A Treatise Of Human Nature

Being An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning Into Moral Subjects

Of Morals - With An Appendix ; Wherein some Passages of the foregoing Volumes are illustrated and explain'd

Hume, David

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Part I. Of Virtue and Vice in general. Sect. I. Moral Distinctions not deriv'd from Reason.

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A

TREATISE

OF

Human Nature.

BOOK III.

Of MORALS.

PART I.

Of Virtue and Vice in general.

SECT. I.

Moral Distinctions not deriv'd from Reason.

THERE is an inconvenience which attends all abstruse reasoning, that it may silence, without convincing an antagonist, and requires the same intense study to make SECT. I.

PART. I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

make us sensible of its force, that was at first requisite for its invention. When we leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life, its conclusions seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning; and 'tis difficult for us to retain even that conviction, which we had attain'd with difficulty. This is still more conspicuous in a long chain of reasoning, where we must preserve to the end the evidence of the first propositions, and where we often lose sight of all the most receiv'd maxims, either of philosophy or common life. I am not, however, without hopes, that the present system of philosophy will acquire new force as it advances; and that our reasonings concerning *morals* will corroborate whatever has been said concerning the *understanding* and the *passions*. Morality is a subject that interests us above all others: We fancy the peace of society to be at stake in every decision concerning it; and 'tis evident, that this concern must make our speculations appear more real and solid, than where the subject is, in a great measure, indifferent to us. What affects us, we conclude can never be a chimera; and as our passion is engag'd on the one side or the other, we naturally think that

that the queſtion lies within human compre- SECT. I.
henſion; which, in other caſes of this na-
ture, we are apt to entertain ſome doubt of. *Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.*
Without this advantage I never ſhould have ventur'd upon a third volume of ſuch abſtruſe philoſophy, in an age, wherein the greateſt part of men ſeem agreed to convert reading into an amuſement, and to reject every thing that requires any conſiderable degree of attention to be comprehended.

IT has been obſerv'd, that nothing is ever preſent to the mind but its perceptions; and that all the actions of ſeeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking, fall under this denomination. The mind can never exert itſelf in any action, which we may not comprehend under the term of *perception*; and conſequently that term is no leſs applicable to thoſe judgments, by which we diſtinguiſh moral good and evil, than to every other operation of the mind. To approve of one character, to condemn another, are only ſo many different perceptions.

Now as perceptions reſolve themſelves into two kinds, viz. *impreſſions* and *ideas*, this diſtinction gives riſe to a queſtion, with which we ſhall open up our preſent enquiry concerning morals, *Whether 'tis by means of*

PART I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

our ideas *or* impreſſions *we diſtinguiſh betwixt vice and virtue, and pronounce an action blameable or praiſe-worthy?* This will immediately cut off all looſe diſcourſes and declamations, and reduce us to ſomething preciſe and exact on the preſent ſubject.

THOSE who affirm that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reaſon; that there are eternal fitneſſes and unfitneſſes of things, which are the ſame to every rational being that conſiders them; that the immutable meaſures of right and wrong impoſe an obligation, not only on human creatures, but alſo on the Deity himſelf: All theſe ſyſtems concur in the opinion, that morality, like truth, is diſcern'd merely by ideas, and by their juxta-poſition and compariſon. In order, therefore, to judge of theſe ſyſtems, we need only conſider, whether it be poſſible, from reaſon alone, to diſtinguiſh betwixt moral good and evil, or whether there muſt concur ſome other principles to enable us to make that diſtinction.

IF morality had naturally no influence on human paſſions and actions, 'twere in vain to take ſuch pains to inculcate it; and nothing wou'd be more fruitleſs than that multitude of rules and precepts, with which all moraliſts abound. Philoſophy is commonly divided

divided into *ſpeculative* and *practical*; and as morality is always comprehended under the latter diviſion, 'tis ſuppoſed to influence our paſſions and actions, and to go beyond the calm and indolent judgments of the underſtanding. And this is confirm'd by common experience, which informs us, that men are often govern'd by their duties, and are deter'd from ſome actions by the opinion of injuſtice, and impell'd to others by that of obligation.

SECT. I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

SINCE morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reaſon; and that becauſe reaſon alone, as we have already prov'd, can never have any ſuch influence. Morals excite paſſions, and produce or prevent actions. Reaſon of itſelf is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not concluſions of our reaſon.

