

Occasional thoughts regarding a Virtuous or Christian Life

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1705

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Small [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. Occasional uses of **small bold type** are meant as aids to spotting similarities, contrasts, links, etc. Cross-headings in ·SMALL CAPS· are not in the original. —Damaris, Lady Masham, was a close friend of Locke's and an important epistolary link between him and Leibniz, to whom she wrote in 1704: 'yours of the 16th September came not to my hands till our 31 of October: the day wherein was performed the last office to one that had been my friend above half my life time. Mr. Locke I mean.' She refers to him several times in the present work, always as 'Mr L—'.

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Glossary

arbitrary: Dependent on someone's will (as distinct from stemming from the nature of things).

assent: At least in the discussion beginning on page 9, assent is a matter of degree. Factors that govern my assent to P determine whether I accept P *and with what degree of confidence*.

catechism: "A treatise for instruction in the principles of the Christian religion, in the form of question and answer" (OED)

condition: In this work a person's 'condition' is his or her social rank.

contemn: Have contempt for; in this work, usually, disregard or treat as negligible.

deist: Someone who believes that there is an impersonal god which has no interest in humanity and does not intervene in the world.

education: At the time of this work it meant 'upbringing' generally. On page 44 DM says that 'learning is perhaps the least part in education'.

evidence: In most of its occurrences in this work, it means 'evidentness'.

infidelity: Lack of any belief relating to religion; not to be confused with atheism.

mean: Low on the social scale,

natural religion: Religion based on philosophical thinking about the natural world—first cause, design, etc.—with no appeal to revelation.

positive: A positive law or 'institution' is one that comes from the will of one or more persons or of God; the contrast is with a natural law, which is somehow laid down in the nature of things.

preposterous: Used here in its old sense of 'having last what should be first, inverted' (OED).

prince: Monarch, possibly female (e.g. Queen Anne).

profaneness: Speaking disrespectfully of sacred things.

proof: In this work, the 'proof' of P is the case that can be made for it; it needn't definitively settle that P is true.

quality: In this work it usually means 'fairly high social rank'.

speculative: Having to do with matters other than morality. Similarly 'speculation'.

station: 'A person's position in life. . . ; one's status; a calling, an office, one's employment' (OED).

temporal: Pertaining to this world. That meaning comes from the idea that life after death is *eternal* in some way that involves being outside time.

vicious: Given to morally bad behaviour. Not, here, as fierce a term as it is today.

Preface

The following discourse was written some years ago, with some thought that it might be useful for more than merely my entertainment; but I had so little definite intention of publishing the product of the leisure hours it employed that these pages lay by for more than two years—unread and almost forgotten. After that time I read and corrected them, and sent them to some of my friends; they judged them to be capable of being useful, so they are now sent into the world in the hope that they will be.

There is nothing asserted or supposed in them that is not obvious; but the most evident truths are sometimes overlooked or not sufficiently and universally attended to; and where these are important truths, it is useful to bring attention to them by frequent representations of them.

Of those who are heartily concerned about the vice and immorality that abounds among us, I think there can be few who have not sometimes reflected on *loose or careless education* [see Glossary] as one cause of this; but the importance that the proper instruction and discipline of youth has for people's present and future happiness seems to me to be far from sufficiently settled in the minds of parents in general; I mean, settled enough for the parents to look on them steadily as the one thing to that is so necessary that unless due care is taken of it all other endeavours to make their children happy—in this life or in the life to come—are likely to be very ineffective.

I presume that there's nothing new about the thought that

right instruction regarding virtue consists in joining
•good principles inseparably with •early habits, nei-
ther of these being sufficient without the other.

But it appears to me to be very little reflected on. When it

is duly considered, I think people must soon be convinced from what hands this right instruction ought to come; for nothing can, in my opinion, be more obvious than that is. If these *Occasional Thoughts* produce better digested thoughts from anyone else, or are themselves in any way serviceable for bringing one single soul into the paths of virtue, I shall not regret having published them. And however useless they may be for this sincerely aimed-at purpose, the mere *plan* for them will entitle them to a favourable reception; for merely *trying* to contribute even slightly to a the honour of God or b the good of mankind can never stand in need of pardon. Whereas the modesty or fear of displeasing anyone that dissuades men from attempting a the one or b the other of these, where nothing is risked but their own credit if their plan doesn't succeed, is on the contrary very blameworthy.

If besides these two motives I needed another to engage me in the defence of virtue, I would find a very powerful one in the dutiful affection that I pay—and that every subject owes—to a good prince [see Glossary]. Since the Queen [Anne], I am quite convinced, would not rejoice in the accession of great kingdoms to her dominions as much as she would rejoice to see the people, already happy in her government over them, trying to make themselves and one another follow the great example of virtue and piety that she sets them.

The Occasional Thoughts

There is no such constant and satisfactory a pleasure, to those who are capable of it, as rational conversation gives. And to me, deprived of that enjoyment [by the death of Locke, a few months earlier], the memory of it in my present solitude is the most delightful entertainment. So I hope that some of my leisure hours will not be misspent if this leads me to develop

thoughts that were recently suggested to me by others. These thoughts started from a limited enquiry, and went on from that to a general consideration of the folly and madness of rational creatures' acting as if they had nothing to direct or determine them except the incitements of their passions and appetites; so they had to do with the unhappiness of mankind both here and hereafter. Why hereafter? Because the breaches of the eternal law of reason that

- disorder commonwealths and kingdoms,
- disturb the peace of families, and
- create the vast majority of the private unhappinesses of particular persons in this world

are what the Sovereign Disposer of all things has ordained shall make men miserable in a future life also.

A survey of these irregularities—which brings into view a large scene of human depravity—does indeed provide matter for melancholy thoughts rather than for pleasing ones. But subjects that are in themselves unpleasant sometimes give the mind as much delight (mixed with sadness) as do ones that are thoroughly welcome to us. And if someone's zeal for the interests of virtue makes her with a charitable concern reflect on others' miscarriages and be led by that to examine her own actions by the true rules and measures of her duty, this shows a disposition of mind that is too appropriate for rational creatures—and too rare!—not to please, even if is stirred into action by surveying facts that are disagreeable, provided they are of kinds we are already aware of.

It is a sad truth that the bulk of mankind everywhere live in opposition to the rule of nature which they ought to obey; but it is even more sad that

- this includes those of us who have this rule enforced by a clearer light than nature provides, and
- our disobedient conduct is the source of many evils—not only feared as due to come in the after-life but

actually present now.

This is made significantly worse by something that has happened within living memory:

This previously sober nation has been seduced away from principles of virtue and religion to such an excess of vice and profaneness [see Glossary] that it has become fashionable to have no shame over the grossest immoralities; and men have even expected to be admired for professing their impiety.

This change could not be considered without extreme regret by any who were sincere Christians or who truly loved the prosperity of their country. This situation has prompted the thought that nothing operates as powerfully as the example of princes [see Glossary]; which has led some in recent years to hope for a revolution in our manners (following the example of Queen Anne), no less advantageous than what previously secured those civil and religious liberties without which virtue cannot subsist among any people whatsoever. But experience shows that human nature is much more easily led into evil than led back from it, and that chronic maladies are hard to cure.

When men's practices have infected their principles and opinions, and these have had time to react back and confirm them in their vicious [see Glossary] habits and customs, the whole constitution is corrupted; and when that happens, the personal virtue of the prince (however conspicuous) will not unaided make any difference to men's vices, except perhaps to make some change in their garb or fashion. [She means (speaking sarcastically) the 'garb or fashion' of the vices, not of the men.]

The only thing that will effectively restrain immorality and profaneness is a due and vigorous **a** enforcement of proper laws against them; and the only human means of making people truly virtuous is a proper **b** care of education. When **a** our lower-court judges come to be *a terror to evil-doers and*

encouragers of those who do well, and when **b** parents come to be convinced that it is in their power to procure for their children treasures more valuable than riches and honours, *then* the old virtue of our ancestors will soon be equalled, if not surpassed, by that of their posterity. But until then, it is in vain to expect any great advances to be made towards an amendment that is as necessary to our individual happiness as it is to our happiness as a nation, and as necessary to our happiness in this life as to our happiness in the after-life.

It doesn't take much **thought about human nature and acquaintance with history** to tell us

- what power education has over our minds,
- how a due regard for it has enabled commonwealths and kingdoms to flourish and become famous, and
- how much this has been recommended by wise men in all ages;

nor is anything more obvious to **observation** than the power of education [see Glossary]. Yet this matter has not been attended to in a manner that is fitting for its obvious importance. And even those who have cared most about it have usually employed their care only on *half* of it; for informing and improving the understanding by useful knowledge (which is highly necessary to the right regulation of conduct) is commonly almost ignored with reference to the female sex, even by those who take due care of it with regard of the male sex. But this omission in respect of one sex is a considerable contributor to the fact that the trouble taken over the education of the other sex often proves to be ineffectual, for this reason: The actual assistance of mothers will (generally speaking) be found necessary for the right forming of the minds of their children of both sexes; and the

impressions received at that tender age—invariably many of them received from women—are of great importance to men throughout the whole remainder of their lives, as having a strong and often unalterable influence on their future inclinations and passions.

·THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN·

As the persons who provided the agreeable conversation I have mentioned¹ were mostly ladies, it was not surprising that they expressed much displeasure at the widespread neglect of the instruction of their sex; a reflection they could not easily avoid when their thoughts about the **a** bad conduct and **b** unhappiness of mankind in general came to focus on a less general consideration of the part that those of their own condition [see Glossary] had in **a** the one and **b** the other. That brought the conversation full circle to where it had begun; for the topic had been introduced when one lady asked another member of the group² what her opinion was of a book entitled *Conseils d'Ariste sur les Moyens de conserver sa Reputaion* ['Ariste's advice on how to preserve one's reputation']. She said she had heard various persons of merit and quality [see Glossary] speak very differently:

- some as if it contained the most useful instructions that could be given for making any young lady such as her best friends could wish her to be;
- others as having too much the tone of an antiquated severity, not indulgent enough either to the natural and agreeable gaiety of youth or to the innocent liberty now in use, derived (like most of our fashions) from that nation where these *Conseils* were thought to be needed.

¹ [She hasn't mentioned any such one conversation; she probably did so in the first draft and then forgot that she had edited it out.]

² [It is reasonable to conjecture that the 'other member of the group' was DM herself.]

The person whose opinion she asked for replied:

'I don't remember the book you speak of well enough to answer your question; but the objection you report against these *Conseils* is without doubt irrelevant unless it shows that the precepts contained in them are in themselves faulty; for without that they can't be objected to on the grounds that they are not indulgent to things established or found agreeable by an age whose manners they were intended to correct. . . . The nature and extent of a Christian's duty does not loom large in the thoughts of those who think that people can be made what they ought to be by rules •dictated by prudence or experience of the world, and •directed to the glory of a good reputation. Only a solid virtue can do this; and having that is infinitely preferable to having b a good reputation; but a the former is so commonly accompanied by b the latter that it can be said that for someone (especially for a lady) to acquire and keep the reputation of being virtuous, the most secure and easy way is for her really to be so.

'But virtue is not (though often so misrepresented) included in innocence, nor does it consist in a partial practice of praiseworthy actions; for its extent is equal to our liberty of action, and its driving force is the most active one in the mind; virtue being the natural result of a sincere desire to conform in all things to the law set us by our Maker; and those who really try to do this will not find much occasion for advice like the above-mentioned *Conseils*, whether to correct their faults or teach them to put a mask over them. The latter is a poor use that is sometimes made of instructions of this kind; but they might be put to a better use, because young people might learn from

the experience of others many things relevant to their own conduct, things it would cost too much for them to learn from their own experience. But I think that the difficulty of applying general rules to particular cases makes books of this sort—however good of their kind—less helpful to those who most need them than some imagine them to be.'

These remarks . . . suggest to me now two serious defects in the documents that are ordinarily given to young ladies who are supposed to have the best care taken of their instruction. The defects are in special need of correction because their effects are especially harmful in a sceptical, loose and unthinking age when many people mistake wit for reason.

·MAKING THE TEACHING OF VIRTUE CONVINCING·

[1] The first defect is that •the notions or ideas of virtue and •the consequent rules of action that are usually given to such young persons are seldom given in a way that conveys an entire conviction of their truth and reasonableness. A result of this is that if these instructions ever happen to clash with the inclinations of the ladies they are given to, it will appear to the latter to be rational to question their solidity. And when principles that interfere with people's passions or interests come to be questioned by them, the odds are that they will be slighted rather than better examined.

Now, this lack of apparent truth and reasonableness occurs not only where the notions and precepts given are not in themselves wholly true and rational, but also (often) where they are entirely conformable to right reason. In these cases, the lack of *apparent* reasonableness comes from the fact that those who are being instructed lack the knowledge that is needed for them to see the reasonableness of the instructions given them; that is to say, needed so that they

can see that these instructions square with or follow from some truths that they have no doubts about—namely, the principles of true religion, presented to them so clearly that they accept them as truths. I am here taking it for granted that religion is the only sufficient ground or solid support of virtue; for the belief that *there is a higher omnipotent being who inspects our actions and who will reward or punish us accordingly* is in all men's minds the strongest—and in fact the only stable and irresistible—argument for submitting our desires to the constant regulation that constitutes virtue.

How far **natural** religion alone is sufficient for this is a good question to consider. But I conclude that most of those who claim to recommend virtue do so either **a** with no reference at all to religion and on purely human principles or else **b** with reference to the **Christian** religion. The **a** first of these, as I have said, will be ineffective; and it is equally certain that **b** the Christian religion cannot be a solid foundation for virtue if virtue is inculcated on the declarations of the Gospel and those who are being instructed are not already convinced of the authority and evidence [see Glossary] of that revelation. And all too commonly they are not. Instructors, instead of teaching this necessary previous knowledge of religion, generally suppose their pupils to have it already; whereas in fact they don't have it, and have never been given any teaching that would make it reasonable to assume that they do. So all the attempts to make them virtuous through their Christianity are merely attempts to erect a real superstructure on an imaginary foundation; for truths received on any ground other than their own evidence, though they may find some room in the mind, will never have a sure hold on it; and as soon as they become troublesome, they are in great danger of being questioned, so that whatever is built on them will likewise be open to the suspicion of being fallacious. Although empty declamations often make livelier

impressions on young people than substantial reasoning, these impressions are, for the most part, easily erased; and they are especially apt to be erased from the minds of those who are naturally the most capable of right reason. One instance of this is the fact that profane [see Glossary] wits often tease even the ablest women ('religiously bred', as they call it) out of their duty; because the women do not see—as they should have been early taught to do—that what they have learned to be their duty is based not on the uncertain and variable opinion of men but on the unchangeable nature of things, and has an indissoluble connection with their happiness or misery.

Those parents, governesses and others who have the direction of young ladies just out of their childhood—why do they most commonly neglect to teach them that which is the ground and support of all the good precepts they give them? Not because the principles of religion are not in their thoughts or are not believed by them to be essential to their teaching task, but because they presume, as I have said, that those now under their care have already been sufficiently instructed in them; instructed 'as children', when their nurses or maids taught them their catechisms [see Glossary], i.e. certain answers to a series of questions adapted to some approved system of divinity.

It seems to be pretty generally believed that this is sufficient instruction in religion. And not only 'young ladies who have recently put off their bibs and aprons but also (and even more) 'most of their parents *and teachers* would be displeased to be told that one can know that much yet still be very ignorant about the Christian religion; because these older people are no more able than the young ones to give any account of it beyond what they have been taught in this way. Many who have learned and well remember long catechisms, with all their supposed proofs [see Glossary],

are so far from having the knowledge that rational creatures ought to have of a religion they claim to believe they can only be saved by, that they cannot say what this religion consists in or why they believe it; and they are so little instructed by their catechisms that often they don't even understand the terms they have learned in them. And more often they find the propositions contained in the catechisms

- so inadequate to cure their ignorance, or
- so unintelligible to their understandings, or
- so plainly contradictory of the most obvious dictates of common sense,

that religion (for which they never think of looking beyond these systems) appears to them not to be built on or defensible by it. Because of this opinion, even the weakest attacks on religion are bound to make such persons at least *waver* in their belief of it. And so it happens that the precepts of virtue that they have received as based on it are—at a time when scepticism and vice pass for wit and gallantry—inevitably suspected of having no solid foundation, and those who have recommended them are suspected of ignorance or of trickery.

Not making young people understand their religion is a fault that is not restricted to the instruction of one sex alone, though its consequences differ, because (ordinarily speaking) women more inevitably suffer from them, not having—at least early enough—the same opportunities that men do to correct the ignorance or errors of their childhood.

·ATTITUDES TO FEMALE CHASTITY·

[2] The other thing that I regard as faulty does more specially concern the ·female· sex, but is chiefly practised on those of it who are of quality [see Glossary]. It consists in insinuating into them a notion of *honour* which implies that the praise of *men* ought to be the supreme object of their desires and their great motive to virtue. But some people when they speak of

women's 'honour' are referring solely to the single virtue of chastity; the possession of which doesn't on its own entitle a lady to the being thought wholly virtuous, any more than a handsome face, unaccompanied by other graces, can render her person truly amiable [= 'can make her physically attractive']. Or rather, chastity on its own is such a small part of the merit of a beautiful mind (though essential to it) that it is better compared to health or youth in the body; these, alone, have small attractions, but other beauties are of no value without them.

The next paragraph: To persuade ladies then that what they cannot want without being contemptible, is the chief merit they are capable of having, must naturally either give them such low thoughts of themselves as will hinder them from aspiring after anything excellent, or else make them believe that this mean opinion of them is owing to the injustice of such men in their regard as pretend to be their masters. . . .

Its content in less condensed form: [Telling women that the best they can do is the bare minimum for them to be any good at all is like telling an aspiring ballet dancer that the best she can do is to put one foot in front of the other. This will have one of two upshots: **(i)** They will believe you, and be led to have such a low opinion of themselves that they'll be discouraged from trying to do better; or **(ii)** They will think that this low rating of them comes from the unfairness of the men who claim to be their masters, namely their husbands.]

