

# 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 V: The influence of custom and fashion on the sentiments of moral approval and disapproval

### Chapter 1: The influence of custom and fashion on our notions of beauty and ugliness

In addition to the ones I have listed, there are two other considerable influences on the moral sentiments of mankind; they are the main causes of the many irregular and discordant opinions that become dominant in different ages and nations concerning what is blameworthy or praiseworthy. These two sources of influence are custom and fashion—forces that extend their sway over our judgments concerning beauty of every kind.

When two objects have often been seen together, the imagination acquires a habit of passing easily from one to the other: when one appears we're willing to bet that the second will follow. With no outside help they put us in mind of one another, and our attention glides easily along them. If we didn't have this habit, we wouldn't see any real beauty in their union; but when custom *has* connected them together in this way, we feel that something is *wrong* when they are separated. We think that one of them is awkward [Smith's word, here and below] when it appears without its usual companion; we miss something that we expected to find, and the habitual arrangement of our ideas is disturbed by the disappointment. A suit of clothes, for example, seems to lack something if it doesn't have some ornament—however insignificant—that it usually has. . . . When there is something *naturally* proper in the union of the two items, custom increases our sense of it, and makes a different arrangement appear even more disagreeable than it would otherwise seem to be. Anything that is clumsy or awkward will be especially disgusting to

people who have been accustomed to seeing things that were made or chosen or arranged in good taste. When a conjunction of items is improper, we'll have less sense of its impropriety—perhaps even *no* sense of it—if it's something to which we have become accustomed. Those who have been accustomed to slovenly disorder lose all sense of neatness or elegance. . . .

Fashion is different from custom—or, rather, it's a particular species of it. Something that everybody wears can't be called *fashion*. The word applies to what is worn by people who are of a high rank or exceptional character. The graceful, easy, commanding manners of the great, when joined to the usual richness and magnificence of their clothing, make the style they adopt seem graceful. As long as they continue to use this style, it is connected in our imaginations with the idea of something genteel and magnificent, so that we come to see the style itself as genteel and magnificent, even if there's nothing special about it considered in itself. As soon as the higher ranks in society drop it, the style loses all the grace it seemed to possess before, and instead seems to have something of the meanness and awkwardness of the inferior ranks of people who now use it.

[The remaining seven book-pages of this chapter contain a sober discussion of fashions in the arts. Everyone agrees that custom and fashion rule in matters of clothing and furniture; but they also have great influence over people's tastes in music, poetry, and architecture. Some of those fashions last a long time, because the objects they concern are very durable—e.g. buildings, poems. Most people know little

about what customs and fashions prevailed at other times and/or in other places, and this ignorance leads them to downplay fashion and to think that *their* tastes 'are founded on reason and nature, not on habit'. Smith challenges them on this, demanding to know what objective reason can be given for the rightness of various time-honoured features of ancient Greek temples. And fashion governs literary judgments too. A verse-form that the French regard as right for tragedy would strike the English as an absurd vehicle for that kind of dramatic content. Then Smith turns to the more interesting topic of enforced changes in fashion:]

An eminent artist will bring about a considerable change in the established modes of any one of those arts, introducing a new fashion of writing, music, or architecture. Just as the dress of an agreeable man of high rank recommends itself, and comes soon to be admired and imitated, however peculiar and fantastic it is, so the excellences of an eminent master in one of the creative arts recommend his peculiarities, and his manner becomes the fashionable style in the art that he practises. Within the past fifty years the Italians' taste in music and architecture has undergone a considerable change, resulting from imitating the peculiarities of some eminent masters in each of those arts. [He gives examples of Latin writers who were criticised for features of their style that were later followed by many others, and remarks:] A writer must have many great qualities if he is to be able to make his very faults agreeable! The highest praise one can give to an author is to say that he refined the taste of a nation; the second highest may be to say that he corrupted it! In our own language, . . . the quaintness of Butler has given place to the plainness of Swift. The rambling freedom of Dryden, and the correct but often tedious and prosaic languor of Addison, are no longer objects of imitation; all long verses are now written after the manner of the vigorous

precision of Pope.

And it's not only over the productions of the arts that custom and fashion hold sway. They have the same kind of influence over our judgments regarding natural objects. Think about the variety of the forms that are found to be beautiful in different species of things! The proportions that are admired in one animal are altogether different from the ones that are valued in another. Every class of things has its own special conformation—one that is approved of and has a beauty of its own—distinct from that of every other species. That is what led Buffier to maintain that the beauty of any object consists in the form and colour that are centrally typical of the species to which the object belongs, because they will be the form and colour that we are, in our experience of that species, most accustomed to. [Smith expounds this theory at great length, without doing much to make it seem worth studying. Smith agrees that our judgments about things' beauty are much affected by what we are *used to*, but he denies that that's the whole story:] The utility of any form, its fitness for the useful purposes for which it was intended, obviously counts in its favour and makes it agreeable to us, independently of custom or usualness. Certain colours are more agreeable than others, and give more delight to the eye the *first* time it ever beholds them. A smooth surface is more agreeable than a rough one. Variety is more pleasing than a tedious undiversified uniformity. Connected variety, in which each new appearance seems to be introduced by what went before it, and in which all the adjoining parts seem to have some natural relation to one another, is more agreeable than a disjointed and disorderly assemblage of unconnected objects. But. . . I go along with Buffier's ingenious theory to this extent: it hardly ever happens that a particular thing's external form is so beautiful that it gives pleasure although

it is quite contrary to custom and unlike anything we have been used to in that species of things; or so ugly as to be disagreeable although custom uniformly supports it and gets us used to seeing it in every single individual of the kind.

## Chapter 2: The influence of custom and fashion on moral sentiments

Our sentiments concerning every kind of beauty are so much influenced by custom and fashion that those forces are bound to have some influence on our sentiments concerning the beauty of conduct. But their influence in this domain seems to be much less than it is everywhere else. It may be that custom can reconcile us to *any* form of external objects, however absurd and fantastical; but no custom will ever reconcile us to the characters and conduct of a Nero or a Claudius—one will always be an object of dread and hatred, the other of scorn and derision. The mechanisms of the imagination, on which our sense of beauty depends, are delicately fine-tuned and can easily be altered by habit and education; but our sentiments of moral approval and disapproval are based on the strongest and most vigorous passions of human nature; and though they may be somewhat warped by custom and fashion, they can't be entirely perverted.

However, the influence of custom and fashion on moral sentiments is similar in kind to their influence everywhere else; it is merely different in strength. When custom and fashion coincide with the natural principles of right and wrong, they heighten the delicacy of our sentiments [Smith's words] and increase our loathing for everything that approximates to evil. Someone who has been brought up in really good company—not what is commonly called 'good company'—will have become used to seeing in the people

he lived with nothing but justice, modesty, humaneness, and good order. Because of his upbringing, he will be more shocked than the rest of us are by anything that seems to be inconsistent with the rules that those virtues of modesty etc. prescribe. And someone who has had the misfortune to be brought up amidst violence, licentiousness, falsehood, and injustice may still have some sense of the impropriety of such conduct, but he won't have any all sense of *how* dreadful it is, or of the vengeance and punishment that it deserves. He has been familiarized with it from his infancy, custom has made it habitual to him, and he's apt to regard it as 'the way of the world', as it is called—something that may, or even something that *should*, be practised so as to stop us from being the dupes of our own integrity [Smith's wording].

[Smith says that a certain degree of disorder can be liked because it is fashionable, and that fashion can lead to people's disliking qualities that deserve to be respected. He cites the reign of Charles II as a time when a degree of licentiousness was connected in people's minds with various virtues, and was taken to show that the licentious person 'was a gentleman, not a puritan'. He describes with colourful indignation the upside-down morality that arises from this kind of fashion. Then:]

Men in different professions and states of life naturally come to have different characters and manners, because of differences in the kinds of objects they have been used to and the passions that they have formed. We expect each man to behave somewhat in the way that experience has taught us belong to his rank or profession; . . . and we'll be especially pleased if he has neither too much nor too little of the character that usually accompanies his particular 'species' (if I may use the word in that way). A man, we say, should look like his trade and profession; but the pedantry [= 'excessive attention to correctness of details'] of every

profession is disagreeable. The different periods of life have different manners assigned to them, for the same reason. We expect in old age the gravity and calm that its infirmities, its long experience, and its worn-out sensibility seem to make natural and respectable; and we expect to find in youth the sensibility, gaiety and sprightly vivacity that experience teaches us to expect from the lively impressions that objects are apt to make on the unpractised senses of the young. But each of those two ages can easily have too much of its special features. The flirting levity of youth, and the immovable insensibility of old age, are equally disagreeable. The young (as the saying goes) are most agreeable when their behaviour has something of the manners of the old, and the old are most agreeable when they retain something of the gaiety of the young. But either of them could go too far: the extreme coldness and dull formality that are pardoned in old age make youth ridiculous; and the levity, carelessness, and vanity that are permitted to the young make old age contemptible.

The special character and manners that custom leads us to associate with a given rank or profession may sometimes have a propriety independent of custom; they are the character and manners that we would approve of for their own sakes if we took into consideration all the different circumstances that naturally affect those in each 'species'. [Smith goes on about this, with some 'very obvious' reflections, such as: our approval of someone's passion regarding something depends in part on *what else* the person's situation involves. We don't blame a mother who expresses, over the death of her soldier son, a level of grief that would be inexcusable in a general at the head of an army, who has so much else on his plate. We disapprove of levity or casualness in the manner of a preacher 'whose special occupation it is to •keep the world in mind of the awe-inspiring after-life that awaits them, and

to •announce what may be the fatal consequences of every deviation from the rules of duty'.]

The basis for the customary character of some other professions is not so obvious, and our approval of it is based entirely on habit, without being confirmed or enlivened by any thoughts of the kind I have been discussing. For example, custom leads us to associate the character of gaiety, levity, and sprightly freedom, as well as of some degree of dissipation, to the military profession. But if we thought about what mood or tone of temper would be most suitable to a soldier's situation, we would be apt to conclude that a serious and thoughtful cast of mind would be the most appropriate for men whose lives are continually exposed to uncommon danger. [Smith develops this thought, and suggests that the levity of serving soldiers may be their way of coping with their dangerous situation, 'losing their anxiety' about it. He offers evidence for that hypothesis:] Whenever an officer has no reason to think he is faced with any uncommon danger, he is apt to lose the gaiety and dissipated thoughtlessness of his character. The captain of a city guard is usually as sober, careful, and penny-pinching as the rest of his fellow-citizens! . . .

The different situations of different times and countries are apt to give different characters to the general run of people who live in them; and their sentiments regarding what *degree* of this or that quality is either blameworthy or praiseworthy vary according to the degree that is usually blamed or praised in their own country at their own time. A degree of politeness that would be regarded as rude and barbaric at the court of France might be highly esteemed in Russia—unless it was condemned there as effeminate! The degree of order and frugality that would be regarded in a Polish nobleman as •excessive parsimony would be regarded as •extravagance in a citizen of Amsterdam. . . .



Among civilized nations, the virtues that are based on humaneness are cultivated more than the ones based on self-denial and the command of the passions. Among rude and barbarous nations it is quite otherwise: in them the virtues of self-denial are more cultivated than those of humaneness. The general security and happiness that prevail at times of civic-mindedness and highly developed society don't call for contempt of danger, or patience in enduring labour, hunger, and pain. Because poverty can easily be avoided, disregard for it almost ceases to be a virtue. . . .