No one, I believe, will deny the juſtneſs of this inference; nor is there any other means of evading it, than by denying that principle, on which it is founded. As long as it is allow'd, that reaſon has no influence on our paſſions and actions, 'tis in vain to pretend, that morality is diſcover'd only by a deduction of reaſon. An active principle

PART I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

can never be founded on an inactive; and if reaſon be inactive in itſelf, it muſt remain ſo in all its ſhapes and appearances, whether it exerts itſelf in natural or moral ſubjects, whether it conſiders the powers of external bodies, or the actions of rational beings.

IT would be tedious to repeat all the arguments, by which I have prov'd,[a] that reaſon is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection. 'Twill be eaſy to recollect what has been ſaid upon that ſubject. I ſhall only recal on this occaſion one of theſe arguments, which I ſhall endeavour to render ſtill more concluſive, and more applicable to the preſent ſubject.

REASON is the diſcovery of truth or falſhood. Truth or falſhood conſiſts in an agreement or diſagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* exiſtence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not ſuſceptible of this argeement or diſagreement, is incapable of being true or falſe, and can never be an object of our reaſon. Now 'tis evident our paſſions, volitions, and actions, are not ſuſceptible of any ſuch agreement or diſagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themſelves, and implying

[a] Book II. Part III. Sect. 3.

no

no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason.

SECT. I.

Moral distinctions not deriv'd from reason.

THIS argument is of double advantage to our present purpose. For it proves *directly*, that actions do not derive their merit from a conformity to reason, nor their blame from a contrariety to it; and it proves the same truth more *indirectly*, by shewing us, that as reason can never immediately prevent or produce any action by contradicting or approving of it, it cannot be the source of moral good and evil, which are found to have that influence. Actions may be laudable or blameable; but they cannot be reasonable or unreasonable: Laudable or blameable, therefore, are not the same with reasonable or unreasonable. The merit and demerit of actions frequently contradict, and sometimes controul our natural propensities. But reason has no such influence. Moral distinctions, therefore, are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals.

BUT perhaps it may be said, that tho' no will or action can be immediately contradictory to reason, yet we may find such a

PART I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

contradiction in ſome of the attendants of the action, that is, in its cauſes or effects. The action may cauſe a judgment, or may be *obliquely* caus'd by one, when the judgment concurs with a paſſion; and by an abuſive way of ſpeaking, which philoſophy will ſcarce allow of, the ſame contrariety may, upon that account, be aſcrib'd to the action. How far this truth or falſhood may be the ſource of morals, 'twill now be proper to conſider.

IT has been obſerv'd, that reaſon, in a ſtrict and philoſophical ſenſe, can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a paſſion by informing us of the exiſtence of ſomething which is a proper object of it; or when it diſcovers the connexion of cauſes and effects, ſo as to afford us means of exerting any paſſion. Theſe are the only kinds of judgment, which can accompany our actions, or can be ſaid to produce them in any manner; and it muſt be allow'd, that theſe judgments may often be falſe and erroneous. A perſon may be affected with paſſion, by ſuppoſing a pain or pleaſure to lie in an object, which has no tendency to produce either of theſe ſenſations, or which produces the contrary to what is imagin'd. A perſon may alſo take

take falſe meaſures for the attaining his end, and may retard, by his fooliſh conduct, inſtead of forwarding the execution of any project. Theſe falſe judgments may be thought to affect the paſſions and actions, which are connected with them, and may be ſaid to render them unreaſonable, in a figurative and improper way of ſpeaking. But tho' this be acknowledg'd, 'tis eaſy to obſerve, that theſe errors are ſo far from being the ſource of all immorality, that they are commonly very innocent, and draw no manner of guilt upon the perſon who is ſo unfortunate as to fall into them. They extend not beyond a miſtake of *fact*, which moraliſts have not generally ſuppos'd criminal, as being perfectly involuntary. I am more to be lamented than blam'd, if I am miſtaken with regard to the influence of objects in producing pain or pleaſure, or if I know not the proper means of ſatisfying my deſires. No one can ever regard ſuch errors as a defect in my moral character. A fruit, for inſtance, that is really diſagreeable, appears to me at a diſtance, and thro' miſtake I fancy it to be pleaſant and delicious. Here is one error. I chooſe certain means of reaching this fruit, which are not proper for my end. Here is a ſecond error; nor is there any

SECT. I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

any third one, which can ever possibly enter into our reasonings concerning actions. I ask, therefore, if a man, in this situation, and guilty of these two errors, is to be regarded as vicious and criminal, however unavoidable they might have been? Or if it be possible to imagine, that such errors are the sources of all immorality?

