

An Enquiry into the Sources of Morals

David Hume

1751

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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. Larger omissions are reported within square brackets, in normal-sized type.—Hume’s title for this work is *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. In his day a ‘principle’ was often not a kind of •proposition but rather a •‘source of activity’ or •‘activator’ or the like. On page 3 he calls morality an ‘active principle’, and on page 29 he writes that a certain ‘principle still exerts its active energy’—he isn’t talking about the active energy of a *proposition*! This sense of ‘principle’ is what is meant in the title of this work, which on pages 4, 56 and 65 Hume describes as an enquiry into ‘the origin of morals’.

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Appendix 1. Moral sentiment (·or feeling·)

If my theory is accepted, that will make it easy for us to answer the question with which I began—the one about whether our morality arises from reason or from sentiment (·or feeling·) or from both. I postponed answering that question because I thought it might involve us in intricate speculations that are unfit for moral discourses; but now I come back to it, and examine how far either reason or sentiment enters into all decisions of praise or censure.

One principal basis for moral praise lies in the usefulness of the quality or action being praised; so obviously *reason* must play a considerable part in all decisions of this kind. Why? Because only reason can instruct us about the tendency [= 'causal properties'] of qualities and actions, and point out their beneficial consequences to society and to the person who has them or does them. There is often a great deal of controversy about this: doubts may arise; conflicting interests may come into it; and one of the options has to be chosen, on the basis of fine details and a small difference in utility. This is especially noticeable with questions about justice—which is what it's natural to expect, given the kind of utility that this virtue involves (more about that in Appendix 3). If every individual instance of justice were useful to society in the way that every individual instance of benevolence is, this would simplify things and not involve much controversy. But ·that is *not* how things stand·. It often happens that a single instance of justice is harmful in its first and immediate consequences, and brings advantage to society only through the observance of the general rule ·of which it is an instance·, so that the advantage requires that many people will act in accordance with that rule; which means that the case—the weighing

up of pros and cons·—becomes more intricate and involved. The many

- details about how society works,
- consequences of any ·general· practice, and
- interests that may come into it

—these are often doubtful, and subject to great discussion and inquiry. The object of civil laws is to settle all the questions about justice: the debates among lay-people, the thoughts of politicians, the precedents of history and public records, are all directed to the same purpose. And in many cases a very precise reason or judgment is needed for the right solution to be found, when there are such intricate doubts arising from obscure or opposite utilities.

But although reason—when it's in good shape and properly used—is all we need for learning about the harmful or useful tendency of qualities and actions, it's not enough on its own to produce any moral blame or approval. Utility is only a tendency to produce a certain end; if that end were totally indifferent to us, we would feel the same indifference towards the means. To get a *preference* for the useful as against the harmful tendencies, some kind of *sentiment* has to be at work. The •sentiment in question can't be anything but a •feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery; since happiness and misery are the different ends that virtue and vice have a tendency to promote. In these contexts, then, •reason instructs us in the various tendencies of actions, and •humanity makes a distinction in favour of the ones that are useful and beneficial.

This partition between the faculties of •understanding and of •sentiment in all moral decisions seems clear from the

theory about the origin of morals that I have been defending in this work. But let us suppose that my theory is false, and start looking for some other satisfactory theory; and I'm willing to risk the claim that we won't find one as long as we suppose reason to be the sole source of morals. In support of this, consider the five following points.

(1) A false hypothesis can easily maintain some appearance of truth as long as it •is stated only in general terms, •uses undefined terms, and •employs comparisons instead of instances. This is conspicuously the case with the philosophy that regards *reason* as the sole source of moral distinctions, with no input from sentiment. However plausible this theory may be in *general* declamations and discourses, when it is applied to any particular instance it can't even be rendered intelligible, let alone be shown to be true. Examine the crime of ingratitude, for instance. [In this context Hume is using 'crime' for any episode of morally wrong conduct or thought or feeling; it has no special link with the criminal law of the state.] This occurs whenever we observe on one side

•good-will, expressed and known, together with help given,

and on the other

•ill-will or indifference, and harm done or at least no help given.

Anatomize all these facts—analyse them as finely as you like—and try *through your reason alone* to discover what there is that's bad or blameworthy about this conduct. You'll never come to any issue or conclusion.

Reason makes judgments concerning •matters of fact and •relations. Let's start by asking, in a case of ingratitude, where is the •matter of fact that we are calling a crime? Point it out; determine the time when it occurred; describe its essence or nature; explain the sense or faculty to which it was revealed. The ingratitude resides in the mind of the

person who is ungrateful. So he must feel it, be conscious of it. But there's nothing there except the frame of mind of •ill-will or absolute •indifference. You can't say that •these, all by themselves, always and in all circumstances, are crimes. No, they are crimes only when we direct them towards people who have previously expressed and displayed good-will towards us. So we can infer that the crime of ingratitude is not any particular individual fact; it arises from a complex of circumstances which, when observed by a spectator, arouses in him the sentiment of blame—this being something that happens because of the particular structure and texture of his mind.

You may say:

What you have just said is false. Something's being a crime doesn't indeed consist in a particular •fact that we are assured of by reason; but it does consist in certain moral •relations that reason discovers, just as we discover by reason the truths of geometry or algebra.

But what relations are you talking about? In the case described, I see first •good-will and help in one person, then •ill-will and harm in the other. Between these there is a relation of contrariety. Does the crime consist in that relation? But suppose a person bore me ill-will or did me harm, and I in return was indifferent towards him, or gave him help. Here is the same relation of contrariety, and yet my conduct is often highly praiseworthy. Twist and turn this matter as much as you will, you can never base morality on *relations*; you have to bring in the decisions of *sentiment*.

When someone says that *two and three are equal to half of ten*, I understand this relation of equality perfectly. I have the thought that if ten is divided into two parts, of which one has as many units as the other; and if either of these parts is compared with two added to three, it will contain as

many units as that compound number. But when you invite me to compare this with moral relations, I admit that I'm altogether at a loss to understand you. A moral action—a crime such as ingratitude—is a complex object. Does the morality consist in the relation of its parts to each other? How? In what way? *Specify* the relation—be more particular and explicit in your propositions—and you'll easily see their falsehood.

You reply: 'No! The morality consists in the relation of •actions to •the rule of right, and they are labelled "good" or "bad" according to whether they do or don't conform to that rule.' In that case, what *is* this rule of right? What does it consist in? How do we discover it? 'By reason', you say, 'which examines the moral relations of actions.' So •moral relations are determined by relating actions to •a rule, and •that rule is determined by considering the •moral relations of objects. Isn't this fine reasoning?

'All this is metaphysics,' you say. 'That is enough to make it very likely that what you say is false.' I reply: Yes, we are certainly involved in metaphysics; but it all comes from you—from your advancing an obscure hypothesis that can never •be made intelligible or •fitted to any particular instance or example. My hypothesis is plain: it says that morality is determined by sentiment •or feeling•. It defines *virtue* as *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approval*; and it defines *vice* as *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the unpleasing sentiment of disapproval*. I then proceed to examine a plain matter of fact, namely, what actions have this influence. I consider the features shared by all the actions we call 'virtuous', and the features shared by all that we call 'vicious' or 'wrong'; and try to extract from some general truths about these sentiments •of approval and disapproval•. If you call *this* metaphysics, and find

anything in it obscure, you should conclude that you don't have the right sort of mind for the systematic study of human behaviour.