But whether or not this emphasis on chastity has any natural—or any designed—bad consequences, it is certain that *true virtue* is the best security against all the misfortunes that can be feared—and the surest pledge of all the comforts that can be hoped for—in a wife. By 'true virtue' I mean a virtue whose foundation is an overwhelming desire

- to approve ourselves to God.

The most opposite drive of this is

- to make people's esteem the chief goal and aim of our actions.

The latter is what motivates those who have the empty idea of *glory* set before them as the great motive for (and high reward of) that particular duty, 'chastity', which where women are concerned usually gets called 'virtue', as if it included all the other virtues. For those who aim at what is truly honourable, the desire for esteem is a very bad motive, which can (and often does) have bad effects rather than good ones, 'despite the goodness of the aim'.

But these wrong or partial notions of virtue and honour are artifacts of men who are unwilling to regulate their own actions by the universal and eternal law of right, and are therefore eager to develop for other people rules that will not reach themselves—rules that they can extend or contract as they please. [DM often says 'men' meaning simply 'people'; but in this context she seems really to be skewering *men*.] In saying this, I am not denying that the love of praise may sometimes be usefully instilled into *very young* persons, to give them a desire for eminence in activities they try to excel in. But just as this ought never to be made the incitement to any virtue except in the earliest childhood of our reason, so also glory (which is 'really' the reward only of actions that are transcendentally good in kind or in degree) should not be represented *at any time* as something to be acquired through conduct that is merely not disgraceful. The fear of being put to shame is for most people a much stronger persuasive not to act badly than is the hope of glory; the two cannot operate together, for no-one can rationally think that glory would be due to them for doing something that it would be shameful in them not to do!

Men's entitling ladies to glory if they are chaste has a further bad result, namely that women's consciousness of

their chastity ordinarily produces in them (especially in those who are beautiful) a pride and imperiousness that is very troublesome to those who have the most to do with them. A man whose business it was to comment on the humours of the age, and of mankind in general, has (I remember) made a husband say about this:

Such virtue is the plague of human life,
A virtuous woman, but a cursed wife.

And he adds:

In unchaste wives,
There's yet a kind of recompensing ease,
Vice keeps 'em humble, gives 'em care to please.
But against clamorous virtue, what defence?

If Mr. Dryden was distinguishing here between real virtue and the vain one of men's invention, he was perhaps not far wrong in what he suggests. But if he meant this to be a satire against marriage as a state that a man can't be happy in, this shows how much this extraneous support harms virtue by exposing it to such a censure. The censure may be just in reference to a vainglorious chastity, but it can't be so of a truly virtuous one, because obedience to the law of God is a universal principle that applies *equally* to everything that falls under its direction.

It is indeed only a rational fear of God, and desire to approve ourselves to him, that will teach us to live in all things as becomes our reasonable nature. Enabling us to do that must be the great business and goal of a religion that comes from God.

·THE LOOSENING OF RELIGIOUS TIES·

But how differently from this has the Christian religion been represented by those who identify it with useless theories, empty forms, or superstitious performances? The natural tendency of these things is to make men think they can

please God at a cheaper rate than by the denial of their appetites and the downplaying of their irregular affections; so these misrepresentations of a supposed divine revelation have been very harmful to morality. And through this they have also been a considerable cause of scepticism; for when the obligation to virtue is loosened, men easily become vicious [see Glossary]; and once that happens, the remorse of their consciences makes them desire •that there be no future reckoning for their actions, and even •that there be no God to take any cognisance of them; so they often come (in some degree at least) to be convinced of both of these. And thus there are, often, only a few steps from being a zealous bigot ·who insists on the superstitious performances· to not believing in any religion.

Scepticism, or rather infidelity [see Glossary], is the characteristic disease our age, and has come from various causes. But whatever the earlier or initial causes may have been, it couldn't ever have been as prevalent as it is if parents hadn't very generally contributed to it by either •neglecting their children's religious instruction or •handling it very badly.

To someone who had no experience of mankind, it might indeed seem strange that people (however neglected in their early education) could when they came to years of judgment be so lacking in care for themselves that they didn't seek to be informed about truths that it is as important for them not to be ignorant of or mistaken about as are the truths of religion. Yet such is the wretched thoughtlessness natural to most men that (in fact) it is no uncommon thing to see men live day after day, following their inclinations, without ever exerting their reason to any other purpose than the gratification of their passions; so is it surprising if they sink into the acceptance of—or become blindly convinced of—the opinions that they see to be most widely held and that will also the best suit their purposes?

•Absolute atheism does no doubt best serve the purposes of those who live as if there were no God in the world; but how far •this great nonsense has been able to spread is not easy to say, because few men will admit to being downright atheists. Here is my evidence for what I think about that:

Those who are willing to go to the lengths of arguing against the existence of a God rarely venture to produce any hypothesis of their own to be fairly examined alongside the one they reject. And their opposition to a deity consists only in objections that that can as well be fired back at them, and that at most prove nothing but the limits of human understanding.

From this it seems to me likely that most atheistic reasoners *want* and *try* to be atheists rather than actually being so. But some men are accustomed to believing things without any evidence of reason for what they believe; and it is likely that they are more in earnest in this wild opinion ·of absolute atheism·. And it seems that there are among us very many of the sort that a learned man calls 'enthusiastic [here = 'fanatical'] atheists', that is, ones whose denial of the existence of an invisible, omniscient, omnipotent first cause of all things comes solely from their stupid disbelief in anything that they cannot **see or feel**; never consulting their **reason** in the case. That there are some of this kind their published writings assure us. The actions of many others are unaccountable without supposing them to be of this number. [There follows a rather condensed sentence, which is worth spelling out more fully, as follows. Many men are hostile to revealed religion, and there is reason to suspect that they are absolute atheists. The alternative is that they are convinced deists [see Glossary] who are fully convinced of the truths of natural religion [see Glossary]; but it's hard to believe that—in a country where people are allowed to read the Scriptures and to use their reason freely in matters of religion, and

where there are so many rational Christians—someone could get that far while remaining a sceptic with regard to the revealed religion of Christianity.]

·THE EFFECTS OF BAD RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION·

In a sceptical age, **lack of instruction** concerning religion disposes men to scepticism and infidelity, often ending in downright atheism. That is sufficiently obvious, and needs no further discussion; so let us turn to a different though related question. Let us see whether **bad instruction** with regard to religion has the same tendency. In this inquiry, I treat all irrational instruction as bad.

It is undeniable. . . .that for rational creatures, reason ought to be the guide of their belief—i.e. that their assent [see Glossary] to anything ought to be governed by the proof [see Glossary] of its truth that reason is the judge of. This holds whether the proof is **argument** or **authority**, for either way reason must determine our assent according to the validity of the ground it finds it built on. By ‘reason’ here I mean the faculty in us which discovers, by the intervention of intermediate ideas, what connection the ideas in the proposition have with one another—whether certain, probable, or none at all. If we don’t regulate our assent according to this finding, we degrade ourselves from being rational creatures, and deprive ourselves of the only guide God has given us for our conduct in our actions and opinions.

But this requirement does not subject **authority** to reason in such a way that it is irrational of us to assent to a proposition that we don’t see the truth of. If we cannot perceive the connection of the ideas contained in the proposition P, reason cannot from the evidence of the thing itself lead us to assent to P; but if it appears that P was truly revealed by God, nothing can be more rational than to believe it, because we know

- that God can neither deceive nor be deceived,
- that there are truths above our conception, and
- that God can if he chooses communicate these truths to us by supernatural revelation.

So the role of reason with respect to P is to examine whether it is indeed a divine revelation; and if reason does not attest to its being so, it is obviously irrational to give or require assent to it as being so.

And it is equally obviously irrational to give or require assent to anything as a divine revelation if it is evidently *contrary* to reason. No less being implied by this than that God has made us so that we clearly see to be a truth something that is yet a falsehood. [Her point: if P is contrary to reason, then saying that P is divinely revealed as true implies that God has made us such that we clearly see (through our reason) that not-P is true when actually it is false.] If this could happen, that would make the testimony of our reason useless to us; and that would also destroy the credibility of all revelation, for no stronger proof can be had of the truth of any revelation than our reason’s evidence that *it* is a revelation.

Now, if

- the Christian religion is very often represented as teaching doctrines that are clearly contrary to reason, or as demanding that we believe things that we can neither perceive the truth of nor find to be revealed by Christ or his Apostles; and if, even further,
 - this supposedly divine religion even *consists in* such a belief as this, so that a man cannot be a Christian without believing something that he has no ground for believing, whether from arguments or from authority;
- what must the natural effect of this be on those who pay even a little attention to their reason, when at a more mature age they come to reflect on the matter? It can only be to make them recall and at least *suspend* their assent to the

truth of a religion that now appears to them to be irrational. For an irrational religion can never be rationally conceived to come from God.

And if men once come to call in question doctrines that they had (though on slender grounds) received as unquestionable truths of religion, they are more likely

- to continue as questioning sceptics, or
- to go the whole way to an entire disbelief of this religion, than
- to let their questioning lead them to conduct a fair inquiry into this religion's truth.

Men generally neglect to make such an inquiry—lacking the ability to conduct it, or having no time or inclination for it—and they are comfortable about this neglect because they are convinced that the Christian religion is indeed self-condemned. Why? Because those whom they imagine to have understood it as well as any men never taught them that this religion even *claims* to have any foundation in (or appeal to) reason—the faculty the possession of which distinguishes us from beasts, and the use of which distinguishes us from madmen—and indeed taught them the contrary. So the Christian religion is prejudged: those who disbelieve it have usually come to reject it without ever allowing it a fair examination.

•TEACHING RELIGION TO CHILDREN•

All this is evidence that scepticism is an outcome of •bad (i.e. irrational) instruction concerning religion as well as of •lack of instruction. And this being so, is it surprising that scepticism, having once become fashionable, should continue so? The **a** uninstructed and the **b** badly instructed are the overwhelming majority, because **a** those who have no religion themselves don't often take care that others should

have any, and **b** those who adhere to a poorly based belief concerning religion and retain a reverence for their teachers are commonly led by this to presume that their children cannot be better taught than *they* once were; and this (I repeat) has generally consisted only in the learning of some approved catechism [see Glossary], •in which commonly enough the *first* principles of religion are not set forth but supposed, and •from which those who learn them learn only that certain propositions are required to be believed—propositions of which they see neither use nor certainty, and which they may even find inconceivable. Because these catechisms are represented to children by those whom they most admire and trust as containing sacred truths that one must believe if one is to be saved, the children quickly become afraid to admit that they are not convinced of the truth of what the catechisms deliver to them. For the greater part among ourselves are instructed in religion in much the manner in which a good lady of the Church of Rome instructed her child: when the girl told her that she 'could not believe ·the doctrine of· transubstantiation', the mother replied, 'What? you do you not believe transubstantiation? You are a naughty girl, and must be whipped.'

Instead of having their reasonable questions answered and encouraged, children are ordinarily rebuked for asking any; and so, not daring. . . .to question anything they are taught concerning religion, they are brought (unlike the girl above-mentioned¹) to say that they *do* believe whatever their teachers tell them they must believe; whereas in fact they remain in an *ignorant unbelief* that exposes them to being seduced by the most pitiful arguments of those who are disbelievers of revealed religion and those who are outright atheists.

¹ [The original says in effect 'like the girl above-mentioned'; presumably a slip

The foundation of all religion is the belief that *there is a God, a maker and governor of the world*. Because

•the evidence for this is visible in everything, and •the general acceptance of it has usually stamped it with awe on children's minds,

it is perhaps best in most cases to assume that they believe it, rather than raising doubts in them by undertaking to prove it to them. ·Why would that make them doubtful?· Because those who can't follow long deductions of reason, and so don't see their force when offered to prove what they had always taken to be a clear and obvious truth, would instead be led by them to suspect that a truth they had previously looked on as unquestionable might reasonably be called into doubt. But if any doubts concerning the existence of God do arise in children's minds—when they admit this, or it is discovered through conversation with them—we should always try to remove these doubts by the best arguments children are capable of following. And they should never be rebuked for having those doubts; because refusing permission to look into the grounds for asserting any truth, *any* truth, can never be the way to establish it in any rational mind; but, on the contrary, will probably raise a suspicion that the truth in question is not well grounded.

The belief in a deity being entertained, what people should *first* be taught concerning religion is what it matters to them most to know.

·WHAT SHOULD COME FIRST IN RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION·

Now, it is certain that what it matters most to us to know is whatever is necessary for our salvation; and it is equally certain that we are capable of knowing anything that God has made necessary for our salvation. So any instruction that forces on someone, as necessary to his salvation, something that he **a** cannot understand or **b** see the evidence [see Glossary]

of, is wrong instruction for that person; and when any such **a** unintelligible or **b** unevident propositions are presented to children as if they were such obvious truths that they, the children, should not ask for any reason or proof of them, what effect can this have on their minds but to teach them early on to silence and suppress their reason? This will leave them with nothing impelling them towards virtue; and their conduct as well as their opinions will be exposed to the operations of their own or other men's fancies.

(i) The existence of God is an acknowledged truth that is received by us so early in our lives, and is so evident to our reason, that it looks like natural inscription [i.e. like something written into our minds from birth]; so the authority of the revelation by which God has made his will known to men should be firmly established in people's minds clearly, evidently, and rationally, and for this purpose they should be referred to the Scriptures themselves, to see there what God requires them to *believe* and to *do*; their great obligation to study these divine oracles diligently being duly represented to them. But it cannot be rational to urge someone to search the Scriptures so as to see what God requires of him, if he is not yet satisfied that the Scriptures are a revelation from God; because *someone's saying* that the Scriptures are God's word cannot satisfy a rational and inquiring mind that they are so; and that the books of the Old and New Testaments were dictated by the spirit of God is not a self evident proposition—it is a truth that cannot be rationally assented to until it has been shown to be true.

(ii) It should also be effectively taught—not in words alone—that it is our duty to study and examine the Scriptures so as to learn from them what God requires us to believe and to do. But someone is not effectively or sincerely taught this if, despite being told it, he is not left at liberty to believe or disbelieve according to what appears to him

(after examination) to be the meaning of the Scriptures. For if we are not to receive them in the sense which (after our best inquiry) appears to us to be their meaning, it obviously signifies nothing to tell us to search and examine them.

These two things—**(i)** a rational assurance of the divine authority of the Scriptures and **(ii)** a liberty of fairly examining them—are absolutely necessary for any rational person to be satisfied concerning the certainty of the Christian religion and what this religion consists in. And an adult who remembers that as a boy

- when he asked for more proof [see Glossary] of the divine authority of the Scriptures than had been given him, he was not given what he asked for but was scolded for doubting, or that
- he was criticised for thinking that the word of God contradicted some article of his catechism,

has good grounds (when he reflects on this) to suspect that the instruction of his childhood was an imposition on his reason; and he will no doubt be more inclined to believe that it was, when others confidently assure him that it was so. And at the age in men's lives when they are most eagerly in pursuit of pleasure, the odds are (as I have already remarked) that if they stop believing what they once thought unquestionable regarding religion, they will more often •be convinced that there is no truth at all in religion than •set themselves seriously to find out what truth there is.

How dangerous a thing, then, is religious instruction that teaches nothing except to stifle the suggestions of our natural light! But there is all too much evidence that instruction such as this is all that the great majority of people have; evidence from the obvious ignorance even of most of those who are zealous in some profession of Christian faith and worship. Most of them are at a loss to answer when asked •What the faith of a Christian consists in or •Why they believe

the doctrines concerning it that they profess to believe. . . .

What is the chief and highest end of man? is a question that I think presupposes the answers to antecedent questions that untaught children can't be presumed to have answers to. But however appropriate this question is to begin a catechism with, the answer to it—*Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and enjoy him for ever*—is surely not very instructive for an ignorant child. The same catechism asks *How does it appear that the Scriptures are the word of God?* It's a good question; but who would imagine that if someone asked it really wanting an informative answer, he should be given the answer that the catechism provides?

The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God by their majesty and purity: by the consent of all the parts, and by the scope of the whole; which is to give all glory to God: by their light and power to convince, and convert sinners; to comfort and build up believers to salvation: But the spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures, in the heart of man is alone able fully to persuade that they are the very word of God.

One would almost be tempted to suspect that men who talked thus were not themselves thoroughly convinced that the Scriptures are indeed the word of God! For how could this answer make a young boy or girl, or even an Indian man or woman, more convinced than they were before that the Scriptures are what they are claimed to be? For any rational inquirers to be assured of this, they must be satisfied

- that the Scriptures were indeed written by those whose names they bear,
- that these persons were unquestionable witnesses and faithful historians of the events they report, and
- that they had were guided and directed by the spirit of God in such a way as to deliver all necessary truth

and avoid all error prejudicial to it.

There is evidence for these propositions; evidence so good that only those who are manifestly prejudiced can refuse assent to the propositions when the evidence is duly presented to them; but although some may firmly believe the divine authority of the Scriptures, they cannot believe this on the conviction of their reason unless they have weighed this evidence,

Given that the religious instruction of most people's younger years is such as I have shown it to be, and given that virtue—i.e. proper regulation of our passions and appetites—has (as I have already said) no sufficient enforcement except the truths of religion, can it reasonably be thought strange that there is so little virtue in the world as we find there is? If the passage of time •gives strength to our **judgments**, by which we may be thought able to inform ourselves and correct the errors and defects of our education [see Glossary], it also •gives strength to our **passions**; and when these have grown strong, they provide and suggest principles suited to the purposes and goals that *they* propose. Anyway, when bad habits have been settled, they are not likely to be changed by the force of any principles that reason may come to convince men of at their ripener age—a truth very little valued, though nothing ought more to be so with respect to a virtuous education. Why? Because rational religion. . . .is not more necessary for engaging people to virtue than is establishing good habits in them, with this being done early, even before they are capable of knowing any reason for what they are taught to do except that those who have a just power over them want them to do it. For just as

- without a knowledge of the truths of religion we would very often lack sufficient motives to submit our passions and appetites to the government of reason; so also
- without early-established habits of denying our appetites

and restraining our inclinations, the truths of religion will operate on only very few as much as they ought to do.