Among savages and barbarians it is quite otherwise. [Smith now launches on three harrowing pages about how 'savages and barbarians'—he mentions in particular 'the savages in North America'—have a value-system that is shaped by the hardships and necessities of their situation. One example: arranged marriages; sexual activity between spouses conducted in secret; no expressions of affection. Then the main example: a régime of discipline to enable any young savage to be able to preserve calm equanimity under threat of death and during horrible tortures (Smith gives details). The closing passage on this theme is notable. [In it, 'magnanimity' means 'courage and calmness in the face of danger'. The second occurrence of 'contempt' means what we mean by the word, but the first occurrence means 'disregard' or 'refusal to treat as important'. The passage is an explosion of Smith's rage at the thought of savage 'heroes' being ill-treated by slave-traders (and their hirelings) who are garbage from the jails.] Smith continues:] The same contempt for death and torture prevails in all the other savage nations. There's not a negro from the coast of Africa who doesn't in this respect have a degree of magnanimity that the soul of his sordid master is too often hardly able to conceive of. Fortune never used her dominance of mankind more cruelly than when she subjected those nations of heroes to the sweepings of the jails of Europe, to wretches who don't have

the virtues of the countries they come from or of the ones they go to—wretches whose levity, brutality, and baseness so deservedly expose them to the contempt of the vanquished.

This heroic and unconquerable firmness. . . . is not required from those who are brought up to live in civilized societies. If *they* complain when they are in pain, grieve when they are in distress, allow themselves to be overcome by love or ruffled by anger, they are easily pardoned. Such weaknesses are not seen as affecting the essential parts of their character. As long as they don't do anything contrary to justice or humaneness, they lose little reputation, even if the serenity of their countenance or the calmness of their discourse and behaviour is somewhat disturbed. A humane and polished people, who have more sensitivity to the passions of others, can more easily sympathize with animated and passionate behaviour, and can more easily pardon any slight excess of it. The person principally concerned is aware of this, . . . and is accordingly less afraid of exposing himself to others' contempt by the violence of his emotions. [Smith goes on about differences in conversational style between civilised people and barbarians, and also about how some European nations differ in this respect, the French and Italians being much more lively than people with 'duller sensibility' such as the English. He reports one writer who said that 'an Italian expresses more emotion on being sentenced to a fine of twenty shillings than an Englishman on receiving a sentence of death'. (Smith seems to have an ascending scale of polish and civilisedness, and a corresponding scale of increasingly expressive and emotional ways of talking and behaving; with 'savages' at the bottom of each scale, the French and Italians at the top, and the English somewhere in between.) He follows this up with examples from ancient Rome. Then:]

This difference gives rise to many others that are equally essential ·as national characteristics·. A polished people,

being accustomed to giving way somewhat to their natural feelings, become frank, open, and sincere. Whereas barbarians, being obliged to smother and conceal the appearance of every passion, inevitably acquire the habits of falsehood and pretence. Everyone who has had any dealings with savage nations—whether in Asia, Africa, or America—has found them equally impenetrable, finding that when they want to conceal the truth there's no way of getting it out of them. They can't be tricked by artful questions, and not even torture can get them to tell anything that they don't want to tell. But the passions of a savage, though never expressed by any outward emotional display and always hidden in the person's breast, rise to the highest pitch of fury. Though the savage seldom shows any symptoms of anger, his vengeance—when he gets to it—is always bloody and dreadful. The least insult drives him to despair. His countenance and discourse remain sober and calm, expressing nothing but the most perfect tranquillity of mind; but his actions are often furious and violent. Among the North-Americans it is not uncommon for girls to drown themselves after receiving only a slight reprimand from their mothers, doing this without expressing any passion or indeed saying anything except 'You shall no longer have a daughter'. In civilized nations the passions of men are not usually so furious or so desperate. They are often noisy, but are seldom very harmful; and they seem often to have no purpose except to convince the spectator that they are in the right to be so much moved, thereby getting his sympathy and approval.

All these effects of custom and fashion on the moral sentiments of mankind are minor in comparison to some of their other effects. Where custom and fashion produce the greatest perversion of judgment is not in connection with the •general style of character and behaviour (•which is what I have been discussing•) but in connection with the propriety

or impropriety of •particular usages.

The different manners that custom teaches us to approve of in the different professions and states of life don't concern things of the greatest importance. We expect truth and justice from an old man as well as from a young, from a clergyman as well as from an officer; and it's only in minor matters that we look for the distinguishing marks of their respective characters [meaning: the characteristics that are typical of them as old, as young, as clergyman, as officer]. Also, the character that custom has taught us to ascribe to a given profession may be *proper*, independently of custom, because of details that we haven't noticed. So these matters don't involve any *large* perversion of natural sentiment. What the manners of different nations require in a character that they think worthy of esteem are different degrees of the same quality, •but there's nothing bad about that•. The worst that it can be said to involve is that the duties of •one virtue are sometimes extended so as to encroach a little on the territory of •some other. The rustic hospitality that is in fashion among the Poles may perhaps encroach a little on economy and good order; and the frugality that is esteemed in Holland may encroach on generosity and good-fellowship. The hardiness demanded of savages diminishes their humaneness; and the delicate sensitivity required in civilized nations may sometimes destroy masculine firmness of character. But the style of manners that obtains in any nation is often, on the whole, the one that is most suitable to its situation. Hardiness is the character most suitable to the circumstances of a savage; sensitivity to the circumstances of life in a very civilized society. So even in this area we can't complain that men's moral sentiments are grossly perverted.

Thus, where custom authorises the widest departure from the natural propriety of action is not in the general style of conduct or behaviour, but in regard to particular practices.

*That* is where custom's influence is often much more destructive of good morals. It can establish, as ·supposedly· lawful and blameless, particular actions that shock the plainest principles of right and wrong. ·I shall give just one example of this·.

Can there be greater barbarity than to harm an infant? Its helplessness, its innocence, its likeableness, call forth the compassion even of an enemy; not to spare that tender age is regarded as the most furious effort of an enraged and cruel conqueror. Well, then, what can be the heart of a •parent who could injure a weakness that even a •furious enemy is afraid to violate? Yet the murder of new-born infants was a permitted practice in almost all the states of ·ancient· Greece, even among the polished and civilized Athenians; and whenever the circumstances of the parent made it inconvenient [here = 'difficult and burdensome'] to bring up the child, it could be abandoned to hunger or to wild beasts without attracting blame or censure. This practice probably began in times of the most savage barbarism: men's imaginations were first made familiar with it in that earliest period of society, and the unbroken continuity of the custom hindered them from later seeing how abominable it is. Even today we find that this practice prevails among all savage nations; and in that roughest and lowest state of society it is undoubtedly more excusable than in any other. A savage can have such a lack of food that it isn't possible for him to support both himself and his child; so it's not surprising

that in this case he abandons it. . . . In the latter ages of ·ancient· Greece, however, the same thing—·leaving babies out in the wilds, to starve or be eaten by wild animals—was permitted on the grounds of *minor* interest or convenience which could by no means excuse it. Uninterrupted custom had by this time so thoroughly authorised the practice that it was tolerated not only •by the loose maxims of the world but even •by the doctrines of philosophers, which ought to have been more just and precise. . . . Aristotle talks of it as though he thought that the authorities ought often to encourage it. The humane Plato is of the same opinion, and—despite all the love of mankind that seems to animate all his writings—he never expresses disapproval of this practice. When custom can give sanction to such a dreadful violation of humanity, we can well imagine that hardly any particular practice is so gross that custom couldn't authorise it. We constantly hear men saying 'It's commonly done', apparently thinking that this a sufficient excuse for something that is in itself the most unjust and unreasonable conduct.

There's an obvious reason why custom never perverts our sentiments with regard to •the general style and character of behaviour in the same degree as it does with regard to •the propriety or unlawfulness of particular practices. It's that there never can be any such custom! No society could survive for a moment if in it the usual strain of men's behaviour was of a piece with the horrible practice I have been discussing.

## Part VI: The character of virtue

When we consider the character of any individual, we naturally view it under two different aspects: •as it may affect his own happiness (the topic of Section 1) and •as it may affect that of other people (the topic of Section 2).

### Section 1: Prudence, i.e. the character of the individual in its bearing on his own happiness

What Nature first recommends to the care of every individual, it seems, is the preservation and healthful state of his body. The appetites of hunger and thirst, the agreeable or disagreeable sensations of pleasure and pain, of heat and cold, etc. can be considered as lessons given by Nature in her own voice, telling him what he ought to choose for this purpose and what he ought to avoid. The first lessons he learns from those who care for him in his childhood are mostly aimed the same way: their main purpose is to teach him how to keep out of harm's way.

As he grows up, he soon learns that some care and foresight are needed if he is to satisfy those natural appetites, to procure pleasure and avoid pain, to procure agreeable temperatures and avoid disagreeable heat and cold. The art of preserving and increasing what is called his external fortune consists in the proper direction of this care and foresight. [To increase one's 'external fortune' is to become more prosperous (in money, property, land etc.). There is an 'art' of doing this, in Smith's sense, simply because doing it requires skill in the mastery of techniques.]

The *basic* advantage of external fortune is that it enables one to provide the necessities and conveniences of the body, but we can't live long in the world without noticing that the respect of our equals, our credit and rank in the society we

live in, depend very much on how large an external fortune we possess, or are supposed to possess. The wish to become proper objects of this respect, to deserve and obtain this credit and rank among our equals, may be the strongest of all our desires; so that our anxiety to obtain the advantages of fortune is stimulated much more by *this* desire than by the desire to supply all the necessities and conveniences of the body—a desire that is always easily satisfied.

Our rank and credit among our equals *also* depends heavily on something that a virtuous man might wish to be the sole source of them, namely our •character and •conduct, or on the confidence, esteem, and good-will that •these naturally arouse in the people we live with.

The care of the health, the fortune, and the rank and reputation of the individual—these being the items on which his comfort and happiness in this life are supposed principally to depend—is regarded as the proper business of the virtue commonly called 'prudence'.

I have already pointed out that our suffering when we fall from a better to a worse situation is greater than any enjoyment we get in rising from a worse to a better. For that reason, the first and the principal object of prudence is *security*. Prudence is opposed to our exposing our health, our fortune, our rank, or our reputation to any sort of risk.

It is cautious rather than enterprising, and more concerned to preserve the advantages that we already possess than to prompt us to the acquisition of still greater advantages. The methods of improving our fortune that it principally recommends to us are the ones that don't involve risk: real knowledge and skill in our trade or profession, hard work and persistence in the exercise of it, frugality to the point of parsimony in all our expenses.

The prudent man always makes a serious point of actually understanding whatever he professes to understand, not merely trying to persuade other people that he understands it; and though his talents may not always be brilliant they are always perfectly genuine. [Note the connection between what he *professes* to understand and his *profession*.] He doesn't try to impose on you by

the cunning tricks of an artful impostor,  
the arrogant airs of a pretentious pedant, or  
the confident assertions of a rash and superficial pretender.

He doesn't make a great show even of the abilities that he really does have. His conversation is simple and modest, and he dislikes all the quackish [Smith's word] arts by which other people so often thrust themselves into public notice and reputation. For reputation in his profession he is naturally inclined to rely a good deal on the solidity of his knowledge and abilities; and he doesn't always think of trying to please the little clubs and gangs who, in the superior arts and sciences, set themselves up as the supreme judges of merit, and celebrate one another's talents and virtues while decrying anything that can come into competition with them. . . .

The prudent man is always sincere. He hates the thought of exposing himself to the disgrace that comes from the detection of falsehood. But though always sincere, he isn't

always frank and open; he never says anything that isn't true, but he doesn't always think he is obliged to volunteer the whole truth. To match his cautious way of acting, he is reserved in his speech, and never forces on people his opinions about anything or anyone.