(2) Think about someone who is deliberating about whether, in a particular emergency, he should help •his brother or •his benefactor—he can't help both•.

In order to settle where his duty lies—which of the two he has a great obligation to—he must consider •the relations *brother of* and *benefactor of*, and all •the facts about what his brother and his benefactor are like and how they are situated.

Now compare that with this:

In order to determine the proportion of lines in a triangle, one must examine •the nature of that triangle and the •relation its different parts have to each other.

The two procedures look similar, but basically they are enormously different. Someone engaged in theoretical reasoning about triangles or circles considers the various **known and given inter-relations** of the parts of these figures, and from them he infers some •previously• *unknown* relation which follows from the known ones. But to engage in moral deliberation, we must be already be acquainted with all the •relevant• objects, and **all their inter-relations**, and from putting all this together we fix our •choice •of what to do• or our •approval •of what someone has done•. (•For example, to deliberate about whether to help my brother or my benefactor, I must know the facts about each, and about **all** the relevant relations I have to each•.) There's no new fact to be ascertained, no new relation to be discovered. All the details of the case are supposed to be laid before us before we assign blame or approval. If any relevant fact about the situation is still unknown or doubtful, we must first use our intellectual faculties to get it settled, suspending all moral decision or sentiment [Hume's exact five-word phrase] until that has been

done. Was *x* an aggressor against *y*? Until we get *that* settled, how can we determine whether *y*'s killing of *x* was criminal or innocent? But when every detailed fact and every relation is known, there's nothing left for the understanding to do, no question for it to work on. The approval or blame that ensues can't be the ·intellectual· work of the ·faculty of· judgment, but the work of the heart; it's not a •speculative [= 'theoretical'] proposition or assertion, but an •active feeling or sentiment. In the activities of the understanding we infer something new and ·previously· unknown from facts and relations that are known. In moral decisions, all the facts and relations must be known already; and the mind goes from its •contemplation of all of this to •feeling some new impression of affection or disgust, admiration or contempt, approval or blame.

Hence the great difference between a •mistake about what action is right and a •mistake about what the facts are; and hence also the reason why the •former kind of mistake is commonly criminal and the •latter is not. When Oedipus killed Laius, he didn't know that Laius was his father; facts about the situation that weren't his fault led to his having false beliefs about the action he performed. But when Nero killed ·his mother· Agrippina, all the relations between himself and her and all the factual details were already known to him; but in his savage heart the motive of revenge or fear or self-interest prevailed over the sentiments of duty and humanity. And when we express our detestation of him, . . . it's not because we see any relations that he didn't see; rather, our upright frame of mind causes us to feel sentiments against which he had become hardened by flattery and a long history of enormous crimes. So all moral determinations consist in these sentiments, and not in a discovery of relations of any kind. Before we can form any decision of this kind, all the facts about the action and its

circumstances must already be known. And then all we have to do is to *feel* some sentiment of blame or approval, on the basis of which we pronounce the action criminal or virtuous.

(3) The truth of my theory will become still more evident if we compare •moral beauty with •natural beauty, which so closely resembles it in many respects. All natural beauty depends on the proportions, relations and positions of parts; but it would be absurd to infer from this that the perception of beauty, like that of truth in geometrical problems, •consists wholly in the perception of relations and •is performed entirely by the understanding or intellectual faculties. In all the sciences, our mind investigates unknown relations of things on the basis of relations that are known; but in all decisions of taste or external beauty *all* the relations are already obvious to the eye, and we move from them to feeling a sentiment of satisfaction or disgust, depending •on what the object in question is like and •on the state of our sense-organs.

Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle, but none of his theorems says a word about its beauty. The reason is clear. Beauty is not a quality of the circle—it is nowhere to be found in any part of the line whose parts are equidistant from a common centre. A circle's beauty is only the *effect* that it produces in the mind, which is built in such a way as to be liable to have such sentiments. You'd be wasting your time if you looked for beauty *in* the circle, trying through your senses or through mathematical reasoning to detect it in the properties of that figure.

Attend to ·the architects· Palladio and Perrault when they explain all the parts and proportions of a pillar. They talk of the 'cornice' and 'frieze' and 'base' and 'entablature' etc., and describe and locate each of these parts of the pillar. But if you asked them to describe and locate the pillar's beauty, they would immediately reply that the beauty isn't in any

of the pillar's parts, but results from the whole thing when that complex figure is presented to an intelligent mind that is liable to have those finer sensations [Hume's word]. Until such a spectator turns up, there is nothing but a figure of such and such dimensions and proportions; it's from the spectator's sentiments—and only from them—that the elegance and beauty of the pillar arises.

Now attend to the orator Cicero when he depicts the crimes of the corrupt politician Verres or the seditious conspirator Catiline. You must admit that the moral baseness results—like the beauty of the pillar—from the contemplation of the whole, when presented to someone whose organs have a particular structure and formation. The orator may paint rage, insolence, barbarity on one side, and meekness, suffering, sorrow and innocence on the other; but if you don't feel indignation or compassion arise in you from this complex of facts, it wouldn't do you any good to ask the orator:

- What is the crime or villainy that you were so vehemently attacking?
- When did it come into existence, and who was its subject?
- Now (a few months later) that every disposition and thought of all the people involved is totally altered or annihilated, what has become of the crime?

The abstract hypothesis of morals—i.e. the theory that moral conclusions are established by reason—can't give a satisfactory answer to any of these questions. Eventually we have to admit that the crime or immorality, rather than being a particular fact or relation that can be investigated by the understanding, arises entirely from the sentiment of disapproval that we unavoidably feel when we learn about barbarity or treachery. (What makes this feeling 'unavoidable' is the structure of human nature.)

(4) Inanimate objects can relate to each other in all the ways that moral agents can; but they can't be the object of love or hatred, and so they aren't capable of merit or iniquity. [Hume here uses 'inanimate' in one of its old senses, to mean 'non-breathing' = (roughly) 'non-animal'.] A young tree that over-tops and destroys its parent stands in all the same relations as Nero did when he murdered his mother; and if morality consisted merely in relations, the young tree would no doubt be equally criminal.

(5) It seems clear that the ultimate ends of human actions can't, in any single case, be accounted for by reason, and submit themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without depending in any way on our intellectual faculties. Here's an example, to help you grasp the idea of an *ultimate end*. Ask a man 'Why do you take exercise?' and he will answer 'Because I want to keep my health'. Ask him 'Why do you want health?' and he will readily reply 'Because sickness is painful'. If you now push on, and ask him 'Why do you hate pain?', he can't possibly answer. This is an *ultimate end*, and is never regarded as a special case of something more general.

He might give to the question 'Why do you want health?' a different answer, namely 'Because I need it to do my job'. If you ask 'Why do you care about that?', he will answer 'Because I want to earn money'. If you demand why, he will say that money is the instrument of pleasure. And beyond this it would be absurd to ask for a reason. There can't possibly be a progress *ad infinitum*, with each desire being based on a reason that consists in a desire for something *else*. Something must be desirable •on its own account, •because of its immediate fit with human sentiment and affection.

