Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristicks

Shaftesbury (1671–1713) exerted an enormous influence on European thought throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, primarily because of his Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1714). He believed that humans are designed to appreciate order and harmony, and that a proper sense of order and harmony is the basis of correct judgments about morality, beauty, and religion. He was at the forefront of developing the idea of a moral sense, of explicating aesthetic experience, of defending political liberty and tolerance, and of arguing for religious belief based on reason and observation rather than revelation or scripture. Shaftesbury thought the purpose of philosophy was to help people lead better lives. Towards that end, he aimed to write persuasively and for the educated populace as a whole, deploying a wide variety of styles and literary forms.

Characteristicks

If the Love of doing good, be not, of itself, a good and right Inclination; I know not how there can possibly be such a thing as Goodness or Virtue. If the Inclination be right; 'tis a perverting of it, to apply it solely to the Reward, and make us conceive such Wonders of the Grace and Favor which is to attend Virtue; when there is so little shewn of the intrinsic Worth or Value of the Thing itself. I could be almost tempted to think, that the true Reason why some of the most heroic Virtues have so little notice taken of 'em in our holy Religion, is, because there would have been no room left for Disinterestedness, had they been intituled to a share of that infinite Reward, which Providence has by Revelation assigned to other Duties....

'Tis ridiculous to say, there is any Obligation on Man to act sociably, or honestly, in a formed Government; and not in that which is commonly called the State of Nature. For, to speak in the fashionable Language of our modern Philosophy: “Society being founded on a Compact; the Surrender made of every Man’s private unlimited Right, into the hands of the Majority, or such as the Majority should appoint, was of free Choice, and by a Promise.” Now the Promise itself was made in the State of Nature: And that which could make a Promise obligatory in the State of Nature, must make all other Acts of Humanity as much our real Duty, and natural Part. Thus Faith, Justice, Honesty, and Virtue, must have been as early as the State of Nature, or they could never have been at all. The Civil Union, or Confederacy, could never make Right or Wrong; if they subsisted not before. He who was free to any Villainy before his Contract, will, and ought to make as free with his Contract, when he thinks fit. The Natural Knave has the same reason to be a Civil one; and may dispense with his politick Capacity as oft as he sees occasion: 'Tis only his Word stands in his way—A Man is obliged to keep his Word. Why? Because he has given his Word to keep it.—Is not this a notable Account of the Original of moral Justice, and the Rise of Civil Government and Allegiance!

BUT to pass by these Cavils of a Philosophy, which speaks so much of Nature with so little meaning; we may with justice surely place it as a Principle, “That if anything be natural, in any Creature, or any Kind; 'tis that which is preservative of the Kind itself, and conducing to its Welfare and Support.” If in original and pure Nature, it be wrong to break a Promise, or be treacherous; 'tis as truly wrong to be in any respect inhuman, or any way wanting in our natural part towards human Kind. If Eating and Drinking be natural, Herding is so too. If any Appetite or Sense be natural, the Sense of Fellowship is the same. If there be any thing of Nature in that Affection which is between the Sexes, the Affection is certainly as natural towards the consequent Offspring; and so again between the Offspring themselves, as Kindred and Companions, bred under the same Discipline and economy. And thus a Clan or Tribe is gradually formed; a Public is recognized: and besides the Pleasure found in social Entertainment, Language, and Discourse, there is so apparent a Necessity for continuing this good Correspondence and Union, that to
have no Sense or Feeling of this kind, no Love of Country, Community, or any thing in common, would be the same as to be insensible even of the plainest Means of Self-Preservation, and most necessary Condition of Self-Enjoyment.

Should a Writer upon Music, addressing himself to the Students and Lovers of the Art, declare to 'em, “That the Measure or Rule of Harmony was Caprice or Will, Humor or Fashion”; 'tis not very likely he should be heard with great Attention, or treated with real Gravity. For Harmony is Harmony by Nature, let Men judge ever so ridiculously of Music. So is Symmetry and Proportion founded still in Nature, let Men’s Fancy prove ever so barbarous, or their Fashions ever so Gothic in their Architecture, Sculpture, or whatever other designing Art. 'Tis the same case, where Life and Manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed Standard. The same Numbers, Harmony, and Proportion will have place in Morals; and are discoverable in the Characters and Affections of Mankind; in which are laid the just Foundations of an Art and Science, superior to every other of human Practice and Comprehension.