·THE NEED FOR REVEALED RELIGION·

By *religion* I still mean revealed religion. It's true that without the help of revelation, the commands of Jesus Christ (with the exception of two positive [see Glossary] institutions) are discoverable by the light of reason because they are also dictates of nature; and they are as much the law of God to rational creatures as the injunctions of revelation are. But **few** people would actually discern this law of nature in its full extent merely by the light of nature; and of those who did, few would find the enforcement of that law a sufficient balance to the natural love of present pleasure that often opposes our compliance to the law of nature. [In two dauntingly complex sentences, DM says that by the time someone is able through 'unassisted reason' to figure out the rules that should govern his actions, he will probably have acquired bad habits that are 'too strong to be overruled by the force of arguments'. And that the only way of making men virtuous that is appropriate for **all** men, clever or stupid, is the word of God, presented as such and] duly enforced by rewards and punishments.

. . . .Some men find it incongruous for God to reveal supernaturally to men what is naturally discoverable to them by the faculties he has given them. And that thought—along with not considering or rightly estimating the enforcements that natural religion needs and receives from revelation—has disposed many to reject revealed religion. This rejection has been encouraged by notions of Christianity that don't agree with the attributes of an infinitely wise and good being, which reason teaches is the first cause of all things; for from hence many men, zealous for the honour of God and lovers of mankind, have been prejudiced against the truth of the

Christian religion. This has led them to conclude, reasonably, that there is no such thing as revealed religion, from which they have further inferred that for men to achieve the goals of natural religion they have no need for revealed religion.

·EVEN NATURAL RELIGION NEEDS REVELATION·

But those who think this, however well-meant they may be towards natural religion, are entertaining an opinion that would undermine it; because experience shows us that natural light, without help from revelation, is insufficient for the goals of natural religion. This truth has to be acknowledged if we are to see the real value of the benefit we receive by the revelation of Jesus Christ; and many who profess belief in him do not rightly value that benefit, because they think too highly—or rather, think wrongly—of natural light, despite the undeniable fact that from the mere light of nature men actually were *far* from discovering the law of nature in its full extent or force; so far that they did not generally admit and very imperfectly saw its prescriptions or obligation. It is equally evident that as Christianity has prevailed, it has also made prevalent—along with polytheism and idolatry—the allowed practice of gross immorality; which in the heathen world was permitted and encouraged by the examples of their very gods themselves and by being frequently made an actual part of religious worship. For the truth of this effect of Christianity we must appeal to history; and if anyone wants to get from history a contrary example, I think there is only **one country** that could provide it. If the historian is to be believed, morality was more exemplary in that country, for the nearly 400 years that its pagan natives possessed it, than in any other country we know of. The exterminators of those natives (calling themselves Christians) made it a most deplorable scene of injustice, cruelty and oppression, bringing in vices previously unknown to those

former inhabitants. But what this example shows is that

- a people who have a continued succession of princes who work to advance the good of the community, making that the sole aim of their government and directing all their laws and institutions to that end (which was the special happiness of **those happy Americans**)

will, without any but *natural* light, practise all social virtues much better than

- men set loose from law and shame, who—though baptised into the name of Christ—have not yet so much as a true notion of Christianity, and than any other people who, though they have the light of the Gospel among them, are not governed by its laws.

A truly Christian commonwealth has not yet been seen in the world. When one is, the virtue and happiness of its people will be found to be greatly superior to the **Peruvians'**, judging by the (perhaps partial) account we have of them. What is admirable in that account is •their long uninterrupted series of excellent princes, and not •the force of the light of nature in them. [There follows an obscure passage about the Peruvians, leading to the conclusion that:] this Peruvian-morality example is part of the case *for* the need for revelation to enforce natural religion, and not *against* it.

But the best way to see how much revelation is needed to assist natural light is to reflect a little on what we receive from each of these guides that God has given us. If it appears from this that •natural religion does need revelation to support it, and that •the revelation we have through Jesus Christ is exquisitely adapted to the purpose of strengthening natural religion, this will be the highest confirmation possible that the design of Christianity was to strengthen natural religion or morality, and will also show that the immorality of those who profess Christianity yet live immoral lives is to be attributed to their not being sincere Christians. From which

it follows that revelation should be considered as the most effective means of reclaiming a vicious [see Glossary] people, making men really and sincerely Christians.

To see what light we receive from nature to direct our actions, and how far we are naturally able to obey that light, men must be considered purely as in the state of nature, i.e. as having no extrinsic law to direct them, but equipped only with an ability to inter-relate their distant ideas through intervening ones, thereby deducing or inferring one thing from another, by which the knowledge we immediately receive from sense or reflection is enlarged to a view of truths about matters that are remote in space or time. By applying this faculty of the mind to a consideration of our own existence and nature, together with the beauty and order of the universe as far as we know it, we can come to know that there is a first cause, and that this must be a thinking being, wise and powerful beyond anything we are able to conceive. And as we delight in ourselves, and receive from the objects around us enough pleasure also to endear to us the possession and enjoyment of life, we have to infer that this wise and powerful being is also most good, since he has made us out of nothing to give us an •existence in which we find such happiness that we are unwilling to part with •it.

And so a consideration of the attributes of God that are visible in the works of the creation leads us to a knowledge of his existence, though he is an invisible being. For power, wisdom and goodness—which we clearly see in the production and preservation of ourselves and of the universe—could not subsist independently of some substance for them to inhere in; so we are assured that there is a substance they belong to, a substance of which they are the attributes.

We could not discover these attributes of God if we didn't discern differences between things; for example the

difference between

- power and weakness,
- benevolence and lack of benevolence or outright malevolence,
- directing means to a goal and acting randomly with no design or choice.

This knowledge, however it gets into the mind, is simply a case of seeing things to be what they are, and seeing that they cannot *not* be what they are.

From this diversity and immutability in the nature of things there necessarily arises a diversity of relations amongst them; and what the Creator wants regarding them is revealed to every thinking agent, so far as he is made capable of discerning these relations, dependencies and consequences. And anything that he finds they imply regarding his own actions—how they can best fit his Creator's design in making him such a part as he is of the whole—he must consider as the will of God dictated to him by these relations. . . .

Because we are given a capacity for perceiving and distinguishing these differences of things, and also a liberty of deciding whether to act in conformity with them, i.e. whether to act in conformity with the will of the Creator (manifested in his works just as much as the will of any human architect is in *his*), it follows that acting appropriately to the nature of such beings as we are requires that we attentively examine and think about the various natures of things so far as they have any relation to our own actions.

·THE ROLE OF HUMAN REASON·

For us to examine and think about the works of God that are presented to our view, we must bring to bear on them that faculty in us by which we infer one thing from another. By means of this (I repeat), knowledge that we immediately

get from sensation or reflection is enlarged by the perception of remote or distant truths. The more obviously eminent advantages that come to us from this faculty of **reason** plainly show the superiority of its nature, and show that we ought to heed its promptings rather than those of **sense**, where the two sorts (as it too often happens) do not agree. For if we knew nothing by inference and deduction, our knowledge and our enjoyment would be much less than what they now are, because •many considerable pleasures depend almost entirely on reason, and •the greatest enjoyments of sense would lose their best flavour if they were separated from the further satisfactions that accompany them only because we are rational creatures. And our having this faculty contributes not only to our greatest happiness but also to our much greater safety and preservation; because these require us to be able to foresee distant events and direct means to an end, often through a long series of actions; and to do this we need that faculty by which the relations, dependencies and consequences of things can be revealed to us, .i.e. the faculty of reason.

Reason is what—in kind or in degree—differentiates men from brutes; and few if any would be willing to lose this distinction; so it is commonly acknowledged that reason is a better endowment than any of the others. And if beasts, which are inferior to men only in the advantages of this faculty, appear to be intended *by this* to be subjected to men, it cannot be less obvious that the part of men that they have in common with beasts was likewise similarly by their maker to be subjected to their reason also. It undeniably follows from all this that we are not acting in conformity with God's will or pleasure in making us such creatures as we are, if we •neglect to search for the measures of our actions that are prescribed to us by the discernible natures of things, or •do not conform ourselves to them although we have seen them.

·THE IRRATIONALITY OF DISOBEYING GOD·

Now, for any creature knowingly to oppose the will of its Creator is not only •bad behaviour, given what it owes to its sovereign benefactor, and •folly, given the dependence on him for its existence,. . .but also—in the nature of things (simply considered)—•so repugnant to right reason that such an attitude, consistently followed through, would operate to the creature's own destruction, since its existence evidently depends on that of its Maker. His will as revealed to us is just one way of looking at his attributes, and our knowledge of those is all the knowledge we have of God. To make sense of the notion of those attributes, we have to think of them as attributes *of something*, unless the God we are thinking of is a fiction of our own imagination, and not the Creator of all things—an invisible being knowable to us only in (and by) the exemplifications of his attributes. The structure and the running of the universe show those attributes to be infinitely perfect and unbreakably in harmony with one another; and this plainly tells us that the divine will cannot be (like ours) •a series of decisions without dependence or connection with one another, let alone inconsistent, contradictory, and changeable; but rather •one steady, uniform, unchangeable result of infinite wisdom and benevolence, extending to all his works. So that sin, i.e. disobedience to our Maker, is clearly the greatest conceivable nonsense, folly and contradiction, this being a conclusion we can reach purely on the basis of •the immutable perfection of the divine nature and •the natural constitution of things, without bringing in any positive [see Glossary] command of God to us, or his irresistible power over us.

If the creature *could not* act contrary to the will of the Creator, no created being could *deserve* anything or be praiseworthy for anything; so contrariety to God's will is permitted in the universe as a necessary result of creaturely

imperfection, under the greatest endowment that a created being is capable of having, namely that of *freedom or liberty of action*. And as the constitution of such a creature as this implies that what *is best* in reference to the Creator's design and to its own happiness need not always be present to its mind *as best*, such a creature may oppose the will of his Maker with various degrees of guilt in so doing—or possibly with no guilt, for no agent can offend further than he wilfully and thus knowingly abuses the freedom he has to act.

But God made men so that they often find in themselves a liberty of acting according to the preference of their own minds, so it is incumbent on them to study the will of their Maker, applying their God-given faculty of reason to the consideration of the different respects, consequences, and dependences of things, so as to discover from them the just measures of their actions in every situation, that is, to discover what in each situation is consonant to the design of the Creator. And these manifestations of his will, thus discoverable to us, ought to be regarded by us as his commands, although they have come to us through thinking, not through revelation.

·HAPPINESS AND PLEASURE·

Yet however certain it is that the dictates of reason (or nature) that we discover through our natural faculties are God's commands to us as rational creatures, it is equally true that the love of happiness (which consists in pleasure) is the earliest and strongest drive in human nature; and therefore no matter what measures reason prescribes on particular occasions, men's sense of what is pleasing or displeasing to them—however contrary to those dictates of right reason—is very apt to determine their choice.

But God, the author of order and not of confusion, has

framed all things with consistency and harmony; and although it too often happens that we are misled by the strong desire for happiness that is implanted in us, this doesn't necessarily interfere in the least with our acting in entire conformity to the prescriptions of the law of reason. On the contrary, this law gets its force from the fact that when we think about it in the right way it will become clear to us that our happiness and misery are annexed to the observance or neglect of that unalterable rule of rectitude that we can discover from the nature of things; so that this rule of rectitude—or eternal will of God—also gets the force of a *law* from the unbreakable link between •our happiness or misery and •our obedience or disobedience to it. Thus our duty can never be divided from our happiness except when we prefer a lesser happiness to a greater one, thereby not acting in conformity to the dictates of our natural desire for *happiness* or *pleasure*. Those two terms differ only in that we apply the word 'pleasure' to any agreeable sentiment or sensation, however small or brief it is, whereas we apply 'happiness' only to degrees of pleasure that do in some considerable degree counter-balance our evils [meaning 'the bad times we go through'].

We find from experience that we can receive pleasure in many ways; every sense provides something to delight and please us. . . . And our minds' operations on the ideas presented by our senses give us other pleasures, which we often prefer to the ones we receive immediately from the senses. But however our pleasures are aroused and whatever they consist in, the ones men enjoy the most are those that come through the gratification of antecedent desire. A good that we hadn't previously desired makes a considerably smaller impression on us.

Though not *always*, it is *often* in men's power to gratify their desires; so they can often choose whether to procure

pleasure for themselves. So it is reasonable for them to ask:

‘Since happiness consists in pleasure, and the gratification of our desires and appetites always gives us pleasure, shouldn’t the gratification of those determine our actions in pursuit of this chief goal of ours?’

There can be no doubt that—with happiness consisting in pleasure—the more pleasure we enjoy the happier we are; but it is equally evident that the gratification of men’s desires and appetites should not always, as men are rational agents, determine or regulate their actions in pursuit of happiness. . . . The gratification of our present desires and appetites¹ does sometimes get us a brief or small pleasure at the price of a greater and longer-lasting pain; and on the other hand, the denial or restraint of our present desires and appetites sometimes brings us a brief or small pain, this being the price of a subsequent larger or longer-lasting pleasure. So it is obvious that the gratification of our present appetites cannot be what should determine or regulate our voluntary actions, because present appetite tells us only what will give us present pleasure, not what will bring us most pleasure in the long run. Well, then, what appears to be the rule or measure of men’s actions—acting purely with respect to the pursuit of happiness as their chief goal—but the determinations of *·reason·*, the only faculty they have that can, by reference to the different properties and relations discernible in things, judge what will bring them most pleasure in the long run?

So our very desire for happiness or love of pleasure, when rightly pursued, obliges us to adopt the determinations or dictates of reason, and not the suggestions of present appetite, as the measure and rule of our actions in our pursuit of happiness. No doubt our Creator’s goal in bringing

us into existence was that we should be happy; for he could not *need* our existence or *be bettered by* it. And if that was his goal in making us, it is certain that he has not set any measures to our actions, or put any biases on our minds, that will necessarily contradict this goal of his. And from this it appears •that the love of pleasure implanted in us—if in pursuing it we always prefer what will bring us most pleasure in the long run—can never lead us away from the observance of the law of reason; and •that this law enjoins only a right regulation of our natural desire for pleasure so that we get the greatest happiness we are capable of; with the result that our natural good and evil is inseparably connected with moral good and evil. To assert therefore that our chief good consists in pleasure is far from implying—as many have claimed that it does—anything to the detriment of the law of reason, that *natural revelation* of God’s will to us. No man who properly *thinks* about it can believe that because pleasure is his chief good, the gratification of his present appetites ought to be his measure or rule for his actions. Experience itself contradicts such a consequence; and does this so evidently that even those who most gratify their passions and appetites do not (I think) behave like this because a cool examination leads them to believe such behaviour is the truest wisdom in consequence of our greatest good’s consisting in pleasure. Such men, rather, indulge their present appetites merely because their love of pleasure and hatred of pain forcefully leads them (often contrary to the promptings of their own minds) to act in whatever way they find will get them the one or free them from the other at the present time. It is however true that declamations that are sometimes made against pleasure as such—as if pleasure was in its own nature false and deceitful,

¹ [The shift from ‘desires and appetites’ to ‘present desires and appetites’ is DM’s.]

not a real and solid good—have had a bad effect:

These declamations have through their absurdity confirmed many people in an evil indulgence of their appetites, as if gratifying these was indeed the truest wisdom of a rational creature because pleasure is his chief good.

But they don't arrive at this through any examination of the nature of things, but through a reason (if it may be called so) of opposition. Many men are so ridiculously weak in their reasoning that when they see that some opponents of their position are wrong, this convinces them that their position is right. . . . This inference is irrational, but not more irrational than the inference in which an obvious truth is denied merely because some have tried to draw—or have been thought to have drawn—ill consequences from it. Yet that is what is going on when people deny that pleasure and pain are truly good and evil; a denial that can't help morality but can harm it; because moral good, and evil, considered independently of any positive [see Glossary] law of our Maker, are apt to be thought of in a way that ignores the inseparable connection between actions that we call *virtuous* or *vicious* and the natural good and evil of mankind. [To make sure that it's clear: the irrationality in question involves denying that *Pleasure is a good* on the grounds that some people have tried to infer from it that there are no moral limits on the pursuit of pleasure.]

Perhaps Christians don't need the thought of this connection to enforce their obedience to the will of their Maker; but just as •it is a great recommendation of the precepts of the Gospel to find that they exactly correspond with and conform to the nature of things: so also •those who are not yet thoroughly convinced of this divine revelation will sooner be induced to embrace virtue and condemn [see Glossary] the allurements of vice

•when they see these to have the very same reality in

nature as their happiness and misery have, than

•when (though ever so grandly displayed) virtue appears to be based only on hair-splitting or subtle theorising.

But some men are so far from approving of any notion or theorem being advanced by which deists [see Glossary] might be led to the love of virtue (which is the best predisposition to the acceptance of Christianity) that they are ready to treat as not Christian—if not as an atheist—anyone who tries to influence the deists by basing virtue on any arguments other than those drawn from revelation, which the deists won't accept.

·THE DANGERS OF PLEASURE·

Still, however true it is that happiness (our chief good) consists in pleasure, it is equally true that the irregular love of pleasure is for us a perpetual source of folly and misery. Our liability to such irregularity is simply a necessary result of our creaturely imperfection; for we cannot love pleasure and not love present pleasure, and the love of present pleasure is what misleads our narrow and inattentive minds from soberly comparing the present with what is future. It is no wonder that we are often misled in this way, for we often wander from the right path with less excuse for doing so: men quite often go astray from reason without being misled by present pleasure. . . . Though only reason has authority to set limits to their desires, they subject both the desires and reason to an unjust and arbitrary [see Glossary] dominion, equally foreign to both. We see this not only in scattered instances but in the examples of whole nations, which—either by positive [see Glossary] institution or by allowed custom—have transgressed against the plainest prescriptions of reason, in things that are so far from gratifying their appetites that they are contrary—and even sometimes grievous—to men's

natural desires. It will be relevant to my present purposes to account for this; and to do that I must first consider what the terms 'virtue' and 'religion' have in their common meanings everywhere generally stood for.