Now, virtue is an *end*; it is desirable on its own account, without fee or reward, purely for the immediate satisfaction

it gives; so there has to be some sentiment that it triggers, some internal taste or feeling—or whatever you want to call it—that distinguishes moral good from moral evil, embracing the one and rejecting the other.

So we can easily establish •the domain and the role of reason and •the domain and role of taste ·or feeling·. The former provides knowledge of truth and falsehood; the latter yields the sentiment of beauty and ugliness, vice and virtue. Reason discovers objects as they really are in nature, not adding or taking away anything; whereas feeling or taste produces something, adds something. It gilds or paints natural objects with colours borrowed from internal sentiment, and so it (in a way) creates something new. Reason is cool and disengaged, so it isn't a motive to action. Its only link with action is that it *directs* the impulse it received from appetite or inclination, showing us the *means* to attaining happiness or avoiding misery. Taste

·or feeling, far from being cool·, gives pleasure or pain; so it constitutes happiness or misery and therefore acts as a motive to action. It is indeed the first spring or impulse—the initial *starter*—for desire and volition. From factual details and relations that are known or supposed, reason leads us to the discovery of truths that were concealed and unknown; after *all* the factual details and relations are laid before us, taste or feeling makes us feel a new sentiment of blame or approval. The standard of reason, being founded on the nature of things, is eternal and inflexible—not even the will of the Supreme Being can alter it. The standard of taste or feeling ·presumably *could* be altered by God if he chose to alter it. It· arises from the eternal make-up and constitution of animals; so it is ultimately derived from the Supreme Will that •gave each ·species of· animal its special nature and •arranged the various classes and orders of existence.

Appendix 2. Self-love

There's a principle, said to be accepted by many people, that is utterly incompatible with all virtue or moral sentiment. It can't come from anything but the most depraved disposition ·in the person who maintains it·, and in its turn it tends still further to encourage that depravity. The principle is this:

All •benevolence is mere hypocrisy, •friendship a cheat, •public spirit a farce, •fidelity a snare to procure trust and confidence. Basically all of us pursue only our private interest, but we wear •these fair disguises so as to put others off their guard and make them

even more vulnerable to our tricks and schemes. It's easy to imagine what kind of *heart* a man must have if he believes this, and feels no internal sentiment that contradicts this harmful theory; and to imagine his level of affection and benevolence towards a species that he paints in such revolting colours and supposes to be so unlikely to return the affection or be grateful for any good that is done for them. Or if someone's acceptance of this principle doesn't come entirely from a corrupted heart, he must have been led by the most careless and rushed examination ·of the human

scene. It could happen like this: a superficial reasoner observes many false pretences among mankind; he doesn't feel within himself any strong resistance to *his* acting in such a way; so he rushes to the general conclusion •that the whole species is equally corrupted; and •that men, unlike all other animals—indeed, unlike all other *things*—can't be distinguished from one another as better or worse, not even *slightly* better or worse, because under their various disguises and appearances they are all, from the evaluative point of view, the same.

Another somewhat similar principle has been much insisted on by philosophers, and has been the foundation of many a system. It is this:

Whatever affection one may feel or imagine one feels for others, there aren't and can't be any disinterested [= 'not *self*-interested'] feelings; the most generous friendship, however sincere, is a version of self-love; even when we appear to be deeply engaged in schemes for the liberty and happiness of mankind, all we are really seeking (though we may not be aware of this) is our own gratification. By a turn of imagination or a refinement of reflection or an enthusiasm of passion we *seem* to do things in the interests of others, and imagine that we are free of all selfish considerations; but *basically* the most generous patriot and the most niggardly miser, the bravest hero and the feeblest coward, are equally concerned with their own happiness and welfare in everything that they do.

This looks like a damage-causing opinion, which might lead you to think that anyone who announces it as *his* opinion can't possibly feel the true sentiments of benevolence, or have any regard for genuine virtue. But that conclusion turns out to be false. Probity and honour were no strangers to Epicurus and his followers. Atticus and Horace seem to have

had by nature, and to have developed through reflection, dispositions that were as generous and friendly as any those of disciples of the sterner schools. And among the moderns, Hobbes and Locke maintained the selfish theory of morals yet lived irreproachable lives; and Hobbes was not in a position to have the defects of his philosophy made up for by the restraints of religion.

An Epicurean or a Hobbesian freely agrees that there is such a thing as a friendship in the world, without hypocrisy or disguise; though he may attempt through a philosophical chemistry •to analyse this passion into elements that belong to some other passion, and •to explain every affection as a case of self-love that is twisted and moulded by a particular turn of imagination into a variety of appearances. People's imaginations differ in ways that affect how the basic passion is redirected, so that even according to this 'selfish' theory men's characters can differ widely—with one man being virtuous and humane, another vicious and meanly self-interested. I admire the man whose self-love is somehow so directed as to give him a concern for others and render him useful to society; I hate or despise the one who has no regard for anything but his own gratifications and enjoyments. It's no use your suggesting that these seemingly opposite characters are basically the same, their only difference coming from a very inconsiderable turn of thought. Each character appears to me to be in practice pretty stable, even if it does rest on a minor fact about how the person's imagination works. And I don't find in this context, any more than I do in others, that the natural sentiments arising from the general appearances of things are easily destroyed by subtle reflections on the fine details of the origins of these appearances. Doesn't the lively, cheerful colour of someone's face give me satisfaction and pleasure, even if I learn from science that differences in complexions *all* arise from tiny differences of thickness in

tiny parts of the skin, making differences in which colours of the spectrum are absorbed and which are reflected?

So the question concerning the universal or partial selfishness of man doesn't make as much real difference to morality and conduct as it is usually thought to do. Still, it is •certainly of consequence in the theoretical study of human nature, and is •a proper object of curiosity and enquiry. So it may be worthwhile to offer a few thoughts about it here.²⁴

The most obvious objection to the 'selfish hypothesis' is this: because it is contrary to common feeling and our natural untutored thoughts, and is therefore an extraordinary paradox, it couldn't be established without the highest stretch of philosophy [= 'without support from lengthy, elaborate, and difficult philosophical argument']. To the most casual observer there appear to be such dispositions as **(1)** benevolence and generosity, such affections as love, friendship, compassion and gratitude. The causes, effects, objects and operations of these sentiments are marked by common language and observation, and are plainly distinguished from the causes etc. of **(2)** the selfish passions. This is the *obvious appearance* of things, and we should just accept it unless and until some hypothesis is discovered that can penetrate deep enough into human nature to show that **(1)** the former affections are nothing but special cases of **(2)** the latter. No-one has yet succeeded in doing that, though many have tried—apparently because of the love of *simplicity* that has been the source of much false reasoning in philosophy. I shan't here go into details about that. Many able philosophers have shown up

the failures of these ·simplifying· theories. The view that I'll be taking for granted is one that I think the slightest reflection will make obvious to every impartial enquirer. [In this paragraph, 'philosophy' and 'philosopher' probably also cover science and scientists.]

