

An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit

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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.—Shaftesbury divided the work into Books, Parts and Sections, but all their titles are added in this version.—This work is the fourth of the five Treatises in Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.

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Glossary

affection: In the early modern period, ‘affection’ could mean ‘fondness’, as it does today; but it was also often used, as it is in this work, to cover every sort of pro or con attitude—desires, approvals, likings, disapprovals, dislikings, etc.

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

art: In Shaftesbury’s time an ‘art’ was any human activity that involves techniques or rules of procedure. ‘Arts’ in this sense include medicine, farming, and painting.

bad: With one exception (noted when it occurs), every occurrence of ‘bad’ in this work replaces Shaftesbury’s ‘ill’.

evil: This replaces Shaftesbury’s ‘ill’ when that is used as a noun. It means merely ‘something bad’. It is customary in English to use ‘evil’ for this purpose (e.g. ‘pain is an evil’, and ‘the problem of evil’ meaning ‘the problem posed by the existence of bad states of affairs’). Don’t load the word with all the force it has in English when used as an adjective.

generous: It had today’s sense of ‘free in giving’ but also the sense of ‘noble-minded, magnanimous, rich in positive emotions’ etc.

lot: ‘What is given to a person by fate or divine providence; esp. a person’s destiny, fortune, or condition in life.’ (OED)

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

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

monster: A monster is an organism that is markedly and disturbingly different from what is normal for its species.

moral: In early modern times, ‘moral’ could mean roughly what it does today, but also had a use in which it meant ‘having to do with intentional human action’.

motion: ‘An inner prompting or impulse; a desire, an inclination; a stirring of the soul, an emotion.’ (OED)

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

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

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

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

set: The phrase 'set or suite of passions' on page 40 is analogous to 'a set of cutlery', 'a suite of bedroom furniture'.

speculative: This means 'having to do with non-moral propositions'. Ethics is a 'practical' discipline, chemistry is a 'speculative' one.

temperament: This is always a replacement for Shaftesbury's 'temper'.

theism: Someone who 'believes in a reigning mind, sovereign

in nature and ruling all things with the highest perfection of goodness, as well as of wisdom and power' (Shaftesbury, page 22).

ugly, ugliness: These words don't occur in the original version of this work; in the present version they replace 'deformed' (and 'deformity'), which have a stronger and nastier sense today than they did in early modern times.

vice, vicious: Morally wrong conduct, not necessarily of the special kind that we reserve 'vice' for these days, or the different special kind that we label as 'vicious'.

BOOK I

What is virtue?

Part 1: Introductory

Section 1: What prompts this inquiry

Religion and virtue seem in many respects to be so nearly related that they are generally presumed to be inseparable companions. We are so willing to think well of their union that we hardly allow it to be permissible to speak or even think of them separately. But it may be questioned whether this attitude can be theoretically justified. We certainly do sometimes encounter cases that seem to go against this general supposition. We have known people who have the appearance of great zeal in religion but have lacked even the common affections of humanity, and shown themselves extremely degenerate and corrupt. Others who have paid little regard to religion and been considered as mere atheists have been seen to practise the rules of morality and in many cases to act with such good meaning and affection towards mankind that one seems forced to admit that they are virtuous. [And, Shaftesbury says, in our everyday lives our willingness to have dealings with someone may depend on his answer to 'What are his morals?', whereas the answer to 'Is he religious and devout?' doesn't interest us.]

This has led to the questions:

- What is honesty or virtue, considered by itself?
- How is it influenced by religion?
- To what extent does religion necessarily imply virtue?
- Is it true, what they say, that an atheist can't possibly be virtuous or have any real honesty or merit?

This topic hasn't been much examined, and is a matter of delicate and dangerous speculation; so you shouldn't be surprised if my approach to it strikes you as somewhat unusual. Religiously inclined people have been so alarmed by some recent writers, creating so much protective fervour surrounding religion, that nothing an author suggests in favour of religion will be accepted if he allows the least advantage to any other principle [see Glossary]. On the other side, men who go in for wit and teasing, and enjoy nothing so much as exposing the weak sides of religion, are so desperately afraid of being drawn into any serious thoughts about it that when someone who has the manner of a free-thinking-writer nevertheless shows some respect for the principles of natural religion they see him as guilty of foul play! They are apt to give as little quarter as they receive [i.e. to show as little mercy as is shown to them], and are resolved to think as badly of the morals of their antagonists as their antagonists can possibly think of theirs. Neither side, it seems, will allow the least advantage to the other. It's as hard to persuade one side that there's any virtue in religion as to persuade the other that there is any virtue outside their particular community. So an author who dares to plead for religion and moral virtue without lessening the force of either is bound to have a bad time of it at the hands of both groups; but by allowing to each its proper range and status he will be hindering their being made enemies by belittling each other.

Be that as it may: if within the intended scope of this inquiry I am to throw the least new light, or explain anything effectively, I'll have to go pretty deep. I'll need to devise some short scheme to represent the origin of each opinion, whether natural or unnatural, relating to the deity. If we can happily get clear of this thorny part of our philosophy, the rest, I hope, will be more plain and easy.

Section 2: The state of opinions

In the totality of things (i.e. in the universe) either •everything conforms to an order that is good and the most agreeable to a general interest or •there's something that is otherwise, something that could have been better constituted, designed more wisely and with more advantage to the general interest of beings as a whole.

If every thing that exists conforms to an order that is good and for the best, then it necessarily follows that there's no such thing as real badness in the universe, nothing that is bad with respect to the whole.

Anything that *couldn't* really have been better or in any way better ordered is perfectly good. Anything in the order of the world that can be called bad must be such that it could have been better designed or ordered. . . .

Anything that is really bad must be caused or produced either •by design (i.e. with knowledge and intelligence) or •by mere chance.

If anything in the universe is bad from design, then that which governs all things is not •one •good designing principle. Either [not good:] there is one designing principle but it is itself corrupt, or [not one:] there is also some other principle, a bad one, operating against it.

If there is any bad in the universe from mere chance, then it is not the case that all things are caused by a

designing principle, i.e. a mind, whether good or bad. [that is Shaftesbury's only use of 'bad' in this work.] Thus, if there is a designing principle who causes only good things but cannot prevent the evil that happens by chance or from a contrary bad design, then there can't be in reality any such thing as a •truly• superior good design or mind, but only one that is impotent and defective—one that •can't totally exclude everything bad or that •doesn't want to.

Anything that is in some degree superior over the world, ruling in nature with discernment and a mind, is what all men agree in calling 'God'. If there are several such superior minds, they are so many gods; but if the single God or the several gods are not in their nature necessarily good, they are called 'daemons'.

To believe that everything is governed, ordered, or regulated for the best by a designing principle—i.e. a mind—that is necessarily good and permanent is to be a perfect **theist**.

To have no belief in any designing principle or mind, or in any cause, measure, or rule of things other than chance, so that in nature no interests of the whole or of any particulars is in the least designed, pursued, or aimed at, is to be a perfect **atheist**.

To believe that there are two or more designing principles or minds, all in their nature good, is to be a **polytheist**.

To believe that the governing mind or minds are not absolutely and necessarily good—aren't confined to what is best, but are capable of acting according to mere will or fancy—is to be a **daemonist**.

·I shall return to some of these opinions starting on page 12·. Not many people think always consistently, or according to one particular hypothesis, on any subject as abstruse and intricate as *the cause of all things, and the workings or government of the universe*. It's clear that the most devout people (and they even admit this) find that

sometimes their faith hardly can support them in the belief of a supreme wisdom; and that they are often tempted to be dubious about providence and a fair administration of the universe.

So nothing should be called a man's opinion unless it's the one that is most habitual to him, and comes to him on most occasions. That makes it hard to say for certain that a given man 'is an atheist'; because unless his thoughts are at all seasons and on all occasions steadily bent against any supposition of design in things he isn't a perfect atheist. Similarly, if a man's thoughts are not at all times steady and resolute against any supposition of chance, fortune, or bad design in things he isn't a perfect theist. But this is a matter of degree. A man can be more an atheist than a theist, or more a daemonist than a theist, depending on which of the relevant opinions predominates in his thought.