Religion has been defined (rightly, I think) to be *the knowledge of how to please God*, and in this sense it necessarily includes virtue, i.e. moral rectitude. But men have usually used the words 'virtue' and 'religion' to stand for things that are very different and distinct from one another. In all countries of the world and in all lesser societies of men, those who call anyone 'virtuous' mean that he steadily adheres to the rule of his actions that is established as a rule in his country, tribe, or society, whatever it is. That is why virtue has in different times and places changed face, sometimes to such an extent that what has been admired as *virtuous* at one time and in one country has been regarded as *quite the contrary* in others. But at all times and in all places where men have set any rules for their actions—

rather than degenerating into a downright brutish or altogether animal life, as some whole nations have done

—the dictates of right reason have had *some* role among them, its size depending on how far they have been directed by the need for those dictates for the survival and convenience of society. And to the extent that custom or the commands of some lawgiver enforced these dictates of reason (or nature), to just that extent obedience to the dictates qualified men as 'virtuous'; without any thought of the dictates' being •precepts of the eternal law of right or as •obligatory in any way other than as being part of the law or fashion of the country or society in question. A steady adherence to the law of the land, whether or not it conformed to the law of

reason, was the one thing that entitled men to be counted as virtuous among those who claimed to live by the same law.

Now, since men have variable and disagreeing inclinations, because their passions are very changeable and often mutually contradictory, they cannot without some difficulty or uneasiness abide strictly by any fixed rule or measure that may be set to their actions; because any steady and unalterable rule is certain often to thwart their changeable appetites and differing inclinations—even a rule that was contrived and intended to be indulgent to the passions and desires of human nature in general.

Thus, for men to conform their actions to any fixed and invariable rule is a thing of some difficulty, whatever the rule is. And so there have always, everywhere, been transgressions against the rule that men professed themselves obliged to act by; and comparatively few men have been strictly virtuous, i.e. have in all their actions obeyed—or sincerely tried to obey—the rule that they acknowledged to hold for them.

·THE CEREMONIES OF RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE·

Yet those who believed that a superior invisible power made them could not be satisfied with themselves in transgressing against what they thought should be their rule; for however they understood this rule to be derived, they believed that it somehow carried with it an obligation on them to obedience, since otherwise they would not have looked on it as a rule. Now, as they could not know that God would not punish their disobedience to something that they looked on as obliging them to obedience, and indeed had some reason to fear that he would do so, they therefore—

thinking him to be exorable¹ as well as omniscient and omnipotent

¹ [meaning 'capable of being moved by pleading'. Compare 'inexorable'.]

—were led when they had transgressed to deprecate his vengeance and implore his mercy. And so the more guilty and fearful of them came to invent atonements, expiations, penances and purgations, with all the various ceremonies that went with those things. They naturally imagined that God's nature resembled their own; so they thought they would more easily appease his anger and avert the effects of his wrath if by such means as these they (as it were) *punished themselves on God's behalf* for their disobedience to him. As the solemnity of these ceremonies meant that not everyone could perform them, and as those who did carry them out were liberally rewarded and highly respected for their pious performances, it followed that the profit some reaped by these things as well as the satisfaction found in them by others

who were unwilling to be rigorously restrained by the rule of their actions, yet were uneasy under the reproaches of their consciences when they transgressed against it,

caused these inventions and the value set on them to be daily improved; until eventually men have tried to be—and have actually become convinced that they could be—acceptable to God without sincerely trying to obey the rule by which they professed to believe they were obliged to live; even when they think that this is a law given to them by God himself.

Now, the great practisers and promoters of the above-said things are everywhere those who are generally esteemed and called 'religious'. Whence the word *religion* appears ordinarily to have stood for nothing but *some expedient or other found out to satisfy men that God was satisfied with them, although their consciences reproached them for their breach of the acknowledged rule or law of their actions.*

Having premised this much concerning men's common notions of virtue and religion, let us now proceed to see how it has come to pass that they have—with the permission or approval of their lawmakers and governors, and even at their command—transgressed against the most visible dictates of the law of nature or reason, in ways that are not favourable to their natural passions and appetites but sometimes even contrary to them; for example,

- denying themselves the most lawful enjoyments of life,
- lacerating their bodies¹,
- prostituting their wives, and
- exposing their offspring and themselves to cruel torments and even to death itself.

The cause of which seems to me plainly to be that

because mankind was generally convinced that there was a maker of themselves and of the world, who they concluded was as able to know what they did as to bring them into existence, and who they could not believe was equally pleased or displeased by all the actions of his creatures,

they became fearful (as I said) of incurring his displeasure whenever they did anything their consciences reproached them for. And from this fear of a higher invisible power inspecting their actions, they were early induced to listen to and follow those who claimed that some knowledge of God's will had been supernaturally revealed to *them*. And we find, in the histories of all nations, that the generality of mankind were convinced (contrary to the opinions of some modern deists) that it was very much in character for the divine being in this way to reveal to men his pleasure concerning them; since the great majority everywhere found it easy to believe those who had the confidence to tell them *they* were sent

¹ [DM writes 'macerating', but this was probably a slip; the conduct she is referring to involved cutting rather than softening.]

by God to teach them what he required of them. From this, a submission of men's reason to the dictates of supposedly *inspired* teachers must necessarily follow; so men become liable to be imposed on in all the ways that could serve the purposes of those who used this pretence to promote any private interest, their own or someone else's.

And as these claims to revelation have occurred in almost every country, so also (I believe)

every institution or generally approved-of practice that is •opposite to the obvious dictates of nature or reason and •not in favour of men's appetites,

can reasonably be presumed to have been received on the basis of the claim of *supernatural revelation*. This claim has always procured the firmest adherence to *any* new institution, and was quite sufficient to get the absurdest things swallowed along with the most reasonable; it being undeniably true that whatever God commands his creatures are obliged to obey.

It may well be that there have always, everywhere, been people who were too sagacious to accept as revelation from God something that was manifestly opposed to natural light, and who needed evidence of the divine mission of such pretenders as these. But the unthinking multitude were always credulous, and so have always been imposed on in ways that suited the purposes of people with •vicious inclinations or •small aims and short views. And people with larger comprehensions, generous designs, and minds above vulgar, base and sordid passions have exploited that same credulity for their own purposes: they have wanted to reclaim men from vices that are more obviously prejudicial to society and civil government, thereby erecting or restoring some flourishing kingdom or commonwealth. Although they have deceived men in making them believe that their laws were divinely inspired, they have deservedly been honoured by

them as benefactors because of the happiness they procured for men in this world—beyond which their aims did not extend, because they had no knowledge of a future life. These people, however rational and virtuous they were, mixed holy mysteries with their civil institutions, so as to give more authority to their dictates, usually representing the mysteries as special secrets taught them by some divinity. And however much they may have secretly contemned [see Glossary] such things, they generally paid a great outward regard to matters of religion, which have always abounded in the best-governed and most flourishing kingdoms and commonwealths.

·A 'THIRD SORT OF MEN'·

As I have already said, those who exactly observed [here = 'conformed to'] **a** the civil institutions of their country or the customs of their ancestors were looked on as **men of virtue**; and anyone who applied himself conspicuously to the observation of **b** such superstitions as consisted of sacrifices, processions, purifications etc.—with a sequence of pompous ceremonies, diversified according to the whims of their authors—was looked on as **a religious man**; while there was **a third sort of men** (always few in number) who judged by the true rule of reason what was right and what was wrong in **a** the former of these; and who—contemning the fopperies of **b** the latter—were often. . . .in danger of being regarded by silly people as atheists. Those who search for their opinions and the measures of their actions in the reason and truth of things have always been very unacceptable to those whose interest it has been to keep up the credit and authority of **a** vain traditions and **b** superstitious practices. . . .

Men of this third sort count as 'virtuous' by rational and Christian standards. Adherence to the rule of men's actions (whatever it is) denominates men 'virtuous' among those share their views about this; so what denominates

a man 'virtuous' among those who take *c* the prescriptions of right reason—or of *a* the Gospel, for these are the same, differently promulgated—as the rule of their actions must be an adherence to *c* the law of right reason or of *a* this revelation. Unlike all other rules, this rule is not changeable, because (as we have seen) it is not an arbitrary [see Glossary] thing, but is based on relations and connections that are as immutable as the determinate constitution in things that makes every thing what it is. Which is why men in all ages and places who have been above the prejudices of their country, religion, and manners—i.e. men of the 'third sort' I am now speaking of—have always had much the same sentiments regarding virtue. But there have never been many of them; custom and blind opinion have always governed the world; and nowhere has the light of reason appeared to men to be, or in fact actually been, sufficient to direct the generality of mankind to truth. Some people imagine that it *can* do that: the clear evidence [see Glossary] that reason gives to the truths that revelation has already taught them leads them to think that they owe (or might have owed) to this light of reason something •that they are not indebted to it for, and •that it's 1000:1 odds they would not have received from it if they had been born in a place where there was only natural light ·and no revelation·.

For we don't find any country at any time where men did generally acknowledge natural religion in its full extent, having been led to it by the mere force of reason, i.e. where the law of nature was *by the light of nature* universally accepted. Some of its dictates were received on grounds of necessity or convenience, but were not distinguished from the most arbitrary [see Glossary] institutions of men; although it is probable that the more any law conformed to the dictates of right reason, the easier it was for someone who claimed to have received it from divine revelation to get people to believe

that this was so. This seems to be what gave such a great success to the Peruvian lawgivers. Their idolatry was the most flamboyant that was possible; and its rules of living—claimed to have been received by them from the Sun, their father, and vice-regent of Pachacamac, the supreme invisible and unapproachable God!—were highly suitable to the dictates of right reason.

Because this was received by that people only as a supernatural revelation, the great morality of the Peruvians provides no argument against revelation, but on the contrary proves strongly the need for it. Whatever force of reason these natural truths appeared to this people to carry with them when represented as divine commands, this light had never attracted their sight purely by its own brightness; nor has it done so anywhere, except in a few scattered instances of persons with more than ordinarily inquisitive minds, and (probably) for the most part exempted by a happy privilege of nature from the servitude of sensual and sordid passions.

Nothing can be more obvious to those who reflect on it than that

men's actions should be regulated and directed by the faculty they have which shows them the different properties, relations, and dependencies of things, and not by their appetite, which only can tell what will at the present please or offend them, not what will in the long run bring them the most pleasure or uneasiness; but the common run of mankind are so little given to reflecting, and so fond of present pleasure, that they pay no attention to this truth, or anyway don't let it persuade them to obey the clearest dictates of reason or natural light that would set limits on their pleasing, and often violent, inclinations. Still less will they take trouble to search for any such measures of their actions in the constitution and dependences of things; which indeed very few men have the

ability or the leisure to do. And none can do this early enough to prevent their lawless inclinations from being strengthened and confirmed by bad habits; and once those are established, it is useless for reason to oppose them, however clearly her dictates appear. On the contrary, when our passions have grown strong, they usually corrupt our reason to the point of making her side with them against herself. [The sudden switch to treating reason as feminine is DM's.] So we don't just act badly, but find arguments to justify our doing so, to ourselves as well as to others.

·KNOWLEDGE OF PENALTIES FOR DISOBEYING GOD·

But beyond this there's a further impediment to men's obeying the law of nature by virtue of the mere light of nature, namely that without revelation they cannot in all circumstances make a just estimate in reference to their happiness. It is demonstrable that the law of reason is the law of God; but the lack of any explicit knowledge of the penalty incurred by the breach of that law stops it from being evident to all men that incurring this penalty would in all cases make it a bad bargain to choose to break this law—which it sometimes *isn't* if one takes into account only the discernible *natural* consequences of such a transgression. Obedience to the law of reason is, in the constitution of natural causes, clearly the means of our greatest happiness even in this present world. Still, if there is no future life (and it's only from the revelation of it in the Gospel that we know for sure that there is), breaking the natural law may sometimes *happen* to conduce to men's greater happiness; and often when they see that obeying the law of reason would have been better for them than following their appetites if they had early enough accustomed themselves to obeying it, yet now that they have contracted different habits that are like a right hand or an eye to them, the difficulty of a

new course of life may seem too great for the attempt of it to be advisable; because the thought of the shortness and uncertainty of life may make men apt to say to themselves on such occasions [the following verse seems to have been composed by DM],

Who would lose the present hour,
for one that is not in his power?
Or not be happy now he may,
But for a future blessing stay:
Who knows not he shall live a day?

The revelation of an eternal life after this one, with an explicit declaration of everlasting rewards (and punishments) for our obedience (or disobedience) to the law of nature. . . ., is still necessary enforcement of the law of nature for the great majority of mankind, who *need* this knowledge and aren't capable of an inference that goes against what their senses daily tell them about this. And the truth of this has scarcely ever received an unwavering assent from the most rational of the heathen philosophers themselves. Now, the unquestionable certainty of a future state in which men will receive everlasting rewards and punishments is something we owe the knowledge of to Jesus Christ *who only has brought life and immortality to light*. Before our Saviour's coming, the most willing to believe the soul's immortality were at best doubtful about it, and the generality of mankind were even less convinced of it.

·PAGAN VIEWS OF THE AFTERLIFE·

The Greeks indeed had fables concerning a life hereafter in which there were rewards and punishments; and some other nations took them over. But it's clear that they were understood to be *fables*, and we are explicitly told so by Diodorus Siculus. He applauds the honours done to good men at their funerals by the Egyptians, because of the warning

and encouragement this gave to the living to be mindful of their duty; and he says that 'the Greeks, with regard to the rewards of the just and the punishment of the impious, had nothing to offer but invented fables and poetical fictions that never wrought on men for the amendment of their lives, but on the contrary were despised and laughed at by them'.

Whether men would live on after death clearly depends what their maker decides; so the pagan world (to whom God had not revealed his will about this) could not possibly have any certainty of a life after this one. There were arguments that might induce rational men to hope for a future existence as something probable; and they did so. But the bulk of mankind were not convinced by these reasonings of something they found as inconceivable as that the life of the person was not totally extinguished in the death of the body, and they had no thought of a resurrection to life. The certainty of that after-life and of future reward and punishment, by enabling us to judge correctly what will most conduce to our happiness, plainly brings this great encouragement to our observance of the law of God, letting us see that our happiness and our duty are inseparably united in it, because whatever pleasure we voluntarily deprive ourselves of in this world out of obedience to God's commands will be recompensed to us many times over in the world to come. So that now we can never be in a situation where our natural desire for happiness or love of pleasure can rationally induce us to depart from the rule of our duty.

The little I have said does, I think, sufficiently bring out the need for revelation to teach and to enforce natural religion. The inadequacy of the light of nature for this purpose is too important a truth to be left after such a short discussion; but it has been developed at length in a recent treatise entitled *The reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures* [by John Locke].

The unhappy mistakes and disputes among us concerning the Christian religion makes this work useful to all men; and for many it has been uniquely useful because it is the only book in which they have found the insufficiency of natural light for natural religion to be fully showed. It is perhaps surprising that there haven't been other such books, because it has been of the utmost importance to present this truth so as to reconcile men to (or establish them in) the belief in divine revelation, at a time when prevalence of deism [see Glossary] has been so much and so justly complained of.

But some have thought it an objection to the thesis that natural light is insufficient for the ends of natural religion that the world has been so many ages without it [meaning, presumably, 'without revelation']. For if supernatural light was so much needed as is claimed, (they say), how could it **comport with the wisdom of God** not to have given it to men sooner and more universally?

·OUR IGNORANCE ABOUT MOST OF THE UNIVERSE·

To judge concerning all the goals and designs of the divine wisdom in the creation or government of the world is to suppose that our comprehension of God's works is adequate for this. And this is to conceive of his wisdom as not being infinite, and indeed as being circumscribed within very narrow limits. If God's wisdom does (like his other attributes) infinitely surpass our reach, his views must for that reason often be as much beyond our short sight. So for us to take on ourselves to say whether something **comports with the wisdom of God**, when *we* don't see the reason for it, has to be the highest possible folly, since it implies a presumption that in this matter we see all that God sees. The objection I am discussing here turns only on

- the unaccountableness of the divine wisdom to our understandings;

for God's dealing thus with men cannot be said to imply any
 •contradiction to his wisdom.

We are reasonably assured (by the countless worlds that surround us) that we are only a small part of our Maker's thinking creatures; and we are certain that our time on this earth is trivially short compared with millions of ages, and is as nothing compared to eternity; so we have to admit that for us to see the beauty of any one part of the design of our Creator it may be necessary for us to know much more than we now do of the entire scheme of providence with respect to the whole extent of thinking beings. And God's all-comprehensive wisdom should lead us to conceive that if we don't have this knowledge, we may be far less able to judge concerning God's dealings with us than someone who sees only one scene of a drama would be equipped to judge concerning the plot or design of the whole. So when men

question **a** the need for revelation to support natural religion, on the grounds that **b** we don't understand why, if revelation was necessary for this purpose, the world did not get it sooner,

they are guilty of the enormous absurdity of arguing from **b** a premise about what we *don't know* to a conclusion denying the reality of **a** something that evidently *is*. It is always irrational to do this, especially in a case where, even if we can't answer the objection now, we see clearly that it might be very answerable even to our conceptions if only our views were a little more enlarged, as they perhaps will be later on.

But in urging this consideration as sufficient to silence the inference from revelation's lateness and lack of universality to its being needed, I am not supposing that the divine economy in this matter really is incomprehensible by men, or at least that it cannot be explained as suitable to the divine attributes; and an appropriate reflection on the entire design of Christianity, so far as it is revealed to us, will probably

lead us best to a sight of that explanation. But my present business is not this inquiry but to see what advantages we get through the revelation of Jesus Christ, who seems to have come into the world with the purpose of enforcing the rule of rectitude—setting it in a clearer light, with the manifest stamp of divine authority, and promulgating it as the law of God—by a declaration of eternal rewards and punishments annexed to obeying or breaking the law.

·THE COVENANT OF GRACE·

But the business for which Christ took our nature on him was not confined to strengthening natural religion by

- delivering clearer and more excellent precepts of morality,
- showing the divinity of those by miracles, and
- bringing immortality to light.

It was a decree as immutable as the divine nature that no unrighteous thing should have everlasting life. All men, both Jews and gentiles, had broken the law and were thereby condemned, since the law strictly required perfect righteousness and could allow no abatement of that; so Christ came to establish between God and man a *covenant of grace* so that men might obtain the eternal life that they could not obtain through the working of the law. This covenant of grace was as follows: God would grant remission of the sins of all those who believe in his Son, taking him for their king and submitting to his law; and this faith of theirs would be credited to them as righteousness—accepted by him in place of perfect obedience—in all who sincerely tried live up to the precepts of Christ their Lord.