[The prudent man is always capable of friendship, Smith says, but his friendship (with a few chosen people) is solid and durable rather than ardent and passionate. He doesn't go in for socializing, because parties and such would interfere too much with his chosen way of life. Also:]

Though his conversation isn't always very sprightly or diverting, it is always perfectly inoffensive. The prudent man hates the thought of being guilty of any petulance or rudeness. . . . In both conduct and conversation he strictly preserves decency and is almost religiously scrupulous in maintaining all the established decorums and ceremonials of society. In this respect he sets a much better example than was set, down through the centuries, by many men with much more splendid talents and virtues than his—from Socrates and Aristippus down to Swift and Voltaire, and from Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great down to Peter the Great of Russia. These men have too often stood out because of their improper and even insolent contempt for all the ordinary decorums of life and conversation, setting a most pernicious example to anyone wanting to resemble them—followers who too often content themselves with imitating their follies, without even trying to attain their perfections.

The prudent man keeps at his work, and is always frugal, thereby sacrificing the ease and enjoyment of the present moment for the probable expectation of greater ease and enjoyment later on and for a longer time; and in this conduct he is always supported and rewarded by the complete approval of the impartial spectator, and of that spectator's representative, the man within the breast. The impartial

spectator doesn't feel *himself* worn out by the present work of the people whose conduct he surveys; nor does he feel *himself* pulled by the loud and persistent demands of their present appetites. To *him* the •present situation •of those people• is nearly the same as •their likely future situation. He sees •them from nearly the same distance and is affected by them in nearly in the same manner. But he knows that to the people principally concerned—the ones whose present and future situations are in question—they're far from being the same, and naturally affect them differently. So he can't help approving—even applauding—the proper exercise of self-control that enables them to act as if their present and their future situation affected •them in nearly the same way that they affect •him.

[Smith now has a paragraph concerning the prudent man's attitude to wealth. He is 'naturally contented with his situation' because he lives within his income. As he gradually becomes wealthier, he can gradually relax his frugality, enjoying modest luxuries both for themselves and for their contrast with his previous way of life. He doesn't rush, unprepared, into any new enterprises. Also:]

The prudent man isn't willing to undertake any responsibility that his duty does not impose on him. He

- doesn't bustle in matters where he has no concern;
- doesn't meddle in other people's affairs;
- doesn't set himself up as a counsellor or adviser, pushing his advice at people who haven't asked for it.

... He is averse to taking sides in any party disputes, hates faction, and isn't always attentive to the voice of ambition—even of noble and great ambition. He won't refuse to serve his country when clearly called on to do so, but he won't scheme and plot in order to force himself into such service; he would prefer public business to be well managed by someone else. . . .

In short, when prudence aims merely at taking care of the *individual* person's health, fortune, and rank and reputation, though it's regarded as a most respectable and even somewhat likeable and agreeable quality, it is never regarded as one the most endearing or ennobling of the virtues. It commands a certain cold esteem, but seems not to be entitled to any ardent love or admiration.

We often label as 'prudence' wise and judicious conduct that is directed to greater and nobler purposes than the care of the health, the fortune, the rank and reputation of the individual. This is a legitimate usage. We talk of the 'prudence' of a great general, a great statesman, a great legislator. In all these cases prudence is combined with many greater and more splendid virtues—valour, extensive and strong benevolence, a sacred regard for the rules of justice, and all these supported by a proper degree of self-control. For this superior •kind of• prudence to reach the highest degree of perfection it has to involve the art, the talent, and the habit or disposition of acting with the most perfect propriety in every possible situation. [Remember that for Smith 'propriety' means *rightness* in a strong moral sense.] It has to involve the utmost perfection of all the •intellectual and of all the •moral virtues—the best head joined to the best heart, perfect wisdom combined with perfect virtue. [Smith adds that this superior public kind of virtue approximates to the character of a 'sage' according to Aristotle, and that the inferior private kind of virtue approximates to the character of a 'sage' according to the Epicureans.]

Mere imprudence—the mere inability to take care of oneself—is *pitied* by generous and humane people. People with less delicate feelings treat imprudence with •neglect or, at worst, •contempt, but never with •hatred or •indignation. Whereas the infamy and disgrace that accompany other vices are enormously intensified when those vices are combined

with imprudence. The rogue whose skill enables him to escape detection and punishment (though not to escape strong suspicion) is too often received in the world with a permissiveness that he doesn't deserve. The awkward and foolish rogue whose lack of skill leads to his being convicted and punished is an object of universal hatred, contempt, and derision. In countries where great crimes often go unpunished, really *atrocious* actions become almost familiar, and stop impressing the people with the kind of horror that everyone feels in countries where the administration of justice is properly carried out. The injustice is the same in both countries, but the level of imprudence may be different. In countries of the latter kind—the ones with good justice systems—great crimes are obviously great follies. In countries of the other kind they aren't always seen in that way. In Italy, during most of the sixteenth century, assassinations and murders. . . . seem to have been almost familiar among the upper classes. Cesare Borgia invited four of the little princes in his neighbourhood—all

with little kingdoms and their own little armies—to a friendly conference in Senigaglia; and as soon as they arrived there he put them all to death. Although this dreadful action wasn't approved of, even in that age of crimes, it doesn't seem to have contributed much to the discredit of the perpetrator, and contributed nothing towards his ruin. . . . The violence and injustice of •great conquerors are often regarded with foolish wonder and admiration; the violence and injustice of •minor thieves, robbers, and murderers are always regarded with contempt, hatred and even horror. . . . The injustice of the •former is certainly at least as great as that of the •latter, but their folly and imprudence are nowhere near as great. A wicked and worthless man who is clever and skillful often goes through the world with much more credit than he deserves. A wicked and worthless fool always appears to be the most hateful, as well as the most contemptible, of mortals. Just as prudence combined with other virtues constitutes the noblest of all characters, imprudence combined with other vices constitutes the vilest.

## Section 2: The character of the individual in its bearing on the happiness of other people

### Introduction

The character of any individual can affect the happiness of other people only through its disposition either to harm them or to benefit them.

The •only motive that the impartial spectator can justify for our harming or in any way disturbing the happiness of our neighbour is •proper resentment for injustice attempted

or actually committed. To harm someone from any other motive is itself a violation of the laws of justice—the sort of thing that should be restrained or punished by force. The wisdom of every state or commonwealth does its best to use the force of the society to restrain its subjects from harming or disturbing one another's happiness. The rules it establishes for this purpose constitute the civil and criminal

law of that state or country. The principles on which those rules are—or *ought to be*—based are the subject of one particular science, by far the •most important of all the sciences though until now perhaps the •least cultivated. I am talking about the science of natural jurisprudence. My present topic doesn't require me to go into this in any detail. A sacred and religious regard not to harm or disturb our neighbour's happiness in any way, even over something for which no law can properly protect him, constitutes the character of the perfectly innocent and just man. [Smith uses 'sacred' (often) and 'religious' (occasionally) with no religious meaning, as we have just seen him do. His topic is simply strict, scrupulous, careful obedience to a rule. On page 89 he said that for anyone who thinks that the rule is a law of God, it acquires a 'new sacredness'.] Whenever someone has this character to the point of being *really careful* not to harm or disturb his neighbour, the character is highly respectable and even venerable for its own sake, and is nearly always accompanied by many other virtues, with great feeling for other people, humaneness, and benevolence. We all understand this character well enough; it needn't be further explained by me. All I'm going to attempt in the present section is to explain the basis for the *order* that Nature seems to have marked out for the direction and employment of our limited powers of beneficence—towards individuals (Chapter 1) and towards societies (Chapter 2). [Smith often uses 'order' to mean 'organisation' etc., but his present topic is the down-to-earth sense of 'order' that concerns who or what comes first, second etc. in the queue.]

It will turn out that the same unerring wisdom that regulates every other part of Nature's conduct also governs the ordering of her recommendations that we attend to potential beneficiaries. The more a particular benefaction is needed, the more useful it can be, the stronger is Nature's recommendation that we make it.

### **Chapter 1: The order in which individuals are recommended by nature to our care and attention**

Every man, as the Stoics used to say, is first and principally recommended ·by Nature· to care for himself; and every man is indeed in every way fitter and abler to take care of himself than to take care of anyone else. Every man feels •his own pleasures and his own pains more intensely [Smith says 'sensibly'] than •those of other people, feels •the original sensations more intensely than •the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations, feels •the substance more intensely than •the shadow.

(1) After himself, the members of his own family—his parents, his children, his brothers and sisters—are naturally the objects of his warmest affections. They are naturally the persons on whose happiness or misery his conduct must have the greatest influence. He is more accustomed to sympathizing with them, he knows better how everything is likely to affect them, and he can have a more precise and definite sympathy with them than he can have with most other people. In short, what he feels for •them is a close approximation to what he feels for •himself.

This sympathy and the affections based on it are naturally directed more strongly towards his children than towards his parents, and his tenderness for the children seems generally to be more *active* than his reverence and gratitude towards his parents. In the natural state of things the child, for some time after it comes into the world, depends for its survival entirely on the care of the parent, whereas the parent's survival doesn't naturally depend on the care of the child. In nature's way of looking at things, a child seems to be a more important object than an old man; and it arouses a much livelier and much more universal sympathy. It ought to do so. Everything can be expected or at least hoped for from



the child, whereas ordinarily little can be expected or hoped for from the old man. [Smith was 36 years old when he wrote this.] The weakness of childhood draws the affections of ·even· the most brutal and hard-hearted, but the infirmities of old age are objects of contempt and aversion for everyone who isn't virtuous and humane. Ordinarily an old man dies without being much regretted by anyone, but it's not often that a child can die without breaking someone's heart.

The earliest friendships—the ones that are naturally formed when the heart is most liable to that feeling—are the friendships among brothers and sisters. While they are still living together their being on good terms with one another is necessary for the household's tranquillity and happiness. They can give more pleasure or pain to one another than to most other people. Their situation ·as siblings living together· makes their mutual sympathy utterly important to their common happiness; and by the wisdom of nature that same situation, by obliging them to accommodate to one another, makes that sympathy more habitual and thus more lively, sharp and definite.

[The same holds for •cousins, though less strongly, Smith says. The friendship among siblings is enhanced if their offspring are also on good terms, but the sympathy between cousins is less necessary than between siblings, and 'so it is less habitual and therefore correspondingly weaker'. Between the •children of cousins etc. 'the affection diminishes as the relation grows more remote'.]

What is called 'affection' is really nothing but habitual sympathy. Our concern for the objects of our 'affections'—our desire to promote their happiness or prevent their misery—is either the actual feeling of that habitual sympathy or a necessary consequences of it. Relatives are usually placed in situations that naturally create this habitual sympathy, so a suitable degree of affection is expected to

hold among them. We generally find that it does indeed hold; . . . and we're shocked whenever we find that it doesn't. The established general rule says that persons related to one another in a certain degree ought always to have mutual affections of a certain kind, and whenever they don't there is the highest impropriety, and sometimes even a sort of impiety. A parent without parental tenderness, a child devoid of all filial reverence, appear to be monsters—objects not only of hatred but of horror.

Sometimes the circumstances that usually produce those 'natural affections' happen not to have existed; but even in those cases the general rule will often make up for that to some extent, producing something that at least is *like* those affections. A father is apt to be less attached to a child who for some reason was separated from him in its infancy and returns to him only as an adult. The father is apt to feel less paternal tenderness for the child, and the child less filial reverence for the father. When siblings are brought up in distant countries they are apt to feel a similar lessening of affection; but if they are dutiful and virtuous, their respect for the general rule will often produce, again, something that at least is *like* those natural affections. Even during their separation, the father and the child, the brothers and the sisters, are by no means indifferent to one another. They consider one another as persons to and from whom certain affections are due, and they hope some day to be in a position to enjoy the friendship that ought naturally to have taken place among such close relatives. Until they meet, the absent son or brother is often the favourite son or brother. He has never offended, or he offended so long ago that the offence is forgotten—a childish prank not worth remembering. . . . When they meet, it is often with a strong disposition to have the habitual sympathy that constitutes family affection—so strong that they're apt •to imagine they actually *have* that

sympathy and •to behave to one another as if they had. But I'm afraid that in many cases time and experience undeceive them. On coming to know one another better, they often turn out to have habits, moods, and inclinations that are different from what the others expected; and they can't easily adjust to these because of the lack of the *habitual* sympathy that is the basis and driving force of 'family affection' properly so-called. . . .