There can also be *mixtures* of daemonism, polytheism, atheism, and theism.¹ Religion excludes only perfect atheism. Religion undoubtedly contains some perfect daemonists, because we know whole nations who worship a devil or fiend to whom they sacrifice and offer prayers and supplications, really just because they fear him. And we know very well that in some religions there people who don't proclaim any idea of God except that of a being who is arbitrary, violent, a cause of bad, and condemning people to misery—which amounts to substituting a daemon or devil in place of God.

So there we have it: there are several different opinions concerning a superior power; and there may be some people who have no formed opinion on this subject—through scepticism, failure to think about the matter, or confusion of judgment. And the question before us is: how can any of these opinions, or this lack of any certain opinion, be consistent with virtue and merit or be compatible with an honest or moral character.

¹ •Theism with Daemonism: One chief mind or sovereign being is divided between a good and a bad nature, being the cause of bad as well as good; or there are two distinct principles, one the author of all good, the other of all bad.

•Daemonism with Polytheism: There are several corrupt minds who govern. This could be called Polydaemonism.

•Theism with Atheism: Chance is not excluded, but God and chance divide.

•Daemonism with Atheism: An evil daemon and chance divide.

•Polytheism with Atheism: Many minds and chance divide.

•Theism (as opposed to Daemonism, denoting goodness in the superior Deity) with Polytheism: There are two or more principal minds, which agree in good, having one and the same will and reason.

•The same Theism or Polytheism with Daemonism: The same system of deity or corresponding deities exists along with one or more contrary principles or governing Minds.

•Daemonism and Atheism: Things are governed by one or more bad principles [see Glossary] together with chance.

Part 2: Qualifying as virtuous

Section 1: Parts and wholes

When we reflect on any ordinary frame or constitution—whether of an artifact or a natural thing—and consider how hard it is to give the least account of any particular part without enough knowledge of the whole, we won't be surprised to find ourselves at a loss over many questions concerning the constitution and frame of nature herself. With respect to many things, even whole species of things, the question 'What are they *for*? What *purpose* do they serve?' will be hard for anyone to answer properly; and yet when such questions are raised about the proportions and shapes of *parts* of many creatures, we can with the help of study and observation answer with great exactness.

[In this paragraph it is Shaftesbury who refers to the creature in question as 'he' rather than 'it'.] We know that every creature has a private good and interest of his own, which nature has compelled him to seek. . . . We know that there is in reality a right and a wrong state of every creature; and that his right state is forwarded by nature and affectionately sought by himself. And because every creature has a certain •interest or •good, there must be also a certain •end or purpose to which everything in his constitution must naturally be related. If anything in his appetites, passions, or affections runs contrary to this end, we must count it as being bad for him. In this way he can be bad with respect to himself; just as he is certainly bad with respect to others of his kind when any of his appetites or passions make him any way injurious to them. Now, if by the natural constitution of a rational creature the same irregularities of appetite that make him bad to others also make him bad to himself; and if the same

regularity of affections

the next clause: which causes him to be good in one sense, causes him to be good also in the other,

which could mean: which causes him to be good to others causes him to be good also to himself,

or it could mean: which causes him to be good to himself causes him to be good also to others,

then the goodness by which he is thus useful to others is a real good and advantage to himself. And thus virtue and interest may eventually be found to agree.

I'll come to this in more detail later on. But first I want to see if we can clearly determine what the quality is that we call 'goodness' or 'virtue'.

Suppose a traveller describes to us a certain creature of a more solitary disposition than ever was yet heard of—he had

- neither mate nor fellow of any kind;
- nothing *like* him towards which he was well-affected or inclined;
- nothing beyond himself for which he had the least passion or concern

—we would hardly hesitate to say that this was doubtless a very melancholy creature, and that in this unsociable and sullen state he was likely to have a very disconsolate kind of life. But if we were assured that despite all appearances the creature enjoyed himself extremely, had a great liking for life, and wasn't lacking in anything needed for his own good, we might accept that the creature wasn't a monster, and wasn't absurdly constituted in himself. But we still wouldn't want to say that he was a *good* creature. But then might be urged against us: 'Such as he is, the creature is still

perfect in himself, and therefore to be regarded as *good*; for what does he have to do with others?' We might be forced to admit that in this sense he was a good creature if he could be understood to be absolute and complete in himself, with no real relation to anything else in the universe. We would be right to insist on that condition. For if there should be anywhere in nature a *system* of which this living creature was to be considered as a part, then he certainly couldn't be regarded as good, because he plainly seemed to be a part that would tend to the harm rather than the good of the system or whole in which he was included.

So if in the structure of this or any other animal there's anything that points beyond himself, and through which he is clearly seen to have a relation to some other being or nature besides his own, then this animal will undoubtedly be regarded as a part of some other system. For instance, if an animal has the proportions of a male, that shows he has relation to a female. And the respective proportions of both male and female will have a joint relation to another existence and order of things beyond themselves. Thus, both those creatures are to be considered as parts of another system, namely that of a particular race or species of living creatures, who have some one common nature, or are provided for by some one order or constitution of things co-existing and co-operating towards their survival and support.

Similarly, if a whole species of animals contributes to the existence or well-being of some other species, then that whole species is a part of some other system.

For instance, the existence of the fly is absolutely necessary for the existence of the spider. The random flight, weak frame, and tender body of the fly fit him to be prey, just as the rough structure, watchfulness, and cunning of the spider fit him for predation. The spider's web and the fly's wing are suited to each other. And the structure of

each of these animals relates to the other animal as perfectly as our of limbs and organs relate to each other, or as in the branches or leaves of a tree relate to each other, and of all of them to one root and trunk.

In the same way flies are also necessary to the existence of other creatures—birds and fish—and other species or kinds are subservient to yet others, as being parts of a certain system, and included in one and the same order of beings. So there's a system of all animals, an animal order or economy according to which animal affairs are regulated.

Now, if the whole system of animals, plants and all other things in this lower world is properly contained within one system of a globe or earth, and if this globe or earth itself appears to have a real dependence on something beyond it (e.g. the sun, the galaxy, or its fellow planets), then it—the earth—really is only a part of some other system. And if there is similarly a system of all things, and a universal nature, every particular being or system must be either good or bad in that general system of the universe. What about something insignificant and useless? That would be an imperfection, and so would be bad in the general system.

Therefore, a being can't be wholly and really bad except by being bad with respect to the universal system; and in that case the system of the universe is bad or imperfect. But if the evil of one private system is the good of others, if it contributes still to the good of the general system (as when

- one creature lives by the destruction of another,
- one thing is generated from the corruption [= 'rotting'] of another, or
- one planetary system or vortex swallows up another)

then the evil of that private system is not really bad in itself; any more than the pain of cutting new teeth is bad in a system or body which is so constituted that without this episode of pain it would suffer worse by being defective.

So we can't say of any being that it is wholly and absolutely bad unless we can show for certain that what we are calling bad isn't also good in some other system or in relation to some other order or economy.

But if the world contained one species of animals that were destructive to every other species, that could rightly be called a bad species, because it is bad in the animal system. And if in any species of animals (for example the human species) one man has a nature that makes him pernicious to the rest, then he can in this respect rightly be called a bad man.

We don't, however, say of anyone that he is a bad man because he has the plague spots on him, or because he has convulsive fits that make him strike and wound anyone who comes close to him. [Here, as almost everywhere, 'bad' replaces 'ill'. Of course the man with plague is 'ill' in your and my sense; but Shaftesbury's point is that he's not a *bad* man although he is contagious and thus a potential source of harm to others.] Nor do we say on the other side that someone is a good man if his hands are tied so that he can't do the mischief [see Glossary] that he plans to do, or if he abstains from carrying out his bad plan through fear of punishment or the attraction of a reward. [Shaftesbury says that the reward/punishment scenario 'is in a manner the same' as the tied-hands one.]

