the good effects of virtue and the disastrous consequences of vice seem then to rise up, to stand out, to distinguish themselves from all the other qualities of virtue and vice.

The same able and enjoyable author who first explained why utility pleases us—David Hume—has been so struck with this view of things that he has reduced all our approval of virtue to a perception of the kind of beauty that results from the appearance of utility. He says that

- the only qualities of the mind that are approved of as virtuous are ones that are useful or agreeable either to the person himself or to other people; and
- the only qualities that are disapproved of as vicious are ones that have the opposite tendency.

If you look into this carefully you'll find, I think, that this is entirely correct. That's apparently because Nature has neatly adjusted our sentiments of approval and disapproval to the convenience of the individual and of the society. But I maintain that our view of this utility or harmfulness isn't the first source, or the principal source, of our approval and disapproval. These sentiments of approval or disapproval are no doubt enriched and enlivened by our perception of the beauty or ugliness that results from this utility or harmfulness; but they are basically and essentially different from this perception. Here are two reasons for saying this.

(1) It seems impossible that our approval of virtue should be a sentiment of the same kind as we have when we approve of a convenient and well-designed building; or that we should have no reason for praising a man except one that would

also be a reason for commending a chest of drawers!

(2) If you look into it you'll find that our approval of a given state of mind is seldom based primarily on its utility, and that the sentiment of approval always has as one of its components a sense of propriety that is quite distinct from the perception of utility. We can see this with regard to *all* the qualities that are approved of as virtuous—the ones that are (according to me) valued as useful to ourselves, as well as those that are valued because of their usefulness to others.

The qualities that are most useful to ourselves are **(a)** superior reason and understanding, enabling us to work out what consequences, good or bad, are likely to result from our actions; and **(b)** self-control, enabling us to abstain from present pleasure (or endure present unpleasure) in order to get greater pleasure (or avoid greater unpleasure) at some future time. The virtue of *prudence*, which is of all the virtues the one that is most useful to the individual, consists in the union of those two qualities—i.e. in the combination of •superior reason and understanding and •self-control.

(a) Superior reason and understanding are—as I pointed out earlier [page 8]—basically approved of as just and right and precise, not merely as useful or advantageous. The greatest and most admired exercises of human reason have been in the abstruser sciences, especially the higher parts of mathematics; but it's not very obvious that those sciences are useful to individuals or to the public, and to show that they are would require a train of thought of which some parts would be hard to grasp. So it wasn't •their utility that first recommended the mathematical sciences to public admiration. •This quality wasn't emphasized at all until there came to be a need for some reply to the reproaches of people who, having no taste for such sublime discoveries, tried to dismiss them as useless.

(b) The exercise of self-control in restraining our present appetites so as to gratify them more fully later on is approved of not only as *useful* but also, equally, as *right*. When we act like that the sentiments that influence our conduct seem to coincide exactly with those of the spectator. The spectator doesn't feel the tug of our present appetites. To him the pleasure that we are to enjoy next week or next year matters just as much as the pleasure that we are to enjoy right now. When our self-control lapses, and we sacrifice the future for the sake of the present, our conduct appears to the spectator to be utterly wild and absurd; he can't enter into our motivation for behaving like that. On the other side, when we abstain from present pleasure so as to get greater pleasure later on, acting as if we were as concerned about the remote object as we are about the one that presses on the senses right now, the spectator is bound to approve of our behaviour because our affections in this matter exactly correspond with his. Also, he knows from experience how few are capable of such self-control, so he looks on our conduct with a considerable degree of wonder and admiration. That is the source for the enormous respect that all men naturally have for a steady perseverance in the practice of frugality, hard work, and application, even when these are directed solely to the project of becoming rich. [Smith now says all this again, in only slightly different words. Then:] Without his consciousness of this deserved approval and respect, the agent wouldn't be able to keep up this tenor of conduct [see note on 'tenor' on page 85]. The pleasure that we're to enjoy ten years hence concerns us so little in comparison with the pleasure that we can enjoy to-day, the passion aroused by the future pleasure is naturally so weak in comparison with the violent emotion that the present pleasure is apt to give rise to, that the former could never outweigh the latter unless it was supported by the sense of propriety, the consciousness

that we deserve •everyone's respect and approval if we act in one of the two ways and •everyone's contempt and derision if we act in the other.

Humaneness, justice, generosity, and public spirit are the qualities most useful to others. I have already explained what the propriety of humaneness and justice consists in: I showed how greatly our respect and approval of those qualities depends on the match between the affections of the agent and those of the spectators.