**An Inquiry concerning Virtue, or Merit**

*Occasion of this INQUIRY. RELIGION and VIRTUE appear in many respects so nearly related, that they are generally presumed inseparable Companions. And so willing we are to believe well of their Union, that we hardly allow it just to speak, or even think of 'em apart. It may however be questioned, whether the Practice of the World, in this respect, be answerable to our Speculation. 'Tis certain that we sometimes meet with Instances which seem to make against this general Supposition. We have known People, who having the Appearance of great Zeal in Religion, have yet wanted even the common Affections of Humanity, and shewn themselves extremely degenerate and corrupt. Others, again, who have paid little regard to Religion, and been considered as mere Atheists, have yet been observed to practice the Rules of Morality, and act in many Cases with such good Meaning and Affection towards Mankind, as might seem to force an Acknowledgment of their being virtuous. And, in general, we find mere moral Principles of such weight, that in our dealings with Men, we are seldom satisfied by the fullest Assurance given us of their Zeal in Religion, till we hear something further of their Character. If we are told, a Man is religious; we still ask, “What are his Morals?” But if we hear at first that he has honest moral Principles, and is a Man of natural Justice and good Temper, we seldom think of the other Question, “Whether he be religious and devout?”*

This has given occasion to enquire, “What Honesty or Virtue is, considered by itself; and in what manner it is influenced by Religion: How far Religion necessarily implies Virtue; and whether it be a true Saying, That it is impossible for an Atheist to be virtuous, or share any real degree of Honesty, or Merit.”

*Private Good. Should a Historian or Traveler describe to us a certain Creature of a more solitary Disposition than ever was yet heard of; one who had neither Mate nor Fellow of any kind; nothing of his own Likeness, towards which he stood well-affected or inclined; nor anything without, or beyond himself, for which he had the least Passion or Concern: we might be apt to say perhaps, without much hesitation, “That this was doubtless a very melancholy Creature, and that in this unsociable and sullen State he was like to have a very disconsolate kind of Life.” But if we were assured, that notwithstanding all Appearances, the Creature enjoyed himself extremely, had a great relish of Life, and was in nothing wanting to his own Good; we might acknowledge perhaps, “That the Creature was no Monster, nor absurdly constituted as to himself.”*

Therefore, if any Being be wholly and really Ill, it must be ill with respect to the Universal System; and then the System of the Universe is ill, or imperfect. But if the III of one private System be the Good of others; if it makes still to the Good of the general System, (as when one Creature lives by the Destruction of another; one thing is generated from the Corruption of another; or one planetary System or Vortex may swallow up another) then is the III of that private System no
real Ill in itself; any more than the pain of breeding Teeth is ill, in a System or Body which is so constituted, that without this occasion of Pain, it would suffer worse, by being defective.

So that we cannot say of any Being, that it is wholly and absolutely ill, unless we can positively shew and ascertain, that what we call Ill is no where Good besides, in any other System, or with respect to any other Order or Economy whatsoever.

Relative Ill. But were there in the World any entire Species of Animals destructive to every other, it may be justly called an ill Species; as being ill in the Animal System. And if in any Species of Animals (as in Men, for example) one Man is of a nature pernicious to the rest, he is in this respect justly styled an ill Man....

Private or Self-Affection. In the first place then, it may be observed, that if there be an Affection towards any Subject considered as private Good, which is not really such, but imaginary; this Affection, as being superfluous, and detracting from the Force of other requisite and good Affections, is in itself vicious and ill, even in respect of the private Interest or Happiness of the Creature.

If there can possibly be supposed in a Creature such an Affection towards Self-Good, as is actually, in its natural degree, conducing to his private Interest, and at the same time inconsistent with the public Good: this may indeed be called still a vicious Affection: And on this Supposition, a Creature cannot really be good and natural in respect of his Society or Public, without being ill and unnatural toward himself.

Whatsoever therefore is done which happens to be advantageous to the Species, through an Affec- tion merely towards Self–good, does not imply any more Goodness in the Creature than as the Affection itself is good. Let him, in any particular, act ever so well; if at the bottom, it be that selfish Affection alone which moves him; he is in himself still vicious. Nor can any Creature be considered otherwise, when the Passion towards Self–good, though ever so moderate, is his real Motive in the doing that, to which a natural Affec-

tion for his Kind ought by right to have inclined him.

For instance; if one of those Creatures supposed to be by Nature tame, gentle, and favorable to Mankind, be, contrary to his natural Constitution, fierce and savage: we instantly remark the Breach of Temper, and own the Creature to be unnatural and corrupt. If at any time afterwards, the same Creature, by good Fortune or right Management, comes to lose his Fierceness, and is made tame, gentle, and treatable, like other Creatures of his Kind; ’tis acknowledged that the Creature thus restored becomes good and natural. Suppose, now, that the Creature has indeed a tame and gentle Carriage; but that it proceeds only from the fear of his Keeper; which if set aside, his predominant Passion instantly breaks out: then is his Gentleness not his real Temper; but his true and genuine Nature or natural Temper remaining just as it was, the Creature is still as ill as ever....