So that in a sentient creature something that isn't done through any affection at all doesn't constitute either good or bad in the nature of that creature. The creature counts as good or bad only when the good or bad of the system to which he is related is the immediate object of some passion or affection moving him.

Therefore, since it is only through his affections that a creature is judged to be good or bad, natural or unnatural, our task is to examine which affections are good and natural, and which are bad and unnatural.

Section 2: Goodness (creatures in general)

[In this section Shaftesbury is talking about 'creatures' in general, not human beings in particular. He does use personal pronouns with 'creature' but doesn't explicitly mention humans except in some of his examples.] If a creature has an affection towards something he thinks is a private good though really it isn't, this affection is in itself vicious and bad, even in respect of the private interest or happiness of the creature who has it, because it is superfluous and detracts from the force of other affections that will do him some good.

If it's conceivable that a creature might have an affection towards his own good that really is (in its natural degree) conducive to his private interests while also inconsistent with the public good, this can indeed still be called a vicious affection. . . . But if the affection is injurious to the society only when it is immoderate, and is not injurious when it is moderate, duly tempered, and damped down, then the immoderate degree of the affection is truly vicious but not the moderate one. Thus, if we find in any creature a more than ordinary concern for his own private interests, this being inconsistent with the interests of the species or public, this must be regarded as in every way a bad and vicious affection. This is what we commonly call 'selfishness' and disapprove of so much in any creature we happen to find having it.

On the other side, if the affection towards private or self-good, however selfish it may be seen as being, is not merely consistent with public good but in some measure contributing to it—e.g. if it would be good for the species in general if every individual shared it—then so far from being bad or in any way blameable it must be acknowledged as absolutely necessary to make a creature good. Consider the affection towards self-preservation: because a general

lack of this would be injurious to the species, a creature is as bad and unnatural from not having this affection as much as from the lack of any other natural affection. That would be your view if you saw a man who didn't care about any precipices that lay in his way and didn't care about food, diet, clothing, or anything else related to his health and survival. The same would be said of any man whose disposition •turned him against any relations with women and therefore •made him unfit (through badness of temperament and not merely through a defect of constitution) for the propagation of his species.

So an affection towards self-good may be a good affection or a bad one. If this private affection is too strong (as when *excessive* love of life unfits a creature for any generous act) then it's undoubtedly vicious; in which case the creature who is moved by it is viciously moved, and will always be somewhat vicious when moved by that affection. If some creature's earnest and passionate love of life leads him accidentally to do some good. . . .he isn't a good creature because of this good he does, any more than a man is made honest or good man for pleading a just cause or fighting in a good cause merely for the sake of his fee.

If an action motivated purely by an affection towards self-good happens to be advantageous to the species, that implies goodness in the creature only to the extent that the affection itself is good. However much good he does by one particular act, if it came solely from that selfish affection then he is in himself still vicious. And the same holds for any creature whose passion towards self-good, however moderate it is, is his real motive in doing something that he ought to have been led to by a natural affection for his kind.

And whatever external helps a badly disposed creature may find to push him on towards performing a good action, none of this will make him *good* until his temperament

changes and he is led *directly* towards good and against bad—led by some immediate affection, not accidentally.

For instance: when a species is thought to be by nature tame, gentle, and favourable to mankind, and a member of it is fierce and savage contrary to his *natural* constitution (i.e. the constitution that is natural to his species), we instantly notice the breach of temperament and agree that the creature is unnatural and corrupt. If later on the same creature comes—through good fortune or proper management—to lose his fierceness, becoming tame, gentle, and treatable like the rest of his species, we'll agree that the creature thus restored becomes good and natural. But if his tame and gentle conduct comes only from his fear of his keeper, and would instantly change if that fear were lost, then his gentleness is not his real temperament, and he. . . .is still as bad as ever.

Because nothing is properly either goodness or badness in a creature except what comes from its natural temperament, we have this result:

- A good creature is one who is through his natural temperament or the slant of his affections carried primarily and immediately, and not secondarily and accidentally, to good and against bad.
- A bad creature is one who lacks the right affections of the force needed to carry him directly towards good and against bad; or who is carried by other affections directly towards bad and against good.

When all the affections or passions are suited to the public good, i.e. the good of the species, then the natural temperament is entirely good. If on the contrary any required passion is lacking, or if there's any passion that is idle or weak or in any way unserviceable or contrary to that main end, then the natural temperament is to some extent corrupt and bad, as is the creature himself.

You don't need me to go through envy, malice, ill-temperament, or other such hateful passions to show how each is bad and makes the creature that has them bad. But perhaps I should point out that even kindness and love of the most natural sort (e.g. a creature's love for its offspring) is vicious if it is immoderate and beyond a certain degree of intensity. Why? Because excessive tenderness destroys the effect of love, and excessive pity makes us incapable of giving help. Thus, excessive motherly love is a vicious fondness; excessive pity is effeminacy and weakness; undue concern for self-preservation is meanness and cowardice; having too little concern for self-preservation, or none at all, is rashness; and the opposite concern (namely a passion leading to self-destruction) is a mad and desperate depravity.

Section 3: Virtue or merit (humans in particular)

Let us move on now from what is judged to be mere *goodness*, which any sentient creature might have, to what is called 'virtue' or 'merit', and is attributable only to man.

In a creature capable of forming general notions of things, affections can have as their objects [see Glossary] not only external things that present themselves to the senses but also the very mental actions themselves, and the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude and their contraries that are brought into the mind by reflection [see Glossary]. By means of this looking into our ourselves we have another kind of affection, namely one towards affections that have already been felt and now become the object of a new liking or dislike.

It's the same with mental or moral [see Glossary] objects as with ordinary bodies, i.e. the ordinary things we perceive by our senses. The shapes, motions, colours, and proportions of bodies being presented to our eye, there necessarily results a beauty or ugliness, depending on the different

measure, arrangement and disposition of their various parts. Similarly with behaviour and mental actions: when they are presented to our understanding, a certain difference between beauty and ugliness must appear, depending on the regularity or irregularity of the subjects.

The mind, which is spectator or auditor of other minds, must have its eye and ear, so as to discern proportion, distinguish sound, and scan each sentiment or thought that comes before it. It can't let anything escape its judgment. It feels the soft and harsh, the agreeable and disagreeable, in the affections; and it finds a fair and foul, a harmonious and dissonant, as really and truly here as in any piece of music or in the external shapes and appearances of sensible [see Glossary] things. And it can't withhold its admiration and ecstasy, its aversion and scorn, any more in what relates to one than in what relates to the other of these subjects. There is a common and natural sense of what is sublime and beautiful in things; and someone who denies this won't be taken seriously by anyone who has attended properly to the facts.

With objects of the sensible kind, the images of bodies, colours and sounds are perpetually moving before our eyes and acting on our senses, even when we're asleep; so also with objects of the moral and intellectual kind, the forms and images of things are always just as actively working on the mind, even when the real objects themselves are absent.

Among these wandering characters or pictures of manners, which the mind is compelled to present itself with and carry around with it, the heart can't possibly remain neutral. It constantly takes sides. However false or corrupt the heart may be within itself, it finds the difference in beauty and comeliness between one heart and another, one turn of affection and another, one action and another, one sentiment and another; so that in any case in which

its own interests aren't involved it must have some approval of what is natural and honest, and disapproval of what is dishonest and corrupt.

Thus the various motions [see Glossary], inclinations, passions, dispositions, and consequent . . . behaviour of creatures are represented to the mind in various perspectives; the mind easily distinguishes good from bad towards the species or public; and this gives rise to a new trial of the heart, which must either •rightly and soundly like what is just and right and dislike what is contrary, or •corruptly like what is bad and dislike what is worthy and good.

We don't call any creature 'worthy' or 'virtuous' unless it can have the notion of a public interest, and can have organised theoretical knowledge of what is morally good or bad, admirable or blameworthy, right or wrong. We may in common speech call a bad horse 'vicious', but we never say of a good-natured horse—or of any mere beast, idiot, or changeling—that he is worthy or virtuous.