Men have always been solicitous to reconcile •pardon of sin to •the purity of God's nature; and this (as we have seen) has exposed them to various delusions and to wearisome and costly superstitions; even sometimes to giving *the fruit of their*

bodies to atone for the sins of their souls. All forms of pagan religion have abounded in institutions of this sort, and the religion of the Jews consisted very much of wearisome and unpleasant performances which, being types and shadows of him that was to come, were practised for the same purpose.¹ We are freed from all this by the Gospel; Christ having offered up himself once for all, through whom forgiveness of sin is preached to as many as believe in him, truly repenting of their past sins, and walking in newness of life, conformably to the law of him their Master. And if through human weakness or incompetence we do sin, he is our advocate with the Father, who for the sake of his beloved Son will accept as righteous those who truly believe in him. So we are justified by God's free grace or favour, and not by the working of the law against which all have transgressed and failed in perfect obedience.

In short, then, the great goal of Christianity is to teach us effectively to renounce all ungodliness and every evil work, by telling us that if we sincerely repent of our past sins and try from now on to obey the law of our lord and master Jesus Christ—which is simply the law of reason, or the eternal rule of right—we need not despair of God's mercy over the imperfection of our obedience; for he will, for the sake of his Son, pardon the sins of those who believe in him. Those who believe in Christ will have their sincere *attempts at perfect righteousness* accepted as if the attempts had succeeded. This is called *the righteousness of faith*. And thus our blessed Lord, so that he might *purchase to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works* [Titus 2:14, with 'purchase' replacing 'purify'], has proposed to his followers the strongest

conceivable motives and encouragements for free agents to be obedient, getting them to use their utmost diligence to fulfill the law, yet also delivering them from the fear that defects in their righteousness will make their efforts fruitless, by assuring them that the Lord will be merciful to their sins.

This Christian doctrine concerning the forgiveness of sins (contrary to that of other religions) effectively obliges men to use their utmost care not to commit sin, and leaves no room for the lusts of their hearts, or for the schemes of cunning men to deceive them by superstitious inventions for expiating or atoning for transgressions—inventions by which (as we have seen) virtue was always undermined. For although in the Christian religion there is an abatement of the rigour and severity of the law, which had to require an unsinning obedience, Christianity teaches us •that Jesus Christ is the only atonement for sin, and •that our only way to salvation is a faith in him that makes us become his obedient subjects. The pagan world had no such enforcement of the law of righteousness: as we have seen, *their* belief in the placability of the divine nature generally taught them only to invent imaginary ways of appeasing God's anger and expiating for their sins—ways that more or less took over from their attempts to obey the law.

This shows that

(i) the assurance of future existence, with the knowledge of eternal rewards and punishments annexed to men's obedience or disobedience to the law of reason, if men had had it without the revelation of the Gospel, would not have been as universal or as powerful an enforcement of obedience to them as it is to us, to whom is also preached

¹ [Although no Old Testament writers endorse the ritual sacrificing of children, their criticisms of it seem to indicate that this 'unpleasant performance'—'giving the fruit of their bodies to atone for the sins of their souls'—did exist in ancient Israel. (See for example Genesis 22; Ezekiel 16:20-21 and 20:26.) DM's tight phrase 'types and shadows of him that was to come' seems to liken this practice to God's later rescuing of humanity by offering his son, Jesus Christ. See also the clause tied to the footnote on page 28.]

(ii) the doctrine of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

That is because for men who had only (i), their awareness of transgression against this law and of that penalty for disobedience must either have made them **a** despair of being accepted by God and thus stopped even *trying* to obey him as a fruitless labour; or else, if they believed that God would accept *some* compensation for their defective righteousness, they would have been induced. . . .to seek to placate the divine wrath by ways that would inevitably lead to **b** a neglect of conformity to his law. Whereas Christianity provides against both these mistakes, in that it **a** assures us that God will accept our imperfect obedience for the sake of his Son, if we believe in him and **b** sincerely try to obey him. So faith clearly does not make the law void, but establishes it, laying on men the highest possible obligation and encouragement to do their best to live up to its prescriptions.

·THE ATTEMPT TO SEPARATE CHRISTIANITY FROM MORALITY·

And so we find that divine wisdom has shaped the Christian religion so that it is admirably fitted for the goal of enforcing the eternal law of reason or nature, which clearly *needed* this enforcement. From which it is obvious that anyone who directly or indirectly teaches men to look on Christianity as separable from morality misrepresents it in the worst possible way, undermining both **a** natural religion and **b** revealed religion, the **b** latter of which does not excuse any breach of **a** the former; and only frees us from the burden of outward performances that do nothing toward making men better and often make them very much worse. Why worse? Because men think these performances enable them to expiate or atone for their sins, and so they become less careful in regard to ·doing· their duty. This is a natural

effect of all those things [= those ‘performances’], which bring benefit only to **those who invent them or manage them** and who by means of them have lived in ease and plenty on other people’s labours. The other people—the common run of the populace—have not complained of this, having been skilfully taught to reverence their labours for their ‘usefulness’.

Such men as these profited considerably from the people’s superstition, and therefore have always had an interest opposite to that of virtue, because the more virtuous men were, the less need they had for—and the less attention they paid to—those matters of which these **managers of mysteries and ceremonies** had the gainful direction. So it’s no wonder that there was so much opposition to the Gospel, •whose design was so diametrically contrary to the interest of a party that was everywhere in such power and credit, and •whose Author so explicitly declared that his coming was to abolish all such institutions and practices.

Yet God’s power prevailed in spite of men’s; and Christianity soon spread through the Roman Empire.

And then for the devil or evil men wanting to make the Gospel of no effect, what remedy remained more fit than to corrupt it—under the plausible pretence of accepting and honouring it—with the old pagan principles and practices, introduced under a Christian disguise? But because the whole tenor of the New Testament shows that

•*Christ being once for all offered up, there remained no more sacrifice for sin;*¹ and that

•he came to teach men to worship God in spirit and in truth,

there was no room left for these people, searching for their religion in these holy oracles [= the books of the New Testament], to be led into the pagan superstitions I have been talking

¹ [This striking clause is semi-quoted from Hebrews 10:12. Compare the footnote on page 27.]

about. So the Scriptures had to be discarded, or—the same thing—closed to all readers except those who had made it their interest to mislead others by their interpretations. Those interpretations—together with vain traditions, supported by the authority of reverend names—took the place of Scripture. People were ordered to accept them equally with divine truths. There was the terror of eternal punishment for as many as could be convinced of that; but anyone who stood up against this violence done to the common reason of mankind could be sure of a temporal [see Glossary] penalty.

This spirit of imposition and persecution began to show itself very early among those who professed Christianity; and as soon as these were armed with secular power, they did not fail to use it against one another as a means of imposing human inventions, to the neglect of what they all professed to believe that God indispensably required of them. Although this *mystery of iniquity already worked*¹ in the Apostles' days, it could not be revealed until the power of heathen Rome was taken out of the way, and Christianity had civil as well as ecclesiastical jurisdiction through their religion's becoming that of the Empire. And when it did, Antichrist soon appeared in his full dimensions, and the Christian world became a very aceldama [= 'scene of slaughter'].

·THE ROMAN CHURCH IS NOT ALONE TO BLAME·

Sad as that history is, it might perhaps be read now with some pleasure, if those tragedies were now at an end or the reformed part of Christendom had no share in the guilt. We do indeed generally exclaim against the cruelties the Roman Church has exercised over men because of religion or the pretence of it; and it is true that they have excelled in this. But all parties among us ·protestants·, proportionally to the extent of their power, have practised the same thing;

and ·even· the best [of us], when restrained from it by the civil magistrate, show clearly that they don't like that restraint.

But while the first spring that moves such animosities is the desire of bad ambitious men for power, well-meaning ignorant people are led by these away from the truth of the Gospel and towards zeal for some distinguishing tenets or forms ·of worship·, as though the emphasis of Christianity lay in those things—as though our religion consisted not

- in such a faith in Jesus Christ as to receive him as our king, becoming his obedient subjects, but
- in the acceptance of opinions that have no tendency to make us live more virtuously, or
- in worshipping God in some special way.

And thus among us Christians, as previously in the heathen world, virtue and religion are again distinguished; and religion—as something more excellent (and of course more easy!)—still parasitically destroys virtue, as it did back in heathen times.

We members of the Church of England do generally dislike the distinction that some others often make between a moral man and a religious man; and our preachers argue from the pulpit that a good life is necessary to make men acceptable to God. But many who condemn any *doctrine* that separates religion from morality still make that distinction in their *conduct*; which may well be presumed to have been one great cause of their having preached up virtue so ineffectively, because ordinarily what someone *says* has less influence on others than what they see him *do*. And our earliest thoughts about virtue and religion are certainly formed in children much more from •what they observe in the conversations or actions of persons they admire than from •written discourses that they occasionally hear from the pulpit, which they can't

¹ [Quoted from 2 Thessalonians 2:7]

understand or attend to early enough to get from them principles that will influence them. But as soon as they are capable of attending to and understanding sermons, they also notice (in cases where this is conspicuous) that someone who frequently recommends a good life to them does not—in his own conversation, and in the respect he expresses for virtue in others—show that he indeed prefers it consistently with the praises he gives it. And if a preacher like this openly lives in the practice of any known immorality—or, not doing so himself, clearly admires those who do—isn't it natural for those who look on this man as a guide to heaven to conclude that virtue is not what is most essential for obtaining •eternal happiness? And they will be even further from thinking it essential for •happiness in this present world if they find that their pious instructor doesn't just choose a profligate and debauched persons as his friends and companions, but also works for the promotion of such persons to employments of the highest truth [= 'to high positions in the church'], in preference to b others of acknowledged integrity and sobriety of life, merely on the grounds that he thinks a the former to be more orthodox in religion than b the latter. Won't anyone (even a child) be forced to the conclusion that this preacher doesn't rate virtue at the top of the scale, whatever he sometimes seems to assert when he is displaying his rhetoric in the pulpit? And since he is an authorised teacher of religion, isn't it likely that his example will get people to regard virtue and religion as distinct things, with the preference being given—as it always was and always will be—to religion?

•BACK TO THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN•

The same result must ensue in the same way when parents (whose conduct usually has the greatest authority with their children) do in this manner express their uncharitable zeal for their own opinions, which they call 'orthodox'. Such

parents teach the separating of religion from virtue no less effectively than those whom they perhaps greatly condemn for making this distinction in what they say; though it is true that the sort of men who use the virtue/religion distinction in their discourses seldom fail to practise accordingly [that is: they usually *behave* as though they regarded virtue as quite separate from religion]. . . . They differ from their critics only in being more consistent with themselves, since their actions match their words.

And they are equally acting in accordance with their opinions in not taking much trouble to inculcate into their children the principles and early habits of virtue. For if virtue or morality is so far from being •what will entitle men to salvation that it is not even •a means or good predisposition to what will provide that entitlement (because, these peoples teachers frequently tell them, God often shows his free grace by preferring the greatest sinners to the most moral persons), there appears indeed to be little reason why they should be virtuous, and no more reason for them to try to make others so. Those who have these views are nevertheless generally (though not, I think, consistently with their doctrines) very solicitous for what they call *religious education*. But how little this will make up for the lack of early principles and habits of virtue will be visible when we reflect on what the content is of the religious education that they value so highly. For commonly it consists only in •teaching children some form of 'sound words' as their teachers conceive them to be, words that are mostly unintelligible to their learners or no cures for their ignorance; and in •accustoming them to hear many sermons that do as little inform them—sermons that too often depict morality as not a route to salvation and sometimes even as making men hateful to God.

The *reading* of the Bible is, I presume, at least as much practised by the people I have been talking about as by those

of any other sect, but they don't work any harder than others to *understand* it. On the contrary, they are so possessed by the sentiments and opinions of their teachers that they are almost incapable of consulting the word of God without prejudice, or of observing in it anything contrary to the doctrines of their sect. They are sure that the Scriptures ought always to be interpreted by the *analogy of faith*, and their teachers insist most on the obscurest parts of the Scriptures; so that the most ignorant members of these sects, as well as the more knowing, are usually far less familiar with the plain doctrines of Jesus Christ than with Saint Paul's difficult Epistles, which *many who are unlearned wrest to their own destruction*.¹ Though I don't think it takes any *skill*, but merely *attention to what the Apostle's topic is*, to see that he teaches none of those doctrines that many are taught to believe he delivers to the prejudice of morality or good works, but quite the contrary.

Now, how can this kind of instruction help children to subdue corrupt affections and curb the inordinate desires and appetites of human nature, thereby enabling them as they grow older to live like rational creatures and acquit themselves well in all the worldly relations they come to be placed in? It doesn't convince them—or even allow them to *think*—that these are the things they'll be judged by at the last day. Rather, it replaces them by groundless conceptions and a presumptuous faith that goes so far in teaching them to neglect obedience that if they followed through the consequences of their own doctrine (which few people do) they would have no morality at all. Things don't often go that far; but that they go too far can be seen in how little concern such people have for giving their children an

early training in the knowledge and practice of virtue; and this is so necessary for making them virtuous in their later years that it's very rare for any for whom this training was neglected to be notably virtuous later on. Even many who are always very sincere in their profession of religion have never (through the lack of this early care taken of them) had their passions subjected to their reason; and this makes them, all their lives long, uneasy to themselves and to others, which brings dishonour to the very profession of religion, giving it a bad name.

·THIS TROUBLE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND·

In the Church of England (whatever her ·Thirty-nine· Articles may be thought to teach), there are not many now who hold these opinions ·that separate virtue from religion·; and those who don't, and who rightly see virtue as the great perfection of human nature and the goal that Christianity is intended to promote, do accordingly (if they are serious in their religion) instruct their children much better than those I have been talking about instruct theirs. At least they *intend* to, for their performance often falls short, because (as I have said) people's actions don't ·always· correspond with their instructions, and also for this other reason: some people's zeal for morality makes them, in recommending it, too forgetful of the doctrine of *faith*, without which (as works ·alone· avail not) the greatest encouragement to and enforcement of morality is lost. And when any who are professed teachers of the Christian religion do this [i.e. forget the doctrine of faith], their wrong apprehensions concerning it frequently confirm those they are trying to convince in mistaking the design of the Gospel; since in the Gospel faith is so obviously the doctrine of salvation that those who never preach it are

¹ [From 2 Peter 3:16: 'As also in all Paul's epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.']

not entirely unreasonably suspected of •not understanding consequences or of •not being sincere Christians but rather concealed deists [see Glossary] and betrayers of the Christian religion.

What mostly happens here is that one error unhappily produces another. The undue emphasis that some people give to the doctrine of **faith** (though they misrepresent it), as if that were all that is needed for our salvation, has led others to put an equally undue emphasis on the doctrine of **good works**; while the former, in their heat against what the latter say, do not sufficiently establish the justifying faith of the Gospel. It is only by this faith that men will obtain eternal life, and not by their works, because

even the best men's obedience has (as I have already observed) imperfection in it; so that all are necessarily condemned by the rigour of the law, and accordingly must be found guilty by him *Who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*;¹ if God had not, in mercy to mankind, been pleased to establish a new covenant of grace through which they may obtain eternal life through faith in his Son—a doctrine which (as has been seen) provides the highest possible motivation for men to try to achieve the most perfect obedience.

So the **a** exalters of faith in opposition to good works don't undermine morality any more than the **b** advancers of the doctrine of good works to the exclusion of free grace undermine revealed religion and in consequence of that undermine natural religion also. The two sorts of men might be said to divide a good Christian between them. The **b** latter of them take the soul and spirit of Christianity but neglect what is equally essential in the doctrine of our salvation. It is essential **(i)** because what God has joined man cannot disjoin,

and **(ii)** because it is an eternal truth that such creatures as we are cannot *consistently with the attributes of God* be entitled to eternal life in any way but that of justification by faith. ·God's attributes come into this· because the dispensation of the Gospel is not a merely arbitrary thing, but is the result of infinite wisdom and goodness for the salvation of men. If the beauty and harmony of its divine design is not evident to all men, that is because they don't •search for the Christian religion as it is delivered—pure and unmixed—in the Scriptures, but •take it up together with admixtures of human inventions and conceptions which add to the truth of God, or subtract from it, at men's pleasure. Though everyone tries to support those systems and notions by Scriptural authority, their effect has been to discourage many folk from the study of those holy oracles, being convinced by them [i.e. by the 'systems and notions'] that the Bible is (at best) too difficult for them to understand, or really just a jumble of contradictions that can be made to assert anything that comes into men's heads to prove from it.