Moral Beauty and Deformity. The Mind . . . feels the Soft and Harsh, the Agreeable and Disagreeable, in the Affections; and finds a Foul and Fair, a Harmonious and a Dissonant, as really and truly here, as in any musical Numbers, or in the outward Forms or Representations of sensible Things. Nor can it withhold its Admiration and Ecstasy, its Aversion and Scorn, any more in what relates to one than to the other of these Subjects. So that to deny the common and natural Sense of a Sublime and Beautiful in Things, will appear an Affection merely, to anyone who considers duly of this Affair....

In these vagrant Characters or Pictures of Manners, which the Mind of necessity figures to itself, and carries still about with it, the Heart cannot possibly remain neutral; but constantly takes part one way or other. However false or corrupt it be within itself, it finds the difference, as to Beauty and Comeliness, between one Heart and another, one Turn of Affection, one Behavior, one Sentiment and another another; and accordingly, in all disinterested Cases, must approve in some measure of what is natural and honest, and disapprove what is dishonest and corrupt.
Thus the several Motions, Inclinations, Passions, Dispositions, and consequent Carriage and Behavior of Creatures in the various Parts of Life, being in several Views or Perspectives represented to the Mind, which readily discerns the Good and Ill towards the Species or Public; there arises a new Trial or Exercise of the Heart: which must either rightly and soundly affect what is just and right, and disaffect what is contrary; or, corruptly affect what is ill, and disaffect, what is worthy and good.

Public Good an Object. In this Case alone we call any Creature worthy or virtuous when it can have the Notion of a public Interest and can attain the Speculation or Science of what is morally good or ill, admirable or blamable, right or wrong. For though we may vulgarly call an ill Horse vicious, yet we never say of a good one, nor of any mere Beast, Idiot, or Changeling, though ever so good-natured, that he is worthy or virtuous.

So that if a Creature be generous, kind, constant, compassionate; yet if he cannot reflect on what he himself does, or sees others do, so as to take notice of what is worthy or honest; and make that Notice or Conception of Worth and Honesty to be an Object of his Affection; he has not the Character of being virtuous: for thus, and no otherwise, he is capable of having a Sense of Right or Wrong; a Sentiment or Judgment of what is done, through just, equal, and good Affection, or the contrary....

Neither can any Weakness or Imperfection in the Senses be the occasion of Iniquity or Wrong:

Impaired Sense: if the Object of the Mind itself be not at any time absurdly framed, nor any way improper, but suitable, just, and worthy of the Opinion and Affection applied to it. For if we will suppose a Man, who being sound and entire both in his Reason and Affection, has nevertheless so depraved a Constitution or Frame of Body, that the natural Objects are, through his Organs of Sense, as through ill Glasses, falsely conveyed and misrepresented; 'twill be soon observed, in such a Person's case, that since his Failure is not in his principal or leading Part; he cannot in himself be esteemed iniquitous, or unjust.

Corrupt Opinion. 'Tis otherwise in what relates to Opinion, Belief, or Speculation. For as the Extravagation of Judgment or Belief is such, that in some Countries even Monkeys, Cats, Crocodiles, and other vile or destructive Animals, have been esteemed holy, and worshiped even as Deities; should it appear to anyone of the Religion or Belief of those Countries, that to save such a Creature as a Cat, preferably to a Parent, was Right; and that other Men, who had not the same religious Opinion, were to be treated as Enemies, till converted; this would be certainly Wrong, and wicked in the Believer: and every Action, grounded on this Belief, would be an iniquitous, wicked, and vicious Action....

Right and Wrong. A Mistake therefore in Fact being no Cause or Sign of ill Affection, can be no Cause of Vice. But a Mistake of Right being the Cause of unequal Affection, must of necessity be the Cause of vicious Action, in every intelligent or rational Being.

But as there are many Occasions where the matter of Right may even to the most discerning part of Mankind appear difficult, and of doubtful Decision, 'tis not a slight Mistake of this kind which can destroy the Character of a virtuous or worthy Man. But when, either through Superstition or ill Custom, there come to be very gross Mistakes in the assignment or application of the Affection; when the Mistakes are either in their nature so gross, or so complicated and frequent, that a Creature cannot well live in a natural State; nor with due Affections, compatible with human Society and civil Life; then is the Character of Virtue forfeited.

And thus we find how far Worth and Virtue depend on a knowledge of Right and Wrong, Vice in Opinion. and on a use of Reason, sufficient to secure a right application of the Affections; that nothing horrid or unnatural, nothing exemplary, nothing destructive of that natural Affection by which the Species or Society is upheld, may, on any account, or through any Principle or Notion of Honor or Religion, be at any time affected or prosecuted as a good and proper object of Esteem. For such a Principle as this must be
wholly vicious: and whatsoever is acted upon it, can be no other than Vice and Immorality. Vicious Worship. And thus if there be any thing which teaches Men either Treachery, Ingratitude, or Cruelty, by divine Warrant; or under color and pretense of any present or future Good to Mankind: if there be any thing which teaches Men to persecute their Friends through Love; or to torment Captives of War in sport; or to offer human Sacrifice; or to torment, macerate, or mangle themselves, in a religious Zeal, before their God; or to commit any sort of Barbarity, or Brutality, as amiable or becoming: be it Custom which gives Applause, or Religion which gives a Sanction; this is not, nor ever can be Virtue of any kind, or in any sense; but must remain still horrid Depravity, notwithstanding any Fashion, Law, Custom, or Religion: which may be ill and vicious itself, but can never alter the eternal Measures, and immutable independent Nature of Worth and Virtue."