AND here it may be proper to observe, that if moral distinctions be deriv'd from the truth or falshood of those judgments, they must take place wherever we form the judgments; nor will there be any difference, whether the question be concerning an apple or a kingdom, or whether the error be avoidable or unavoidable. For as the very essence of morality is suppos'd to consist in an agreement or disagreement to reason, the other circumstances are entirely arbitrary, and can never either bestow on any action the character of virtuous or vicious, or deprive it of that character. To which we may add, that this agreement or disagreement, not admitting of degrees, all virtues and vices wou'd of course be equal.

SHOU'D it be pretended, that tho' a mistake of *fact* be not criminal, yet a mistake of *right* often is; and that this may be the source of immorality: I would answer, that 'tis

'tis impoſſible ſuch a miſtake can ever be the original ſource of immorality, ſince it ſuppoſes a real right and wrong; that is, a real diſtinction in morals, independent of theſe judgments. A miſtake, therefore, of right may become a ſpecies of immorality; but 'tis only a ſecondary one, and is founded on ſome other, antecedent to it. SECT. I. *Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.*

As to thoſe judgments which are the *effects* of our actions, and which, when falſe, give occaſion to pronounce the actions contrary to truth and reaſon; we may obſerve, that our actions never cauſe any judgment, either true or falſe, in ourſelves, and that 'tis only on others they have ſuch an influence. 'Tis certain, that an action, on many occaſions, may give riſe to falſe concluſions in others; and that a perſon, who thro' a window ſees any lewd behaviour of mine with my neighbour's wife, may be ſo ſimple as to imagine ſhe is certainly my own. In this reſpect my action reſembles ſomewhat a lye or falſhood; only with this difference, which is material, that I perform not the action with any intention of giving riſe to a falſe judgment in another, but merely to ſatisfy my luſt and paſſion. It cauſes, however, a miſtake and falſe judgment by accident; and the falſhood of its effects may be aſcribed,

by

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

by ſome odd figurative way of ſpeaking, to the action itſelf. But ſtill I can ſee no pretext of reaſon for aſſerting, that the tendency to cauſe ſuch an error is the firſt ſpring or original ſource of all immorality [a].

THUS upon the whole, 'tis impoſſible, that the diſtinction betwixt moral good and evil, can

[a] One might think it were entirely ſuperfluous to prove this, if a late author, who has had the good fortune to obtain ſome reputation, had not ſeriouſly affirmed, that ſuch a falſhood is the foundation of all guilt and moral deformity. That we may diſcover the fallacy of his hypotheſis, we need only conſider, that a falſe concluſion is drawn from an action, only by means of an obſcurity of natural principles, which makes a cauſe be ſecretly interrupted in its operation, by contrary cauſes, and renders the connection betwixt two objects uncertain and variable. Now, as a like uncertainty and variety of cauſes take place, even in natural objects, and produce a like error in our judgment, if that tendency to produce error were the very eſſence of vice and immorality, it ſhou'd follow, that even inanimate objects might be vicious and immoral.

'Tis in vain to urge, that inanimate objects act without liberty and choice. For as liberty and choice are not neceſſary to make an action produce in us an erroneous concluſion, they can be, in no reſpect, eſſential to morality; and I do not readily perceive, upon this ſyſtem, how they can ever come to be regarded by it. If the tendency to cauſe error be the origin of immorality, that tendency and immorality wou'd in every caſe be inſeparable.

Add to this, that if I had uſed the precaution of ſhutting the windows, while I indulg'd myſelf in thoſe liberties with my neighbour's wife, I ſhould have been guilty of no immorality; and that becauſe my action, being perfectly conceal'd, wou'd have had no tendency to produce any falſe concluſion.

For the ſame reaſon, a thief, who ſteals in by a ladder at a window, and takes all imaginable care to cauſe no diſturbance, is in no reſpect criminal. For either he will not be perceiv'd, or if he be, 'tis impoſſible he can produce any error, nor will any one, from theſe circumſtances, take him to be other than what he really is.

'Tis

can be made by reaſon; ſince that diſtinction has an influence upon our actions, of which reaſon alone is incapable. Reaſon and judgment may, indeed, be the mediate cauſe of an action, by prompting, or by directing a paſſion:

SECT I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

'Tis well known, that thoſe who are ſquint-ſighted, do very readily cauſe miſtakes in others, and that we imagine they ſalute or are talking to one perſon, while they addreſs themſelves to another. Are they therefore, upon that account, immoral?

Beſides, we may eaſily obſerve, that in all thoſe arguments there is an evident reaſoning in a circle. A perſon who takes poſſeſſion of *another*'s goods, and uſes them as his *own*, in a manner declares them to be his own; and this falſhood is the ſource of the immorality of injuſtice. But is property, or right, or obligation, intelligible, without an antecedent morality?