·THE DANGERS OF PHILOSOPHICAL EMBROIDERY·

Those who want to cure or prevent all mistakes prejudicial to the right understanding of the Christian religion should try to persuade people to study the Scriptures diligently and with unprejudiced minds—not in the usual way by *first* embracing opinions about religion and *then* consulting the Scriptures only for support for their preconceived opinions. In going about things in that way, they are in fact relying blindly on the teachings of men—most of whom have equally blindly followed others. A scattered few—having more refined wits, and despising 'shackles' such as most people like to wear, but not loving the truth in its simplicity—have sought to improve and adorn Christianity by their philosophical

¹ [Habakkuk 1:13: 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. . .']

conceptions and notions, which is no less dangerous than the other misconduct I have been talking about. For when someone is better pleased with intricate theories than with plain and obvious truths, it is very apt to happen that a favourite hypothesis or opinion runs away with his reason and judgment; and when that happens, he will interpret the Scriptures in terms of that ·favourite hypothesis·, as though it were an eternal and unquestionable principle of truth. And so the sacred doctrines of divine revelation are often submitted to being **tried by** philosophical fancies as a criterion of their truth; which is an even more direct disservice to Christianity than the above-mentioned implicit faith, since this exposes even the divine authority of the Christian religion to being questioned. For when anyone, especially one whose profession it is to teach this religion, either •argues against the plain sense of what is delivered in the Scriptures merely because it does not square with his preconceived opinions or those of his admired masters of reason; or •insists on some of his own or these men's theorems, as required to confirm anything taught by our Saviour or his Apostles; the natural effect of this must be to make those who lack the leisure or inclination to examine the truth of this revelation sceptical about it, by convincing them that even rational men who are teachers of the Christian religion are not very clearly and fully convinced of its divine authority; because if they *were*, they would certainly submit their opinions to being **tried by** the Scriptures rather than bending the Scriptures into compliance with their opinions or thinking the doctrines contained in them needed some external confirmation to support them. And why should we think that such men as these are not convinced of the divine revelation of the Christian religion? Because they (who will be presumed to have examined this matter better than anyone else) do find indeed some flaw or just cause

of doubt about the evidence [see Glossary] of it; and they prefer their natural reason as a surer teacher than that ·supernatural· revelation, however highly they sometimes speak of the latter. And men of this philosophical genius are likely to be looked up to in a special way, •because of the reputation of their not-widely-shared branch of learning and also •because they usually have more virtue than those who, hoodwinked, follow their leaders, and than those who look on virtue as no part of religion; and so their apparent lack of deference to the Scriptures (liable to be seen as a degree of scepticism) sets a dangerous example. This is obviously shown in its direct tendency to satisfy in their infidelity those who cannot or will not find leisure to examine the truths of religion for themselves. But the apparent lack of deference to Scriptural authority in those who claim to believe (and, much more, to teach) the Gospel has another bad effect: it gives too much comfort to the multitude of people who, professing the Christian religion, do in their practical opinions what these men do in their speculative [see Glossary] opinions, namely make the dictates of the Gospel their rule only so far as they are authorised by *their* reason, infected as it is by custom, passion, or worldly interest; which is done by very many who would be offended to have their belief of the Scriptures questioned. But however they purport to accept the Scriptures, none who act in this way can reasonably be thought to be sincerely convinced of their divine authority. Though it is possible that many of these people don't entirely disbelieve the Scriptures either; because merely *not assenting* is the natural effect of ignorance in those who have enough good sense to see that it is irrational to be confidently assured of something that they don't have sufficient reason to be so assured of.

Now, this lack of a firm assent to the divine authority of the Scriptures in people who profess to accept them as the

word of God is perfectly obvious when such men allow the precepts of the Gospel to be the rule of their actions only to the extent that they find those precepts to be authorised by the testimony of their reason. Many very common examples of this can easily be produced.

·BAD BEHAVIOUR AND HYPOCRISY·

However much a man is convinced of the authority of any rule, a strong passion or apparent interest may nevertheless seduce him from obedience to its prescriptions; but when such a transgression is accompanied by regret or followed by repentance, the rule is still as much acknowledged as if it were obeyed. The only people who can be accused of not believing the rule because their actions infringe it are those who transgress it by a deliberate choice and without remorse. Many who profess to be Christians do this and even teach their children to do likewise—in which case it can't be supposed that they are misled by the strength of a prevailing passion!

For example, the Scriptures command as plainly as words can be that *we should forgive our enemies and be patient under insults*. But many men who profess to believe that the Scriptures are the word of God behave as if no such command as this was delivered by Christ or his disciples: they both *practise* and *teach* not letting affronts go unrevengeed, simply because the fashion of the country has laid down that a gentleman cannot do so *with honour*—a phrase that here means nothing but

in conformity with certain measures of acting that men have arbitrarily [see Glossary] made for themselves, and which are not founded on any principle of right reason, but are to be obeyed (it seems) by a gentleman in preference to the commands of Christ.

If there are cases where the lack of a due provision in

governments against some sort of insults may be thought to give men an excuse for asserting their own cause, it is still certain that this precept of forgiveness could not be transgressed against by men professing to believe the authority of the Scriptures if these men were indeed fully convinced that it was a divine command which forbade us to avenge ourselves.

But there are others who (unlike the former) •would find it altogether condemnable for a man to risk his own life and someone else's in a duel, however grievously he had been provoked, but •would see no evil in his misspending his time, consuming day after day and year after year, uselessly to himself and to everyone else, in a course of continual idleness and triviality, as if eating, drinking and gratifying his senses were what he was made for. And there are few parents of quality [see Glossary], even among those who are regarded as the most virtuous, who do not permit their daughters to pass the best part of their youth in that ridiculous circle of pastimes that is pretty generally thought the proper business of young ladies; which so absorbs them that they can find no spare hours in which to make such improvements of their understanding •as the leisure they have for it demands from them as rational creatures, or •as is required or useful for performing well their present or future duties.

Some formal devotions are perhaps necessary for some of these ·young ladies· to be thought well of, even by themselves; and if they can regularly find 30 or 60 minutes a day to spend on private devotions and on reading some pious book, together perhaps with a certain number of chapters in the Bible, that is enough to make them celebrated as great examples to the age they live in. As if the Gospel gave these people no precepts concerning the improvement of their time and talents, as things they must one day answer for! They can't help seeing that there are such commands *for*

others; but the sacred law of fashion has made endless idle visits, and less innocent entertainments, the indispensably constant employment of those of their condition [see Glossary]; and when they are grown old in the perpetually repeated round of such irrelevance and folly, all they have achieved is to work hard in that employment.

·TWO MORE EXAMPLES OF SOCIALLY ACCEPTED HYPOCRISY·

(i) Another example of how little many people who profess to believe the Scriptures actually look on them as the rule for their actions has to do with the command not to **covet**. This is as much forbidden by the law of God as not to **steal** or **cheat** a man of his property; yet the same parents who have bred their children in such a sense of the wickedness of these last vices that they often seem to them to be something they are naturally incapable of are so far from teaching them to restrain their exorbitant desires that very often they take care to put these desires into them. It is pretty clear that the line that is drawn between stealing and cheating on the one hand and coveting on the other comes from this: ambition is thought to be a passion that is suitable for some ranks of men, whereas cheating and stealing are not vices proper for a gentleman. This distinction must involve some rule other than that of the Gospel; so these people are not taking the Gospel's divine law as the measure of their actions.

(ii) One more example of people who claim to be Christians but obey •Christ's commands only so far as they comply with some other rule that is taken to outrank •them. According to the Gospel, **chastity** is a duty for both sexes; but a transgression with respect to chastity—even with the aggravation of wronging another man, and possibly a whole family—is ordinarily talked of, in the case of a young man, as lightly as if it was merely a peccadillo; whereas a far less criminal offence against this duty in a maiden will, in the

opinion of those same persons, brand her with perpetual infamy. Often her nearest relations are hardly brought to look on her after such a dishonour done by her to their family; while the fault of her more guilty brother is only very moderately reprov'd by them, and before long it may become the subject of their mirth and teasing. This wrongly placed line is drawn because people's actions are measured and judged by whether they conform to •measures of living established by men themselves and not to •the precepts of Jesus Christ. This would be inexplicable if men really were convinced of the divine revelation of our Saviour's doctrine, rather than professing to believe this only because

- it is the fashion of their country to do so, and
- their parents have done so before them, or at most
- their education has made them unable to reject the Christian religion (though without getting them to assent to the truth of it).

·THE LAZY WAY OUT·

It is indeed strange that men who have any virtue or sobriety, and who are not entirely destitute of good sense, can allow themselves to have such uncertainty about something that matters as much to them as the truths of the Christian religion. But the slightest arguments against any truth have some weight to those who don't know the evidence [see Glossary] of that truth; and those who have never been accustomed in their youth to exert themselves in any rational inquiry usually when they are older look on the easiest work of this kind as painful. And so most of them either

- lazily think it best to go along with (as well as they can) the opinions of they men they have imagined to understand this matter best; or else
- are readily inclined—given the disagreement and contrariety of people's thoughts about it—to decide not

to trouble themselves about it, as being something in which there is no certainty to be found, and probably, therefore, not much truth.

An opinion which the often-admitted scepticism of the age helps to confirm unthinking people in; especially because these days men get a reputation of more than ordinary intelligence and wisdom if they doubt something that most people believe—though few have any reason for doubting it except that others do not! The scepticism among us has not been the effect of uncommon light and knowledge; quite the contrary, it is considerably due to the recent fashionableness of a very general ignorance regarding religion and other useful sciences; for men's not knowing how employ their time usefully and with pleasure seems to be one great cause of their debauchery.

So long as the consciousness and shame of not acting like rational creatures is not extinguished in men, the uneasiness of that remorse naturally leads them to seek out principles to justify their conduct, because few men can endure the constant reproaches of their own reason: if they don't conform their actions to the dictates of their reason, they will naturally try to bend their reason into compliance with their practices. Reconciling these in one direction or the other is necessary, even for men who are not *very* profligate, if they are to be at peace with themselves.¹

The lack of knowledge that I have ventured to call 'fashionable' consists not only in **(i)** ignorance—among men who have leisure for it—of arts and sciences in general, but also and especially **(ii)** the lack of the particular knowledge that everyone needs if they are to do well in discharging either

next phrase: their common or peculiar business and duty,

meaning: the duties they have as human beings, and the duties that come with their particular trade or profession (their 'calling'),

and this necessarily brings in religion, because it's the duty of all persons—whatever their sex, condition [see Glossary] or calling—to understand religion. Now, to assert that

- most people are ignorant concerning
- something that they have a duty to know about, with many being so conscious of this duty that they pretend to understand
- it well enough to be zealous about it or else to condemn [see Glossary] it;

and to assert likewise that

- they lack the knowledge of what they in their particular station [see Glossary] especially need to understand;
- are charges that ought not to be brought if they weren't so evidently true that we cannot open our eyes without seeing them to be so.

·HOW WOMEN ARE ENCOURAGED INTO IT·

I think everyone agrees that the common people of all sorts are very ignorant concerning religion (some of the blame for this, surely, going to those who ought to have instructed them better). But I will consider here only the upper ranks of persons who have been my topic up to here. I begin with the female sex, who certainly ought to be Christians. Of these, from the meanest [see Glossary] gentlewoman to the greatest ladies, what proportion could we expect to be able to give an account of the Christian religion that would tell an inquiring stranger what it consisted in and what the grounds are for believing it? Women who understand something of the distinguishing opinions of **the denomination they have been brought up in** are commonly thought to be highly intelligent

¹ [This paragraph, though wholly in the spirit of DM's work, does not link with either of its immediate neighbours. Presumably she wanted to include it somehow, and couldn't find a suitable place.]

in matters of religion; but very few even of this little number, I think, could well inform a rational heathen concerning **Christianity itself**. This ignorance is inexcusable in them, though it may often arise from the lack of other useful knowledge, for the lack of which women are much more to be pitied than blamed.

The improvements of reason, however much required for the accomplishment of ladies as rational creatures, and however much needed by them for the well-educating of their children and for their being useful in their families, seldom do anything to recommend them to men. Foolishly thinking that money will solve all problems, men mostly regard nothing else in the woman they would marry.

the next sentence: And not often finding what they do not look for, it would be no wonder if their offspring should inherit no more sense than themselves.

spelled out: Husbands seldom find any intellectual talents in their wives because they don't think about them in those terms; so it's not surprising if their offspring—brought up by mothers whose talents are neglected—come to be as foolish as their fathers are.

But however kind nature is to those of the female sex in the bountiful talents she bestows on them, this usually comes to nothing because the talents are not cultivated. Between silly fathers and ignorant mothers, girls are generally brought up in such a way that throughout their lives the place of reason is taken by traditional opinions. They are perhaps sometimes told that they must *believe* and *do* such-and-such things because the word of God requires it; but they are not

told to search the Scriptures for themselves to see whether these things are so; and they so little know *why* they should regard the Scriptures as the word of God that they are—all too often—easily persuaded out of the reverence due to them as being so. And (if they happen to encounter such bad persuaders) they are quite often led by them even to scoff at the documents of their education [see Glossary], consequently having no religion at all. While others who are naturally more disposed to be religious are either

- as some were in the Apostles' days, *carried away with every wind of doctrine, always learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth;*¹ weak, superstitious, useless creatures;

or else, if more tenacious in their natures,

- blindly and confidently wedded to the principles and opinions of their spiritual guides, who, having the direction of their consciences, nearly always also direct their affairs and fortunes.

A wife of the latter sort very often proves to bring considerable unhappiness to the family she joins; for ignorant persons of this kind are the most arrogant of all; and once they are credited with saintship for their blind zeal, •nothing is more troublesome than they are in finding fault with and censuring everyone who differs from them, and •to their admirers (who lead them as they please) they think they can never pay enough for the incense that is offered them. [The sarcastically labelled 'admirers' are the 'spiritual guides' who are running these women's lives.] So the dearest interests of human life are often in this way sacrificed to a vain image of piety; while *makers of long prayers* have *devoured widows' houses*.²

¹ [Ephesians 4:14: 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.']

² [Mark 12:40: 'Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers'; similarly Luke 20:47.]

What I say here implies that ladies should understand their religion well enough to be able to answer **those who oppose it and those who misrepresent it**. This may seem to require that they should have the knowledge of academics and be well versed in theological disputes and controversies; but I think there could hardly be found a more *useless* employment for them than studying for that! Patrons of ignorance who themselves know nothing that they ought to know may not call it 'learning', but *understanding the Christian religion and the grounds for accepting it* is indeed a sort of learning. Obviously, anyone who thinks that a woman has no need for that much knowledge must either

- a not be convinced of the truth of Christianity, or
- b believe that being a Christian is not important for a woman.

For if a Christianity is a religion from God, and b women as well as men have souls to be saved, it must be as necessary for a woman as for a man to know what this religion consists in and to understand the grounds on which it is to be accepted. This necessary knowledge is sufficient to enable a person to answer the **opposers or corrupters** of Christianity well enough to secure him- or herself from the danger of being imposed on by such men's argumentations. That is all I have thought requisite for a lady; not that she should be prepared to challenge every adversary to truth.

This much knowledge can be acquired without learned education or great study, as can be seen from the fact that the first Christians were mean [see Glossary] and illiterate people. The Gospel may be thought to have had a special concern for that part of mankind, rather than excluding

them from its benefits on the grounds that they weren't able to receive it understandingly. At the time of the apostle Paul *there were not many wise who were called*, and he tells us that *after that the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*; and though *to the perfect* the Apostle says he did *preach wisdom*, yet it was the simplicity and plainness of the Christian religion that made it *to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness*.¹

From this we see that all theorems that are too abstruse for common people's minds but that Christianity is believed to teach are no part of the doctrine of salvation, even if they are divine truths. So it is wrong to require people to believe anything that *they* do not find to be revealed in Scripture. Imposing this requirement has not only caused deplorable dissensions among Christians but has also led multitudes of well-meaning people to have confused and unsatisfactory conceptions and understandings of the Christian religion. This state of mind has not perhaps been absolutely or immediately prejudicial to their salvation, but it has indirectly been so because it has prevented them from seeing clearly that Christianity is a rational religion, and without that few will be very secure from the infection of scepticism or infidelity where those have become fashionable and prevalent. Many women are as much exposed to this danger as men are, and often more so. So they really need to understand their religion well enough to be Christians on the convictions of their reason; which is indeed no more than one would think every Christian as a rational creature should be, if only because of the danger of scepticism and infidelity. For

¹ [All from the first chapter of 1 Corinthians. 26: 'For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.' 21: 'For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' 23: 'But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.']

some there is no danger, because there is, no doubt, many a country gentlewoman who has never in her life heard the articles of her faith questioned, or imagined that anyone in their wits could question them, yet doesn't know why she believes them.

. . . It must be granted that women in general are shamefully ignorant about religion. As for other knowledge: it is believed to be so improper for them, and is indeed so little allowed them, that they are not to be expected to have it; but the cause of this is only the ignorance of men. [Probably meaning 'only human ignorance'; but perhaps not—she may be blaming *men* for a gap in the lives of *women*.]

·THE WILFUL IGNORANCE OF THE GENTRY·

The age we live in has (not undeservedly) been esteemed a *knowing* one. But it has obtained that reputation largely because of the learned clergy; and though some few gentlemen have been the greatest advancers of learning among us, there are very few who apply themselves to any science that is curious [i.e. that requires careful attention to detail]. As for knowledge of the sort that men who have families and estates absolutely need to have if they are to conduct the proper business of their station [see Glossary]: I think it may be said that this was never more neglected than it is at present; for there is not a commoner complaint in every county than of the lack of gentlemen qualified for the service of their country as **a** executors of the law and **b** law-makers [i.e. **a** judges and **b** members of parliament]. It belongs to this rank of Englishmen to fulfill these roles; and if they are to do this well, they need some insight into **a** the **law** they are to see executed and into **b** the **constitution** they are to support. And such knowledge will be adequate for this purpose only if it is accompanied by some acquaintance with **history**, **politics**, and **morals**. Each of these ·five· is, then, a branch of knowledge that an English

gentleman cannot, without blame, be ignorant of, because it is essential to his being suitably equipped for his proper business.

But whether we further look on such men

- as having immortal souls that will be happy or miserable for ever, depending on whether they comply with the terms their Maker has proposed to them, or
- as protestants, whose birthright it is to examine their religion rather than blindly believing it, or only
- as men whose ample fortunes allow them leisure for such an important study,

they are certainly obliged to understand the **religion** they profess. Adding this to the other five that I have argued that a gentleman ought to know, let us examine how common it is for our gentlemen to have the knowledge that they cannot lack without being open to criticism. I don't think anyone will deny that. . . there are only a relative few who have even a competent knowledge in any *one* of the ·six· above-mentioned fields—a few who pass among us as extraordinary men.

They seem to reflect very little on the obligations of their duty in the matter of religion; and as for the other ·five· matters that they might be thought, as gentlemen, to be drawn to: their ancestors' care has distinguished them from their tenants and other inferior neighbours by titles and riches, and that is all the distinction they desire to have. They believe that they have done enough for knowledge if they did once understand a little Latin or logic in the university; and anyone who still retains that understanding, although he has made no use of it in the real improvement of his intellect, is nevertheless thought to be very highly accomplished, and counts (in the countryside) as learned.

From the little that most gentlemen understand of religion, and their usual lack of shame in avowing their ignorance of it, one can only suppose that they pretty commonly

take this to be a matter that *they* don't need to understand, thinking the public has provided •others to understand it for them, and that their role in this is merely to maintain (as far as their authority enables them to) what •those men assert.