"Degrees of Virtue. Thus is Virtue shared in different degrees by rational Creatures: such at least as are called rational; but who come short of that sound and well-established Reason, which alone can constitute a just Affection, a uniform and steady Will and Resolution. And thus Vice and Virtue are found variously mixed, and alternately prevalent in the several Characters of Mankind. For it seems evident from our Inquiry, that how ill soever the Temper or Passions may stand with respect either to the sensible or the moral Objects; however passionate, furious, lustful, or cruel any Creature may become; however vicious the Mind be, or whatever ill Rules or Principles it goes by; yet if there be any Flexibleness or favorable Inclination towards the least moral Object, the least appearance of moral Good (as if there be any such thing as Kindness, Gratitude, Bounty, or Compassion), there is still something of Virtue left; and the Creature is not wholly vicious and unnatural...."

In short: As it seems hard to pronounce of any Man, “That he is absolutely an Atheist”; so it appears altogether as hard to pronounce of any Man, “That he is absolutely corrupt or vicious”; there being few, even of the horridest Villains, who have not something of Virtue in this imperfect sense. Nothing is more just than a known saying, “That it is as hard to find a Man wholly Ill, as wholly Good”: because wherever there is any good Affection left, there is certainly some Goodness or Virtue still in being."

Part III, Sec. 1

Causes of VICE. The Nature of Virtue consisting (as has been explained) in a certain just Disposition, or proportionable Affection of a rational Creature towards the moral Objects of Right and Wrong; nothing can possibly in such a Creature exclude a Principle of Virtue, or render it ineffectual, except what.

- Either takes away the natural and just Sense of Right and Wrong;
- Or creates a wrong Sense of it;
- Or causes the right Sense to be opposed by contrary Affections.

Of VIRTUE. On the other side, nothing can assist, or advance the Principle of Virtue, except what either in some manner nourishes and promotes a Sense of Right and Wrong; or preserves it genuine and uncorrupt; or causes it, when such, to be obeyed, by subduing and subjecting the other Affections to it.

We are to consider, therefore, how any of the above-mentioned Opinions on the Subject of a Deity, may influence in these Cases, or produce either of these three Effects.

- Loss of Moral Sense. As to the first case:
  The taking away the natural Sense of Right and Wrong

It will surely not be understood, that by this is meant the taking away the Notion of what is good or ill in the Species, or Society. For of the Reality of such a Good and Ill, no rational Creature can possibly be insensible. Everyone discerns and owns a public Interest, and is conscious of what affects his Fellowship or Community. When we say therefore of a Creature, “That he has wholly lost the Sense of Right and Wrong”; we suppose that being able to discern the Good and Ill of his Species, he has at the same time no Concern for
either, nor any Sense of Excellency or Baseness in any moral Action, relating to one or the other. So that except merely with respect to a private and narrowly confined Self—good, 'tis supposed there is in such a Creature no **Liking** or **Dislike** of Manners; no **Admiration**, or Love of anything as morally good; nor Hatred of anything as morally ill, be it ever so unnatural or deformed.

**Moral Sense.** There is in reality no rational Creature whatsoever, who knows not that when he voluntarily offends or does harm to anyone, he cannot fail to create an **Apprehension** and Fear of like harm, and consequently a **Resentment** and **Animosity** in every Creature who observes him. So that the **Offender** must needs be conscious of being **Liable** to such **Treatment** from everyone, as if he had in some degree offended All.

Thus Offence and Injury are always known as punishable by everyone; and equal **Behavior**, which is therefore called **Merit**, as **rewardable** and well—deserving from everyone. Of this even the wickedest Creature living must have a Sense. So that if there be any further meaning in this **Sense** of Right and Wrong; if in reality there be any **Sense** of this kind which an absolute wicked Creature has not; it must consist in a real **Antipathy** or Aversion to **Injustice** or **Wrong**, and in a real Affection or Love towards **Equity** and **Right**, for its own sake, and on the account of its own natural **Beauty** and **Worth**.