Anyway, the nature of the subject creates the strongest presumption that no better system will *ever* be invented that will •explain the benevolent feelings as arising from the selfish ones, and thus •reduce all the various emotions of the human mind to a perfect simplicity. The situation in this area of philosophy is quite different from the situation in physics. Many an hypothesis in natural science has appeared false at first and then after more accurate scrutiny found to be solid and satisfactory. This happens so often that a judicious and witty philosopher [Fontenelle] has gone so far as to say that if there's more than one way in which a phenomenon could be produced, there's a general presumption that it is produced by the least obvious and familiar of them! But the presumption always lies on the other side in all enquiries into the origin of our passions and of the internal operations of the human mind. ·In *that* context· the simplest and most obvious causal story about any given phenomenon is probably the true one. When a philosopher in setting out his system has to avail himself of some very intricate and refined reflections, and to suppose them to be essential to the production of some passion or emotion, *beware!* In such a case we have reason to be alertly on our guard against a false theory. Our affections can't be affected by refined activities of

²⁴ Benevolence naturally divides into two kinds—•general and •particular. My general benevolence towards someone occurs when I'm not his friend, am not connected with him, and am not one of his admirers, but feel a general sympathy with him, being sorry about his pains and rejoicing with him over his pleasures. My particular benevolence towards someone is based on my thinking that he is virtuous, or on help that he has given me, or on some special connection between us. There's no denying that both these sentiments are real aspects of human nature; the question of whether they are really subtle versions of self-love is •interesting to study rather than •practically important. In the course of this inquiry I shall often have occasion to refer to general benevolence, or humanity, or sympathy; and my general experience leads me to assume without further argument that it is real.

reason or imagination; what we always find is that a vigorous exertion of the faculties of reason or imagination brings affections [= feelings] to a halt. (This is bound to happen, because of the narrow capacity of the human mind.) It's true that quite often our predominant motive or intention is concealed from ourselves when it's mixed in with other motives which the mind (from vanity or self-conceit) wants to think are more prevalent; but such concealment of one's own motives from oneself has *never* happened because of the abstruseness and intricacy of the motive. A man who has lost a friend and patron may be flattering himself when he thinks that all his grief arises from generous sentiments with no admixture of self-interested considerations; but when a man grieves for a valuable friend whose patron and protector he was—i.e. when the benefits have been flowing in the opposite direction—how can we think that his passionate tenderness arises from some metaphysical relation to a self-interest that he doesn't actually *have*? We may as well imagine that tiny wheels and springs, like those of a watch, are what make a loaded wagon move, as account for the origin of passion from such abstruse reflections.

Animals are found to be capable of kindness to their own species and to ours, and there's no suspicion that this involves disguise or play-acting. Are we to account for all *their* sentiments too in terms of refined versions of self-interest? And if we admit a disinterested benevolence in the lower species, by what rule of analogy can we refuse it in the higher?

Love between the sexes generates a satisfaction and good-will that are quite different from the gratification of an appetite. In all sentient beings, tenderness towards their offspring is commonly able to outweigh the strongest motives neglect of self-love, and doesn't in any way arise from self-love. Consider this case: a fond mother loses her health

through the hard work of nursing her sick child; the child dies; and the mother languishes and dies of grief. Remember that the child's death frees her from the slavery of caring for it around the clock. What self-interest could possibly be at work here?

Isn't gratitude an affection of the human breast, or is 'gratitude' merely a word, with no meaning or reality? Don't we get more satisfaction from one man's company than from another's? Don't we want our friend to have a happy life, even if •absence or •death prevent us from having any part in it? And in most cases, even while we are •alive and •present, what gives us any part in our friend's good fortune other than affection and respect for him?

These and a thousand other examples are signs of a general benevolence in human nature in situations where no real self-interest binds us to the object. And it's hard to see how a •real passion or emotion can arise from an 'interest' that the person knows and admits to be •imaginary. No satisfactory hypothesis of this kind *has been* discovered so far, and there isn't the least probability that one *will* be found, however hard men work at it.

And there's another point. If you think about it properly you'll see that as between these two hypotheses—

(1) There is disinterested benevolence, distinct from self-love

(2) All friendship and humanity is a version of self-love—the one that is *really* simpler is not (2) but (1). It's true that (2) postulates only one basic feeling, while (1) postulates at least two; but (1) leads to a simpler over-all theory than (2) does because it fits better into the analogy of nature. In the rest of this paragraph I shall present an important very general thesis, and then fit (1)-type benevolence in with it. Everyone agrees that there are bodily wants or appetites that necessarily precede all sensual enjoyment, and lead

us immediately to try to *get* whatever it is that the appetite is an appetite *for*. For example, hunger and thirst have eating and drinking as the ends they aim for; and from the gratification of these primary appetites arises a pleasure that may become the object of another sort of desire or inclination that is secondary and self-interested.

[Hume's point in that very condensed sentence is this: **Primary appetite:** I am very hungry, which leads me to reach up to pick an apple off a tree. This isn't *self-interested* conduct, because the hunger leads to the action *immediately* rather than through any such thought as 'It will suit my purposes very well if I pick that apple'. But in general when I am hungry and then eat, I get pleasure from this; and so. . . **Secondary desire:** at a time when I'm not hungry I want to ensure that I will always have enough to eat, and this want and the actions it leads to *are* self-interested, because they do involve a thought about my own interests.]

Similarly, there are mental passions (·as distinct from physical appetites·) by which we are driven *immediately* to seek particular objectives—fame, power, vengeance—without any thought about what is in our interests; and when these objectives are attained a pleasing enjoyment ensues as a consequence of our getting what we wanted. For us to ·reap any pleasure from getting fame, or to ·pursue fame from motives of self-love and desire for happiness, nature must have given us a *basic* inclination to go after fame—·basic in the sense that it isn't a special case of some more general desire or inclination·. (Why is this so? It's an upshot of the way the human mind is structured.) If I have no vanity I get no pleasure from praise; if I lack ambition, power gives me no enjoyment; if I'm not angry, the punishment of an adversary is totally indifferent to me [see note on page 3]. In each of these cases there's a passion that points *immediately* to the objective, and makes ·the achieving of· it a part of our good or happiness; and then there are other, secondary passions that arise afterwards and ·lead us to· pursue the

same objective as a ·part of our happiness, once it has been made to be ·such by our basic affections. If there were no appetite of any kind in advance of—and more basic than—self-love, there would be hardly anything for self-love to *do*, because we would have felt few pains or pleasures and no intense ones, and so there would be little misery or happiness for us to avoid or to pursue.

Well, it's easy to see that the same thing may be the case with benevolence and friendship. The following individual case would be part of general story:

Because of the basic way I am built, I feel a desire for *your* happiness or good; because of that affection of mine, ·your good becomes ·my own good; and then I pursue your good from the combined motives of benevolence and self-enjoyment.