Anyway, it is only with dutiful and virtuous people that the general rule has even this slender authority. People who are dissipated, profligate or vain will disregard the rule entirely. They will be so far from respecting it that they'll seldom talk of it except with indecent derision; and an early and long separation of this kind always completely estranges them from one another. With such persons, respect for the general rule can at best produce only a cold and affected civility (a faint copy of real regard), and even this is commonly abolished by a slight offence, a tiny conflict of interests.

The education of boys at distant great schools, of young men at distant colleges, of young ladies in distant nunneries and boarding-schools, seems in the higher ranks of society to have done crucial harm to domestic morals and thus to domestic happiness, both in France and in England. Do you want to bring up your children to be dutiful to their parents, kind and affectionate to their brothers and sisters? Then bring them up in your own home—make it *necessary* for them to be dutiful children, kind and affectionate brothers and sisters! From their parents' house the children may, with propriety and advantage, go out every day to attend public schools; but let them continue to live at home. That way of bringing up a child is the institution of nature; education away from home at a boarding school is a contrivance of man. You don't need me to tell you which is likely to be wiser!

[Smith's next three paragraphs make these points: •In 'tragedies and romances' we meet stories about people who are drawn to one another because they are blood-related, though they don't know that they are; but this never happens in real life. •In 'countries where the authority of law is not alone sufficient to give perfect security to everyone', the different branches of a growing extended family often choose to live close to one another; and that gives any two of them a weakened version of the kind of connection most of us have with members of our more immediate family. •In countries where the authority of law is enough to protect everyone, as families grow they spread and scatter, and the parts of them stop mattering to one another.]

I regard natural affection (as they call it) as an effect of the moral connection between the parent and the child more than of the supposed physical connection. [The 'moral connection' is the fact that the parent and child live together.] •But sometimes a belief about physical connection outweighs the actual facts about moral connection. A jealous husband, despite the moral connection—despite the child's having been brought up in his own house—often hates the unhappy child whom he supposes to be the offspring of his wife's infidelity. . . .

Among well-disposed people who need •in their occupations• to accommodate themselves to one another there often comes to be a friendship not unlike what holds between those who are born to live in the same household. Colleagues in office, partners in trade, call one another 'brothers', and often feel towards one another as if they really were so. . . .

Even the trivial fact of living in the same neighbourhood has some effect of the same kind. We respect the face of a man whom we see every day, provided he has never offended us. Neighbours can be convenient to one another, and they can also be troublesome. If they are a good sort of people

they are naturally disposed to agree. . . . So there are certain small favours that everyone agrees are due to a neighbour in preference to anyone who has no such connection.

This natural disposition to do our best to make our own sentiments, principles, and feelings fit with the sentiments etc. that we see fixed and rooted in persons whom we are obliged to live and converse with is the cause of the contagious effects of both good and bad company. A man who associates chiefly with the wise and the virtuous, though he may not become either wise or virtuous himself, can't help acquiring at least a certain respect for wisdom and virtue; and one who associates chiefly with profligate and dissolute people, though he may not become profligate and dissolute himself, must soon at least lose all his original loathing of profligacy and dissoluteness. This same disposition may contribute something to the similarity of family characters that we often see transmitted through several generations; but the family character seems not to come only from the moral connection but also in part from the physical connection—which is of course the sole cause of the family face.

**(2)** But by far the most respectable of all attachments to an individual is the one that is wholly based on respect and approval of what he does and how he does it, confirmed by much experience and long acquaintance. The sympathy that underlies such friendships isn't •constrained—it isn't a sympathy that has been assumed and made habitual for the sake of convenience and getting along together. It is a •natural sympathy that comes from an involuntary feeling that the persons we choose as friends are natural and proper objects of respect and approval. Such friendship is possible only between men of virtue. Only *they* can feel the entire confidence in one another's conduct that gives them a guarantee that they will never offend or be offended

by one another. Vice is always capricious; it's only virtue that is regular and orderly. The attachment that is based on the love of virtue is the •happiest of all attachments as well as the most •permanent and secure. Such friendships needn't be confined to a single person; they can safely include *all* the wise and virtuous people whose wisdom and virtue we can wholly depend on because we have seen them from close up for a long period of time. Those who want to confine friendship to two persons seem to be confusing •the wise security of friendship with •the jealousy and folly of love. The hasty and foolish intimacies of young people are often based on

- some slight similarity of character, quite unconnected with good conduct, on
- a taste for the same studies, the same amusements, the same diversions, or on
- their sharing some special opinion that isn't widely held.

These intimacies that begin from a whim and are ended by another whim, however agreeable they may appear while they last, come nowhere near to deserving the sacred and venerable name of 'friendship'.

**(3)** Of all the persons whom nature points out for our special beneficence, however, there are none to whom it seems more properly directed than those who have already been our benefactors. Nature, which formed men for a mutual kindness that is necessary for their happiness, makes every man the special object of the kindness of people to whom he himself has been kind. Even when the beneficiaries' gratitude doesn't correspond to what their benefactor has done for them, the sense of his merit—the sympathetic gratitude of the impartial spectator—will always correspond to it. And sometimes the general sense of someone's merit can be increased by people's indignation over the ingratitude

of his beneficiaries. No benevolent man ever lost altogether the fruits of his benevolence. If he doesn't always gather them from the persons from whom they *ought* to have come, he nearly always gathers them, and with a tenfold increase, from other people. Kindness is the parent of kindness; and if the great object of our ambition is to be beloved by our brethren, the surest way of obtaining it is to show by our conduct that we really love them.

After the persons who are recommended to our beneficence by **(1)** their connection with ourselves, by **(2)** their personal qualities, or by **(3)** their past services, come **(4)** those whom nature points out to us not for •friendship with us but for •our benevolent attention. What picks these people out is •not any special intrinsic qualities that they have, but their special situation: they are •greatly fortunate or •greatly unfortunate—•rich and powerful •or poor and wretched. [In what follows, the phrases 'the distinction of ranks' and 'the peace and order of society' are Smith's.]

- The distinction of ranks, the peace and order of society, are *largely* based on the respect that we naturally have for the rich and powerful.
- The relief and consolation of human misery depend *altogether* on our compassion for the poor and wretched.

The peace and order of society is more important than even the relief of the miserable. So our respect for the great is most apt to offend by going too far, while our fellow-feeling for the miserable is more apt to offend by not going far enough. Moralists urge us to exhibit charity and compassion, and warn us against the fascination of greatness. It's true that this fascination •can easily be overdone•: it is so powerful that **(4)** the rich and great are too often preferred to **(2)** the wise and virtuous. Nature has wisely judged that •plain and obvious differences of birth and fortune provide a more

stable basis for the distinction of ranks, the peace and order of society, than would the •invisible and often uncertain differences of wisdom and virtue. The indiscriminating eyes of the great mob of mankind can see the differences of birth and fortune well enough, whereas difference of wisdom and virtue—well, even those who are wise and virtuous sometimes have trouble distinguishing them! In the order of all these recommendations, the benevolent wisdom of nature is equally evident. . . .

Those different beneficent feelings sometimes pull in different directions, and we don't—perhaps we *can't*—have any precise rules to settle which way we should go in a given case. When should **(2)** friendship give way to **(3)** gratitude, or gratitude to friendship? When should **(1)** the strongest of all natural affections give way to a regard for **(4)** the safety of superiors on whose safety the welfare of the whole society depends, and when can that choice go the other way without impropriety? Such questions must be left altogether to the decision of the man within the breast, the supposed impartial spectator, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. If we place ourselves completely in his situation, if we *really* view ourselves with his eyes, and listen with diligent and reverential attention to what he suggests to us, his voice will never deceive us. We shan't need any applied-ethics rules to direct our conduct. . . .

## Chapter 2: The order in which societies are recommended by nature to our beneficence

The motivational forces that direct the order in which •individuals are •naturally• recommended to our beneficence also direct the order in which •societies are recommended to it. The ones that we find it natural to attend to first are those that are or may be of most importance •to us•.

•The state in which we have been born and brought up, and under the protection of which we continue to live, is ordinarily the biggest society on whose happiness (or misery) our good (or bad) conduct can have much influence. So fittingly •it's the one that nature most strongly recommends to us. Not only we ourselves but all the people we care about most—our children, our parents, our relatives, our friends, our benefactors, *all* those whom we naturally love and revere the most—are usually included within •it, and their prosperity and safety depend to some extent on its prosperity and safety. So nature makes it dear to us not only through all our selfish feelings but also through all our private benevolent feelings. On account of our own connection with it, its prosperity and glory seem to reflect some sort of honour on ourselves. When we compare our society with others of the same kind, we are proud of its superiority and are somewhat humiliated if it seems to be in any way below them. All the illustrious characters that it has produced in former times. . . .—its warriors, statesmen, poets, philosophers, and writers of all kinds—we're inclined to view with the most partial [opposite of 'impartial'] admiration, and to rank (sometimes quite wrongly) above those of all other nations. The patriot who lays down his life for the safety of this society—or even for its vain-glory!—appears to do precisely the right thing. He appears to view himself in the way the impartial spectator has to view him, as merely one of the multitude, of no more importance than any of the others, and as bound at all times to sacrifice and devote himself to the safety, the service, and even the glory of the greater number. Although this sacrifice seems to be perfectly right and proper, we know how hard it is to make it and how few people are capable of making it. So someone who does sacrifice himself in this way arouses not only our entire approval but our highest wonder and admiration; he seems

to deserve all the applause that the most heroic virtue can deserve. On the other side, the traitor who in some special situation imagines he can promote his own interests by betraying the interests of his native country appears to be of all villains the most detestable. He is disregarding the judgment of the man within the breast, and shamefully and basely putting himself ahead of all those with whom he has any connection.

Our love for our own nation often disposes us to look with malignant jealousy and envy at the prospering of any neighbouring nation. All nations live in continual dread and suspicion of their neighbours, because there is no independent superior ·to whom they can appeal· to decide their disputes. Each sovereign, not expecting much justice from his neighbours, is inclined to treat them with as little justice as he expects from them. There are laws of nations—rules that independent states claim to think they are obliged to conform to in their dealings with one another—but the regard for those laws is often little more than mere pretence. [Citing an example from ancient Rome, Smith distinguishes •the defensible wish for neighbouring nations not to have too much power from •the coarsely primitive wish for neighbouring nations to fail in every way. Then:] France and England may each have some reason to fear the other's increase of the naval and military power, but for either of them to envy

the internal happiness and prosperity of the other, the cultivation of its lands, the advancement of its manufactures, the increase of its commerce, the security and number of its ports and harbours, its proficiency in all the liberal arts and sciences,

is surely beneath the dignity of two such great nations. Those are all real improvements of the world we live in. . . . They all proper objects of national emulation, not of national prejudice or envy. [To 'emulate' something is to *try to copy* it.]

The love for our own country seems not to come from love for mankind—and indeed sometimes seems to dispose us to act in ways that are inconsistent with a love for mankind. France has nearly three times the population of Great Britain, so that within the great society of mankind France's prosperity should appear to be much more important than Great Britain's. Yet a British subject who took that view and accordingly always preferred France's prosperity to Great Britain's would *not* be thought a good citizen of Great Britain. We don't love our country merely as a part of the great society of mankind; we love it for its own sake, and independently of any thoughts about mankind in general. The wisdom that designed the system of human affections, as well as the system of every other part of nature, seems to have thought that the best way to further the interests of the great society of mankind would be for each individual to attend primarily to the particular portion of it that lies most within the sphere both of his abilities and of his understanding.