Thus, if a creature is generous, kind, constant and compassionate, but can't

reflect on what he himself does or sees others do, so as to take notice of what is worthy or honest and make the worth and honesty that he notices or thinks about an object of his affection,

he doesn't count as being virtuous, because that's the only way he can have a sense of right or wrong—a sentiment or judgment that something that happens did, or that it didn't, arise from just, equal, and good affection. [Shaftesbury wrote 'make that notice or conception of worth and honesty an object of his affection', but this was presumably a slip.]

Anything done through any unequal affection is iniquitous, wicked, and wrong. If

•the affection from which the action is performed is equal, sound, and good, and

•the person who has the affection could at some time rightly be on the receiving end of such an action or the object of such an affection,

then this must make the action equal and right. What makes an action wrong is not simply its being the cause of harm, because a dutiful son who aims at an enemy but by mistake or bad luck happens to kill his father doesn't do wrong. An action is wrong if it is done through insufficient or unequal affection—e.g. when a son shows no concern for his father's safety, or the father needs help and the son instead helps an indifferent person [here = 'helps some stranger'].

[In a syntactically difficult sentence, Shaftesbury says that unsatisfactory conduct isn't wrong, and doesn't make the person wrong, if his thinking and his attitudes are perfectly all right and the trouble comes purely from:] weakness or imperfection in his **senses**. If a man whose **reason and affections** are sound and entire has such a depraved constitution of body that natural objects are falsely conveyed and misrepresented by his sense-organs, as though through glasses with the wrong prescription, it will soon be seen that he can't in himself be regarded as iniquitous or unjust, because his failure is not in his **principal or leading part**.

It's a different story when we come to opinion, belief, or theory. Judgments or beliefs can go far astray—so far that in some countries even monkeys, cats, crocodiles, and other vile or destructive animals have been regarded as holy and worshipped as though they were gods. If a believer in one of those countries thought that it is better to save a creature such as a cat than to save one of his parents, and that anyone who didn't also have this religious opinion should be treated as an enemy until he is converted, this would certainly be wrong and wicked in the believer, and everything he did on the basis of this belief would be iniquitous, wicked, and vicious.

Thus, anything is the occasion [see Glossary] of wrong if it causes a misconception or misapprehension of something's worth or value that lessens an appropriate affection or raise an inappropriate, irregular, or unsocial one. So someone who loves a man because of something ·about him· that is widely regarded as honourable but is really vicious, is himself vicious and bad. We often see the beginnings of such corruption—e.g. when. . . an ambitious man by the fame of his high attempts, or a pirate by his boasted enterprises, creates in someone else a respect and admiration of an immoral and inhuman character which deserves disgust. When that happens, the hearer becomes corrupt, when he secretly approves of the evil that he hears about. But a man isn't vicious or corrupt because he loves and respects someone whom he believes to be a philanthropist though really he is a pirate.

In short: a mistake of •fact can't be a cause of vice [see Glossary] because it isn't a cause or a sign of any bad affection; but a mistake of •right is the cause of unequal affections, and so it must be the cause of vicious action in every thinking being.

It often happens that a question of right is hard to answer confidently, even for very discerning people; and it's not a slight mistake ·in a matter· of *this* kind that can destroy the character of a virtuous or worthy man. But when superstition or bad customs lead to very gross mistakes in what affections are had towards what objects—

mistakes that are intrinsically so gross, or so complicated and frequent, that the creature who makes them can't live well in a natural state, and can't have appropriate affections that are compatible with human society and civil life

—then the creature can't be counted as virtuous.

This shows us how far worth and virtue depend on having enough knowledge of right and wrong and enough use of reason to ensure a right application of the affections. That involves ensuring that

- nothing horrible or unnatural,
- nothing unexemplary,
- nothing destructive of the natural affection by which the species or society is upheld

will *ever* be pursued or valued as a good and proper object of esteem, through any principle or notion of honour or religion. For any such principle must be wholly vicious; and anything that is done because of it must be vicious and immoral. So if there's anything that teaches men treachery, ingratitude or cruelty •as permitted by God or •as bringing present or future good to mankind; if there's anything that teaches men

- to persecute their friends 'through love',
- to torment captives of war in sport,
- to offer human sacrifice,
- to torment, macerate, or mangle themselves in religious zeal before their 'god', or
- to commit any sort of barbarity or brutality. . . .to be applauded by the populace or permitted by religion,

this isn't and can't ever be virtue of any kind or in any sense. It will always be horrible depravity, no matter what support it gets from fashion, law, custom, or religion. Any of these may be bad and vicious in themselves, but they can't ever alter the eternal standards and unchangeable independent nature of worth and virtue.

Section 4: Wholly good? Wholly bad?

As for creatures that are only capable of being moved by **sensible** objects: their status as good or vicious depends on the state of their sensible affections, ·their affections towards sensible objects·. It's not like that with creatures capable of thinking about and valuing **rational** objects of moral good. For someone like this, it could happen that •his sensible affections were all wrong, but that •they didn't prevail because of his other affections—the rational ones I have just spoken of. If that happens, it's clear that the person's temperament still holds good in the main, and everyone rightly respects him as virtuous.

If someone's temperament is passionate, angry, fearful, amorous, but he resists these passions and despite their force sticks to virtue, we ordinarily say in such a case that the person's virtue is the greater; and we are right to say that. But if what restrains the person and holds him to behaviour that looks virtuous is an affection not towards goodness or virtue itself but merely towards his own private good, then he isn't really more virtuous, as I showed earlier. But it's still clear to us that if, voluntarily and without external constraint, an angry temperament subsides or an amorous one refrains, so that no cruel or immodest action can be forced from such a person, however strongly he is tempted by his constitution, we applaud his virtue more highly than we would if he were free of this temptation and these propensities. But of course no-one will say that a propensity to vice can be an *ingredient* in virtue or any way necessary to complete a virtuous character.

So there seems to be some kind of difficulty in the case, but it amounts only to this. If one part of the temperament contains •bad passions or affections while in another part the affections towards moral good are such as absolutely

to dominate the attempts of •their antagonists, this is the best possible proof that a strong principle of virtue lies at the bottom and has taken charge of the natural temperament. If there are no bad passions stirring, the person may be indeed virtuous more cheaply; that is, he may conform himself to the known rules of virtue without sharing as much of a virtuous principle as another person ·who also acts virtuously by overcoming bad passions etc.·. But if that other person, who has the principle of virtue so strongly implanted, eventually loses those obstacles to virtue that we have stipulated in him, that doesn't make him *less* virtuous. On the contrary, by losing only what is vicious in his temperament he is left more entirely to virtue, and has it in a still higher degree.

That is how rational creatures can differ in *how* virtuous they are. Well, I'm really talking about creatures who are *called* rational, but who fall short of the sound and well established reason that alone can constitute a just affection, a uniform and steady will and resolution. So vice and virtue are found variously mixed and alternately prevalent in the various characters of mankind. My inquiry so far seems to make it evident that

- however bad the temperament or passions may be with respect to sensible or moral objects,
- however passionate, furious, lustful, or cruel a creature becomes,
- however vicious his mind is or whatever bad rules or principles it goes by,

still if he has *any* flexibility or favourable inclination towards *the least* moral object, the least appearance of moral good (as though recognising that *there is* such a thing as kindness, gratitude, bounty, or compassion), there is still something of virtue left in the person so that he's not wholly vicious and unnatural.

For example, a ruffian who from some sense of fidelity and honour refuses to betray his associates, preferring instead to endure torments and death, certainly has *some* principle of virtue, however he may misapply it. Similarly with the malefactor who chose to be executed with his companions when his only alternative was to serve as their executioner.

In brief: just as it seems hard to say that any man is 'absolutely an atheist', it seems to be equally hard to say

that any man is 'absolutely corrupt or vicious', because there are few, even of the most horrible villains, who don't have *something* of virtue in this imperfect sense. There's an old saying: *It's as hard to find a wholly bad man as to find a wholly good one*, and there's nothing truer than that. . . .

