Part First. Of the General Characteristics of Human Nature

Section I. Of the question relating to the State of Nature

Natural productions are generally formed by degrees. Vegetables grow from a tender shoot, and animals from an infant state. The latter being destined to act, extend their operations as their powers increase: they exhibit a progress, in what they perform, as well as in the faculties they acquire. This progress in the case of man is continued to a greater extent than in that of any other animal. Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilization. Hence the supposed departure of mankind from the state of their nature; hence our conjectures and different opinions of what man must have been in the first age of his being. The poet, the historian, and the moralist, frequently allude to this ancient time; and under the emblems of gold, or of iron, represent a condition, and a manner of life, from which mankind have either degenerated, or on which they have greatly improved. On either supposition, the first state of our nature must have borne no resemblance to what men have exhibited in any subsequent period; historical monuments, even of the earliest date, are to be considered as novelties; and the most common establishments of human society are to be classed among the encroachments which fraud, oppression, or a busy invention, have, on this subject, led to many fruitless inquiries, and given rise to many wild suppositions. Among the various qualities which mankind possess, we select one or a few particulars on which to establish a theory, and in framing our account of what man was in some imaginary state of nature, we overlook what he has always appeared within the reach of our own observation, and in the records of history.

In every other instance, however, the natural historian thinks himself obliged to collect facts, not to offer conjectures. When he treats of any particular species of animals, he supposes, that their present dispositions and instincts are the same they originally had, and that their present manner of life is a continuance of their first destination. He admits, that his knowledge of the material system of the world consists in a collection of facts, or at most, in general tenets derived from particular observations and experiments. It is only in what relates to himself, and in matters the most important, and the most easily known, that he substitutes hypothesis instead of reality, and confounds the provinces of imagination and reason, of poetry and science.

If both the earliest and the latest accounts collected from every quarter of the earth, represent mankind as assembled in troops and companies; and the individual always joined by affection to one party, while he is possibly opposed to another; employed in the exercise of recollection and foresight; inclined to communicate his
own sentiments, and to be made acquainted with those of others; these facts must be admitted as the foundation of all our reasoning relative to man. His mixed disposition to friendship or enmity, his reason, his use of language and articulate sounds, like the shape and the erect position of his body, are to be considered as so many attributes of his nature: they are to be retained in his description, as the wing and the paw are in that of the eagle and the lion, and as different degrees of fierceness, vigilance, timidity, or speed, are made to occupy a place in the natural history of different animals.

If the question be put, What the mind of man could perform, when left to itself, and without the aid of any foreign direction? we are to look for our answer in the history of mankind. Particular experiments which have been found so useful in establishing the principles of other sciences, could probably, on this subject, teach us nothing important, or new: we are to take the history of every active being from his conduct in the situation to which he is formed, not from his appearance in any forced or uncommon condition; a wild man therefore, caught in the woods, where he had always lived apart from his species, is a singular instance, not a specimen of any general character. As the anatomy of an eye which had never received the impressions of light, or that of an ear which had never felt the impulse of sounds, would probably exhibit defects in the very structure of the organs themselves, arising from their not being applied to their proper functions; so any particular case of this sort would only shew in what degree the powers of apprehension and sentiment could exist where they had not been employed, and what would be the defects and imbecilities of a heart in which the emotions that pertain to society had never been felt.

Mankind are to be taken in groups, as they have always subsisted. The history of the individual is but a detail of the sentiments and thoughts he has entertained in the view of his species: and every experiment relative to this subject should be made with entire societies, not with single men. We have every reason, however, to believe, that in the case of such an experiment made, we shall suppose, with a colony of children transplanted from the nursery, and left to form a society apart, untaught, and undisciplined, we should only have the same things repeated, which, in so many different parts of the earth, have been transacted already. The members of our little society would feed and sleep, would herd together and play, would have a language of their own, would quarrel and divide, would be to one another the most important objects of the scene, and, in the ardour of their friendships and competitions, would overlook their personal danger, and suspend the care of their self-preservation. Has not the human race been planted like the colony in question? Who has directed their course? whose instruction have they heard? or whose example have they followed?