National prejudices and hatreds seldom extend beyond neighbouring nations. We may weakly and foolishly call the French our 'natural enemies', and it may be that they, equally weakly and foolishly, think the same about us. Neither they nor we have any sort of envy for the prosperity of China or Japan, though we can't often employ our good-will towards such distant countries in any way that does them much good.

The most extensive public benevolence that can commonly be exercised to good effect is that of statesmen who plan and create alliances among neighbouring or near-neighbouring nations, for the preservation of the so-called 'balance of power' or of the general peace and tranquillity of the states that are involved. Yet the statesmen who plan and implement such treaties are seldom *aiming at* anything but the interest of their respective countries; though sometimes

they are looking wider than that. [Smith suggests some historical examples.]

Every independent state is divided into many different orders and societies, each of which has its own particular powers, privileges, and immunities. Every individual is naturally more attached to his own particular order or society than to any other. His own interests, his own vanity, the interests and vanity of many of his friends and companions, commonly have a lot to do with this: he is ambitious to extend this group's privileges and immunities, and is zealous to defend them against the encroachments of every other order or society.

What is called the *constitution* of any particular state depends on how that state is divided into the different orders and societies that make it up, and on how powers, privileges, and immunities have been distributed among them.

The *stability* of a state's constitution depends on the ability of each of its particular orders or societies to maintain its own powers, privileges, and immunities against the encroachments of all the others. A particular constitution inevitably undergoes *some* change whenever the rank and condition of any of its subordinate parts goes up or down.

All those different orders and societies depend on the state to which they belong, because it's to the state that they owe their security and protection. Even the most biased member of any one of them will agree to this—i.e. will agree that his order or society is subordinate to the state, and dependent for its existence on the prosperity and preservation of the state as a whole. But it may be hard to convince such a person that the prosperity and preservation of the state requires any lessening of the powers etc. of his own particular order or society. This bias is sometimes unjust, but that doesn't mean that it is useless. It holds back the spirit of innovation, tending to preserve the established

balance among the different orders and societies into which the state is divided. While it sometimes appears to obstruct some political changes that may be fashionable and popular at the time, it really helps to make the whole system stable and permanent.

The love of our country ordinarily seems to have two motivational drivers: **(1)** a certain respect and reverence for the constitution or form of government that is actually established; and **(2)** an earnest desire to make our fellow-citizens as safe, respectable, and happy as we can. Someone who isn't disposed **(1)** to respect the laws and to obey the lawful authorities •is not a citizen; and someone who doesn't want to **(2)** do everything he possibly can to promote the welfare of the whole society of his fellow-citizens •is not a *good* citizen.

In times of peace those two motivations generally coincide and lead to the same conduct. It seems obvious that the best way of maintaining the safe, respectable, and happy situation of our fellow-citizens is to support the established government—when we see that this government *does* maintain them in that situation. But in times of public discontent, faction, and disorder those two motivations can pull in different directions, and even a wise man may be inclined to think that the present government appears plainly unable to maintain public tranquillity and that some change should be made in its constitution or form. In such cases, however, it often needs the highest effort of political wisdom for a real patriot to decide whether to **(1)** support and try to re-establish the authority of the old system or rather **(2)** to go along with the more daring but often dangerous spirit of innovation.

Foreign war and civil faction provide the most splendid opportunities for the display of public spirit. The hero who serves his country successfully in foreign war satisfies the wishes of the whole nation, which makes him an object

of universal gratitude and admiration. In times of civil discord, the leaders of the opposing parties may be admired by half their fellow-citizens but are likely to be cursed by the other half. Their characters and the merit of their respective services often seem more doubtful, which is why the glory that is acquired through foreign war is almost always purer and more splendid than any that can be acquired through civil faction.

Yet the leader of the successful party in a factional dispute, if he has enough authority to prevail on his own friends to act with moderation (and often he doesn't!), may be able to serve his country in a much more essential and important way than the greatest victories and the most extensive conquests in foreign wars. . . .

Amidst the turbulence and disorder of faction, •a certain spirit of *system* is apt to mix itself with •the public spirit that is based on the love of humanity, on a real fellow-feeling with the difficulties and distresses to which some of our fellow-citizens are exposed. This spirit of system commonly goes in the same direction as that gentler public spirit, pumping energy into it and often inflaming it even to the madness of fanaticism. Nearly always the leaders of the discontented party display some plausible plan of reformation which, they claim, will not only remove the difficulties and relieve the distresses immediately complained of, but will prevent anything like them from *ever* occurring again. To this end they propose to rebuild the constitution, altering some of the most essential parts of a system of government under which the subjects of a great empire may have enjoyed peace, security, and even glory through a period of several centuries. The great mass of party-members are commonly intoxicated with the imaginary beauty of this ideal system: they have had no experience of it, but it has been represented to them in the most dazzling colours in which the eloquence of their

leaders could paint it. [Calling it 'ideal', Smith means merely that it exists only as an *idea* that someone has.] Many of those leaders themselves, though they may at first have aimed only at a growth of their own personal power, eventually become dupes of their own sophistry, and are as eager for this great reformation as the weakest and stupidest of their followers. There are other leaders who keep their own heads free from this fanaticism, but don't dare to disappoint the expectation of their followers; so they are constantly forced to act as if they were under the common delusion, doing this in defiance of their principles and their conscience. The violence of the party, refusing all offers of reasonable compromise, by requiring too much often gets *nothing*; and difficulties and distresses which with a little moderation might have been considerably removed and relieved are left with absolutely no hope of a remedy.

A man whose public spirit is prompted only by humaneness and benevolence will respect the established powers and privileges of individuals, and even more those of the great orders and societies into which the state is divided. If he regards some of them as somewhat abusive, he'll settle for •moderating things that he often can't •annihilate without great violence. . . . He will do his best to •accommodate public arrangements to the confirmed habits and prejudices of the people, and to •remedy any inconveniences that flow from the lack of regulations that the people are unwilling to submit to. When he can't establish the right, he won't be too proud to ameliorate the wrong. Like Solon, when he can't establish the best system of laws he will try to establish the best that the people can bear.

The man of system is nothing like that. He is apt to be sure of his own wisdom, and is often so in love with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government that he can't allow the slightest deviation from any part of it. He

goes on to establish it completely and in detail, paying no attention to the great interests or the strong prejudices that may oppose it. He seems to imagine that he can arrange the members of a great society as easily as a hand arranges the pieces on a chess-board! He forgets that the chessmen's *only* source of motion is what the hand impresses on them, whereas in the great chess-board of human society every single piece has its own •private• source of motion, quite different from anything that the legislature might choose to impress on it. If •those two sources coincide and act in the same direction, the game of human society will go on easily and harmoniously, and is likely to be happy and successful. If •they are opposite or different, the game will go on miserably and the society will be in the highest degree of disorder all the time.

The views of a statesman need, no doubt, to be guided by some •general idea of the perfect state of policy and law—perhaps even a •systematic idea of these. But to insist on establishing *everything* that that idea may seem to require, and on establishing it all at once and in spite of all opposition, must often be the highest degree of arrogance. The statesman who does that is holding up his own judgment as the supreme standard of right and wrong. He imagines himself to be the only wise and worthy man in the commonwealth, and thinks that his fellow-citizens should accommodate themselves to him and not he to them. That is why of all political theorists sovereign princes are by far the most dangerous! This arrogance •that I have just described• is perfectly familiar to them. They have no doubt as to the immense superiority of their own judgment. So when such imperial and royal reformers are graciously willing to give thought to the humdrum topic of the constitution of the country they have to govern, the worst things they see in it are obstructions that the country sometimes sets up against



the carrying out of their own will. They...consider the state as made for themselves, not themselves for the state. So the great object of their 'reformation' is to remove those obstructions, to reduce the authority of the nobility, to take away the privileges of cities and provinces, and to bring it about that the greatest individuals *and* the greatest orders of the state are as incapable of opposing their commands as the weakest and most insignificant.

### Chapter 3: Universal benevolence

Although our effective *help* can't often be extended to any society wider than that of our own country, our *good-will* isn't hemmed in by any boundary—it can embrace the universe. We can't form any idea of an innocent and sentient being whom we wouldn't want to be happy. . . . The idea of a mischievous sentient being naturally provokes our hatred; but our hostility to such a being is really an effect of our universal benevolence. It comes from our sympathy for the misery and resentment of the other innocent and sentient beings whose happiness is disturbed by the malice of this one.

This universal benevolence, however noble and generous it may be, can't be the source of any solid happiness for any man who isn't thoroughly convinced that *all* the inhabitants of the universe, low and high, are under the immediate care and protection of the great, benevolent, and all-wise Being who •directs all the movements of nature, and who •is determined [here = 'caused'] by his own unalterable perfections to maintain in it always the greatest possible amount of happiness. To •someone who has• this universal benevolence the mere *suspicion* of a fatherless world must be the saddest of all thoughts, involving the thought that all the unknown regions of infinite and incomprehensible space may be filled

with nothing but endless misery and wretchedness. All the splendour of the highest prosperity can't lighten the gloom that this dreadful idea must necessarily inflict on imagination; just as, in a wise and virtuous man, all the sorrow of the most terrible adversity can't ever dry up the joy that necessarily arises from the habitual and thorough conviction of the truth of the contrary system, •i.e. the truth of theism•.

The wise and virtuous man is always willing for his own private interest to be sacrificed to the public interest of his own particular order or society. He is always willing, too, for the interests of this order or society to be sacrificed to the greater interests of the state of which it is a subordinate part. So he should be equally willing for all those inferior interests to be sacrificed to the greater interests of the universe—of the great society of all sentient and thinking beings whose immediate administrator and director is God himself. If he *really does believe* that this benevolent and all-wise Being can't allow any partial evil that isn't necessary for the universal good, he must regard all the misfortunes that may happen to himself, his friends, his society, or country as necessary for the prosperity of the universe. This involves believing that not only should he patiently put up with them but also that his attitude should be: 'If I had known all the connections and dependences of things, I would have sincerely and devoutly wanted all those misfortunes to happen.'

This noble-minded acceptance of the will of the great Director of the universe doesn't seem to be beyond the reach of human nature. Good soldiers who both love and trust their general often march with more alacrity and gaiety •to a **forlorn station** from which they don't expect to return than they would •to one that didn't involve difficulty or danger. [Smith contrasts these as •'the noblest thing a man can do' and •'the dullness of ordinary duty' respectively; and he

likens the former of them to what a convinced theist is called upon to do:] No conductor of an army can deserve more unlimited trust. . . .than the great Conductor of the universe. In the greatest disasters a wise man ought to think that he himself, his friends and his countrymen have only been ordered to the **forlorn station** of the universe; that they wouldn't have been so ordered if it hadn't been necessary for the good of the whole; and that it's their duty not only to accept this order humbly but to try to embrace it with alacrity and joy. Surely a wise man should be capable of doing what a good soldier is at all times ready to do.

The idea of

the divine Being whose benevolence and wisdom have from all eternity directed the immense machine of the universe so as to produce at every moment the greatest possible amount of happiness

is the most sublime thought human beings can have. Every other thought necessarily appears mean in comparison with it. We usually have the highest veneration for anyone whom we believe to be principally occupied with this sublime thought; even if his life is altogether contemplative, we often regard him with a higher kind of religious respect than we

have for the most active and useful servant of the commonwealth. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, which are mainly devoted to this subject, may have contributed more to the general admiration of his character than everything he did in the course of his just, merciful, and beneficent reign—as emperor of Rome.