Now, having considered what virtue is in itself, I now turn to the question of how virtue relates to opinions concerning a deity.

Part 3: The causes of vice

Section 1: Lack of moral sense

As I have said, the nature of virtue consists in a certain just disposition, or appropriate affection, of a rational creature towards the moral objects of right and wrong. In a rational creature, what can possibly exclude a principle of virtue or make it ineffectual? For this to happen, something must **(1)** take away the natural and just sense of right and wrong, or **(2)** bring error into the creature's sense of right and wrong, or **(3)** causes the unerroneous sense of right and wrong to be opposed by contrary affections.

(And for something to assist or advance the principle of virtue, it must **(1)** in some way nourish and promote a sense of right and wrong, or **(2)** keep that sense genuine and uncorrupt, or **(3)** cause it to be obeyed by subduing contrary affections.)

Our next concern is to consider how any of the opinions about a deity that I mentioned on page 2 might lead to any

of the these three effects—loss of moral sense, perversion of moral sense, victory of opposing affections. Let us start with the first of them.

You'll surely understand that I'm not talking about the loss of the *notion of* what is good or bad for the species or for society. No rational creature can possibly be unaware of the reality of such a good and bad. Everyone sees and acknowledges a public interest, and is conscious of what affects his community. So when we say of a creature 'He has wholly lost the sense of right and wrong' we mean that although he can discern the good and bad of his species he has no concern for either, no sense of excellence or baseness in any moral action involving one or the other. Apart from what involves his own narrowly conceived self-interest, we are saying that in this creature there is no liking or dislike of ways of behaving, no admiration or love of anything as morally good or hatred of anything—however unnatural or ugly—as morally bad.

Every rational creature knows that when he voluntarily offends or harms anyone, he is bound to create •an apprehension and fear of similar harm, and consequently •resentment and hostility in every creature who observes him. So the offender *must* be aware that he is liable to such treatment from everyone, as though he had to some degree offended everyone.

So offence and injury are always known to be punishable by everyone; and good behaviour—known as *merit*—is universally known to be rewardable by everyone. Even the wickedest creature alive must have a sense of this. So if there's any further meaning in this 'sense of right and wrong'—if there really is any sense of this kind that an absolutely wicked creature doesn't have—it must consist in a real antipathy or aversion to injustice or wrong, and in a real affection or love towards justice and right, for its own sake and just because of its own natural beauty and worth.

It's impossible to conceive of a **sentient** creature who is basically so badly constituted, so unnatural, that from the moment he comes into interaction with **sensible** objects he doesn't have a single good passion towards his kind, doesn't have any foundation of pity, love, kindness, or social affection. It's equally impossible to conceive that a **rational** creature coming into his first interaction with **rational** objects, receiving into his mind the images or representations of justice, generosity, gratitude, or other virtues, might have no liking for these or dislike of their contraries—being absolutely indifferent towards anything of this sort that is presented to him. A soul might as well be without sense as without admiration for things of which it has any knowledge. Coming therefore to an ability to see and admire in this new way, it *must* find beauty and ugliness actions, minds and temperaments as well as in shapes, sounds, or colours. If there's no •real amiableness [see Glossary] or ugliness in moral

acts there is at least an •imaginary one of full force. Even if the thing itself didn't exist in nature, the imagination or fancy of it is entirely natural; and it would take skill and strong endeavour, together with long practice and meditation, to overcome the mind's natural disposition to distinguish right from wrong.

Because a sense of right and wrong is as natural to us as natural affection itself, and is a first principle in our make-up, there is no theory, opinion, persuasion or belief that can immediately or directly exclude or destroy it. If something is basic and purely natural, it can't be displaced by anything except contrary habit and custom (•which create• a second nature). And *this* affection is a basic one—one of the first to arise in the 'affectionate' part of the soul—so that nothing except frequent blocking and control by contrary affections can destroy it altogether or even diminish it.

If we have an oddity of facial expression or gesture that is either •natural to us and a result of our **bodily** constitution, or •accidental and acquired through habit, we know that we can't get rid of it by our immediate disapproval of it or by strenuously trying to avoid it. Such a change can only be brought about by extraordinary means, the intervention of art [see Glossary] and method, strict attention, and repeated self-correction. And even with all this, we find that nature is hardly mastered, but lies sullen and ready to revolt at the first opportunity. This is even more so in the case of the **mind** in respect of the natural affection and anticipating fancy [Shaftesbury's phrase] that makes the sense of right and wrong. It's impossible for this to be effaced, deleted from the natural temperament, instantly or without much force and violence, even by means of the most extravagant belief or opinion in the world.

Thus, neither theism nor atheism, nor daemonism, nor any religious or irreligious belief of any kind can operate

immediately or directly in this case. For any such belief to affect someone's moral sense, it would have to do so indirectly, by stirring up opposing or favouring affections casually excited by any such belief. I'll come to that in section (3).

Section 2: Defective moral sense

As for the second case, namely an erroneous sense of what is right and wrong: this can only come from the force of custom and education in opposition to nature. We can see this happen in countries where custom or political institution bring it about that certain actions that are naturally foul and odious are repeatedly applauded and regarded as honourable. In some parts of the world a man may force himself to eat the flesh of his enemies, conduct that goes against his stomach and against his nature, thinking it a right and honourable service to his community because it can advance the name and spread the terror of his nation.

But now let us come to our topic—the question of whether and how opinions relating to a deity can affect the content of someone's sense of right and wrong. It doesn't seem that **atheism** can directly contribute to someone's having false views about right and wrong. Customs and activities favoured by atheism could lead a man to lose much of his natural moral sense; but it doesn't seem that atheism could by itself cause anyone to judge to be fair, noble, and deserving something that was the contrary. For example, atheism could never make anyone think that eating man's flesh or committing bestiality is good and excellent in itself. But corrupt religion, i.e. superstition, *can* cause many horribly unnatural and inhuman things to be accepted as excellent, good, and praiseworthy in themselves.

Whenever something that is in its nature odious and abominable is advanced by religion as the will or pleasure of a supreme deity, if that doesn't make it look any less bad or odious to the believer, then the deity must bear the blame and be regarded as a naturally bad and odious being, however much courted and solicited through mistrust and fear. But that's just what religion, in the main, forbids us to imagine! It always prescribes esteem and honour in company with worship and awe. So whenever it teaches the love and admiration of a deity who has any apparent bad qualities, it teaches at the same time a love and admiration for that badness, and causes to be regarded as good and amiable something that is in itself horrible and detestable.

For instance, if Jupiter is regarded with awe and reverence, and if his history reports him as amorously inclined and permitting his desires of this kind to wander in the loosest manner, his worshippers, believing this history to be literally and strictly true, will be taught a greater love of amorous and wanton acts. If there's a religion that teaches awe and love towards a god whose character is like this:

- he is quarrelsome, resentful, given to anger, furious, revengeful;
- when he is offended he gets revenge on people other than those who gave the offence;
- he has a fraudulent disposition, and encourages deceit and treachery amongst men;
- he favours a few, though for slight causes, and is cruel to everyone else;

it's obvious that when such a religion is strongly enforced it is bound to create even approval and respect for vices [see Glossary] of this kind, and to breed in its followers a suitable disposition—a capricious, biased, vengeful, and deceitful temperament. . . .

If in the worship of such a deity there is nothing but going through the motions, nothing except what comes from mere example, custom, constraint, or fear; if basically the worshippers *hearts* are not in this, and no real esteem or love is involved, then a worshipper may not be much misled in his notions of right and wrong. If in obeying the commands of his supposed god, or in doing what he judges necessary to satisfy his deity, he is compelled only by fear, and makes himself perform an act that he secretly detests as barbarous and unnatural, then he still has a sense of right and wrong, and is aware of evil in the character of his god—however cautious he may be about saying this aloud or even thinking it as an explicit theological opinion. But if this happens:

as he proceeds in his religious faith and devout worship, he very gradually comes to be more and more reconciled to the malignity, arbitrariness, bias and vengeance of the deity he believes in,

his reconciliation with these qualities themselves will soon grow proportionately; and by the power of this example the most cruel, unjust, and barbarous acts will often be considered by him not only as just and lawful but as divine and worthy of imitation.