'Tis impossible to suppose a mere sensible Creature originally so ill—constituted, and unnatural, as that from the moment he comes to be tried by sensible Objects, he should have no one good Passion towards his Kind, no foundation either of Pity, Love, **Kindness**, or social Affection. 'Tis full as impossible to conceive, that a rational Creature coming first to be tried by rational Objects, and receiving into his Mind the Images or Representations of Justice, Generosity, **Gratitude**, or other Virtue, should have no **Liking** of these, or **Dislike** of their contraries; but be found absolutely indifferent towards whatsoever is presented to him of this sort. A Soul, indeed, may as well be without **Sense**, as without **Admiration** in the Things of which it has any knowledge. Coming therefore to a Capacity of seeing and admiring in this new way, it must needs find a **Beauty** and a **Deformity** as well in Actions, Minds, and Tempers, as in Figures, Sounds, or Colors. If there be no real Amiableness or Deformity in moral Acts, there is at least an **imaginary one** of full force. Though perhaps the Thing itself should not be allowed in Nature, the Imagination or Fancy of it must be allowed to be from Nature alone. Nor can anything besides Art and strong Endeavor, with long **Practice** and Meditation, overcome such a **natural Prevention**, or **Prepossession** of the Mind, in favor of this moral Distinction….

Nature, we find, is hardly mastered; but lies sullen, and ready to revolt, on the first occasion. Much more is this the **Mind's Case** in respect of that natural Affection and anticipating Fancy, which makes the sense of Right and Wrong. 'Tis impossible that this can instantly, or without much Force and Violence, **Not by Opinion merely** be effaced, or struck out of the natural Temper, even by means of the most extravagant Belief or Opinion in the World….

**Sec 2: Corruption of Moral Sense. As to the Second Case, viz. The Wrong Sense or False Imagination of Right and Wrong**

THIS can proceed only from the Force of Custom and Education in opposition to Nature; as may be noted in those Countries where, according to Custom or politick Institution, certain Actions naturally foul and odious are repeatedly viewed with Applause, and Honor ascribed to them. For thus 'tis possible that a Man, forcing himself, may eat the Flesh of his Enemies, not only against his Stomach, but against his Nature; and think it nevertheless both right and honorable; as supposing it to be of considerable service to his Community, and capable of advancing the Name, and spreading the Terror of his Nation.

**Causes of this Corruption.** But to speak of the Opinions relating to a Deity; and what effect they may have in this place. As to **Atheism**, it does not seem that it can directly have any effect at all towards the setting up a false Species of Right or Wrong. For notwithstanding a Man may through
Custom, or by licentiousness of Practice favored by Atheism, come in time to lose much of his natural moral Sense; yet it does not seem that Atheism should of itself be the cause of any estimate or valuing of anything as fair, noble, and deserving, which was the contrary. It can never, for instance, make it be thought that the being able to eat Man’s Flesh, or commit Bestiality, is good and excellent in itself. But this is certain, that by means of corrupt Religion, or Superstition, many things the most horribly unnatural and inhuman, come to be received as excellent, good, and laudable in themselves....

[2:49]: For whoever thinks there is a God, and pretends formally to believe that he is just and good, must suppose that there is independently such a thing as Justice and Injustice, Truth and Falsehood, Right and Wrong; according to which he pronounces that God is just, righteous, and true. If the mere Will, Decree, or Law of God be said absolutely to constitute Right and Wrong, then are these latter words of no significance at all. For thus if each part of a Contradiction were affirmed for Truth by the supreme Power, they would consequently become true....

Where a real Devotion and hearty Worship is paid to a supreme Being, who in his History or Character is represented otherwise than as really and truly just and good; there must ensue a Loss of Rectitude, a Disturbance of Thought, and a Corruption of Temper and Manners in the Believer. His Honesty will, of necessity, be supplanted by his Zeal, whilst he is thus unnaturally influenced, and rendered thus immorally devout.

Influence of Religion. To this we need only add, that as the ill Character of a God does injury to the Affections of Men, and disturbs and impairs the natural Sense of Right and Wrong; so, on the other hand, nothing can more highly contribute to the fixing of right Apprehensions, and a sound Judgment or Sense of Right and Wrong, than to believe a God who is ever, and on all accounts, represented such as to be actually a true Model and Example of the most exact Justice, and highest Goodness and Worth. Such a View of divine Providence and Bounty, extended to All, and expressed in a constant good Affection towards the Whole, must of necessity engage us, within our Compass and Sphere, to act by a like Principle and Affection. And having once the Good of our Species or Public in view, as our End or Aim, ’tis impossible we should be misguided by any means to a false Apprehension or Sense of Right or Wrong.

As to this second Case therefore; Religion (according as the kind may prove) is capable of doing great Good, or Harm; and Atheism nothing positive in either way. For however it may be indirectly an occasion of Men’s losing a good and sufficient Sense of Right and Wrong; it will not, as Atheism merely, be the occasion of setting up a false Species of it; which only false Religion, or fantastical Opinion, derived commonly from Superstition and Credulity, is able to effect.

Sec 3: Now as to the last case, the opposition made by other affections to the natural sense of right and wrong.