Still, the administration of the great system of the universe—the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sentient beings—is God's business, not man's. Man is assigned a role that is much humbler but also much more suitable to the limited nature of his powers and his intellect—namely the care of his own happiness and of the happiness of his family, his friends, his country. A man can't be excused for neglecting this humbler task on the grounds that he is busy contemplating the more sublime one! Marcus Aurelius was accused, perhaps wrongly, of doing this. It was said that while he was busy with philosophical speculations and thoughts about the welfare of the universe he neglected the welfare of the Roman empire. The most sublime theory-building of the contemplative philosopher can hardly compensate for the neglect of the smallest active duty.

### Section 3: Self-control

A man who acts according to the rules of perfect prudence, strict justice, and proper benevolence may be said to be perfectly virtuous. But a complete knowledge of those rules won't, unaided, enable him to act in this manner. His own passions play a role in this, and they are apt to mislead

him—sometimes driving him to violate all the rules that in his sober and cool hours he approves of, and sometimes seducing him into doing this. The most perfect knowledge won't always enable him to do his duty if it isn't supported by the most perfect self-control.

Some of the best ancient moralists seem to have divided passions into two classes: **(1)** those that can't be restrained, even for a moment, by a considerable exertion of self-control; and **(2)** those that it's easy to restrain for a short period of time, although over the course of a lifetime they are apt to lead us far astray through their continual quiet urgings.

**(1)** The first class consists of •fear and •anger and some other passions that are mixed or connected with those two. **(2)** The second class contains love of ease, of pleasure, of applause, and of many other selfish satisfactions. Extravagant fear and furious anger are often hard to restrain, even for a moment. As for the love of ease and the others in **(2)**, it's always easy to restrain those for a short period of time; but through their continual urgings they often mislead us into weaknesses that we later have much reason to be ashamed of. We could say that the **(1)** passions •drive us from our duty, whereas the **(2)** passions •seduce us from it. The ancient moralists that I have referred to used the labels 'fortitude', 'manliness', and 'strength of mind' for control over the passions in group **(1)**; and 'temperance', 'decency', 'modesty', and 'moderation' for control over the ones in group **(2)**.

Control of each of those sets of passions has a beauty that comes from its utility—from its enabling us always to act according to the dictates of prudence, of justice, and of proper benevolence. But it also has an ·intrinsic· beauty of its own, and seems to deserve a certain degree of esteem and admiration for its own sake, because of the qualities of the exertion involved in such self-control—its strength and greatness with passions in group **(1)**, and its uniformity, evenness and unflinching steadiness in group **(2)**.

A man who keeps his tranquillity unaltered at a time when he is in danger, or being tortured, or nearing death, and doesn't allow a word or gesture to escape him that

doesn't perfectly match the feelings of the most uninvolved spectator, inevitably commands a high degree of admiration from us. [Smith elaborates on this, mentioning great men of the remote past (Socrates) and of the more recent past (Sir Thomas More) who went to their deaths in a calm and dignified manner, and whose great posthumous reputation has derived from this. We even have a certain admiration for a truly wicked man who deserves to be sent to the gallows, if he goes there 'with decency and firmness'.]

War is the great school both for acquiring and for exercising this sort of magnanimity. Death is called the 'king' of terrors; and a man who has conquered his fear of death isn't likely to be thrown off-balance by the approach of any other natural evil. In war, men become familiar with death, and this cures them of the superstitious horror with which death is viewed by weak and inexperienced. They consider it merely as the loss of life, and as an object of aversion only to the extent that life happens to be an object of desire. Also, they learn from experience that many seemingly great dangers are not as great as they appear, and that with courage, energy and presence of mind they often have a good chance of extricating themselves with honour from situations where at first they could see no hope. [Smith elaborates on our admiration for the calmly bold warrior, even one who is fighting on the wrong side in a wicked war.]

Control over anger often seems to be just as generous [see note on page 11] and noble as control over fear. Many of the most admired examples of ancient and modern eloquence have been *proper* expressions of righteous indignation. The speeches of Demosthenes against Philip of Macedonia, and Cicero's speeches against Catiline, derive all their beauty from the noble propriety with which indignation is expressed in them. And this just indignation is simply anger restrained and properly damped down to something that the impartial

spectator can enter into. The blustering and noisy passion that goes beyond this is always odious and offensive, and it draws us in not on the side of the angry man but on the side of the man he is angry with. The nobleness of pardoning often seems better than even the most perfect propriety of resenting. When

- the offending party has properly acknowledged what he did, or even without that when
- the public interest requires that mortal enemies should unite to carry out some important duty,

the man who sets aside all animosity and acts with confidence and cordiality towards the person who has most grievously offended him seems to be entitled to our highest admiration.

But the command of anger doesn't always appear in such splendid colours. Fear is contrary to anger, and is often the motive that restrains it; and in such cases the lowness of the motive takes away the nobleness of the restraint. Anger prompts us to attack, and giving way to it seems sometimes to show a sort of courage and superiority to fear. People sometimes take pride in having acted on their anger; no-one takes pride in having acted out of fear! . . .

Acting according to the dictates of prudence, justice, and proper beneficence seems to have no great merit when there's no temptation to do otherwise. But

- acting with cool deliberation in the midst of the greatest dangers and difficulties,
- observing religiously the sacred rules of justice, in spite of being tempted by self-interest and provoked by great injuries to violate them; and
- never allowing the benevolence of our temperament to be damped or discouraged by malignity and ingratitude on the part of some beneficiaries,

is the character of the most exalted wisdom and virtue.

Self-control is not only itself a great virtue, but it seems to be the source of most of the *glow* of all the other virtues.

Control over one's fear and over one's anger are always great and noble powers; and when they're directed by justice and benevolence they increase the splendour of those other virtues as well as being great virtues themselves. But when they are directed by other motives they can be (though still great and respectable) excessively dangerous. [Calm self-control in the deceitful pursuit of really bad objectives has sometimes been admired by people with good judgment, Smith says; and he cites examples, ancient and modern. Then:] This character of dark and deep dissimulation occurs most commonly in times of great public disorder, in the violence of faction and civil war. When the law has become largely powerless, when perfect innocence can't guarantee safety, a concern for self-defence obliges most men to resort to dexterity, to skill, and to *apparent* agreement with whatever party happens to be uppermost at the moment. This false character is also often accompanied by cool and determined courage, which is needed because being detected in such a deception often leads to death. . . .

Control over one's less violent and turbulent passions seems less open to being abused for any pernicious purpose. Temperance, decency, modesty, and moderation are always likeable, and can seldom be directed to any bad end. It is from the unremitting steadiness of those gentler exercises of self-control that the likeable virtue of •chastity and the respectable virtues of •industry and •frugality derive all the sober *shine* that they have. The conduct of everyone who is content to walk in the humble paths of private and peaceable life has a beauty and grace that are less •dazzling but not always less •pleasing than the beauty and grace of the more splendid actions of the hero, the statesman, or the legislator.

After what I have already said in different parts of this work concerning the nature of self-control, I don't think I need to go into any more detail concerning those virtues. All I'll say now is that the intensity-scale's •point of propriety, the •degree of a passion that the impartial spectator approves of, is differently placed for different passions. **(1)** Of some passions it's better to have too much than to have too little, an excess being less disagreeable than a shortage; and in such passions the point of propriety seems to stand high—i.e. nearer to 'too much' than to 'too little'. **(2)** With other passions a shortage is less disagreeable than an excess; and their point of propriety seems to stand low—i.e. nearer to 'too little' than to 'too much'. The **(1)** passions are the ones the spectator is most disposed to sympathize with, the **(2)** the ones he is least likely to sympathize with. Also, the **(1)** passions are the ones that *feel* good to the person who has the passion, and the **(2)** passions are the ones that feel bad to the person who has them. So out of this we get a general rule:

- (1)** The passions that the spectator is most disposed to sympathize with, and that have a correspondingly high point of propriety, are the ones that feel good to the person who has them; and
- (2)** the passions that the spectator is least disposed to sympathize with, and that have a correspondingly low point of propriety, are the ones that feel disagreeable to the person who has them.

I haven't found a single exception to this general rule. A few examples will sufficiently explain it while also demonstrating its truth. [Smith's 'few examples' and his comments on them fill the remaining *thirty* book-pages of this section. The present version will reduce the length considerably.]

It's possible for someone to be •too much disposed to have the affections that tend to unite men in society—

humaneness, kindness, natural affection, friendship, esteem. [Notice that in that sentence Smith uses 'affections' in the broad sense and 'affection' in the narrow one—see note on page 6.] But even this •excess makes the person interesting to everybody [=, roughly, 'gives us all a concern for him, puts us all on his side, sort of']. We blame him for it, but we still regard it with compassion and even with kindness, and never with dislike. We're sorry rather than angry about it. To the person himself, having such excessive affections is often not only agreeable but delicious. On some occasions, especially when directed towards unworthy objects (as it too often is), it exposes him to much real and heartfelt distress. Even then, though, a well-disposed person will regard him with intense pity, and will be highly indignant with those who despise him as weak and imprudent. As for having •too little disposition to have such feelings—what we call 'hardness of heart'—it makes a man insensitive to the feelings and distresses of other people, while also making them insensitive to *his*. This excludes him from the friendship of all the world, cutting him off from the best and most comfortable of all social enjoyments.

As for the disposition to have the affections that drive men away from one another, tending to break the bands of human society (so to speak)—i.e. the disposition to anger, hatred, envy, malice, revenge—one is more apt to offend by having too much of this disposition than by having too little. Having too much of it makes a man wretched and miserable in his own mind, and draws down on him the hatred, and sometimes even the horror, of other people. It's not often that anyone is complained of for having too little of this disposition, but there *is* such a thing as having too little of it. The lack of proper indignation is a most essential defect in the manly character, and it often makes a man incapable of protecting himself or his friends from insult and injustice. The odious and detestable passion of envy consists in a

misdirected excess of a certain motivational drive, and it's possible to have *too little* of that drive. Envy is the passion that views with malignant dislike the greater success of people who are really entitled to all the success they have had. A man who in matters of consequence tamely allows other people who are *not* entitled to any such success to rise above him or get before him is rightly condemned as poor-spirited. This weakness is commonly based on laziness, sometimes on good nature, on a dislike for confrontation and for bustle and pleading, and sometimes also on a sort of ill-judged magnanimity. [This last basis for poor-spiritedness, Smith says, involves the person's having a dismissive attitude to the advantages that he is passing up, and fancying that he'll be able to keep up this attitude indefinitely. He is apt to be wrong in this belief, and to end up with 'a most malignant envy' and hatred for the success of the others.]

One is more likely to offend by •being too sensitive to personal danger and distress than by •not being sensitive enough to these. (This is similar to being too sensitive or not sensitive enough to personal provocation.) No character is more contemptible than that of a coward; no character is more admired than that of the man who faces death bravely, maintaining his tranquillity and presence of mind amidst the most dreadful dangers. [Smith develops this line of thought, mainly repeating things he has said earlier.]

But although our sensitivity to our own injuries and misfortunes is usually •too strong, it *can* be •too weak. A man who feels little for his own misfortunes will always feel less for those of other people, and be less disposed to relieve them. [And so on, as Smith develops the general theme that a proper care for the welfare of others requires a proper care for one's own interests. The most striking thing here is the description of the internalized impartial spectator as 'the great inmate, the great demi-god within the breast'.]

[Then a paragraph about a moral risk involved in having too fine a sensitivity to personal injury, danger and distress. It's possible to have this and yet behave well, Smith says, because this extreme sensitivity can be controlled by 'the authority of the judge within the breast'. But this may be too fatiguing for the inner judge, giving him 'too much to do'. In such a case, Smith says, there will be a constant inner conflict between (for example) cowardice and conscience, depriving the person of 'internal tranquillity and happiness'. He continues:] A wise man whom Nature has endowed with this too-fine sensitivity, and whose too-lively feelings haven't been sufficiently blunted and hardened by early education and proper exercise, will do whatever he decently can to avoid situations for which he isn't perfectly fitted. . . . A certain boldness, a certain firmness of nerves and hardness of constitution, whether natural or acquired, are undoubtedly the best preparatives for all the great exercises of self-control. . . .