A man that is ungrateful to his benefactor, in a manner affirms, that he never received any favours from him. But in what manner? Is it becauſe 'tis his duty to be grateful? But this ſuppoſes, that there is ſome antecedent rule of duty and morals. Is it becauſe human nature is generally grateful, and makes us conclude, that a man who does any harm never received any favour from the perſon he harm'd? But human nature is not ſo generally grateful, as to juſtify ſuch a concluſion. Or if it were, is an exception to a general rule in every caſe criminal, for no other reaſon than becauſe it is an exception?

But what may ſuffice entirely to deſtroy this whimſical ſyſtem is, that it leaves us under the ſame difficulty to give a reaſon why truth is virtuous and falſhood vicious, as to account for the merit or turpitude of any other action. I ſhall allow, if you pleaſe, that all immorality is derived from this ſuppoſed falſehood in action, provided you can give me any plauſible reaſon, why ſuch a falſhood is immoral. If you conſider rightly of the matter, you will find yourſelf in the ſame difficulty as at the beginning.

This laſt argument is very concluſive; becauſe, if there be not an evident merit or turpitude annex'd to this ſpecies of truth or falſhood, it can never have any influence upon our actions. For, who ever thought of forbearing any action, becauſe others might poſſibly draw falſe concluſions from it? Or, who ever perform'd any, that he might give riſe to true concluſions?

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

passion: But it is not pretended, that a judgment of this kind, either in its truth or falshood, is attended with virtue or vice. And as to the judgments, which are caused by our judgments, they can still less bestow those moral qualities on the actions, which are their causes.

BUT to be more particular, and to shew, that those eternal immutable fitnesses and unfitnesses of things cannot be defended by sound philosophy, we may weigh the following considerations.

IF the thought and understanding were alone capable of fixing the boundaries of right and wrong, the character of virtuous and vicious either must lie in some relations of objects, or must be a matter of fact, which is discovered by our reasoning. This consequence is evident. As the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact; were virtue discover'd by the understanding; it must be an object of one of these operations, nor is there any third operation of the understanding, which can discover it. There has been an opinion very industriously propagated by certain philosophers, that morality is susceptible of demonstration; and tho' no one has ever

ever been able to advance a ſingle ſtep in thoſe demonſtrations; yet 'tis taken for granted, that this ſcience may be brought to an equal certainty with geometry or algebra. Upon this ſuppoſition, vice and virtue muſt conſiſt in ſome relations; ſince 'tis allow'd on all hands, that no matter of fact is capable of being demonſtrated. Let us, therefore, begin with examining this hypotheſis, and endeavour, if poſſible, to fix thoſe moral qualities, which have been ſo long the objects of our fruitleſs reſearches. Point out diſtinctly the relations, which conſtitute morality or obligation, that we may know wherein they conſiſt, and after what manner we muſt judge of them.

SECT. I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

IF you aſſert, that vice and virtue conſiſt in relations ſuſceptible of certainty and demonſtration, you muſt confine yourſelf to thoſe *four* relations, which alone admit of that degree of evidence; and in that caſe you run into abſurdities, from which you will never be able to extricate yourſelf. For as you make the very eſſence of morality to lie in the relations, and as there is no one of theſe relations but what is applicable, not only to an irrational, but alſo to an inanimate object; it follows, that even ſuch objects muſt be ſuſceptible of merit or demerit.

Reſem-

PART I. *Resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number*; all these relations belong as properly to matter, as to our actions, passions, and volitions. 'Tis unquestionable, therefore, that morality lies not in any of these relations, nor the sense of it in their discovery [b].

Of virtue and vice in general.

SHOU'D it be asserted, that the sense of morality consists in the discovery of some relation, distinct from these, and that our enumeration was not compleat, when we comprehended all demonstrable relations under four general heads: To this I know not what to reply, till some one be so good as to point out to me this new relation. 'Tis impossible to refute a system, which has ne-

[b] As a proof, how confus'd our way of thinking on this subject commonly is, we may observe, that those who assert, that morality is demonstrable, do not say, that morality lies in the relations, and that the relations are distinguishable by reason. They only say, that reason can discover such an action, in such relations, to be virtuous, and such another vicious. It seems they thought it sufficient, if they cou'd bring the word, Relation, into the proposition, without troubling themselves whether it was to the purpose or not. But here, I think, is plain argument. Demonstrative reason discovers only relations. But that reason, according to this hypothesis, discovers also vice and virtue. These moral qualities, therefore, must be relations. When we blame any action, in any situation, the whole complicated object, of action and situation, must form certain relations, wherein the essence of vice consists. This hypothesis is not otherwise intelligible. For what does reason discover, when it pronounces any action vicious? Does it discover a relation or a matter of fact? These questions are decisive, and must not be eluded.

ver yet been explain'd. In ſuch a manner of fighting in the dark, a man loſes his blows in the air, and often places them where the enemy is not preſent.