’TIS evident, that a Creature having this sort of Sense or good Affection in any degree, must necessarily act according to it; if it happens not to be opposed, either by some settled sedate Affection towards a conceived private Good, or by some sudden, strong and forcible Passion, as of Lust or Anger; which may not only subdue the Sense of Right and Wrong, but the very Sense of private Good itself; and overrule even the most familiar and received Opinion of what is conducing to Self–interest....

Rise of Moral Sense. That it is possible for a Creature capable of using Reflection, to have a Liking or Dislike of moral Actions, and consequently a Sense of Right and Wrong, before such time as he may have any settled Notion of a God, is what will hardly be questioned: it being a thing not expected, or any way possible, that a Creature such as Man, arising from his Childhood, slowly and gradually, to several degrees of Reason and Reflection, should, at the very first, be taken up with those Speculations, or more refined sort of Reflections, about the Subject of God’s Existence.
Let us suppose a Creature, who wanting Reason, and being unable to reflect, has, notwithstanding, many good Qualities and Affections; as Love to his Kind, Courage, Gratitude, or Pity. 'Tis certain that if you give to this Creature a reflecting Faculty, it will at the same instant approve of Gratitude, Kindness, and Pity; be taken with any shew or representation of the social Passion, and think nothing more amiable than this, or more odious than the contrary. And this is to be capable of Virtue, and to have a Sense of Right and Wrong.

Before the time, therefore, that a Creature can have any plain or positive Notion one way or other, concerning the Subject of a God, he may be supposed to have an Apprehension or Sense of Right and Wrong, and be possessed of Virtue and Vice in different degrees; as we know by Experience of those, who having lived in such places, and in such a manner as never to have entered into any serious Thoughts of Religion, are nevertheless very different among themselves, as to their Characters of Honesty and Worth: some being naturally modest, kind, friendly, and consequently Lovers of kind and friendly Actions; others proud, harsh, cruel, and consequently inclined to admire Acts of Violence and mere Power....

DEITY. Now, as to the Belief of a Deity, and how Men are influenced by it; we may consider, in the first place, on what account Men yield Obedience, and act in conformity to such a supreme Being. It must be either in the way of his Power, as presupposing some Disadvantage or Benefit to accrue from him; or in the way of his Excellency and Worth, as thinking it the Perfection of Nature to imitate and resemble him.

If, as in the first Case, there be a Belief or Conception of a Deity, who is considered only as powerful over his Creature, and enforcing Obedience to his absolute Will by particular Rewards and Punishments; and if on this account, through hope merely of Reward, or fear of Punishment, the Creature be incited to do the Good he hates, or restrained from doing the Ill to which he is not otherwise in the least degree averse; there is in this Case (as has been already shewn) no Virtue or Goodness whatsoever. The Creature, notwithstanding his good Conduct, is intrinsically of as little Worth, as if he acted in his natural way, when under no dread or terror of any sort. There is no more of Rectitude, Piety, or Sanction in a Creature thus reformed, than there is Meekness or Gentleness in a chained Tiger, or Innocence and Sobriety in a Monkey under the Discipline of the Whip. For however orderly and well those Animals, or Man himself upon like terms, may be induced to act, whilst the Will is neither gained, nor the Inclination wrought upon, but Awe alone prevails and forces Obedience; the Obedience is servile, and all which is done through it, merely servile. The greater degree of such a Submission or Obedience, is only the greater Servility; whatever may be the Object. For whether such a Creature has a good Master, Fear, or an ill one, he is neither more or less servile in his own nature. Be the Master or Superior ever so perfect, or excellent, yet the greater Submission caused in this Case, through this sole Principle or Motive, is only the lower and more abject Servitude; and implies the greater Wretchedness and Meaness in the Creature, who has those Passions of Self-love so predominant, and is in his Temper so vicious and defective, as has been explained.

Honor and Love. As to the second Case. If there be a Belief or Conception of a Deity, who is considered as worthy and good, and admired and reverenced as such; being understood to have, besides mere Power and Knowledge, the highest Excellence of Nature, such as renders him justly amiable to All: and if in the manner this Sovereign and mighty Being is represented, or, as he is historically described, there appears in him a high and eminent regard to what is good and excellent, a Concern for the good of All, and an Affection of Benevolence and Love towards the Whole; Divine Example. such an Example must undoubtedly serve (as above explained) to raise and increase the Affection towards Virtue, and help to submit and subdue all other Affections to that alone....
in the mean while may be gathered from what has been said above; That neither this Fear or Hope can possibly be of the kind called good Affections, such as are acknowledged the Springs and Sources of all Actions truly good. Nor can this Fear or Hope, as above intimated, consist in reality with Virtue, or Goodness; if it either stands as essential to any moral Performance, or as a considerable Motive to any Act, of which some better Affection ought, alone, to have been a sufficient Cause.