It is also possible to have too much, or to have too little, sensitivity to the pleasures, amusements and enjoyments of human life. Having too much seems less disagreeable than having too little. A •strong propensity for joy is certainly more pleasing—to the person himself and to the spectator—than a •dull numbness towards objects of amusement and diversion. We are charmed with the gaiety of youth, and even with the playfulness of childhood, but we soon grow weary of the flat and tasteless solemnity that too often accompanies old age. It can happen that a great propensity for joy etc. isn't restrained by a sense of propriety—is unsuitable to the time or the place, or to the age or the situation of the person—so that in giving way to it the person is neglecting his interests or his duty; and when that happens, the propensity is rightly blamed as excessive, and as harmful both to the individual and to the society. But in most of these cases the chief fault is not so much the strength of the propensity for joy as the

weakness of the sense of propriety and duty. . . .

[The twenty-odd book-pages that Smith has ahead of him in this section are entirely devoted to 'self-estimation'—thinking too highly of oneself, not thinking highly enough of oneself, or getting it right.]

One's estimate of oneself may be too high, and it may be too low. It is so agreeable to think highly of ourselves, and so disagreeable to take a low view of ourselves, that for the person himself some degree of over-rating must be much less disagreeable than any degree of under-rating. But it may be thought that things must appear quite differently to the impartial spectator, who must always find under-rating less disagreeable than over-rating. . . .

In estimating our own merit, judging our own character and conduct, there are two different standards to which we naturally compare them. **(1)** One is the idea of *exact propriety and perfection*, so far as each of us can comprehend that idea. **(2)** The other is the idea of *a certain approximation to exact propriety and perfection*—specifically, the degree of perfection etc. that is commonly achieved in the world, the degree that most of our friends and companions, and most of our rivals and competitors, may have actually arrived at. We don't often—I'm inclined to think we don't *ever*—try to judge ourselves without paying some attention to both these standards. But different men distribute their attention between them differently; so indeed does one man at different times.

So far as our attention is directed towards **(1)** the first standard, even the wisest and best of us can see nothing but weakness and imperfection in his own character and conduct, finding no reason for arrogance and presumption, and plenty of reason for humility, regret and repentance. So far as our attention is directed towards **(2)** the second standard, we may be affected in either way, feeling ourselves to be really above the standard to which we are comparing

ourselves, or really below it.

The wise and virtuous man directs his attention mainly to **(1)** the first standard, the idea of exact propriety and perfection. There exists in every man's mind an idea of this kind, gradually formed from his observations on the character and conduct both of himself and of other people. It is slowly and steadily under construction by the great demigod within the breast, the great judge and arbiter of conduct. [Smith writes about how the wise and virtuous man constantly measures himself against this standard, trying to get closer to it in his own character and conduct. But never fully succeeding, because, Smith says, 'he is imitating the work of a divine artist, which can never be equalled'. He may cheer himself up by comparing himself with **(2)** the second standard, 'but he is necessarily much more humbled by **(1)** one comparison than he ever can be elevated by **(2)** the other'. And he won't let the results of **(2)** the second comparison lead him to behave arrogantly or dismissively towards other people.]

In all the liberal and ingenious arts [see note on page 99]—painting, poetry, music, eloquence, philosophy—the great artist always feels the real imperfection of his own best works, and is more aware than anyone else is of how far short they fall of the ideal perfection of which he has formed some conception. He does what he can to imitate that ideal, but he despairs of ever equalling it. Only the inferior artist is ever perfectly satisfied with his own works. He has little conception of ideal perfection, and doesn't think about it much. What he mostly compares his works with are the works of other artists, perhaps less good artists than he is. [Smith decorates this point with an anecdote: a great French poet said that no great man is ever completely satisfied with his own works, and an inferior poet replied that *he* was always completely satisfied with *his*! Smith then goes on

to say that the situation of an artist in relation to his work is *not* after all a good model of the situation of a good man in relation to his whole life. He handles this point in terms not of **(1)** as a standard by which to *evaluate* one's work or one's life but rather of it as a standard by which to *make* one's works or to *live* one's life:] But to support and finish off (if I may put it that way) the conduct of a whole life to some resemblance to this ideal perfection is surely much more difficult than to work up to an equal resemblance any of the productions of any of the ingenious arts. The artist sits down to his work undisturbed, at leisure, in the full possession and recollection of all his skill, experience, and knowledge. The wise man must support the propriety of his own conduct in health and in sickness, in success and in disappointment, in the hour of fatigue and drowsy indolence as well as in that of the most awakened attention. The most sudden and unexpected assaults of difficulty and distress must never surprise him. The injustice of other people must never provoke him to injustice. The violence of faction must never confound him. All the hardships and hazards of war must never either dishearten or appal him.

[The next topic is the person who, when he judges himself by **(2)** the second standard—the one set by how well the general run of people are performing—*rightly* thinks that he is 'very much above it'. If this person doesn't attend carefully to **(1)** the ideal standard (and most such people *don't*), he will become arrogant and inappropriately self-admiring, and will often persuade the gullible multitude to take him at his (over-)valuation. This creates for him a kind of 'noisy fame' that may stay with him down the centuries. It may be—Smith allows—that a high-achieving person *needed* this self-overestimation—both to embolden him to embark on his ventures and to get others to join and support him in them. But if he becomes (by worldly standards) extremely success-

ful while still having this unduly high opinion of himself, he may be betrayed into 'a vanity that approaches almost to insanity and folly'. Smith cites the ancient examples of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Intelligent as Caesar was, he says, he *liked* being said to have descended from the goddess Venus; and he was guilty of various instances of 'an almost childish vanity', which may have helped to motivate his assassins. Then:] The religion and manners of modern times don't encourage our great men to think they are gods or even prophets. But the combination of success and popularity has led many of the greatest of them to credit themselves with far more importance and far more ability than they really possess; and this has sometimes pushed them into rash and sometimes ruinous adventures. [The only exception to this in modern times, Smith says, is the great Duke of Marlborough, an enormously successful general who was never undermined by immodesty.]

In the humble projects of private life as well as in the ambitious and proud pursuit of high rank and high office, great ability and success at the outset often encourage people to tackle projects that are bound to lead to bankruptcy and ruin in the end.

[Smith now embarks on four book-pages of reflection about how self-overestimation figures in the lives and reputations of notably able people who are guilty of it. He repeats at length that it can be an aid to success but can also be a trap, leading the person to ruin himself in one way or another; and he describes in glowing terms the situation of an able person who is truly modest. He speculates on the interplay, in a great man's reputation, between knowledge of his real successes and inflated beliefs about how great he was—e.g. what would Caesar's reputation be *now* if he had lost the battle of Pharsalia? He describes in some detail the disgusting moral depths to which a great man—Alexander



the Great—descended because of the weight of his grossly exaggerated idea of who he was. And he also describes a further upshot:] The humble, admiring, and flattering friends whom Alexander left in power and authority at his death divided his empire among themselves, and after having thus robbed his family and kindred of their inheritance, put to death every single surviving member of the family, male and female, one by one.

[The next paragraph leads Smith into one special department of the self-overestimation topic, a department that will be his topic through the remaining ten book-pages of the section:] Faced with the excessive self-estimation of the splendid people in whom we observe a notable superiority above (2) the common level of mankind, we don't just •pardon it but often •thoroughly enter into it and sympathize with it. We call such people 'spirited', 'magnanimous', and 'high-minded'—labels that all convey a considerable degree of praise and admiration. But we can't enter into and sympathize with •the excessive self-estimation of people in whom we don't see any such distinguished superiority. We're disgusted and revolted by •it, and we find it hard to forgive and hard to put up with! We call it 'pride', a word that •usually conveys a considerable degree of blame, or 'vanity', a word that •always does so. [This version will use those two words exactly as Smith does, not getting into questions about whether what they meant to him is exactly what they mean to us. (Hume in *Treatise II* treats them as synonyms.)]

Pride and vanity are alike in some ways, because each is a variety of self-overestimation; but in many respects they are different.

The proud man is sincere: he really is thoroughly convinced of his own superiority, though it's not always easy to see what this conviction is based on. He wants you to view him in just the way he views himself when he looks

at himself from your viewpoint. All he demands from you (he thinks) is justice. If you seem not to respect him as he respects himself, he is offended rather than humiliated, and feels the kind of indignant resentment he would feel if you had harmed him in some way. (•He would feel humiliated only if he had a *tentative* high opinion of himself and was looking to you to confirm him in it. •) Even then, he doesn't condescend to explain his reasons for his own conviction of his worth. He is too proud to make an effort to win your esteem. He even acts as though he despises it, and tries to keep his end up by making you aware not of how high he is but of how low you are. He seems to want not so much to arouse your esteem for *him* as to grind down your esteem for yourself.

The vain man is not sincere: he usually isn't convinced, in his heart of hearts, that he really has the superiority that he wants you to ascribe to him. He wants you to view him in much more splendid colours than those in which he can view himself when he places himself in your situation and supposes you to know everything that he knows. So when it seems that you view him in different colours, perhaps in his proper colours, he is humiliated rather than offended. He takes every opportunity to display the grounds for his claim to the character that he wants you to ascribe to him; he does this by ostentatious and unnecessary parades of the good qualities and accomplishments that he does possess in some tolerable degree, and sometimes even by false claims to good qualities that he *doesn't* have, or that he does have but only in such a low degree that he might as well be said not to have them at all. Far from despising your esteem, he anxiously and busily courts it. Far from wishing to grind down your self-estimation, he is happy to accept it, in the hope that you will accept his own in return. He flatters in order to be flattered. He works on pleasing people; and he

tries to bribe you into a good opinion of him by politeness and acceptance, and sometimes even by giving real and essential help—though often in an unnecessarily showy manner.

The vain man sees the respect that is paid to rank and fortune, and wants to usurp this respect as well as respect for talents and virtues. So his dress, his art collection, his carriage and horses, his way of living all announce a higher rank and a greater fortune than he really has; and in order to support this foolish deception for a few years early in his life, he often reduces himself to poverty and distress later on. . . . Of all the illusions of vanity this may be the most common. Obscure strangers visiting foreign countries, or paying a brief visit to the capital of their own country, often try to practise it; and although this is foolish and most unworthy of a man of sense, it isn't quite as foolish in these cases as it is on most other occasions. If their visit is short, they may escape any disgraceful detection; and after they have given full play to their vanity for a few months or a few years, they can return home and start living frugally so as to recover from the extravagant spending during the visit.

A proud man is seldom guilty of this folly. His sense of his own dignity makes him careful not to become anyone's dependent; and if his fortune isn't large he will—while wanting to be decent—be carefully frugal and careful in all his expenses. He is offended by the vain man's ostentatious extravagance, which may out-spend his own. It provokes his indignation as an insolent assumption of a rank to which the vain man isn't entitled, and he never talks about it without loading it with the harshest and severest reproaches.

The proud man doesn't always feel at his ease in the company of his equals, let alone his superiors. He can't give up •his lofty claims, and the faces and conversation of such company awe him so much that he doesn't dare to display •them. He resorts to humbler company, for which he has

little respect, and which he wouldn't *willingly* choose and doesn't find in the least agreeable—I mean the company of his inferiors, his flatterers, and his dependants. He seldom visits his superiors; and when he does, it's not because he will get any real satisfaction from such a visit, but rather to show that he is *entitled* to keep such people company. As Lord Clarendon says about the Earl of Arundel: he sometimes went to court because that's the only place where he could he could find a greater man than himself, and he seldom went to court because it's a place where he found a greater man than himself!