Nature, therefore, we shall presume, having given to every animal its mode of existence, its dispositions and manner of life, has dealt equally with those of the human race; and the natural historian who would collect the properties of this species, may fill up every article now, as well as he could have done in any former age. yet one property by which man is distinguished, has been sometimes overlooked in the account of his nature, or has only served to mislead our attention. In other classes of animals, the individual advances from infancy to age or maturity; and he attains, in the compass of a single life, to all the perfection his nature can reach: but, in the human kind, the species has a progress as well as the individual; they build in every subsequent age on foundations formerly laid; and, in a succession of years, tend to a perfection in the application of their faculties, to which the aid of long experience is required, and to which many generations must have combined their endeavours. We observe the progress they have made; we distinctly enumerate many of its steps; we can trace them back to a distant antiquity of which no record remains, nor any monument is preserved, to inform us what were the openings of this wonderful scene. The consequence is, that instead of attending to the character of our species, where the particulars are vouched by the surest authority, we endeavour to trace it through ages and scenes unknown; and, instead of supposing that the beginning of our story was nearly of a piece with the sequel, we think ourselves warranted
to reject every circumstance of our present condition and frame, as adventitious, and foreign to our nature. The progress of mankind from a supposed state of animal sensibility, to the attainment of reason, to the use of language, and to the habit of society, has been accordingly painted with a force of imagination, and its steps have been marked with a boldness of invention, that would tempt us to admit, among the materials of history, the suggestions of fancy, and to receive, perhaps, as the model of our nature in its original state, some of the animals whose shape has the greatest resemblance to ours.¹

It would be ridiculous to affirm, as a discovery, that the species of the horse was probably never the same with that of the lion; yet, in opposition to what has dropped from the pens of eminent writers, we are obliged to observe, that men have always appeared among animals a distinct and a superior race; that neither the possession of similar organs, nor the approximation of shape, nor the use of the hand,² nor the continued intercourse with this sovereign artist, has enabled any other species to blend their nature or their inventions with his; that in his rudest state, he is found to be above them; and in his greatest degeneracy, never descends to their level. He is, in short, a man in every condition; and we can learn nothing of his nature from the analogy of other animals. If we would know him, we must attend to himself, to the course of his life, and the tenor of his conduct. With him the society appears to be as old as the individual, and the use of the tongue as universal as that of the hand or the foot. If there was a time in which he had his acquaintance with his own species to make, and his faculties to acquire, it is a time of which we have no record, and in relation to which our opinions can serve no purpose, and are supported by no evidence.

We are often tempted into these boundless regions of ignorance or conjecture, by a fancy which delights in creating rather than in merely retaining the forms which are presented before it: we are the dupes of a subtility, which promises to supply every defect of our knowledge, and, by filling up a few blanks in the story of nature, pretends to conduct our apprehension nearer to the source of existence. On the credit of a few observations, we are apt to presume, that the secret may soon be laid open, and that what is termed wisdom in nature, may be referred to the operation of physical powers. We forget that physical powers, employed in succession, and combined to a salutary purpose, constitute those very proofs of design from which we infer the existence of God; and that this truth being once admitted, we are no longer to search for the source of existence; we can only collect the laws which the author of nature has established; and in our latest as well as our earliest discoveries, only come to perceive a mode of creation or providence before unknown... If we are asked therefore, Where the state of nature is to be found? we may answer, It is here; and it matters not whether we are understood to speak in the island of Great Britain, at the Cape of Good Hope, or the Straits of Magellan... If we admit that man is susceptible of improvement, and has in himself a principle of progression, and a desire of perfection, it appears improper to say, that he has quitted the state of his nature, when he has begun to proceed; or that he finds a station for which he was not intended, while, like other animals, he only follows the disposition, and employs the powers that nature has given...

Section II. Of the Principles of Self-preservation

If in human nature there are qualities by which it is distinguished from every other part of the animal creation, men are themselves in different climates and in different ages greatly diversified. So far as we are able to account for this diversity on principles either moral or physical, we perform a task of great curiosity or signal utility. It appears necessary, however, that we attend to the universal qualities of our nature, before we regard its

¹ Rousseau, *Sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes.*
² *Traité de l'esprit.*
varieties, or attempt to explain differences consisting in the unequal
possession or application of dispositions and powers that are in some
measure common to all mankind.