Thus a Person loving Life for Life’s sake, and Virtue not at all, may by the Promise or Hope of Life, and Fear of Death, or other Evil, be induced to practice Virtue, and even endeavor to be truly virtuous, by a Love of what he practices. Yet neither is this very Endeavor to be esteemed a Virtue: For though he may intend to be virtuous, he is not become so, for having only intended, or aimed at it, through love of the Reward. But as soon as he is come to have any Affection towards what is morally good, and can like or affect such Good for its own sake, as good and amiable in itself; then is he in some degree good and virtuous, and not till then.

Security to Virtue. Such are the Advantages or Disadvantages which accrue to Virtue from Reflection upon private Good or Interest. For though the Habit of Selfishness, and the Multiplicity of interested Views, are of little Improvement to real Merit or Virtue; yet there is a necessity for the preservation of Virtue, that it should be thought to have no quarrel with true Interest, and Self-enjoyment.

Whoever therefore, by any strong Persuasion or settled Judgment, thinks in the main, That Virtue causes Happiness, and Vice Misery, carries with him that Security and Assistance to Virtue which is required. Or though he has no such Thought, nor can believe Virtue his real Interest, either with respect to his own Nature and Constitution, or the Circumstances of human Life; yet if he believes any supreme Powers concerned in the present Affairs of Mankind, and immediately interposing in behalf of the Honest and Virtuous, against the Impious and Unjust; this will serve to preserve in him, however, that just Esteem of Virtue, which might otherwise considerably diminish.

Bk 2, Sec 1: We have considered what Virtue is, and to whom the Character belongs. It remains to inquire, Obligation to VIRTUE What Obligation there is to Virtue; or what Reason to embrace it.

We have found, that to deserve the name of good or virtuous, a Creature must have all his Inclinations and Affections, his Dispositions of Mind and Temper, suitable, and agreeing with the Good of his Kind, or of that System in which he is included, and of which he constitutes a Part. To stand thus well affected, and to have one’s Affections right and entire, not only in respect of one’s self, but of Society and the Public: This is Rectitude, Integrity, or Virtue. And to be wanting in any of these, or to have their Contraries, is Depravity, Corruption, and Vice.

It has been already shewn, that in the Passions and Affections of particular Creatures, there is a constant relation to the Interest of a Species, or common Nature. This has been demonstrated in the case of natural Affection, parental Kindness, Zeal for Posterity, Concern for the Propagation and Nurture of the Young, Love of Fellowship and Company, Compassion, mutual Succor, and the rest of this kind. Nor will anyone deny that this Affection of a Creature towards the Good of the Species or common Nature, is as proper and natural to him, as it is to any Organ, Part or Member of an Animal–Body, or mere Vegetable, to work in its known Course, and regular way of Growth. ’Tis not more natural for the Stomach to digest, the Lungs to breathe, the Glands to separate Juices, or other Entrails to perform their several Offices; however they may by particular Impediments be sometimes disordered, or obstructed in their Operations.

This we know for certain; That all social Love, Friendship, Gratitude, or whatever else is of this generous kind, does by its nature take place of the self–interesting Passions, draws us out of ourselves, and makes us disregardful of our own Convenience and Safety. So that according to a known way of reasoning on Self-interest, that
which is of a social kind in us, should of right be abolished. Thus Kindness of every sort, Indulgence, Tenderness, Compassion, and in short, all natural Affection should be industriously suppressed, and, as mere Folly, and Weakness of Nature, be resisted and overcome; that, by this means, there might be nothing remaining in us, which was contrary to a direct Self-end; nothing which might stand in opposition to a steady and deliberate Pursuit of the most narrowly confined confined Self-interest.

According to this extraordinary Hypothesis, it must be taken for granted, “That in the System of a Kind or Species, the Interest of the private Nature is directly opposite to that of the common one; the Interest of Particulars directly opposite to that of the Public in general.”—A strange Constitution in which it must be confessed there is much Disorder and Untowardness; unlike to what we observe elsewhere in Nature. As if in any vegetable or animal Body, the Part or Member could be supposed in a good and prosperous State as to itself, when under a contrary Disposition, and in an unnatural Growth or Habit as to its Whole.

Reconciliation. Now that this is in reality quite otherwise, we shall endeavor to demonstrate; so as to make appear, “That what Men represent as an ill Order and Constitution in the Universe, by making moral Rectitude appear the Ill, and Depravity the Good or Advantage of a Creature, is in Nature just the contrary. That to be well affected towards the Public Interest and one’s own, is not only consistent, but inseparable: and that moral Rectitude, or Virtue, must accordingly be the Advantage, and Vice the Injury and Disadvantage of every Creature.”

Sec 2: Contradictory Notions. THERE are few perhaps, who when they consider a Creature void of natural Affection, and wholly destitute of a communicative or social Principle, will suppose him, at the same time, either tolerably happy in himself, or as he stands abroad, with respect to his Fellow-Creatures or Kind. ’Tis generally thought, that such a Creature as this, feels slender Joy in Life, and finds little Satisfaction in the mere sensual Pleasures which remain with him, after the Loss of social Enjoyment, and whatever can be called Humanity or Good-nature....