·The basic passions and propensity that resemble our primary physical appetites are further removed from self-interest than I have so far indicated. I have made the point that they don't *come from* self-interest, aren't *versions* of it; but now I add that sometimes they run *against* self-interest. We all know that someone's desire for revenge may be so strong that he seeks revenge while knowing that he is neglecting every consideration of ease, interest and safety; like some vindictive animals he infuses his very soul into the wounds he gives his enemy. [Hume here has a footnote, quoting (in Latin) Horace writing about the bee that leaves its sting in the body of its enemy and dies as a consequence, and Seneca writing about someone's neglecting his own welfare in his eagerness to harm an enemy.] What a malignant philosophy it would be that didn't allow to ·humanity and ·friendship the same privileges that are indisputably granted to the darker passions of ·enmity and ·resentment!. . . Such a philosophy may be a good foundation for paradoxical wit and teasing, but it's a very bad one for any serious argument or reasoning.

Appendix 3. Further points about justice

In this Appendix I plan to give some further details about the origin and nature of justice, and to mark some differences between it and the other virtues.

The social virtues of humanity and benevolence exert their influence *immediately*, by a *direct* tendency or instinct that is focussed mainly on whatever it is that has aroused the feeling in question; They don't bring in any theory or system, or any thought about the consequences of the behaviour they lead to—consequences from other people going along with the behaviour, imitating it, taking it as an example. A parent rushes to help his child, swept along by the natural sympathy that drives him, and doesn't give him a space in which to reflect on how the rest of mankind feel or behave in similar circumstances. [See note on 'sympathy' on page 6.] A generous man cheerfully takes up an opportunity to do something for his friend because at that moment he feels himself to be governed by beneficent affections; he isn't concerned with whether anyone else in the universe ever was driven by such noble motives, or ever will be influenced by his behaviour now to act in similar ways. In every such case, the social passions of a person x aim at a single individual objective, and pursue the safety or happiness of the loved and admired person—of that person and no-one else. All x wants is just that, with no thought of further consequences. And, in a corresponding way, the good his beneficence does arouses the moral sentiment of approval in others without *their* thinking about further consequences of x's behaviour itself or of its being a model for how other members of society might act. So far from the behaviour's being valuable only because others might follow suit, the truth is almost the opposite. If the generous friend or disinterested patriot were

the only person engaged in beneficence of this sort, that would *enhance* his value in our eyes; the rarity and novelty of his conduct would *add* to the things we praised him for.

The case is not the same with the social virtues of justice and fidelity. They are highly useful—or indeed absolutely necessary—to the well-being of mankind; but the benefit they bring is not a consequence of every individual single act; rather, it arises from the whole scheme or system accepted by the whole society or anyway most of it. General peace and order are products of justice or the *general* practice of not taking things that belong to others; but it often happens that a *particular* case of respecting the *particular* right of one *individual* citizen is, considered in itself, harmful in its consequences. In a case of that sort the result of the individual act is directly opposite to that of the whole system of actions; the individual act may be extremely harmful although the general system of which it is a part is enormously advantageous. When a bad man inherits riches from a parent, this can lead to mischief—that's an individual case where right of inheritance is harmful. Its benefit comes only from the rule's being generally obeyed, and it is sufficient [here = 'morally acceptable, over-all'] if that benefit outweighs all the bad consequences in some particular cases. . . .

The happiness and prosperity of mankind that arises from the social virtue of **benevolence** and its varieties can be compared to a **wall** that is built by many hands: each stone that is put in place helps the wall to rise, and its over-all increase in size depends on the diligence and care of each workman. The happiness that arises from the social virtue of **justice** and its varieties is comparable to the building of a stone **arch**, where each individual stone

would fall to the ground if left to itself, and the whole arch is supported purely by the mutual assistance and combination of its parts. [This splendid comparison of Hume's depends on knowing how a stone arch works. For help with that, go to <http://www.technologystudent.com/struct1/arch1.htm>.]

All the laws of nature that regulate property, as well as all civil laws that do so, are *general*; they fix on certain essential circumstances of the case, and ignore •the characters, situations, and inter-relations of the people concerned, as well as •any particular consequences that may result from applying these laws in any particular case that comes up. If a beneficent man has acquired all his possessions through a mistake and without having a good legal title to them, these laws don't hesitate to make him pass the whole lot over to the man who *is* legally entitled to them, even if he is a selfish miser who has already heaped up immense stores of superfluous riches. The interests of society as a whole require that property should be regulated by inflexible general rules; the rules that are adopted are the ones that best serve the end of public utility; but it's impossible for them to prevent all particular hardships, or make beneficial consequences result from every individual application of a rule. It is sufficient if the whole plan or scheme is necessary for the support of civil society, and if the over-all good greatly outweighs the bad aspects of particular cases. •Don't think it would have been easy to devise rules that didn't work badly in special cases•. Even the general laws of the universe, though planned by •God's• infinite wisdom, can't exclude all evil or inconvenience from some particular events.

Some have maintained that justice arises from human conventions, and depends on the voluntary choice, consent, or working-together of mankind. If in this context 'convention' means what is usually means, namely *a promise*, nothing could be more absurd than this thesis. The keeping

of promises is itself a considerable *part* of justice—surely we aren't bound to keep our word because we have given our word to keep it! But if on the other hand 'convention' is being used here to refer to

a sense of common interest that each man feels in himself and notices in his fellow-men as well, a sense that carries him and them into a general plan of actions that has public utility as a consequence,

then I have to agree that justice *does* arise from human 'conventions' in *this* sense. Given the obvious fact that the particular consequences of a particular act of justice may be harmful not only to some individuals but to the public in general, it follows that anyone who aims always to act justly must have an eye to the whole plan or system, and must expect his fellow-humans to act in the same way in the same circumstances. If he took into account nothing but the consequences of each •individual• act of his own, his benevolence and humanity—as well as his self-love—might often have him behaving in ways very different from what the strict rules of right and justice prescribe.

Thus, two men pull the oars of a boat by common convention for common interest, without any promise or contract; thus gold and silver are made the measures of exchange; thus speech and words and language are fixed by human convention and agreement. When two or more people behave in a way that is advantageous to all of them if they all perform their part in it, but loses all advantage if only one performs, their conduct must arise from a 'convention' in the second of the above senses. There's no other possible source for it; no other motive for any one of them to participate in that scheme of conduct. (This theory about the origin of property, and thus the origin of justice is pretty much the same as one hinted at and adopted by Grotius in his *Laws of War and Peace*. [Hume quotes at some length from this Latin

work; the passage doesn't add any philosophical content to what is already before us.)