·MEN DEPRIVING WOMEN OF KNOWLEDGE·

That is how wretchedly destitute our English gentlemen are (generally speaking) of all the knowledge they ought to have. And this being so, it is no wonder that they don't like women to have knowledge, for this quality will give some sort of superiority even to those ·women· who do not want to have it. But such men as these would assuredly be doing *themselves* a favour if their concern for that prerogative taught them a more legitimate way of maintaining it than one that is a very great impediment—or at least a discouragement—to others in doing what God requires of them. ·My reason for saying this runs through the rest of this subsection·.

It can't be denied that a lady who knows enough (but *only* enough) to be able

- to give an account of her faith, and defend her religion against the attacks of the carping intellects of the age or the abuses of the obtruders of vain opinions;
- to instruct her children in the reasonableness of the Christian religion, and
- to lay in them the foundations of a solid virtue,

can hardly escape being called *learned* by the men of our days, leading to her becoming a subject of ridicule to one part of them and of aversion to the rest—with only a few exceptions of some virtuous and rational persons. And isn't the incurring of general dislike one of the strongest discouragements that we can have to anything?

If I have been right in saying that the assistance of mothers is necessary for the right forming of the minds and regulating of the manners of their children, I am also

right in thinking that this care is indispensably a mother's *duty*. This is a work that can never be too soon begun, because it is rarely performed at all well when it is not undertaken early, nothing being as effective in making men virtuous as having good habits and principles of virtue established in them before the mind is tainted with anything opposite or prejudicial to them; which is why a *mother's* involvement is necessary for the first eight or ten years of a boy's life. Anyone who counts those years as nothing must be ignoring •the chief business of education or •the constitution of human nature. Those first years are an age in which fathers—who are seldom able to do it at *any* time—cannot burden themselves with the care of their children, or watch over those to whom the children must be entrusted.

·MOTHERS SHOULD OVERSEE THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION·

The latter are usually—and for most parents unavoidably—a sort of people much fitter to be learners than to be teachers of the principles of **a** virtue and **b** wisdom. The great foundation of those consists in being able to **a** govern our passions and **b** subject our appetites to the direction of our reason. This lesson is hardly ever well learnt if not taught us from our cradles, and for this what is needed is a *parent's* care and watchfulness; so it undoubtedly ought to be the watchful *mother's* business to take care of this. Even quality [see Glossary] of the highest degree cannot exempt a woman from this, because the relation between mother and child is the same at all social levels. To base one's case for being unnatural on *quality* is a very preposterous [see Glossary] abuse of quality. This is a truth that might displease many ladies if it were told to them, which may be why they so seldom hear it! But none of them could be so much **offended** with anyone who tried to restrain them from some of their expensive and ridiculous diversions by an activity so worthy of rational creatures and

so fitting for maternal tenderness, as it is **just** to be angry with them for neglecting their children,¹ This is a fault that women of quality are in every way too often guilty of, and are perhaps less excusable for than they are for any other fault they are ordinarily chargeable with. Though it is to be feared that few ladies (from the disadvantage of their own education [see Glossary]) are as well fitted as they ought to be to take the care of their children, still

not being willing to do what they can about this, thinking this to be either too much trouble for them or below their condition [see Glossary]

expresses such a senseless pride, and such a lack of the affectionate and compassionate tenderness natural to that sex and relation [meaning 'to being a woman and a wife'], that one would almost be tempted to question whether such women were any more *capable of* than *worthy of* being the mothers of rational creatures.

Even apart from natural affection, these women should have the thought that no-one is born into the world to live idly, enjoying the fruit and benefit of other people's labours, without in return contributing somehow to the good of the community, the contribution being suitable to the station [see Glossary] that God (the common father of all) has placed them in. God evidently intended human kind for society and mutual communion, as members of the same body, all useful to each other in their respective places. Now, consider women whose condition puts them above all the necessities or cares of a mean [see Glossary] or scanty fortune: what can they be employed in as honourably and as usefully, both to themselves and to others, as in looking after the education and instruction of their own children? This seems indeed to be more particularly the business and duty of such than

of any others [she means that mothers high on the social scale are more, not less, obliged to care for their children's upbringing than are lower-class mothers]. And if examples are necessary to persuade them that this will not involve doing anything unfitting for their rank, the greatest ladies among us may be assured that women whose condition was superior even to theirs have in the past been so far from thinking it any lowering of themselves to take on the instruction of their own children, that (to their immortal honour) they have made it part of their business to help also in the education of other people's children, who were likely one day to be important to the commonwealth. And if the bare love of their country could induce (among many others) the great Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, and Aurelia, the mother of Julius Caesar, to do this for the sons of noblemen of Rome to whom they had no relation but that of their common country, won't similar reasons—

or, what is infinitely beyond them, the thought of their children being hereafter forever happy or miserable depending on how they live in this world

—prevail with the ladies of our days who call themselves Christians to devote some of their time and trouble to their own offspring?

·TWO THEORIES OF EDUCATION·

(i) The care of them should (I repeat) begin with the first years of children's lives, in •curbing at its earliest appearance every bad inclination that they have, and •accustoming them to an absolute, constant, and universal submission and obedience to the will of those who are in charge of them. ·Why the latter?· Because children who are not made compliant to the reason of others before they can make fit/unfit judgments by any measure except *whether it is the will of those they*

¹ [The original says 'just to be with them for neglecting' etc. Presumably something got dropped.]

believe to have a just power over them will in later years hardly ever be governed by their own reason. When they do become capable of examining and determining their actions by reason, they should be taught never to do anything of consequence heedlessly; and to look on the dictates of their reason as such an inviolable rule of their choices that no passion or appetite must ever make them swerve from them.

(ii) But instead of following this method, it is commonly thought that children should not be *corrected* for anything until a time when in fact the time has passed for this sort of discipline. If it comes too late, this discipline is commonly so far from producing the good it was designed for that—losing the benefit of correction (which, if duly applied, is of infinite use)—it turns into a provocation, and makes stiff and incorrigible a temperament that it was meant to soften. And quite often this wrongly-timed discipline, together with the remissness and inequality with which children’s inclinations are overruled, leads to their seeing their parents’ government over them not as a natural and just **right** established for their benefit, but a tyrannical and arbitrary [see Glossary] **power**, which accordingly they disobey without remorse whenever they think they can do so with impunity. And what is still worse, not only are most of their bad dispositions not restrained early enough, but children are actually taught to indulge their naturally irregular inclinations by the vicious [see Glossary] or wretchedly ignorant people by whom they are surrounded. Almost all these people instill downright vice into the children, even before they can speak well—vices such as revenge, covetousness, pride and envy. The silly creatures who do them such unspeakable harm are hardly capable of being made to understand the harm that they do. They regard as ill-natured, or as having fancies fit only to be smiled at, parents •who deny their child something perhaps for no other reason than that he has desired it, •who before

he is trusted to go alone will curb his resentment, impatience, avarice, or vanity, which *they* think become him so prettily, and •who will not allow him to be rewarded for doing what *they* bid him to do. [In that sentence, italicised occurrences of *they* refer to the ‘silly creatures’ that DM is criticising.].

·BACK TO THE ROLE OF MOTHERS IN EDUCATION·

I am sure that anyone who has found

- how little sense is to be met with in—or can be infused into—**nurses and nurse-maids**; and
- how difficult it is for those who make it their business to watch over them to restrain even the best of them from what they are convinced has no hurt in it,

will soon be satisfied how inappropriate it is to entrust children into such hands any more than is necessary. And no wiser than such ‘nurses and nurse-maids’, if not much worse, are the great majority of those who are usually their immediate successors ‘as the children get a little older’, namely young scholars and French maids, elevated into **tutors and governesses** on the strength of a little Latin and French.

In Mr. Locke’s excellent *Treatise of Education*, he shows how early and how great a watchfulness and prudence are required to form the mind of a child to virtue. Anyone who reads what he has written on that subject will probably think that few mothers are qualified for this undertaking. But that they are not so is the fault that should be amended; ‘more about this shortly’. In the meantime, nevertheless, their presumed willingness to do the right thing where it involves the happiness of their children must certainly enable them, once they are convinced that this is their duty, to perform it much better than will people who

- have as little skill and ability for it as the mothers themselves,

- rarely desire to increase their own learning, and
- are not induced by affection to do all the good they can for those under their care.

Because **men** do not have the leisure to pay daily attention to the education of their children, because of their callings, their private estates, or the service of their country (all which are indispensably their business), and because in any case they are naturally less capable than women of the complaisance and tenderness required for the right instruction and direction of young children; and because **servants** are so far from being fit to be relied on in this great concern that a considerable part of the care a wise parent has to take is to be on guard against the impediments that servants bring to it; I presume that (ordinarily speaking) this necessary work of forming early the minds of children so as to dispose them to become wise and virtuous men and women can be performed only by **mothers**. Very few can afford to purchase [= 'engage the services of'] wise, virtuous and well-bred people to take the place of a parent in governing their children, and along with them to hire such servants and teachers as must be employed about them; for the world does not abound with persons •who have these qualities and •whose circumstances prevent them from getting more profitable employments than men of one or two thousand pounds a year (and much less the many who have smaller estates) can afford to pay for the care of governing their children from their infancy. . . . Engaging for reward virtuous, wise, and well-bred men and women to take care of the education [see Glossary] of young children is possible for only a very few; since the expense of it would be difficult for the greater part of almost any rank among us, unless they were willing, for the sake of it, to cut back on some of their extravagant expenses—which are usually the last that men will deny themselves!

If we consider men as rational creatures, it is amazing to see how much money they will often devote not only to their •vices (for this is not so hard to explain) but also to merely •fashionable vanities that give them more trouble than pleasure in the enjoyment; while also spending as little as possible on a child's education. [What follows is unclear, and seems to involve an omission. It's gist is that to engage people who were fit to make a good job of educating children, one would have to offer very high 'rewards', and:] not every gentleman of a good family, or good estate also, is in a position to offer such rewards; and for what most of them *can* afford to pay, very few who are capable of performing this matter well will trouble themselves about it, at least with pupils attended by nurses or maids. So the only remedy, I believe, is to return to my conclusion that this great concernment—on which no less than people's temporal [see Glossary] and eternal happiness greatly depends—ought to be the care and business of mothers. And women seem to be naturally equipped for it, as we might expect them to be if the Author of Nature (as no doubt he did) designed this to be their province in the division of cares of human life that ought to be made between a man and his wife. For the softness, gentleness and tenderness natural to the female sex make them much more capable than men are of the kind of gentle adaptation [DM writes 'insinuating condescension'] to the capacities of young children that is needed for gradually forming their early inclinations. And surely these distinguishing qualities of the sex were not given barely to •delight, when they can so obviously •be profitable also, if combined with a well-informed understanding. From this—i.e. from women's being *naturally* thus fitted to take this care of their little ones—it follows that besides the injustice done to themselves it is neglecting the direction of nature for the bringing up of children, when ladies are made incapable of it through the

lack of the improvements of their reason that it demands.

It seems very strange that this has not been thought about more, from a principle of pity to that tender age of children which so much requires help. For what can move a juster commiseration than to see such poor innocents, so far from having the aid they need that even those who most wish to do them good—and who deplore with the deepest compassion every little malady that afflicts their bodies—never try to rescue them from the greatest evils that await them in this life, but even help to plunge them into those evils by cherishing in them the passions that will inevitably render them miserable? And that is how things are bound to be while women are brought up with no right notions of religion and virtue, and no use of reason except in the service of their passions and inclinations, or at best of their (comparatively trivial) interests.

•LADIES SHOULD WIDEN THE RANGE OF THEIR LEARNING•

To assert on this occasion that

ladies would do well if, before they became mothers, they employed some of their many idle hours in gaining a little knowledge in languages and the useful sciences

would be, I know, to contradict the sense of most men; but I don't think that this assertion can be countered in any way but by laughing at it—which is how people who don't reason but live by fancy and custom usually deal with opinions that are opposite to theirs. For it can't be denied that this knowledge would later be more or less useful to ladies, in enabling them to teach their children or to make a better job of overseeing and directing those who do so. And though learning is perhaps the least part in education [see Glossary], it is not to be neglected; in fact it needs to be taken some care of *early*, lest a habit of idleness or mental slackness sets

in, which is very hard to cure once it has been contracted.

This being so, and given that the beginnings of all science are difficult for children (who cannot like grown people fix their attention), it is reasonable to fear that **(i)** they will develop an aversion to learning because of the ill usage they receive from the impatience and peevishness of teachers such as servants or young tutors (and we see in fact that this very frequently happens). For the teaching of little children so as not to disgust them requires much greater patience and skill than common people are often capable of, or indeed than most can *imagine* if they haven't had experience of it in their own teachers. But if such teachers as I have spoken of *do* have the necessary complaisance for those they teach, there is a still greater danger to be feared from them, namely that **(ii)** their pupils will become fond of them, with the bad effect that—through children's natural liking for imitating those they love—they will have their manners and dispositions tinctured and tainted by those of persons so dear to them.

Now both these inconveniences could be remedied—at least to a great extent, if not wholly—if mothers would merely involve *themselves* in part or all of the process of teaching their children the things that it is appropriate for them to learn in the first eight or ten years of their lives. For example:

- to read English perfectly;
- to understand ordinary Latin; and
- arithmetic; along with general knowledge of
- geography,
- chronology, and
- history.

most or all of which can be understood by a child of a very ordinary capacity at the age I am talking about; and can be taught to children in such a way that they learn them almost insensibly in play, if they have skilful teachers.

It seems to me therefore that young ladies cannot better employ as much of their time as is needed for this than in acquiring such qualifications as these, which may be so useful to them later on. And if any who have not early acquired such knowledge truly want to do their children all the good it is in their power to do them, they may be able (though not as easily) to instruct them in the same way, despite that disadvantage. And Mr. Locke has asserted, on the experience thereof,¹ that a mother who does not understand Latin beforehand can still teach it to her child; and if she can do *that*, it is not to be doubted that she can do the same with all the rest; for a superficial knowledge that serves to enter someone into each of the above-named sciences is much easier to attain than the Latin tongue; and if a mother has just a little more capacity than her child, she can easily keep ahead of him in teaching both him and herself together. In doing this she will be doing the best she can to make up for her past neglect ·of herself· in this respect—or her parents' neglect. But it may not have been from negligence that her parents failed to give her this advantage. For parents sometimes deliberately omit it because they fear that if daughters were perceived to understand a learned language or be at home with books, they might be in danger of not finding husbands, because so few men relish these accomplishments in a lady. Even the example of a mother who **a** was herself thus qualified, and who **b** understood her religion, would probably not be any great encouragement to her daughters to imitate her example; but the contrary. For this knowledge—of which **b** one part is so strictly the duty of a Christian, and **a** the other so inconsiderable for those who commonly have a great deal of spare time—would expose a young woman of

quality (especially one who is thought fit for the social world's fashionable goings-on) to be characterised or censured in a way that would not be very pleasing to her. Someone who did seriously desire to make the best use of what she knew would necessarily be obliged (so as to make time in which to do so) to order the course and manner of her life rather differently from others of her sex and condition [see Glossary]; and it can't be doubted that such conduct—carrying with it so much •reproach to woman's idleness, and •disappointment to men's vanity—would soon be judged fit to be ridiculed out of the world before others were infected by the example. So that the best fate such a lady could expect would be that, hardly escaping calumny, she should be **in town**

- the jest of the would-be-wits,
- the wonder of fools, and
- a scarecrow to keep from her house many honest people who are to be pitied for having no more wit than they have, because it is not their own fault that they have no more.

But **in the country** she would probably fare still worse; for there her understanding of the Christian religion would come close to getting her suspected of heresy, even by those who thought the best of her; while her little zeal for any sect or party would make the clergy of all sorts declare her to be a socinian [i.e. someone who denies the divinity of Christ] or a deist [see Glossary]. And if only a very little philosophy was added to her other knowledge, she might even be taken to be an atheist. However cordially she invited the parson of the parish to visit her, he would be reluctant to come near her, for fear of the hard questions she might ask him; and this would have to arouse the suspicions of folk who revered the doctor, and who might be already convinced

¹ [presumably referring to his experience of the teaching of Lady Masham's children]

by the reports of nurses and maids that their lady was indeed a woman of very odd whimsies. Her prudent conduct and management of her affairs would probably protect her from being regarded as out of her wits by her near neighbours; but the country gentlemen who wished her well would be afraid, on her behalf, that too much learning might in time make her mad.

·BACK TO MEN'S HARM TO WOMEN·

The saving of just one soul from destruction is a noble recompense for ten thousand such censurers as these; but it is *very* strange that a lady should be exposed to such great reproaches simply because she is a Christian with as much other knowledge as a child of nine or ten years can and ought to have. And what a shame this is for men whose woeful ignorance is the sole cause of it! For it is clearly true that if ·Jean de la Bruyère·, the inimitable author of *Les Caractères ou les mœurs de ce Siècle*, had asked in England *Who forbids knowledge to women?*, the answer would have to have been that the ignorance of the men does so; and I think he might have received the same answer in France.

Monsieur Bruyère says indeed, and likely it is, that

‘Men have made no laws or put out any edicts whereby women are forbidden to open their eyes; to read; to remember what they read, and to make use of it in their conversation or in composing works.’

But surely he had little reason to suppose, as he does in this book, that women could not be restrained from learning except by *laws and edicts*. It is sufficient for this that •nobody helps them in it, and that •early in their lives they are made to see that it would be disadvantageous to them to have it. For how few men are there that achieve any eminence in learning? Yet learning is not only not forbidden to them by *laws and edicts*, but ordinarily much care and

trouble is taken to give it to them; and their having it often brings great profits and always brings honour.

The law of fashion, established by repute and disrepute, is for most people the most powerful of all laws, as Monsieur Bruyère very well knew. His satirical genius makes him say that women's not having knowledge is caused by the universally necessary consequences of their being brought up without knowledge. But what he says of the ·female· sex in different places will either **a** vindicate them or **b** show that this ingenious writer's reflections, however witty, are not always instructive or fair corrections. For either **a** women have generally some other more powerful driver of their actions than the desire to make themselves pleasing to men (as he insinuates they have not), or **b** they neglect the improvement of their minds and understandings because they don't find them useful in pleasing men; and if the latter is right, it is not fair of him to accuse that sex (if indeed they are as guilty of it as men are) of being diverted from knowledge by *une curiosité toute différente de celle qui contente l'Esprit, ou un tout autre gout que celui d'exercer leur mémoire* [‘a curiosity quite different from the one that the intellect is satisfied with, or a taste quite different from the one that brings their memory into play’].