For anyone who thinks there is a god, and explicitly claims to believe that he is just and good, must think that there is independently such a thing as justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, right and wrong, according to which he declares that God is just, righteous, and true. Some will try to avoid this result by claiming that the mere will, decree, or law of God constitutes right and wrong, so that God's righteousness etc. don't involve any independent moral standard. But if that were right, then the words 'right' and 'wrong' would be meaningless. . . . If one person were sentenced to suffer for someone else's fault, that sentence

would be just and fair. If arbitrarily and without reason some beings were destined to endure perpetual evil and others as constantly to enjoy good, this would also count as just and fair. But to call something 'just' on a basis like that is to say nothing, to speak without a meaning.

And so we see that where a real devotion and heart-felt worship is paid to a supreme being who is represented as something other than really and truly just and good, this is sure to lead to a loss of rectitude in the believer, a disturbance of his thought and a corruption of his temperament and conduct. His honesty will inevitably be supplanted by his zeal while he is in this way unnaturally influenced and made immorally devout.

One thing needs to be added. Just as a god's bad character harms men's affections and spoils their natural sense of right and wrong, so also a god's good character—

a god who is always and in all accounts of him represented as being a true model and example of the most exact justice, and the highest goodness and worth

—will contribute greatly (nothing could contribute more) to the fixing of a sound judgment or sense of right and wrong in the minds of those who worship him. Such a view of divine providence and generosity, extended to everyone and expressed in a constant good affection towards the whole, *must* draw us into acting within our own sphere with a similar principle and affection. And once we have focused on the good of our species or public as our end or aim, there's no way we can be led astray by any false apprehension or sense of right or wrong.

That completes the second case. We have found that religion is capable of doing great good, or great harm, depending on what kind of religion it is; and that atheism does nothing positive in either way. It may indirectly lead to men's losing

a good and sufficient sense of right and wrong; but atheism as such can't lead to anyone's setting up a false kind of 'right and wrong'. Only false religion, or fantastical opinion produced by superstition and credulity, can do that.

Section 3: Opposition from other affections

Now we come to the third and last possible cause of vice, namely the opposition that other affections bring against the natural sense of right and wrong.

It's obvious that a creature having any degree of this kind of ·moral· sense, or good affection, must act according to it whenever it happens not to be opposed either by •some settled calm affection towards a conceived private good, or by •some sudden, strong and forcible passion—e.g. of lust or anger—which may not only subdue the sense of right and wrong but even the sense of private good, overruling the most familiar and accepted opinions about what conduces to self-interest.

But I am not concerned here with examining •the many ways in which this corruption ·of the moral sense· is introduced or increased. My topic the question of how •opinions concerning a deity can make a difference to this in one way or another.

It will hardly be questioned that a creature capable of using reflection could have a liking or dislike for moral actions, and thus a sense of right and wrong, before having any settled notion of a god. We don't expect it to happen—indeed it couldn't happen—that a human child slowly and gradually rising to various levels of reason and reflection will from the outset be taken up with speculations, or more refined sort of reflections, on the topic of God's existence.

Let us suppose a creature who lacks reason and can't reflect, but who has many good qualities and affections, such

as love for his kind, courage, gratitude, pity. If you give this creature a capacity to reflect, he will at the same instant *approve of* gratitude, kindness, and pity, be pleased with any show or representation of the social passion—i.e. the passion for doing good to the public—and think that nothing is more amiable than this or more odious than its contrary. This will be his becoming capable of virtue, and having a sense of right and wrong.

Thus, before a creature can have any positive view, one way or the other, on the subject of a god, he can be supposed to have a sense of right and wrong, and to be possessed of virtue and vice in different degrees. We know this from our experience of people whose place and way of life led to their never having any serious thoughts of religion, yet who greatly differ from one another in their characters of honesty and worth: some being naturally modest, kind, friendly, and consequently lovers of kind and friendly actions; others proud, harsh, cruel, and consequently inclined to admire rather the acts of violence and mere power.

As for the belief in a deity, and how men are influenced by it: we should first think about *why* men give their obedience to such a supreme being. It must be either

- (a) because of his power, and the associated thought of him as a possible source of disadvantage or benefit, or
- (b) because of his excellence and worth, and the associated thought of him as the best thing on which to try to model oneself.

(a) If there's a belief or conception of a deity who is considered only as having power over his creatures and enforcing obedience to his absolute will by particular rewards and punishments; and if it's only on this account—the hope for reward, or fear of punishment—that the creature is incited to do the good that he hates or restrained from doing the

evil to which he is not otherwise in the least averse; then, I repeat, there is in him no virtue or goodness whatsoever. The creature, despite his good conduct, is intrinsically no better, morally, than if he had acted in his natural way when under no dread or terror of any sort. There's no more rectitude, piety or sanctity in that creature than there is meekness or gentleness in a tiger that is strongly chained, or innocence and sobriety in a monkey disciplined by a whip. . . . The moral quality of the deity or the man with the whip doesn't affect this. Indeed, the more perfect the deity is, the *worse* it is for the creature to obey him solely in hope of reward or fear of punishment.

(b) If there's a belief or conception of a deity who is considered not merely as powerful and knowing but also as worthy and good, and admired and revered as such; . . . and if this sovereign and mighty being is represented or historically described as having a high and eminent regard for what is good and excellent, a concern for the good of all, and an affection of benevolence and love towards the whole; such an example must undoubtedly raise and increase the affection towards virtue, and help to submit and subdue all other affections to that alone; ·which is to say that it does affect the moral quality of the believers·.

And this good effect doesn't come merely from the example ·set by the deity·. Someone who entirely and perfectly believes in this deity must have a steady opinion of the superintendency of a supreme being, a witness and spectator of human life who is conscious of everything that is felt or done in the universe. This believer, even in his deepest solitude, must always have a sense of someone remaining with him—*someone* whose presence must be more important than that of the most august assembly on earth. In such a presence, obviously, the shame of guilty actions must be the greatest of any and so must the honour be of well-doing,

even when people wrongly condemn it. This shows how a perfect theism [see Glossary] must be conducive to virtue, and how powerless atheism is in this respect.

If in addition to that belief there is *also* a fear of future punishment and hope for future reward, what can this hope and fear contribute towards virtue? Well, what I have already said shows that neither this fear nor this hope can possibly count as *good* affections of the sort that are agreed to be the springs and sources of all truly good actions. Furthermore, as I have already indicated, if this fear or hope is either •essential to or •a considerable motive to some act that ought to have been caused solely by some better affection, then the fear or hope doesn't really consist with virtue or goodness. [He means something like 'isn't really consistent with virtue or goodness', but not exactly that. His point is that in any particular episode where virtue and hope-or-fear are both at work, the hope-or-fear doesn't give a shove in the same direction as the virtue, fitting in with it and helping it along. The following paragraph moves from the individual episode to the general way of life.]

It may go further than that. In *this* this sort of 'religious' discipline, the principle of self-love, which is naturally so strong in us, is actually made stronger every day through the exercise of the passions in a person whose self-interest has an ever wider range. There's reason to fear that this aspect of his temperament will extend itself through all the parts of his life. For if the habit—

·meaning: the habit of approaching questions of the form 'Should I do this?' in terms of hopes for reward and/or fear of punishment·

—has the effect of making the person maintain a steady concern for his own good, his own interests, it must gradually •diminish his affections towards public good, i.e. the interests of society, and •introduce a certain narrowness of spirit. Some people contend that such narrowness of spirit is

conspicuous in devout believers and zealots of almost every religious persuasion.