The word 'natural' is taken in so many senses, and is so loose in its meaning, that it seems pointless to argue about whether justice is 'natural'. If these are natural to man:

self-love,
benevolence,
reason,
forethought,

then we can also describe

justice,
order,
fidelity,
property,
society

as 'natural' too. **(1)** Men's wants and needs lead them to combine; and **(2)** their understanding and experience tell them that this combination won't work if each man governs himself by no rule and isn't affected by the thought that this or that thing *belongs* to someone else. And from these **(1)** passions and **(2)** reflections taken together, as soon as we observe similar passions and reflections in other people, the sentiment of justice inevitably comes to have some place, large or small, in the make-up of every individual of the human species. That's what has happened down through the centuries. In as intelligent an animal as man, anything that necessarily arises from the use of his intellectual faculties can fairly be regarded as natural.²⁵

Among all civilized nations there has been a constant attempt to separate the institution of property from every kind of bias and favouritism, and to base legal decisions about property on general views and considerations that apply equally to every member of society. There are at least two reasons for this. •Nothing could be more dangerous than for judges to be accustomed to allowing their decisions to reflect—however slightly—their own private friendship or enmity. •If men thought that the only reason why they lost a legal case was the judge's personal bias, they would be apt to become extremely hostile to the whole legal system. That is why, in cases where natural reason doesn't yield any fixed view of public utility that could settle a controversy about property, man-made laws are often created to do what natural reason doesn't do, and to govern procedure of all courts of law. Quite often man-made laws don't do the job either; and then precedents are called for; and an earlier decision—even one for which there was no sufficient reason—is rightly treated as a sufficient reason for a new decision. When direct laws *and* precedents fail, imperfect and indirect reasons are brought to the rescue, and the case in dispute is brought under them by analogical reasonings and comparisons, likenesses and correspondences, which are often more fanciful than real. It is pretty safe to say that •general jurisprudence [usually = 'legal theory', but here probably = 'legal practice'] is unlike all the sciences in this respect, and •that in many of its more fine-grained questions there can't properly be said to be truth or falsehood on either side.

²⁵ 'Natural' can be opposed •to 'unusual', •to 'miraculous' or •to 'artificial'. In the first two of those senses, justice and property are undoubtedly 'natural'. Perhaps they can't strictly be called 'natural' in the third sense—i.e. meaning 'not artificial'—because justice and property do presuppose reason, forethought and design, which means that they are really artificial. . . . If men hadn't lived in society, property would never have been known, and neither justice nor injustice would have existed. But society among human creatures would have been impossible without reason and forethought. Lower animals that unite into something like societies are guided by instinct, which serves them in place of reason. But all these disputes are merely verbal.

If one pleader bring the case under some earlier law or precedent by means of a refined analogy or comparison, his opponent won't be at a loss to find an analogy or comparison that goes the opposite way, and the judge's choice between these is often based more on taste and imagination than on any solid argument. The general objective of all courts of law is public utility, and this also requires a stable rule in all controversies; but when there is an *impasse* created by several equally plausible rules, some very slight turn of thought settles the decision in favour of one of the parties.

·START OF A VERY LONG FOOTNOTE·

The origin of justice and property is society's absolute need for *some* steady and constant scheme under which individual people *possess* things. It usually doesn't matter much what possessions are assigned to this or that person, and rules governing that, though they are to be strictly adhered to, are often based on very frivolous views and considerations. Here are five examples of relatively specialised property-rules, in the last two of which our imagination is at work in ways that could fairly be called 'frivolous'.

(1) If a number of independent people came together to form a society, the most obvious rule for them to agree on as a basis for property would be that everyone is to have a right of possession in any property that he owns or has the use of *now*. A person's becoming in this way the legal owner of something *x* would be based on a real relation that already existed between himself and *x*.

(2) For a similar reason, someone's having been the *first* to occupy or use something is treated as a basis for his having it as his property. This differs from **(1)** only in not being tied to the imagined situation in which the society and its laws are being devised. So it still has **(1)**'s feature of being based on an antecedent real relation between the person and the property.

(3) When a man puts work in on something that previously didn't belong to anyone—e.g. cutting down and shaping a tree, cultivating a field, or the like—the alterations he produces causes •one relation between him and the object, and this naturally draws us into establishing •a second relation between them, by ruling that the object is his legal property. There is also a public-utility reason for this ruling, namely that it encourages hard work.

Those are two reasons for ruling that labour creates property in the manner I have described. There may be a third. Perhaps private humanity towards the man joins in with the other two reasons, and make us want to leave him in possession of something that he has acquired by his sweat and labour, something that he has thought and hoped he could go on using. Private humanity certainly can't be the origin of justice, because justice often goes against it; but when society's needs have established rules of property, *some* rules may arise from private humanity and reluctance to bring hardship upon someone.

(4) I'm much inclined to think that the right of *inheritance* depends greatly on connections of the imagination, and that the reason why property is transferred to a man after the death of his father (say) is the fairly frivolous thought that the man's •relation to his father somehow gives birth to a •relation between him and the property. It's true that hard work is more encouraged by the transference of ownership to children or near relatives, but this has force only in developed societies, whereas the right of inheritance is recognized even among the greatest barbarians.

(5) Acquisition of property by *accession* can only be explained in terms of the relations and connections of the imaginations. ['Accession: *Law*. Artificial improvement or natural growth of a property.' Shorter OED.] To explain this I need first to say something about the ownership of rivers.

The laws of most nations *and* the natural turn of our thoughts dictate that rivers are owned by the owners of their banks, except for such vast rivers as the Rhine or the Danube, which seem too wide to come to be owned through ownership of the neighbouring fields. But even these big rivers are regarded as belonging to the nation through whose territory they run, because we think of a nation as being *big enough* to match up to such rivers in our imagination.

Civil laws say that the accessions that are made to land bordering upon rivers follow the land, .i.e. are owned by the owners of the land, provided that the accessions were made very gradually and imperceptibly .by the river's depositing of silt or the like. This gradualness helps the imagination to tie the new land to the old land.

When a considerable portion of land is suddenly washed away from one bank and swept across to the other, it becomes the property of the person who owns the land on that other side after it has united with his land and the trees and plants have spread their roots into both his old land and this new bit. *After* that, and not *before*. It is only after that uniting by soil and roots that our thought—strictly speaking, our imagination—sufficiently joins them.

In short, we must always distinguish •the need for a system of permanent property-rights from •the rules that determine who owns what. The need is obvious, strong, and invincible; the specific rules may depend on lighter and less serious views about public utility, on the sentiment of private

humanity and aversion to bringing hardship on people, on man-made laws, on precedents, analogies, and very fine connections and turns of the imagination.

·END OF THE VERY LONG FOOTNOTE·

Before leaving this subject I should remark that *after* the laws of justice have been fixed by considerations of •general utility, we pay a great deal of attention to the harm that comes to •individuals through any violation of those laws. Such individual harms play a large part in how strongly we *blame* an unjust action. By the laws of society, this coat or this horse is mine, and *ought* to stay in my possession: I'm relying on being able to go on enjoying it, and when you take it from me you disappoint my expectations, and doubly displease me and offend every bystander. It is a public wrong because it violates the general rules of ownership; and it is a private harm because in it an individual is injured. The private consideration wouldn't have any place in this if the .laws violated by the. public wrong hadn't first been established; for without those laws the distinction between *mine* and *thine* wouldn't be known in society. But unquestionably our concern for general good is intensified by our concern for particular good. Something that harms the community without harming any individual is often more lightly thought of. But when the greatest public wrong also involves a considerable private wrong, it's not surprising that the highest disapproval attends such wicked behaviour.