SECT. I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

I MUST, therefore, on this occaſion, reſt contented with requiring the two following conditions of any one that wou'd undertake to clear up this ſyſtem. *Firſt*, As moral good and evil belong only to the actions of the mind, and are deriv'd from our ſituation with regard to external objects, the relations, from which theſe moral diſtinctions ariſe, muſt lie only betwixt internal actions, and external objects, and muſt not be applicable either to internal actions, compared among themſelves, or to external objects, when placed in oppoſition to other external objects. For as morality is ſuppoſed to attend certain relations, if theſe relations cou'd belong to internal actions conſider'd ſingly, it wou'd follow, that we might be guilty of crimes in ourſelves, and independent of our ſituation, with reſpect to the univerſe: And in like manner, if theſe moral relations cou'd be apply'd to external objects, it wou'd follow, that even inanimate beings wou'd be ſuſceptible of moral beauty and deformity. Now it ſeems difficult to imagine, that any relation can be diſcover'd betwixt our paſ-

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

sions, volitions and actions, compared to external objects, which relation might not belong either to these passions and volitions, or to these external objects, compar'd among *themselves.*

But it will be still more difficult to fulfil the *second* condition, requisite to justify this system. According to the principles of those who maintain an abstract rational difference betwixt moral good and evil, and a natural fitness and unfitness of things, 'tis not only suppos'd, that these relations, being eternal and immutable, are the same, when consider'd by every rational creature, but their *effects* are also suppos'd to be necessarily the same; and 'tis concluded they have no less, or rather a greater, influence in directing the will of the deity, than in governing the rational and virtuous of our own species. These two particulars are evidently distinct. 'Tis one thing to know virtue, and another to conform the will to it. In order, therefore, to prove, that the measures of right and wrong are eternal laws, *obligatory* on every rational mind, 'tis not sufficient to shew the relations upon which they are founded: We must also point out the connexion betwixt the relation and the will; and must prove that this connexion is so necessary,

SECT. I.

Moral distinctions not deriv'd from reason.

neceſſary, that in every well-diſpoſed mind, it muſt take place and have its influence; tho' the difference betwixt theſe minds be in other reſpects immenſe and infinite. Now beſides what I have already prov'd, that even in human nature no relation can ever alone produce any action; beſides this, I ſay, it has been ſhewn, in treating of the underſtanding, that there is no connexion of cauſe and effect, ſuch as this is ſuppos'd to be, which is diſcoverable otherwiſe than by experience, and of which we can pretend to have any ſecurity by the ſimple conſideration of the objects. All beings in the univerſe, conſider'd in themſelves, appear entirely looſe and independent of each other. 'Tis only by experience we learn their influence and connexion; and this influence we ought never to extend beyond experience.

THUS it will be impoſſible to fulfil the *firſt* condition required to the ſyſtem of eternal rational meaſures of right and wrong; becauſe it is impoſſible to ſhew thoſe relations, upon which ſuch a diſtinction may be founded: And 'tis as impoſſible to fulfil the *ſecond* condition; becauſe we cannot prove *a priori*, that theſe relations, if they really exiſted and were perceiv'd, wou'd be univerſally forcible and obligatory.

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

BUT to make these general reflections more clear and convincing, we may illustrate them by some particular instances, wherein this character of moral good or evil is the most universally acknowledged. Of all crimes that human creatures are capable of committing, the most horrid and unnatural is ingratitude, especially when it is committed against parents, and appears in the more flagrant instances of wounds and death. This is acknowledg'd by all mankind, philosophers as well as the people; the question only arises among philosophers, whether the guilt or moral deformity of this action be discover'd by demonstrative reasoning, or be felt by an internal sense, and by means of some sentiment, which the reflecting on such an action naturally occasions. This question will soon be decided against the former opinion, if we can shew the same relations in other objects, without the notion of any guilt or iniquity attending them. Reason or science is nothing but the comparing of ideas, and the discovery of their relations; and if the same relations have different characters, it must evidently follow, that those characters are not discover'd merely by reason. To put the affair, therefore, to this trial, let us chuse any inanimate object,