And there's no getting away from this: if true piety involves loving God for his own sake, the undue concern about private good expected from him *must* diminish piety. Why? Because when God is loved only as the cause of the believer's private good, he is being loved in just the same way that any other instrument or means of pleasure can be loved by any vicious creature. And the more there is of this violent affection towards one's own private good, the less room there is for the other sort of affection, namely affection towards goodness itself, or towards any good and deserving object that is worthy of love and admiration for its own sake—which is what God is acknowledged to be by everyone or at least by all civilized or refined worshippers.

It's in this respect that a strong desire for and love of life may also be an obstacle to piety as well as to virtue and public love. For the stronger this affection is in a person, the less capable he will be of true resignation, i.e. submission to the rule and order of the deity. And if what the believer calls 'resignation' depends solely on his expectations regarding infinite retribution or infinite reward, he isn't showing any more worth or virtue here than in any other bargain of interest [= 'than in any other profitable deal that he makes']. All there is to his 'resignation' is this: he resigns his present life and pleasures on condition that this brings him something that he admits is vastly more valuable, namely eternal life in a state of highest pleasure and enjoyment.

Despite this way in which the increase of the selfish passion can harm the principle of virtue, the fear of future punishment and hope for future reward, however mercenary or servile it may be, is in many circumstances a great advantage, security, and support to virtue.

To see how, remember my point that even with someone who has implanted in his heart a real sense of right and wrong, a real good affection towards the species or society, this good affection may often be controlled and overcome by the violence of rage, lust, or any other counterworking passion. If nothing in his mind can make such bad passions the objects of its aversion, causing it to oppose them earnestly, it's clear how much a good temperament must eventually suffer from them, and how a character must gradually change for the worse. But if religion steps in with a belief that a deity is opposed to such bad passions. . . ., this belief is bound to be a useful remedy against vice, and to be in a particular way helpful to virtue. That is because a belief of this kind will calm the mind down considerably, getting the person to pull himself together and more strictly conform to the good and virtuous principle that draws him wholly onto its side as long as he attends to it.

And this belief in future rewards and punishments, as well as helping a believer not to stray, can also provide help to those who have already strayed. When bad opinion and wrong thought have turned someone's mind against the honest course, and brought it down to the level of valuing and deliberately preferring a vicious one, the belief in question may be the only relief and safety.

Consider someone who has much goodness and natural rectitude in his temperament, but also a softness or effeminacy that unfits him to bear poverty, crosses or adversity. If he has the bad luck to meet with many trials of this kind, that must certainly bring a sourness and distaste into his temperament, and make him exceedingly hostile to what he may wrongly think has led to such calamity. Now, if his own thoughts or the corrupt insinuations of others lead him often to think **(a)** 'My honesty is what led to this calamity; if I could get rid of this restraint of virtue and honesty, I might be much

happier', it's obvious that his respect for honesty and virtue must diminish by the day, as his temperament becomes uneasy and quarrels with itself. But if he opposes to **(a)** the thought **(b)** 'Honesty carries with it an advantage—if not a present then at least a future one—that will compensate me for this loss of private good', then this may prevent **(a)** from harming his good temperament and honest principle, so that his love or affection towards honesty and virtue remains as it was before.

·And here's another way in which the reward-or-punishment thought can serve the cause of virtue·. Consider a person or society that is outright hostile to what is good and virtuous (e.g. because leniency and forgiveness are despised, and revenge is highly thought of and beloved). If this further thought enters the picture: 'Leniency is rewarded in such a way as to bring greater self-good and enjoyment than can be found in revenge', that very affection of leniency and mildness may come to be industriously nourished, and the contrary passion suppressed. In this way temperance, modesty, candour, benignity, and other good affections, however despised they were at first, may eventually come to be valued for their own sakes, the contrary affections rejected, and the good and proper object be loved and pursued without any thought of reward or punishment.

So we see that in a civil state a virtuous administration and a fair distribution of rewards and punishments is of the highest service. Not only by restraining the vicious and forcing them to act in ways that are useful to society, but also by causing virtue to be visibly in everyone's interests. This removes all prejudices against virtue, creates a fair reception for it, and leads men into a virtuous path that they can't ever easily quit. Think of a people who are •raised from barbarity or despotic rule, •civilised by laws, and •made virtuous by a long course of lawful and just government; if

they happen to fall suddenly under any misgovernment of unjust and arbitrary power, this will stir them into an even stronger virtue in opposition to this violence and corruption. And even if through long and continued arts [see Glossary] of a prevailing tyranny such a people are at last totally oppressed, the scattered seeds of virtue will for a long time remain alive, even to a second generation, before the utmost force of misapplied rewards and punishments can bring them down to the abject and compliant state of slaves who have become accustomed to their condition.

But although a proper distribution of justice in a government is such an essential cause of virtue, what chiefly •influences mankind and •forms the character and disposition of a people is *example*. A virtuous administration has to be accompanied by virtue in the legal system. Otherwise it couldn't have much effect, and couldn't last long. But where it [i.e. such an administration] is sincere and well established, virtue and the laws must be respected and be loved. The effectiveness of punishments and rewards, then, comes not so much from •the fear or expectation that they raise as from •a natural esteem for virtue, and detestation of villainy, which are both awakened and energised by these public expressions of mankind's approval (or hatred) ·of the conduct that is being rewarded (or punished)·. In public executions of the greatest villains, we see generally that •the infamy and odiousness of their crime and •the shame of it before mankind contribute more to their misery than all the rest of the situation; and that what creates so much horror in the sufferers and the spectators is not the immediate pain, or death itself, but the ignominy of suffering a death that is inflicted for public crimes and violations of justice and humanity.

Reward and punishment have the same role in private families as they do in public states. Slaves and paid servants

who are restrained and made orderly by punishment and the severity of their master are not made good or honest by this. But the same master of the family teaches his children goodness by the use of proper rewards and gentle punishments; and this helps to instruct them in a virtue that in later years they practise on other grounds, with no thought of a penalty or bribe. And this way of handling the young is what we call a liberal education and a liberal service; the contrary service and obedience, whether towards God or man, is illiberal, and unworthy of any honour or commendation.

Religion, however, is a special case. If by ‘the hope of reward’ we mean ‘the love of and desire for virtuous enjoyment, or for the exercise of virtue in another life’, this expectation or hope is so far from being harmful to virtue that it is evidence of our loving it the more sincerely and for its own sake. And this principle can’t fairly be called ‘selfish’; for if the love of virtue is not mere self-interest, the love and desire for life for virtue’s sake can’t be regarded as self-interested either. But if the desire for life comes purely from the violence of the natural aversion to death—if it comes from the love of something other than virtuous affection, or from an unwillingness to part with some such thing—then it is no longer a sign or sample of real virtue.

Thus, a person who loves life for life’s sake and doesn’t love virtue at all may, by the promise or hope of life and the fear of death or some other evil, be induced to •practise virtue and even to •try to be truly virtuous through a love of what he practises. But this attempt isn’t virtuous: the man may intend to be virtuous, but he hasn’t succeeded because this intention is motivated by love of the reward for virtue. But as soon as he comes to have any affection towards what is morally good, and can like such good for its own sake, as good and amiable [see Glossary] in itself, *then* he is in some

degree good and virtuous—but not until then.

Such are the advantages or disadvantages that thoughts about private good or self-interest bring to virtue. Advantages to virtue? Yes, because although the habit of selfishness and the multiplicity of self-interested views do little to help real merit or virtue, if virtue is to survive it must be thought to have no quarrel with true self-interest, and self-enjoyment.

Thus, anyone who believes that in general

- virtue causes happiness and vice causes misery carries with him the required security and assistance for virtue. Now consider someone who has no such belief, and who can’t believe that virtue is really in his interests (as a matter of health and sanity, or of external success); still, if he believes that

- some supreme power is attending to the present affairs of mankind and immediately intervening on behalf of the honest and virtuous against the impious and unjust,

this belief will serve to preserve in him the proper esteem for virtue that might otherwise considerably diminish. Then think about someone who doesn’t believe in the immediate intervention of Providence in the affairs of this present life, but who believes that

- there is a God dispensing rewards to virtue and punishments to vice in a future life;

he carries with him the same advantage and security—for as long as his belief is steady, with no wobble or doubt in it.