Appendix 4. Some verbal disputes

Nothing is more usual than for philosophers to trespass on the territory of grammarians, and engage in disputes about words while thinking they are handling controversies of the deepest importance and concern. I was trying to keep out of frivolous and endless arguments of that sort when I used the utmost caution in stating the objective of my present enquiry, and set out simply to collect

- a list of the mental qualities that are the object of love or esteem, and form a part of personal merit, and
- a catalogue of the qualities that are the objects of censure or reproach, and detract from the character of the person who has them;

adding some thoughts about the origins of these sentiments of praise or blame. I avoided the terms ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ on every occasion when there might be some difficulty about them—difficulty arising from the fact that some of the qualities on my first list are usually called ‘talents’ rather than ‘virtues’, and that some of the items on my second list are often called ‘defects’ rather than ‘vices’. You might expect me now, before ending this moral enquiry, to draw sharp lines between virtues and talents, and between vices and defects, and to explain the rationales and the origins of those lines. Well, I am not going to! An exploration of those lines would end up being a merely grammatical enquiry. But I shall offer four reflections, which will contain all that I intend to say on this subject.

(1) I don’t find that in English or any other modern language the boundaries are exactly fixed between virtues and talents, vices and defects, or that a precise definition can be given of the one as distinguished from the other. We might try this:

- The only admirable qualities that count as ‘virtues’ are ones that are •voluntary.

But think about such qualities as *courage*, *equanimity*, *patience*, *self-control*, which almost every language classifies as ‘virtues’ although they depend little if at all on our •choice. Or we might try this:

- It’s only the qualities that prompt us to act our part in society that are entitled to be called ‘virtues’.

Those are indeed the most valuable qualities; but they are commonly called ‘the social virtues’, and that adjective presupposes that some virtues are not social. A third try:

- Intellectual endowments don’t count as ‘virtues’, only moral endowments do, because they are the only ones that lead to action.

But many of the qualities that are usually called ‘intellectual virtues’—e.g. *prudence*, *penetration*, *discernment*, *discretion*—also have a considerable influence on conduct. Or we might try this:

- Qualities of *the heart*—meaning ones the exercise of which is accompanied by a feeling or sentiment—are the genuine virtues, whereas qualities of *the head* are not.

But that won’t do either, because industry, frugality, temperance, perseverance, and many other praiseworthy powers or habits are generally called ‘virtues’, and the exercise of them doesn’t involve any immediate sentiment in the person concerned. . . . In the middle of this welter of suggestions and refutations, it is fortunate that the question can’t possibly be of any importance because it is purely verbal. A moral and philosophical discourse needn’t enter into all these whims of language, which are so variable in different dialects and even

in the same dialect at different times. Still, I'll offer a view about the matter. It seems to me that although everyone agrees that there are virtues of many different kinds, what we chiefly have in mind when we call a man 'virtuous' or 'a man of virtue' are his social qualities, which are indeed the most valuable. All the same, an honest good-natured man *wouldn't* get that honourable label if he were notably lacking in any of the non-social virtues such as courage, temperance, economy, industry, understanding, dignity of mind. Who would ever say, except as a joke, 'He is a man of great virtue, but a complete blockhead?'

(2) It's not surprising that languages aren't very precise in marking off virtues from talents and vices from defects, because how we feel about them is not very different. The sentiment of conscious worth, the self-satisfaction that comes from a review of one's own conduct and character; . . . arises from the endowments of courage and ability, industry and ingenuity, as well as from other mental excellences. And, on the other side, who isn't deeply embarrassed when he thinks back on his own folly and clumsiness of behaviour, feeling a secret sting whenever his memory brings back any past episode in which he behaved with stupidity or bad manners? Time never erases the cruel ideas that a man has of his own foolish conduct, or of hostility he has brought on himself through his own cowardice or impudence. They still haunt his solitary hours, damp his most aspiring thoughts, and show him, even to himself, in the most contemptible and odious colours imaginable.

What are we more anxious to conceal from others, and not have exposed by jeering and satire, than such blunders, infirmities and meannesses? And what are we chiefly vain about? Isn't it our bravery or learning, our wit or breeding, our eloquence or skill in speaking, our taste or abilities? We display these with care, if not with ostentation; and

we commonly show more ambition to excel in them than even in the social virtues themselves, though the social virtues are really of much greater excellence. Good-nature and (especially) honesty are so indispensably required for society that, although any violation of these duties [Hume's word] brings the greatest blame, no special praise is given to common instances of them of the sort that seem essential for the support of human society. That, I think, is why, although men are often very free in praising the qualities of their heart, they are shy about commending the endowments of their head; because the virtues of the head, being thought to be more rare and extraordinary, are experienced as more usual objects of pride and self-conceit, so that when someone boasts of having them we strongly suspect that pride and self-conceit are at work in him.

It's hard to tell whether you hurt a man's character more by calling him a knave or by calling him a coward, or to tell whether a beastly glutton or drunkard is as odious and contemptible as a meanly selfish miser. Suppose I could choose my character—specifically, choosing between having

(1) a friendly, humane heart, and

(2) extensive genius and courage and all the other virtues of Demosthenes and Philip combined.

For my own happiness and self-satisfaction I would choose **(1)**; but *for the world's view of me* I would choose **(2)**, expecting to get much more general applause and admiration from that than from **(1)**. The figure that a man cuts in life, the reception he meets with in company, the admiration he gets from those who know him—all these advantages depend as much on his good sense and judgment as on any other part of his character. A man who has the best intentions in the world, and is utterly removed from all injustice and violence, still won't get much respect from the world unless he has at least a moderate share of intellectual competence.

So what is there here for us to dispute about? If **(2)** sense and courage, temperance and industry, wisdom and knowledge are agreed to form a considerable part of personal merit; if a man who has those qualities is better satisfied with himself and better entitled to the good-will, respect and co-operation of others than is anyone who entirely lacks them; if, in short, these **(2)** endowments arouse similar sentiments to those aroused by **(1)** the social virtues; is there any reason for us to be so extremely scrupulous about a *word*, or to argue about whether they are entitled to the label ‘virtues’? It may be claimed that the sentiment of approval produced by the **(2)** accomplishments, as well as being *inferior to* the sentiment that greets the **(1)** virtues of justice and humanity, is also somewhat *different from* it. But this doesn’t seem to be a sufficient reason for classifying the two quite differently and giving them different labels. Within the class of characteristics that are uncontroversially classed as ‘virtues’, there are considerable differences in the sentiments that they produce in others. The historian Sallust describes the characters of Caesar and of Cato in a way that qualifies each to count as ‘virtuous’ in the strictest and tightest sense of the word; but their ways of being virtuous were different, and the sentiments they arouse in us are also somewhat different. Caesar produces love, Cato produces admiration; Caesar is amiable, Cato is awe-inspiring; we would like our friends to resemble Caesar, but our ambition for ourselves would be to resemble Cato. Similarly, the approval we give to temperance or industry or frugality may be somewhat different from our approval

of the social virtues—but not so different as to make them completely different species of approval. . . .²⁶

I believe that most people will naturally and unhesitatingly agree with what an elegant and judicious poet wrote:

Virtue (for mere good-nature is a fool)
Is sense and spirit with humanity.

What claim does a man have to our generous assistance if he has dissipated his wealth in luxurious expenses, idle vanities, fatuous projects, dissolute pleasures or extravagant gambling? These vices (I do call them ‘vices’) bring unpitied misery and contempt on everyone who is addicted to them.

Achaeus, a wise and prudent prince, fell into a trap that cost him his crown and his life, after he had used every reasonable precaution to guard himself against it. On that account, says the historian Polybius, he deserves both respect and compassion; only those who betrayed him merit hatred and contempt.