such

ſuch as an oak or elm; and let us ſuppoſe, that by the dropping of its ſeed, it produces a ſapling below it, which ſpringing up by degrees, at laſt overtops and deſtroys the parent tree: I aſk, if in this inſtance there be wanting any relation, which is diſcoverable in parricide or ingratitude? Is not the one tree the cauſe of the other's exiſtence; and the latter the cauſe of the deſtruction of the former, in the ſame manner as when a child murders his parent? 'Tis not ſufficient to reply, that a choice or will is wanting. For in the caſe of parricide, a will does not give riſe to any *different* relations, but is only the cauſe from which the action is deriv'd; and conſequently produces the *ſame* relations, that in the oak or elm ariſe from ſome other principles. 'Tis a will or choice, that determines a man to kill his parent; and they are the laws of matter and motion, that determine a ſapling to deſtroy the oak, from which it ſprung. Here then the ſame relations have different cauſes; but ſtill the relations are the ſame: And as their diſcovery is not in both caſes attended with a notion of immorality, it follows, that that notion does not ariſe from ſuch a diſcovery.

SECT. I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

PART I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

BUT to chuse an instance, still more resembling; I would fain ask any one, why incest in the human species is criminal, and why the very same action, and the same relations in animals have not the smallest moral turpitude and deformity? If it be answer'd, that this action is innocent in animals, because they have not reason sufficient to discover its turpitude; but that man, being endow'd with that faculty, which *ought* to restrain him to his duty, the same action instantly becomes criminal to him; should this be said, I would reply, that this is evidently arguing in a circle. For before reason can perceive this turpitude, the turpitude must exist; and consequently is independent of the decisions of our reason, and is their object more properly than their effect. According to this system, then, every animal, that has sense, and appetite, and will; that is, every animal must be susceptible of all the same virtues and vices, for which we ascribe praise and blame to human creatures. All the difference is, that our superior reason may serve to discover the vice or virtue, and by that means may augment the blame or praise: But still this discovery supposes a separate being in these moral distinctions, and a being, which depends only on the will

will and appetite, and which, both in thought and reality, may be diſtinguiſh'd from the reaſon. Animals are ſuſceptible of the ſame relations, with reſpect to each other, as the human ſpecies, and therefore wou'd alſo be ſuſceptible of the ſame morality, if the eſſence of morality conſiſted in theſe relations. Their want of a ſufficient degree of reaſon may hinder them from perceiving the duties and obligations of morality, but can never hinder theſe duties from exiſting; ſince they muſt antecedently exiſt, in order to their being perceiv'd. Reaſon muſt find them, and can never produce them. This argument deſerves to be weigh'd, as being, in my opinion, entirely deciſive.

SECT. I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

NOR does this reaſoning only prove, that morality conſiſts not in any relations, that are the objects of ſcience; but if examin'd, will prove with equal certainty, that it conſiſts not in any *matter of fact*, which can be diſcover'd by the underſtanding. This is the *ſecond* part of our argument; and if it can be made evident, we may conclude, that morality is not an object of reaſon. But can there be any difficulty in proving, that vice and virtue are not matters of fact, whoſe exiſtence we can infer by reaſon? Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Wil-

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

ful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: And this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho', like that too, it has little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own

own ſentiments of pleaſure and uneaſineſs; and if theſe be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requiſite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour.

SECT. I.

Moral diſtinctions not deriv'd from reaſon.

I cannot forbear adding to theſe reaſonings an obſervation, which may, perhaps, be found of ſome importance. In every ſyſtem of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for ſome time in the ordinary way of reaſoning, and eſtabliſhes the being of a God, or makes obſervations concerning human affairs; when of a ſudden I am ſurpriz'd to find, that inſtead of the uſual copulations of propoſitions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no propoſition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the laſt conſequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expreſſes ſome new relation or affirmation, 'tis neceſſary that it ſhou'd be obſerv'd and explain'd; and at the ſame time that a reaſon ſhould be given, for what ſeems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly uſe this precaution, I ſhall preſume to recommend it to the readers; and

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

and am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason.

SECT. II.

Moral distinctions deriv'd from a moral sense.

THUS the course of the argument leads us to conclude, that since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them. Our decisions concerning moral rectitude and depravity are evidently perceptions; and as all perceptions are either impressions or ideas, the exclusion of the one is a convincing argument for the other. Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of; tho' this feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle, that we are apt to confound it with an idea, according to our common

mon cuſtom of taking all things for the ſame, which have any near reſemblance to each other.

SECT. II.

Moral diſtinctions deriv'd from a moral ſenſe.