Part 2, Sec. 1

We may inquire first, what those are which we call Pleasures or Satisfactions; Pleasures of the BODY and MIND, from whence Happiness is generally computed. They are (according to the common distinction) Satisfactions and Pleasures either of the Body, or of the Mind.

The latter preferable. That the latter of these Satisfactions are the greatest, is allowed by most People, and may be proved by this: That whenever the Mind, having conceived a high Opinion of the Worth of any Action or Behavior, has received the strongest Impression of this sort, and is wrought up to the highest pitch or degree of Passion towards the Subject; at such time it sets itself above all bodily Pain as well as Pleasure, and can be no way diverted from its purpose by Flattery or Terror of any kind....

If so; it follows, that the natural Affections duly established in a rational Creature, being the only means which can procure him a constant Series or Succession of the mental Enjoyments, they are the only means which can procure him a certain and solid Happiness,...

How much the social Pleasures are superior to any other, may be known by visible Tokens and Effects. The very outward Features, the Marks and Signs which attend this sort of Joy, are expressive of a more intense, clear, and undisturbed Pleasure, than those which attend the Satisfaction of Thirst, Hunger, and other ardent Appetites. But more particularly still may this Superiority be known, from the actual Prevalence and Ascendancy of this sort of Affection over all besides. Wherever it presents itself with any advantage, it silences and appeases every other Motion of Pleasure. No Joy, merely of Sense, can be a Match for it. Whoever is Judge of both the Pleasures, will ever give the preference to the former. But to be able to judge of both, ’tis necessary to have a Sense of each. The honest Man indeed can judge of sensual Pleasure, and knows its utmost Force. For neither is his Taste,
or Sense the duller; but, on the contrary, the more intense and clear, on the account of his Temperance, and a moderate Use of Appetite. But the immoral and profligate Man can by no means be allowed a good Judge of social Pleasure, to which he is so mere a Stranger by his Nature....

There is no one who, by the least progress in Science or Learning, has come to know barely the Principles of Mathematics, but has found, that in the exercise of his Mind on the Discoveries he there makes, though merely of speculative Truths, he receives a Pleasure and Delight superior to that of Sense. When we have thoroughly searched into the nature of this contemplative Delight, we shall find it of a kind which relates not in the least to any private Interest of the Creature, nor has for its Object any Self–good or Advantage of the private System. The Admiration, Joy, or Love, turns wholly upon what is exterior, and foreign to ourselves. And though the reflected Joy or Pleasure, which arises from the notice of this Pleasure once perceived, may be interpreted a Self–passion or interested Regard; yet the original Satisfaction can be no other than what results from the Love of Truth, Proportion, Order, and Symmetry, in the Things without. If this be the Case, the Passion ought in reality to be ranked with natural Affection. For having no Object within the compass of the private System; it must either be esteemed superfluous and unnatural (as having no tendency towards the Advantage or Good of anything in Nature) or it must be judged to be, what it truly is, “A natural Joy in the Contemplation of those Numbers, that Harmony, Proportion, and Concord, which supports the universal Nature, and is essential in the Constitution and Form of every particular Species, or Order of Beings.”

But this speculative Pleasure, however considerable and valuable it may be, or however superior to any Motion of mere Sense; must yet be far surpassed by virtuous Motion, and the Exercise of Benignity and Goodness: where, together with the most delightful Affection of the Soul, there is joined a pleasing Assent and Approbation of the Mind to what is acted in this good Disposition and honest Bent. For where is there on Earth a fairer Matter of Speculation, a goodlier View or Contemplation, than that of a beautiful, proportioned, and becoming Action? Or what is there relating to us, of which the Consciousness and Memory is more solidly and lastingly entertaining?...

From all this we may easily conclude, how much our Happiness depends on natural and good Affection. For if the chief Happiness be from the Mental Pleasures; and the chief mental Pleasures are such as we have described, and are founded in natural Affection; it follows, “That to have the natural Affections, is to have the chief Means and Power of Self–enjoyment, the highest Possession and Happiness of Life.”

Pleasures of the Sense depend also on natural Affection. As to the Pleasures of the Body and the Satisfactions belonging to mere Sense; 'tis evident, they cannot possibly have their Effect, or afford any valuable Enjoyment, otherwise than by the means of social and natural Affection.

To live well has no other meaning with some people than to eat and drink well (Vulgar Epicurism). And methinks 'tis an unwary Concession we make in favor of these pretended good Livers, when we join with 'em, in honoring their way of Life with the Title of living fast. As if they lived the fastest who took the greatest pains to enjoy least of Life: For if our Account of Happiness be right; the greatest Enjoyments in Life are such as these Men pass over in their haste, Pleasures of the Sense, and have scarce ever allowed themselves the liberty of tasting.