Pompey’s sudden flight and rash negligence at the start of the civil wars struck Cicero as such notorious blunders that they wiped out his friendship towards that great man. He compared the effect on him of this behaviour of Pompey’s with the way we would be affected by lack of cleanliness or decency or discretion in a mistress. That’s how Cicero put it when speaking in his role not as a philosopher but as a statesman and man of the world. But when this same Cicero was thinking like a philosopher, he followed all the ancient moralists in presenting a very broad idea of *virtue*, giving that honourable label to every praiseworthy quality or endowment of the mind. This leads me to . . .

²⁶ [Hume has a longish footnote about differences in emotional response to various character-traits, focussing mainly on •love and •admiration. He throws in another example:] There seems to be a stronger mixture of •pride in •contempt than of •humility in •admiration; and it wouldn’t be hard to work out why, if one made a careful study of all the passions. All these various mixtures and compositions and appearances of sentiment make a challenging subject of theoretical investigation, but they aren’t relevant to my present topic. Throughout the present Enquiry I have always considered in a *general* way what qualities are praised or blamed, without going into all the minute differences of sentiment that they arouse. . . .

(3) The ancient moralists, the best models, attached little weight to any differences among the different kinds of mental endowments and defects, treating them all alike as ‘virtues’ or ‘vices’ and bringing them all within the scope of their moral reasonings. . . . In the classification adopted by that eloquent moralist Cicero, our social duties constitute merely one of four main kinds of virtue. [At this point Hume has a footnote quoting (in Latin) a passage by Cicero which he says clearly and explicitly makes his (Hume’s) point.]

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We need only glance through the chapter-titles in Aristotle’s ethical works to be convinced that he takes the ‘virtues’ to include not only •justice and friendship but also •courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, modesty, prudence, and manly openness.

For some of the ancients, all morality is summed up in ‘Sustain and abstain’, i.e. ‘Be patient and continent’. [That’s a morality that tells us to •put up with the blows that fate lands on us, and to •refrain from various kinds of misconduct. Hume’s point, presumably, is that such a morality is notably distant from emphasizing *virtue* in anything like his or our sense of the word.]

Epictetus hardly ever mentioned the sentiment of humanity and compassion except to warn his disciples against it. The ‘virtue’ of the Stoics seems to consist mainly in a firm temperament and a good intellect. With them, as with Solomon and the eastern moralists, •folly and •wisdom

are equivalent to •vice and •virtue respectively.

‘Men will praise thee’, says David ‘when thou dost well unto thyself’ (Psalm 49). The Greek poet Euripedes says ‘I hate a wise man who isn’t wise to himself’.

Plutarch doesn’t let *systems* of morality cramp his style in his philosophy any more than in his history. When he compares the great men of Greece and Rome, he sets out all their blemishes and accomplishments, of whatever kind, including everything significant that could either lower or raise their moral standing. His moral discourses contain the same free and natural censure of men and manners.

Livy’s description of the character of Hannibal is regarded as biased, but it does allow him many eminent virtues. According to Livy, before Hannibal there had never been anyone as well equipped as he was for both of his opposite roles—commanding and obeying—so that it would be hard to decide whether he was valued more by the general whom he obeyed or by the army which he commanded. There was no-one to whom the general Hasdrubal would more willingly entrust the conduct of any dangerous enterprise; and no-one under whom the soldiers revealed more courage and confidence. Great boldness in facing danger; great prudence in the midst of it. No labour could fatigue his body or subdue his mind. Cold and heat meant nothing to him; food and drink he sought as •something needed to keep him alive, not as •gratifications of luxurious appetites. Waking or rest he used indiscriminately, by night or by day. These great *virtues* were balanced by great *vices*—inhuman cruelty, treacherousness that was extreme even for a Carthaginian, no truth, no faith, no respect for oaths or promises or religion.

The character of Pope Alexander VI, as drawn by the historian Guicciardini, is pretty similar, but less biased; and it shows that even the moderns, when they speak naturally,

use the same moral language as the ancients. This Pope, says the historian, had a singular capacity and judgment, admirable prudence, a wonderful talent for persuasion, and in any important enterprise incredible diligence and dexterity. But these *virtues* were infinitely outweighed by his *vices*—no faith, no religion, insatiable greed, extravagant ambition, and more than barbarous cruelty.

Polybius regards the Sicilian leader Agathocles as the most cruel and impious of all tyrants; but he still rebukes Timaeus for giving such a one-sidedly negative account of him. From Timaeus himself, Polybius says, we learn this about Agathocles:

He took refuge in Syracuse, fleeing the dirt and smoke and toil of his former profession as a potter. From such humble beginnings he rose quite quickly to be the master of all Sicily; he put the Carthaginian state in the utmost danger; and he died as an old man in possession of sovereign dignity.

If all that is right (says Polybius), shouldn't it be granted that there was something prodigious and extraordinary about him, and that he had great talents and capacity for business and action? His historian oughtn't have recorded only what tended to his reproach and infamy but also what might redound to his praise and honour.

We may notice that the distinction between voluntary and involuntary wasn't attended to much by the ancients in their moral reasonings, as witness the fact that they often treated the question 'Can virtue be taught?' as genuinely open. [Hume refers to Plato, Seneca, Horace, and one other writer. Then:] They rightly thought that cowardice, meanness, frivolity, anxiety, impatience, folly, and many other qualities of the mind might appear ridiculous and deformed, contemptible and odious, even though they are independent of the will. And it couldn't be supposed that

everyone always has the power to attain every kind of mental excellence, any more than the power to become physically beautiful.

(4) Why in their moral enquiries have modern philosophers often followed such a different course from that of the ancients? In later times, philosophy of all kinds and especially ethics has been more closely united with theology than was ever the case with the heathens; and that has made a big difference, because theology won't bargain or compromise, but bends every branch of knowledge to its own purposes, without much regard to the phenomena of nature or to the unbiassed sentiments of the mind. Because of this intransigence, reasoning and even language have been warped from their natural course, and people have tried to establish verbal distinctions where the difference in the objects was virtually imperceptible. Philosophers, or rather theologians disguised as philosophers, have treated all morals as on a par with civil laws, guarded by the sanctions of reward and punishment; and this has inevitably led them to put the voluntary/involuntary distinction at the foundation of their whole theory. Well, anyone may use words in whatever senses he likes, but they ought to concede that people *often* have sentiments of blame and praise that they direct at items that don't fall within the scope of will or choice, and that we ought—if not as moralists then as theoretical philosophers—to give some satisfactory theory and explanation of this phenomenon.

A 'blemish', a 'fault', a 'vice', a 'crime'—these expressions seem to express different degrees of censure and disapproval. But they are all basically pretty much the same, belonging to the same kind or species. Having one of them explained will easily lead us into a sound conception of the others, and it matters more to attend to things than to attend to verbal labels. Even the most ordinary system of morals will agree

that we owe a duty to ourselves, and it must be worthwhile to examine that duty in order to see how it compares with the duty we owe to society. It is probable that the approval

given to the performance of either of these duties is similar, and arises from similar sources, whatever label we may give to either of these excellences.