THE next queſtion is, Of what nature are theſe impreſſions, and after what manner do they operate upon us? Here we cannot remain long in ſuſpenſe, but muſt pronounce the impreſſion ariſing from virtue, to be agreeable, and that proceeding from vice to be uneaſy. Every moment's experience muſt convince us of this. There is no ſpectacle ſo fair and beautiful as a noble and generous action; nor any which gives us more abhorrence than one that is cruel and treacherous. No enjoyment equals the ſatisfaction we receive from the company of thoſe we love and eſteem; as the greateſt of all puniſhments is to be oblig'd to paſs our lives with thoſe we hate or contemn. A very play or romance may afford us inſtances of this pleaſure, which virtue conveys to us; and pain, which ariſes from vice.

Now ſince the diſtinguiſhing impreſſions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but *particular* pains or pleaſures; it follows, that in all enquiries concerning theſe moral diſtinctions, it will be ſufficient to ſhew the principles, which make us feel a ſatiſfaction or uneaſineſs from the ſurvey of any cha-

PART I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

character, in order to satisfy us why the character is laudable or blameable. An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. In giving a reason, therefore, for the pleasure or uneasiness, we sufficiently explain the vice or virtue. To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no farther; nor do we enquire into the cause of the satisfaction. We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is imply'd in the immediate pleasure they convey to us.

I HAVE objected to the system, which establishes eternal rational measures of right and wrong, that 'tis impossible to shew, in the actions of reasonable creatures, any relations, which are not found in external objects; and therefore, if morality always attended these relations, 'twere possible for inanimate matter to become virtuous or vicious.

cious. Now it may, in like manner, be ob- SECT. II.
jected to the preſent ſyſtem, that if virtue and vice be determin'd by pleaſure and pain, theſe qualities muſt, in every caſe, ariſe from the ſenſations; and conſequently any object, whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, might become morally good or evil, provided it can excite a ſatisfaction or uneaſineſs. But tho' this objection ſeems to be the very ſame, it has by no means the ſame force, in the one caſe as in the other. For, *firſt*, 'tis evident, that under the term *pleaſure*, we comprehend ſenſations, which are very different from each other, and which have only ſuch a diſtant reſemblance, as is requiſite to make them be expreſs'd by the ſame abſtract term. A good compoſition of muſic and a bottle of good wine equally produce pleaſure; and what is more, their goodneſs is determin'd merely by the pleaſure. But ſhall we ſay upon that account, that the wine is harmonious, or the muſic of a good flavour? In like manner an inanimate object, and the character or ſentiments of any perſon may, both of them, give ſatisfaction; but as the ſatisfaction is different, this keeps our ſentiments concerning them from being confounded, and makes us aſcribe virtue to the one, and not to the other.

Moral diſtinctions deriv'd from a moral ſenſe.

PART I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions, of that *peculiar* kind, which makes us praise or condemn. The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil. 'Tis true, those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another. It seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious, and can distinguish betwixt his opposition to our interest and real villainy or baseness. But this hinders not, but that the sentiments are, in themselves, distinct; and a man of temper and judgment may preserve himself from these illusions. In like manner, tho' 'tis certain a musical voice is nothing but one that naturally gives a *particular* kind of pleasure; yet 'tis difficult for a man to be sensible, that the voice of an enemy is agreeable, or to allow it to be musical. But a person of a fine ear, who has the command of himself, can separate these feelings, and give praise to what deserves it.

Secondly,

SECT. II.

Moral distinctions deriv'd from a moral sense.

Secondly, We may call to remembrance the preceding syſtem of the paſſions, in order to remark a ſtill more conſiderable difference among our pains and pleaſures. Pride and humility, love and hatred are excited, when there is any thing preſented to us, that both bears a relation to the object of the paſſion, and produces a ſeparate ſenſation related to the ſenſation of the paſſion. Now virtue and vice are attended with theſe circumſtances. They muſt neceſſarily be plac'd either in ourſelves or others, and excite either pleaſure or uneaſineſs; and therefore muſt give riſe to one of theſe four paſſions; which clearly diſtinguiſhes them from the pleaſure and pain ariſing from inanimate objects, that often bear no relation to us: And this is, perhaps, the moſt conſiderable effect that virtue and vice have upon the human mind.