Generosity and public spirit are proper for the same reason that justice is. Don't confuse generosity with humaneness. Those two qualities seem at first sight to be close relatives of one another, but it isn't always true that someone who has one will have the other. Humaneness is the virtue of a woman, generosity the virtue of a man. The fair sex, who usually have much more tenderness than we males do, seldom have as much generosity. That women rarely make considerable donations is an observation of the civil law. [That sentence is verbatim Smith.] Humaneness consists merely in the spectator's sharp fellow-feeling with the sentiments of the persons principally concerned—his grieving for their sufferings, resenting their injuries, and rejoicing at their good fortune. The most humane actions don't need self-denial or self-control or much exercise of the sense of propriety. They consist only in doing what this sharp sympathy would, on its own, prompt us to do. But generosity is different. Whenever we are generous it is because in some respect we put some other person ahead of ourselves, sacrificing some great and important interest of our own to an equal interest of a friend or of a superior. When someone x

gives up his claim to a governmental position that was the great object of his ambition, because he thinks that someone else y is better entitled to it,

or when someone x

risks his own life in defence of the life of his friend y, because he judges y's life to be more important than his own,

he isn't acting from humaneness, feeling y's concerns more sharply than he feels his own. He considers those conflicting interests not in the light in which they naturally appear to •him but in the light in which they appear to •others. All the bystanders can rightly have a greater concern for y's success or preservation than for x's, but that can't be x's position. So when he sacrifices his own interests to those of y, he is accommodating himself to the sentiments of the spectator, making an effort of magnanimity to act in accordance with what he thinks must naturally be the view of the matter that any third person has. When a soldier gives up his life in order to defend that of his officer, it may be that the death of that officer, if it happened without this soldier's being at fault, wouldn't have affected the soldier much, causing him less sorrow than a quite small disaster to himself—e.g. his loss of a finger—would cause. •So his act of self-sacrifice isn't to be understood in terms of the relative value of lives•. He is trying to act so as to deserve applause, giving the impartial spectator a role in the guidance of his conduct; he feels that *to everyone but himself* his own life is a trifle compared with that of his officer. . . . [Note with care that he is trying to act so as to *deserve* applause; this doesn't mean that he is trying to win applause.]

[Smith now reworks these same ideas in connection with 'greater exertions of public spirit'. One example concerns a soldier who risks his life in an attempt to add to 'the dominions of his sovereign' some little sliver of territory that he doesn't care about in the least, on his own account. Another is historical: 'the first Brutus' [this is centuries before the Brutus who was Julius Caesar's friend and assassin] delivered his sons up for capital punishment 'because they had conspired against the rising liberty of Rome'. In doing this, 'he viewed

them with the eyes not of a father but of a Roman citizen'. Smith continues:] In cases like these our admiration is based not so much on the utility of the action as on its propriety—its unexpected and therefore great, noble, and exalted propriety. When we take into account the action's utility, that undoubtedly gives it a new beauty and still further recommends it to our approval. But this beauty isn't much noticed except by men who reflect and theorize; it is *not* the quality that first recommends such actions to the natural sentiments of the bulk of mankind.

Notice that insofar as the sentiment of approval arises from a perception of this beauty of utility, it doesn't involve *any* reference to the sentiments of anyone else. Suppose it were possible that a person should grow up to manhood without any communication with society, and consider what his attitudes to his own conduct could be. His own actions might be agreeable or disagreeable to him on account of their tendency to his happiness or disadvantage. He might perceive beauty of this kind in prudence, temperance, and good conduct (and ugliness in the opposite behaviour); he might view his own temperament and character with the

sort of satisfaction we get from a well-contrived machine (or distaste and dissatisfaction from an awkward and clumsy contrivance). These perceptions of his, however, would be merely matters of *taste*. They would be weak and delicate, like the perceptions whose correctness is the basis for taste properly so-called; and someone in this solitary and miserable condition probably wouldn't pay much attention to them. Even if they did occur to him, they wouldn't affect him before he was connected to society in the way they would affect him after, and because of, the making of that connection. He wouldn't be cast down with inward shame at the thought of this ugliness; nor would he be elated with secret triumph by the consciousness of the contrary beauty. He wouldn't exult from the notion of deserving reward in the one case, or tremble from the suspicion of deserving punishment in the other. All such sentiments presuppose the idea of some *other* being who is the natural judge of the person that feels them; and it's only by sympathy with the decisions of that judge of his conduct that he can experience either the triumph of self-applause or the shame of self-condemnation.