But since I think it is only natural for each sex to desire to please the other, I can presumably suppose, without insulting ladies, that if men did usually find women more amiable for being knowledgeable, they would *be* so much more commonly than they are now.

But the knowledge I have been speaking of has a nobler aim than pleasing men, and asks from them only toleration. In granting that, they would be serving their own interests at least as much as womens'; and they would discover that this is so, if it weren't for the fact that they—by a common folly, incident to human nature—hope that contradictions might

exist together in their favour. That is why very many men who don't want women to have knowledge complain of the natural and unavoidable consequences of their ignorance.

But what sure remedy can be found for effects whose cause remains? On what ground can it be expected that ignorant and uninstructed persons should have the virtues that come from a rightly informed understanding and well cultivated mind? Or not be liable to the vices that their natures incline them to? And

those who have never considered the nature and constitution of things, or weighed the authority of the divine law and what it demands from them,

how could they *not* be convinced that their best course is the indulgence of their present passions and appetites? Yet people who seek happiness in the satisfaction of those passions and appetites cannot fail to bring to themselves or to those who are involved with them.

Human nature is not capable of durable satisfaction when the passions and appetites are not under the direction of right reason. And while we eagerly pursue what disappoints our expectation, or (like all irregular pleasures, however natural) cloy with the enjoyment; and while we daily create still more vain desires for ourselves, thinking they will lead to new delights; we shall always—instead of finding true contentment—be subjected to uneasiness, disgust and vexation. That is unhappy state, more or less, of all those who lack the knowledge needed to direct their actions suitably to the goals which as rational creatures they ought to have—goals that can enable them to employ their time profitably.

·HOW MEN LOSE BY IT·

... Let us see what plainly are the natural consequences of the ignorance that women are usually brought up in, and

that men think so advantageous to themselves. I shall take the case of

a lady who has been brought up, as most men think she should be, in a blind belief concerning religion; and has been taught that it is ridiculous for a lady even to trouble her head about this matter, since it is so far from being a branch of knowledge fit for her that it properly belongs only to qualified academics, and that a woman who tries to act the doctor thoroughly deserves to be laughed at—her duty in this matter being plain and easy, requiring her only to believe and practise what she is taught at church or in books of piety recommended to her by her parents or some spiritual director.

This, I think, is what men generally think concerning the knowledge ladies ought to have of religion; and I don't doubt that it may be enough knowledge for their salvation. But the saving of their souls (even if this made it certain) is not, I suppose, all that men care about in regard to their wives; they much more frequently and obviously employ their care on *their own honour* as reflected by those who are near to them; and that too often appears to be only weakly secured by an implicit faith such as this, [i.e. such as is described in the indented passage above]. For these believers (especially if they are thought to have any intelligence, as well as beauty) will hardly escape meeting people who will ask them why they believe; and if they find then that they have no more reason for going to church than they would have had to go to mass, or even to the synagogue, if they had been brought up among papists or Jews, this must make them wonder whether the faith they have been brought up in is any more right than either of those; from which they will by easy steps be induced to question the truth of all religion, when they are told by those who have insinuated themselves into their esteem and

good graces

- that all religions are alike the inventions and tricks of cunning men to govern the world by, unworthy of imposing on people who have good sense;
- that only a fool or an ignoramus is kept in awe and restrained by their precepts; and
- that they will always find that those precepts are least obeyed by the people who do the most to force them on others.

This is certainly something that women are often told; and a woman who knows no reason for what she has been taught to believe—and may even have been scolded for asking for one—can hardly avoid being persuaded that there is much appearance of truth in this; and this will soon lead her to conclude that she has previously been in the wrong if any religious scruple has stopped her from gratifying her inclination in anything that she imagines might make her life more pleasing to her. And if such a young lady finds a **lover** who she thinks puts a just value on all her good qualities—which at best may procure her only the cold civility of her **husband**—she may be in danger of giving her husband cause to wish she had been better instructed than may possibly suffice for her salvation. Her salvation *may* be secured through the allowances made for her great ignorance, or at least through any timely repentance; whereas honour, if not entirely shipwrecked, cannot reasonably be expected to remain intact on such an occasion.¹ In an age like this, the best way to keep virtuously disposed women away from such an event is for them to be instructed *early* in the true reasons and measures of their duty; since those who are so •are better able to defend their virtue and also •have the least frequent occasion for such a defence. Men, however

evil their inclinations, are awed by women whom they see to be rationally virtuous, and are ashamed to attack them with the pitiful arguments that are all vice admits of; whereas easy ignorance is looked on as a prey exposed to every bold invader: And whatever garb of gravity or modesty it is clothed in, it very often invites such an attack, even where the charms of the person would not otherwise attract the predator.

But men who think that •the understanding of religion is needless for women commonly believe even more strongly that the same applies to •all other rational knowledge. Let us see, then, how reasonably these same men, who are not willing to allow ladies any employment of their thoughts worthy of rational creatures, nevertheless complain

- that *play* is their daily and expensive pastime,
- that they don't like to be at home taking care of their children, as ladies who were honoured for their virtue used to do, and
- that an eternal round of idle visits, the park, court, play-houses and music meetings, with all the costly preparations for being seen in public, constantly take up their time and their thoughts.

However heavy an accusation this is, in itself, isn't it fair for us to put to the men I am talking about these two questions?

- What good do you imagine mothers who understand nothing that is fit for their children to know will get from being much in the children's company?
- Do you really think it fair to want to confine ladies to spending the best part of their lives in the company of little children, when the only pleasing conversation they can have with them is to play with them as a more entertaining sort of monkeys or parrots?

¹ [This refers to the husband's honour as well as the wife's; note 'their own honour' in the preceding paragraph.]

For ignorant women can't take any other pleasure in the company of young children; and if it is not fair or right to desire this, mustn't we conclude that most of those who make the above-mentioned complaints are really just using a plausible and high-sounding cover for pressure on their wives to be less expensive, or perhaps to avoid occasions of gaining admirers which may make the husbands uneasy? Such men can't be presumed to have any reasons of *virtue* for disapproving others' ways of spending time or money, given that they themselves will not forgo such expenditures for any reason, or will forgo them only so as to indulge in things that are no more reasonable—perhaps even less—such as drinking, gambling, or lewd company. Such persons as these, of both sexes, are indeed fit scourges to chastise each other's folly; which they do sufficiently when •restraint on one side creates unconquerable hatred and aversion on the other, or •an equal indulgence puts all their affairs into entire confusion and disorder, which leads to want, mutual ill-will, and, in the children, disobedience, extravagance, and all the bad effects of neglected government and bad example, until they make such a family a very purgatory to everyone who lives in it. And just as the original cause of all these mischiefs is people's not living like rational creatures but blindly following the lead of their desires and appetites, so all who in any measure behave like this will correspondingly create vexation for each other, because it is impossible for them ever to be at ease or contented in their own minds.

•THE TROUBLES OF THE MARRIED STATE•

Given that there are so very few reasonable people—i.e. ones who try to live in conformity with the dictates of reason, submitting their passions and appetites to the government and direction of the faculty that God gave them for that purpose—is it any wonder that so few are happy in a married

state? And how little reason is there to say, as it often *is* said, that their unhappiness is caused by their being married, as if one were a necessary consequence the other?

the next clause: The necessities of a family very often, and the injustice of parents sometimes, causes people to sacrifice their inclinations, in this matter, to interest;

meaning: It happens that young people marry, without being in love, for practical reasons; often because their families need this match and sometimes because their parents wrongly push them into it;

which inevitably makes the married state uneasy, at the beginning, for couples who are otherwise ever so much fitted to live well in such a relation; but hardly any virtuous and reasonable married couple can know that it is both their duty and their interest (as it is) to make each other happy, without actually doing so in a short period of time. If no contrary inclination obstructs this happiness, a greater cannot be proposed, as friendship has been allowed by the wisest, most virtuous, and most generous men of all ages to be the solidest and sweetest pleasure in this world. And where can friendship have a better chance of being achieved and maintained in its perfection than where two persons have inseparably one and the same interest, and see themselves united (so to speak) in their shared offspring? Certainly, not all people are fit for, or have a liking for, this pleasure of friendship; so it cannot be equally valuable to all. But where there is mutually the predominant disposition to virtuous love that is the characteristic of the most excellent minds, I don't think we can even *form an idea* of a greater happiness to be found in anything in this life than is found in a married state.

It seems therefore that one of the worst signs there can be of the vice and folly of any age is that in it marriage is

commonly contemned [see Glossary]; since nothing can make it contemptible but men's averseness to (or incapacity for) the things that most distinguish them from brutes, *virtue* and *friendship*.

As things stand, marriage has become a state almost as much feared by the wise as despised by fools. Custom and silly opinion, whose consequences are mostly real evils, not imaginary ones, lead a woman's best friends to think it advisable for her to marry, although the risk of wretchedness that this exposes her to is much greater than it is for men. Without having the same inducements from the risk to their reputation or any uneasy dependance, men are often deterred from seeking •happiness in a condition in which they so rarely see or hear of any who find •it; because it is all too easy to hear of the public divisions and discords of married people, or to learn of their private discontents from their being in that state. But since the cause of such unhappiness lies only in the corruption of manners, if *that* were remedied nothing more would be needed to bring *marriage* into credit.

So we see that vice and ignorance are the great sources of the miseries that men suffer in *every* state. . . . But what remedy for them can be hoped for, if I have been right in saying that the only way to rectify these evils is through rational instruction and a well-ordered education of youth in respect of virtue and religion? For vicious and ignorant parents cannot provide this, and most of them are unwilling for their children to be instructed or governed in any way other than the one they went through before them.

One might reasonably believe, therefore, that God reserves to himself—by some extraordinary intervention of his providence—the reformation that we are assured will some time come about. But •it could happen without divine intervention•: if an example were set by all the socially high-ranking persons who don't deserve to be counted among

the vicious and ignorant, that would do much towards introducing a general amendment, because these people could make it to some extent *fashionable* to pay more attention to education in the respects I have been writing about. For even a reasonable thing will not lack followers, once it is thought to be the fashion! We have seen also that mothers ought to take on themselves, as their proper business, a very great part in the management of their children's instruction; and one might think that a good many ladies among us might respond favourably if challenged to try to do their duty in this respect. I mean all those who are unhappily married. For the misfortune of having foolish and vicious [see Glossary] husbands who neglect them or treat them badly, what reparation can they find that would be as good as having children honoured for their virtue—children who will honour and love them not only as their parents but as those to whom they owe much more than their existence?

•URGING ILL-TREATED WIVES TO BE LESS PASSIVE•

There would be no point in trying to persuade women whose heads are full of pleasure and whose hours pass gaily to seek their satisfaction in things they have never had any taste of. But ones who are wretched, one would think, should be easily persuaded to listen to any proposition that brings even a small glimpse of happiness to them. [DM elaborates on this for a while, and then:] Children's doing well must be an unspeakable joy to parents who are aware that this is in great measure an effect of their right direction. Nor is there anything which a virtuous man or woman does not think they owe to those to whom they believe themselves indebted for their being such. [That is, for being virtuous. This sentence concerns the adult offspring—referred to in the next sentence as the 'friends'—of the mother who has brought them up properly.] How great a happiness, then, may a mother who is unhappy

in the relation of a wife lay up for her declining age by procuring for herself such friends as these—an old age that must otherwise be more miserable than her unfortunate youth? And employing her time in this care of her children's upbringing—how much better this would be than giving in to a weakness that is very common in tender minds, which is to bemoan themselves instead of casting about for relief against their afflictions! Through this weakness they only become even more softened to the impressions of their sorrow, and every day less able to endure them.

It is indeed the most virtuous women who are most apt to bear with immoderate grief the ill-humour or unkindness of their husbands. But it's a pity that women who have more virtue than to think of responding to injuries by injuries (at a time when that is too often what happens) should not have enough sense to repay unkindness with a just contempt [see Glossary] of it, rather than foolishly sacrificing the comforts of their lives to those—their husbands—who will not sacrifice anything to *their* reasonable satisfaction. How much wiser and more suitable for Christians it would be if such ladies were to reflect less on what others owe to them, and more on what they owe to themselves and their children; not abandoning themselves, as too many do, to a fruitless grief that only serves to make them even less agreeable to those they desire to please, and useless in the world, because diseases and (eventually) constant ill-health are the almost never failing effects on such feeble constitutions of a lasting discontent.

But I make bold to say that

- the fault of those who make others miserable in this way [the bullying husbands], and
- the weakness of those who allow their minds to sink under adversity [the passive wives]

to a great extent have one and the same cause, namely

- ignorance of the true rules and measures of their duty, which would teach them to correct every excess, along with
- the lack of whatever other knowledge (suitable to the capacity and condition [see Glossary] of the person) would usefully and agreeably employ their time. This knowledge may not *immediately* serve to form or rectify anyone's manners, but it can do so less immediately by restraining or preventing their irregularities. For just as

- ill-natured and vicious men, if only they knew how pleasantly and profitably to employ the tedious hours that lie on their hands, would generally be less vicious and less ill-humoured than they are; so also

- women of the most sensitive dispositions would not give themselves up to sorrow that is always hurtful, and sometimes dangerous

both to their honour and to their salvation (because excess of tenderness, when abused, too often produces hatred, which leads to revenge)

if they were not only very little informed about what God requires of them, but also very ignorant concerning any demanding kind of knowledge on which they could pleasantly employ themselves, diverting the unpleasant thoughts that otherwise would incessantly torment and prey on their minds. Someone who

- has no inclinations unfitting for a virtuous woman,
- prefers her husband's affection to all other things in the world, and
- can no longer find in the ordinary circle of ladies' diversions the pleasure that they perhaps gave her in her first youth

is very ill-equipped to bear discontent in the state she looked to for her greatest satisfaction, if she has nothing within herself that can give her pleasure independently of others.

And none can durably have *that* without some improvement of their rational faculties; because as childhood and youth wear off, the taste for the pleasures that are suited to them wears off too; for which reason the most happy¹ would be doing themselves some good if—by developing *early* a love of knowledge (which goes on giving pleasure to those who have once had a true taste of it)—they provide in their youth a source of pleasure for their old age, a source that time will not dissipate but improve, by making their minds no less vigorous, and its beauties even more attractive when the short-lived beauties of their faces are impaired and gone. Whereas those whose youthful time has been devoted to vanities or trifles are inevitably delivered over by old age either to melancholy repentance or (at best) to the wearisome boredom that attends a life deprived of desire and enjoyment.

•WHAT THE RANGE OF WOMEN'S LEARNING SHOULD BE•

Now, in the pursuit of the pleasure that the exercise and improvement of the understanding gives, I see no reason why it shouldn't be thought •that every field of knowledge lies as open to a lady as to a man, and •that there is none that she may not properly study, depending on which of them she finds herself best fitted to succeed in or on which she is most drawn to. Always with the proviso that her first and principal care will be for all such knowledge as relates to her duty or is in any way specifically appropriate to her sex and condition; for it is indeed very preposterous [see Glossary] for a woman to spend her time on enquiries or theories that are not necessary for her, to the neglect of things that she will be guilty before God—or blameworthy in the opinion of all wise men—for being ignorant of. To do this is clearly as irrational and absurd as it would be for someone who was destitute of necessary clothing to spend on mere ornaments the money

that should be used to fill that gap. But I don't think there is any difference between the folly of such learned women and that of learned men who do the same thing, except that the one is the greater rarity.

But perhaps it is not the time to propose that ladies should have accomplishments or improvements of their understandings beyond the knowledge they need to discharge their duty well, until it is thought fit for them to have *that!* Its advantages to men themselves, and the need of it for a right education of their children of both sexes, are too evident (when reflected on) not to get all lovers of virtue to support women's having that much knowledge, if it weren't for the fact that people don't always *act* on their convictions. The law of fashion or custom is still to be obeyed, however much reason contradicts it. And those bold adventurers whose zeal for any reformation leads them to combating generally received opinions or practices are looked on as merely a sort of Don Quixotes. But I am sure that serious thought about the honour of their Maker and (what is nearer for most) their own private and temporal interests would provide all people with very powerful inducements to make what opposition they can to immorality, both by amending their own faults and by trying to prevail on others to correct whatever has contributed to making us a vicious people. It is a rational as well as pious fear that God might by some striking judgment on those who have abused many mercies make an example of them so as to deter others; but set that aside. It is more certain (though usually less reflected on) that it is not necessary for the punishment of a wicked ungrateful nation that God should inflict on them the due reward for their disobedience and ingratitude by some extraordinary act of his providence; because all things are

¹ [She presumably means: even those who are happiest when young.]

so fitly disposed—through their original constitution and the order of nature—to the all-wise ends of their Maker, that without his special intervention the established course of things brings about the effects that he sees fit in respect of the moral world as well as of the natural world. And no people can receive a more severe punishment •from the avenging hand of the Almighty, in the most astonishing judgments that can make them a prime example of his displeasure, than what they will find in •the *natural* consequences of their moral corruption when grown to an extremity.

To show how experience has always attested this would be to enter into a large field of discourse. And we don't need to search for foreign or remote examples to establish the all too visible fact that vice, proportionally to its severity, carries its own punishment along with it.

- A general contempt for religion,

- lack of truth and fidelity among men,
- luxury and intemperance, followed by
- the neglect of hard work and of application to useful arts and sciences

are necessarily attended with misery; and have usually been the fore-runners of approaching ruin to the best and most flourishing governments the world has seen. And in proportion as these things prevail anywhere, so must naturally the unhappiness of such a people; so it is evident that for any profane, debauched, or vicious nation to expect durable prosperity is simply to hope that God will withhold the natural effects of the constitution and order of things that he has with infinite wisdom established, in favour of those who have incurred his just indignation. I don't think that anyone would entertain a thought that is so presumptuous and so contradictory to reason.