It may now be ask'd *in general*, concerning this pain or pleaſure, that diſtinguiſhes moral good and evil, *From what principles is it derived, and whence does it ariſe in the human mind?* To this I reply, *firſt*, that 'tis abſurd to imagine, that in every particular inſtance, theſe ſentiments are produc'd by an *original* quality and *primary* conſtitution. For as the number of our

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

our duties is, in a manner, infinite, 'tis impossible that our original instincts should extend to each of them, and from our very first infancy impress on the human mind all that multitude of precepts, which are contain'd in the compleatest system of ethics. Such a method of proceeding is not conformable to the usual maxims, by which nature is conducted, where a few principles produce all that variety we observe in the universe, and every thing is carry'd on in the easiest and most simple manner. 'Tis necessary, therefore, to abridge these primary impulses, and find some more general principles, upon which all our notions of morals are founded.

BUT in the *second* place, should it be ask'd, Whether we ought to search for these principles in *nature*, or whether we must look for them in some other origin? I wou'd reply, that our answer to this question depends upon the definition of the word, Nature, than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal. If *nature* be oppos'd to miracles, not only the distinction betwixt vice and virtue is natural, but also every event, which has ever happen'd in the world, *excepting those miracles, on which our religion is founded.* In saying, then, that the sentiments

ments of vice and virtue are natural in this sense, we make no very extraordinary discovery. SECT. II.

Moral distinctions deriv'd from a moral sense.

BUT *nature* may also be opposed to rare and unusual; and in this sense of the word, which is the common one, there may often arise disputes concerning what is natural or unnatural; and one may in general affirm, that we are not possess'd of any very precise standard, by which these disputes can be decided. Frequent and rare depend upon the number of examples we have observ'd; and as this number may gradually encrease or diminish, 'twill be impossible to fix any exact boundaries betwixt them. We may only affirm on this head, that if ever there was any thing, which cou'd be call'd natural in this sense, the sentiments of morality certainly may; since there never was any nation of the world, nor any single person in any nation, who was utterly depriv'd of them, and who never, in any instance, shew'd the least approbation or dislike of manners. These sentiments are so rooted in our constitution and temper, that without entirely confounding the human mind by disease or madness, 'tis impossible to extirpate and destroy them.

BUT *nature* may also be opposed to artifice, as well as to what is rare and unu-

PART I.

Of virtue and vice in general.

sual; and in this sense it may be disputed, whether the notions of virtue be natural or not. We readily forget, that the designs, and projects, and views of men are principles as necessary in their operation as heat and cold, moist and dry: But taking them to be free and entirely our own, 'tis usual for us to set them in opposition to the other principles of nature. Shou'd it, therefore, be demanded, whether the sense of virtue be natural or artificial, I am of opinion, that 'tis impossible for me at present to give any precise answer to this question. Perhaps it will appear afterwards, that our sense of some virtues is artificial, and that of others natural. The discussion of this question will be more proper, when we enter upon an exact detail of each particular vice and virtue [a].

MEAN while it may not be amiss to observe from these definitions of *natural* and *unnatural*, that nothing can be more unphilosophical than those systems, which assert, that virtue is the same with what is natural, and vice with what is unnatural. For in the first sense of the word, Nature, as opposed to miracles, both vice and virtue are equally natural; and in the second sense, as oppos'd to

[a] In the following discourse *natural* is also opposed sometimes to *civil*, sometimes to *moral*. The opposition will always discover the sense, in which it is taken.

what

what is unuſual, perhaps virtue will be found to be the moſt unnatural. At leaſt it muſt be own'd, that heroic virtue, being as unuſual, is as little natural as the moſt brutal barbarity. As to the third ſenſe of the word, 'tis certain, that both vice and virtue are equally artificial, and out of nature. For however it may be diſputed, whether the notion of a merit or demerit in certain actions be natural or artificial, 'tis evident, that the actions themſelves are artificial, and are perform'd with a certain deſign and intention; otherwiſe they cou'd never be rank'd under any of theſe denominations. 'Tis impoſſible, therefore, that the character of natural and unnatural can ever, in any ſenſe, mark the boundaries of vice and virtue.

SECT. II.

Moral diſtinctions deriv'd from a moral ſenſe.

THUS we are ſtill brought back to our firſt poſition, that virtue is diſtinguiſhed by the pleaſure, and vice by the pain, that any action, ſentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation. This deciſion is very commodious; becauſe it reduces us to this ſimple queſtion, *Why any action or ſentiment upon the general view or ſurvey, gives a certain ſatisfaction or uneaſineſs*, in order to ſhew the origin of its moral rectitude or depravity, without looking for any incomprehenſible relations and qua-

PART I. *Of virtue and vice in general.*

lities, which never did exist in nature, nor even in our imagination, by any clear and distinct conception. I flatter myself I have executed a great part of my present design by a state of the question, which appears to me so free from ambiguity and obscurity.

PART