The vain man is different. He seeks the company of his superiors as much as the proud man shuns it. He seems to think that *their* splendour reflects a splendour onto those who are often in their company. He haunts the courts of kings and the receptions of ministers, and puts on the manner of someone who is •a candidate for fortune and promotion, when really he has the much more precious happiness, if he knew how to enjoy it, of *not* being •one! [Smith adds details about how the vain man treats his superiors, ending with:] . . . often flattery, though mostly pleasant flattery delivered with a light touch, and seldom the gross and overdone flattery of a parasite. The proud man, on the other hand, never flatters, and is often hardly civil to anybody.

Notwithstanding the falsity of its basis, however, vanity is usually a sprightly, cheerful, and often good-natured passion. Pride is always grave, sullen, and severe. Even the falsehoods of the vain man are innocent falsehoods, meant to raise himself, not to lower other people. The proud man (let's be fair) doesn't often go as low as falsehood; but when he does, his falsehoods are far from innocent. They are all trouble-making, and meant to lower other people. He is full of indignation against people who are accorded

a superiority that he thinks they don't deserve; and this makes him energetic in saying what he can to undermine the supposed basis for their superiority, and to pass on, uncritically, stories that discredit them. The worst falsehoods of vanity are all so-called 'white lies'; when pride sinks to the level of falsehoods, they are falsehoods of the opposite colour!

Our dislike of pride and vanity generally inclines us to rank •below rather than above the common level the people we think of as proud or vain. I think we are usually wrong about this, and that the proud man and the vain one are often and perhaps usually a good deal •above the common level, though nowhere near *as much* above it as the proud man thinks he is or as the vain man wants *you* to think he is. . . . Pride is often accompanied by many •respectworthy virtues—truthfulness, integrity, a high sense of honour, cordial and steady friendship, unshakable firmness and resolution. Vanity is often accompanied by many •likeable virtues—humaneness, politeness, a desire to be helpful in all little matters, and sometimes real generosity in great matters. . . . In the last century, the French were accused of vanity by their rivals and enemies, while the Spanish were accused of pride; and foreign nations were inclined to regard the French as more likeable and the Spanish as more respectworthy.

[Smith's next three points can be reported briefly. (i) The word 'vain' is never used approvingly; 'proud' is sometimes used as a term of praise, though when that happens 'pride is being confused with magnanimity'. (ii) A proud man is likely to be too contented with himself to try for self-improvement, unlike the vain man, who would like to have the qualities and talents that people admire. A vain young man shouldn't be discouraged from trying to become something worthy of admiration; and his vanity—which is really just his trying to

get admiration too soon—should be treated with forbearance. (iii) Pride and vanity often go together in one man, and Smith explains why this is natural:] It is natural that a man who thinks more highly of himself than he deserves should want other people to think still more highly of him; and that a man who wants other people to think more highly of him than he thinks of himself should also think more highly of himself than he deserves.

[On page 129 Smith introduced the 'point of propriety' for this or that passion, and discussed 'too much' and 'too little' for various passions. When on page 131 he turned to self-estimation, this led him into two topics—•different standards for self-estimation, and •pride and vanity—that mostly breathed the air of 'too high'. Now at last he is going to discuss the 'too low' side of self-estimation.]

Men whose merit is considerably above the common level sometimes *under*-rate themselves. Such a person is often pleasant to be with, in private: his companions are at ease in the society of such a perfectly modest and unassuming man. But those companions, though they are fond of him, are likely not to have much respect; and the warmth of their fondness usually won't be enough to make up for the coolness of their respect. That won't apply if the companions have more discernment *and* more generosity than people usually have. Men of ordinary discernment never rate a person higher than he appears to rate himself. 'Even *he* seems unsure whether he is perfectly fit for the post we are considering him for', they say, and they immediately appoint some impudent blockhead who has no doubt about *his* qualifications. And even discerning people, if they are mean-minded, will take advantage of his simplicity and impertinently set themselves up as superior to him although they are nothing of the sort. His good nature may enable him to put up with this for some time, but he'll grow tired of it eventually. That is apt to happen when it is too late, i.e. when the rank

that he ought to have had is lost irrecoverably, having been stolen—through his failure to push his own merits—by some more pushy but less meritorious companion. . . . Such a man, too unassuming and unambitious in his younger years, is often insignificant, complaining, and discontented in his old age.

The unfortunate folk whom nature has formed a good deal *below* the common level seem sometimes to rate themselves as even *further* below it than they really are. This humility appears sometimes to sink them into idiotism. [Smith could mean ‘sink them into *behaving like* idiots’ or ‘sink them into *being* idiots’. The ensuing discussion implies a challenge to the very distinction between those two.] Examine idiots carefully and you’ll find that many of them have faculties of understanding that are quite as strong as those of many people who, though acknowledged to be dull and stupid, are not classified as ‘idiots’ by anyone. Many idiots who have had no more than ordinary education have learned to •read, •write, and •do sums tolerably well. And many persons who were never classified as ‘idiots’ and who received careful education have never been able to acquire a reasonable level in any one of •those three accomplishments—not even when, later on in life, they have had spirit enough to try to learn what their early education hadn’t taught them. •They have escaped being classed as ‘idiots’ because •an instinct of pride has led them •to set themselves on a level with their equals in age and situation, and—with courage and firmness—•to maintain their proper station among their companions. By an opposite instinct, the idiot feels himself to be below every company into which you can introduce him. Ill-treatment (which is extremely likely to come his way) can throw him into violent fits of rage and fury. But no good usage, no kindness or patience, can ever raise him to converse with you as your equal. If you can bring him into conversation with

you at all, you’ll often find his answers •relevant enough and even •sensible; but they will always be marked by his strong sense of his own great inferiority. He seems to shrink back from your look and conversation, and to feel—seeing himself from your viewpoint—that despite your apparent kindness to him you can’t help considering him as immensely below you. **(a)** Some idiots—perhaps most idiots—seem really to be immensely below the rest of us, mainly or entirely because of a certain numbness or sluggishness in their faculties of the understanding. But there are **(b)** other idiots whose faculties of understanding don’t appear to be more sluggish or numb than in **(c)** many people who are not regarded as idiots. •Then what is the difference between the **(b)** group and the **(c)** group? It’s that •the instinct of pride that is needed if they are to maintain themselves on a level with their brethren seems to be totally lacking in the **(b)** group and not in the **(c)** group.

So it seems that the degree of self-estimation that contributes most to the happiness and contentment of the person himself seems also to be the degree that is most agreeable to the impartial spectator. The man who values himself as he ought and no more than he ought is nearly always valued by other people at the level that he thinks is right. He wants no more than is due to him, and he settles for that with complete satisfaction.

The proud man and the vain man, on the other hand, are constantly dissatisfied. One is tormented with indignation at the high ranking that other people get (wrongly, he thinks). The other is in continual fear of the shame that he predicts he would suffer if his deceit were discovered. Take the special case of a vain man who makes extravagant claims about himself although he really *does* have a fine mind and splendid abilities and virtues and is also favoured by good luck. His claims will be accepted by the multitude, whose applause

he doesn't care about much; but they won't be accepted by the wise people whose approval is just what he is most anxious to get. He feels that they see through his deceptions and suspects that they despise him for them; and he may well suffer the cruel misfortune of becoming. . . . a furious and vindictive enemy of the very people whose friendship he would have most enjoyed.

Though our dislike for the proud and the vain often inclines us to rank them rather below than above their real level, we seldom venture to treat them badly unless we are provoked by some particular and personal impertinence. In common cases we find it more comfortable to accept their folly and adjust ourselves to it as best we can. But with the man who *under-rates* himself the situation is different: we usually do to *him* all the injustice that he does to himself, and often much more (unless we are more discerning and more generous than most people are). As well as being more unhappy in his own feelings than either the proud or the vain man is, he is much more open than they are to every sort of ill-treatment by other people. It is almost always better to be •a little too proud than to be •in any respect too humble. In the sentiment of self-estimation, some degree of excess seems—to the person himself *and* to the impartial spectator—to be less disagreeable than any degree of defect.

In this respect, therefore, self-estimation is like every other emotion, passion, and habit: the degree that is most agreeable to the impartial spectator is likewise most agreeable to the person himself. . . .

### Conclusion of Part VI

Concern for our own happiness recommends to us the virtue of **(1)** prudence; concern for the happiness of other people recommends to us the virtues of **(2)** justice, which restrains us from harming their happiness, and **(3)** beneficence, which prompts us to promote it. Quite apart from any considerations about the sentiments of other people—facts about what those sentiments

are, or

ought to be, or

would be if such-and-such were the case

—**(1)** prudence is **basically** recommended to us by our selfish affections, and **(2)** justice and **(3)** benevolence by our benevolent ones. But a regard for the sentiments of other people enters the picture after the **basis** is laid, serving to enforce and to direct the practice of all those virtues. Anyone who has for many years walked steadily and uniformly in the paths of prudence, justice, and proper beneficence has been primarily guided in his conduct by a concern for the sentiments of •the imagined impartial spectator, •the great inmate of the breast, •the great judge and arbiter of conduct. If in the course of the day we have in any way swerved from the rules that •he prescribes to us, if we have

**(1)** gone too far or not far enough in our frugality,

**(2)** in any way harmed the interests or happiness of our neighbour (through passion or by mistake), or

**(3)** neglected a clear and proper opportunity to do something *for* those interests and that happiness,

it is this inmate of the breast who, in the evening, challenges us concerning those omissions and violations, and his reproaches often make us blush inwardly for our folly and inattention to our own happiness and for our still greater indifference and inattention to the happiness of other people.

But though the virtues of **(1)** prudence, **(2)** justice, and **(3)** beneficence can at different times be recommended to us almost equally by two different sources (our feelings and those of the impartial spectator), the virtues of **(4)** self-control are in most cases recommended to us almost entirely by one source—our sense of propriety, our regard for the sentiments of the imagined impartial spectator. Without the restraint that *this* imposes, every passion would usually rush headlong to its own gratification. . . . No facts about time or place would restrain vanity from loud and impertinent showing off, or restrain voluptuousness from open, indecent, and scandalous indulgence. In nearly every case, the only thing that overawes all those mutinous and turbulent passions, toning them down into something that the impartial spectator can enter into and sympathize with, is a concern for what the sentiments of other people are, or ought to be, or would be if such-and-such were the case.

It's true that sometimes those passions are restrained not so much by •a sense of their impropriety as by •a prudential consideration of the bad consequences that might follow from letting them have their way. In these cases the passions are *restrained* but aren't always *subdued*, and they often remain lurking in the breast with all their original fury. The man whose anger is restrained by fear doesn't always get rid of

his anger, but only delays acting on it until it is safer for him to do so. Contrast that with the following case:

A man tells someone else about the harm that has been done to him, and immediately feels the fury of his passion being cooled and calmed down through sympathy with the more moderate sentiments of his companion. He adopts those more moderate sentiments for himself, coming to view the harm not in the black and atrocious colours in which he had originally saw it but in the much milder and fairer light in which his companion naturally views it.

This man doesn't just restrain his anger; he to some extent subdues it. The passion becomes really less than it was before, and less capable of arousing him to the violent and bloody revenge that he may at first have thought of inflicting.

When any passion is restrained by the sense of propriety it will be somewhat moderated and subdued. But when a passion is restrained only by prudential considerations of some sort, it is often inflamed by the restraint, and sometimes. . . .it bursts out with tenfold fury and violence in some context where nobody is thinking about the matter and the outburst is merely absurd.

[The remaining three paragraphs of the section are mainly repetitions of things said earlier.]