Here is why I included that last condition. Expecting and depending on something as miraculous and great as this—i.e. as the reward or punishment or virtue or vice in the next life—is naturally bound to sap the energy of inferior dependencies and encouragements. When infinite rewards are insisted on and the imagination is strongly turned towards

them, the other common and natural motives to goodness are apt to be neglected and to weaken through disuse. For as long as our mind is thus transported in the pursuit of a high advantage and self-interest, so narrowly confined within ourselves, we'll hardly bother even to think about other interests. All affections towards friends, relations, or mankind will have little respect because they'll be seen as 'worldly' and as minor in comparison with the interests of our soul. Many devout people give so little thought to any immediate satisfaction arising from such everyday good deeds that they zealously decry all temporal advantages of goodness, all natural benefits of virtue. They magnify the happiness one can get from being vicious, and declare that if it weren't for the sake of future reward and fear of future punishment, they would immediately shed all their goodness and freely allow themselves to be immoral and profligate. It seems from this that in some respects nothing can be more fatal to virtue than a weak and uncertain belief in future rewards and punishments. If the stress is put wholly *there*, then if this foundation fails there's no further prop or security for men's morals; and thus virtue is supplanted and betrayed.

Now, as for atheism: when atheism leads someone to a wrong judgment about the happiness of virtue, he is wrong, *incurably* wrong; but atheism doesn't necessarily cause any such wrong judgment. It could happen that someone who doesn't absolutely assent to any hypothesis of theism sees and accepts the advantages of virtue and forms a high opinion of it. Admittedly, though, the natural tendency of atheism is—as I explain in the next two paragraphs—in a different direction.

It is. . . impossible to have any great opinion of the happiness of virtue without having high thoughts of the satisfaction that comes from admiring and loving it; and no-one is

likely to believe in this satisfaction if he hasn't himself loved virtue. So the chief basis for this opinion of *happiness in virtue* must come from •the powerful feeling of this generous [see Glossary] moral affection, and •the knowledge of its power and strength. But this is certain:

In anyone who thinks that •there is neither goodness nor beauty in the ·universe as a· whole, and that •there is no example or precedent of good affection in any superior being ·such as God·, these beliefs can't much strengthen his moral affection, or greatly support him in the pure love of goodness and virtue.

Such beliefs must tend rather to wean his affections away from anything amiable or intrinsically worthy, and to suppress ·in him· the ordinary habit of admiring natural beauties, i.e. anything in the natural order of things that exhibits just design, harmony, and proportion. If someone thinks that the universe itself a pattern of disorder, he won't be much disposed to love or admire as orderly anything *in* the universe. Think how unapt he will be to reverence or respect any particular subordinate beauty of a •part when he thinks that the •whole is imperfect—is indeed only a vast and infinite ugliness!

There's no sadder thought than that of living in a chaotic universe from which many evils may arise, with nothing good or lovely presenting itself, nothing that it's good simply to think about or that can raise any passion except contempt, hatred, or dislike. Such an opinion as this ·regarding the universe· may gradually embitter the person's temperament, and not only reduce his feeling of love of virtue but also help to impair and ruin the natural and kind affections that are the very principle of virtue.

Consider now a person who firmly believes in a God whom he doesn't merely call 'good' but of whom he really does believe nothing but real good, nothing but what is

truly appropriate to the most precise character of benignity and goodness. Believing in rewards or punishments in another life, this person must believe them to be tied to real goodness and merit, real villainy and baseness, and not to any accidental [here = 'casual'] qualities or circumstances. . . . (If the latter were the case, these wouldn't strictly qualify as 'rewards' or 'punishments'; they would merely be whimsical distributions of happiness or unhappiness to creatures.) These are the only terms on which the belief in a world to come can influence the believer to good effect. And on these terms and by virtue of this belief, a man can perhaps retain his virtue and integrity even when he has the hardest thoughts of human nature if bad circumstance or false doctrine have brought him to that unfortunate opinion of virtue's being naturally an enemy to happiness in life.

But this opinion ·about human nature· can't be regarded as consistent with sound theism. Whatever a man thinks regarding a future life, or about the rewards and punishments in such a life, if he is a sound theist he believes in a reigning mind, sovereign in nature and ruling all things with the highest perfection of goodness, as well as of wisdom and power. So he *must* believe virtue to be naturally good and advantageous. For what could more strongly imply an unjust order, a blot and imperfection in the general constitution of things, than to suppose that virtue is the natural evil and vice [see Glossary] the natural good of any creature?

And now, last of all, we have to consider yet another advantage to virtue that theism has over atheism. . . .

According to what I have already shown, any creature who has any affection or aversion in a stronger degree than is suitable •to his own private good, or •to the good of the system to which he belongs must be *bad* in some degree. For in either case the affection is bad and vicious. Now, if a rational creature has the degree of aversion that is needed to

arm him against some particular misfortune, and alarm him against the approach of some calamity, this is regular and good. But if after the misfortune has happened, his aversion continues and his passion actually *grows* in him, while he rages at the event and exclaims against his particular fortune or lot [see Glossary], this will be acknowledged to be vicious both in present, and for the future; because it will affect his temperament and disturbs the easy course of the affections on which virtue and goodness so much depend. On the other hand, patiently enduring the calamity and bearing up under it must be acknowledged to be virtuous right now and preservative of virtue ·for the future·. Now, according to the hypothesis of those who exclude a universal mind, ·i.e. according to atheism·, nothing can happen that would deserve either our admiration and love, or our anger and abhorrence. Still, just as there can be no satisfaction, at the best, in thinking about what atoms and good luck produce, so on disastrous occasions involving calamity and bad luck it's hardly possible to prevent a natural kind of abhorrence and rage that will be kept alive by

the rest of the sentence: the imagination of so perverse an order of things.

what Shaftesbury is getting at: the pretend-thought that the universe is organized against one (something that an atheist can't seriously believe).

But on another hypothesis (that of perfect theism) it is understood that *whatever the order of the world produces is mainly just and good*. Therefore in the course of events in this world, whatever hardship may seem to force from any rational creature a hard censure of his private condition or lot, he can still through reflection come to have patience and to acquiesce in it. And that's not all. He may take this reconciliation ·with the universe· a step further, and from

the same principle may acquire a good affection towards his lot itself, while trying to maintain this generous [see Glossary] obedience and retaining a good attitude to the laws and government of his higher country, ·i.e. the universe·.

Such an affection is bound to create the highest constancy in any state of suffering, and to make us in the best manner support whatever hardships have to be endured for virtue's sake. And just as this affection is bound to cause a greater acquiescence and acceptance with respect to bad events, bad men, and injuries, so also it can't fail to produce greater evenness, gentleness, and benignity in the temperament. So this affection must be a truly good one, and a creature must be made the more truly good and virtuous by possessing it. . . .

This too is certain: the admiration and love of order, harmony and proportion of whatever kind is naturally improving to the temperament and to social affection, and extremely helpful to •virtue—which is itself nothing but •the love of order and beauty in society. Even in the most low-down and minor things in the world, the appearance of order impresses itself on the mind and draws affection towards it.

But if the order of the world itself appears just and beautiful, the admiration and esteem for order must run higher, and the elegant passion—i.e. the love of beauty that so greatly supports virtue—must be the all the more improved by being aimed at such a vast and magnificent object. . . .

Now, if the object and basis of this divine passion is not really just or adequate—i.e. if the hypothesis of theism is false—the passion is still in itself sufficiently natural and good to be an advantage to virtue and goodness, according to what I have shown; and if the object of this passion really is adequate and just—because theism is true—then the passion is also just, and becomes absolutely due and requisite in every rational creature.

So we can settle accurately the relation that virtue has to piety, namely: virtue is not complete unless it is accompanied by piety, because where piety is lacking there can't be the same benignity, firmness, or constancy, the same good composure of the affections, or uniformity of mind.

So the perfection and height of virtue must be due to the belief in a god.