Man, like the other animals, has certain instinctive
propensities, which, prior to the perception of pleasure or pain, and
prior to the experience of what is pernicious or useful, lead him to
perform many functions of nature relative to himself and to his
fellow-creatures. He has one set of dispositions which refer to his
animal preservation, and to the continuance of his race; another
which lead to society, and by enlisting him on the side of one tribe
or community, frequently engage him in war and contention with the
rest of mankind. His powers of discernment, or his intellectual
faculties, which, under the appellation of reason, are distinguished
from the analogous endowments of other animals, refer to the
objects around him, either as they are subjects of mere knowledge,
or as they are subjects of approbation or censure. He is formed not
only to know, but likewise to admire and to contemn; and these
proceedings of his mind have a principal reference to his own
character, and to that of his fellow-creatures, as being the subjects
on which he is chiefly concerned to distinguish what is right from
what is wrong. He enjoys his felicity likewise on certain fixed and
determinate conditions; and either as an individual apart, or as a
member of civil society, must take a particular course in order to
reap the advantages of his nature. He is, withal, in a very high
degree susceptible of habits; and can, by forbearance or exercise, so
far weaken, confirm, or even diversify his talents, and his
dispositions, as to appear, in a great measure, the arbiter of his own
rank in nature, and the author of all the varieties which are exhibited
in the actual history of his species. The universal characteristics, in
the mean time, to which we have now referred, must, when we
would treat of any part of this history, constitute the first subject of
our attention; and they require not only to be enumerated, but to be
distinctly considered.

The dispositions which refer to the preservation of the
individual, while they continue to operate in the manner of
instinctive desires, are nearly the same in man that they are in the
other animals: but in him they are sooner or later combined with
reflection and foresight; they give rise to his apprehensions on the
subject of property, and make him acquainted with that object of
care which he calls his interest. Without the instincts which teach
the beaver and the squirrel, the ant and the bee, to make up their
little hoards for winter, at first improvident, and, where no
immediate object of passion is near, addicted to sloth, he becomes,
in process of time, the great storemaster among animals. He finds in
a provision of wealth, which he is probably never to employ, an
object of his greatest solicitude, and the principal idol of his mind.
He apprehends a relation between his person and his property, which
renders what he calls his own in a manner a part of himself, a
constituent of his rank, his condition, and his character, in which,
independent of any real enjoyment he may be fortunate or unhappy;
and, independent of any personal merit, he may be an object of
consideration or neglect; and in which he may be wounded and
injured, while his person is safe, and every want of his nature
completely supplied.

In these apprehensions, while other passions only operate
occasionally, the interested find the object of their ordinary cares;
their motive to the practice of mechanic and commercial arts; their
temptation to trespass on the laws of justice; and, when extremely
corrupted, the price of their prostitutions, and the standard of their
opinions on the subject of good and of evil. Under this influence,
they would enter, if not restrained by the laws of civil society, on a
scene of violence or meanness, which would exhibit our species, by
turns, under an aspect more terrible and odious, or more vile and
contemptible, than that of any animal which inherits the earth.

Although the consideration of interest is founded on the
experience of animal wants and desires, its object is not to gratify
any particular appetite, but to secure the means of gratifying all; and
it imposes frequently a restraint on the very desires from which it
arose, more powerful and more severe than those of religion or duty.
It arises from the principles of self-preservation in the human frame;
but is a corruption, or at least a partial result, of those principles, and
is upon many accounts very improperly termed self-love.

Love is an affection which carries the attention of the mind
beyond itself, and has a quality, which we call tenderness, that never
can accompany the considerations of interest. This affection being a
complacency and a continued satisfaction in its object, independent
of any external event, it has, in the midst of disappointment and
sorrow, pleasures and triumphs unknown to those who act without
any regard to their fellow-creatures; and in every change of
condition, it continues entirely distinct from the sentiments which
we feel on the subject of personal success or adversity. But as the
care a man entertains for his own interest, and the attention his
affection makes him pay to that of another, may have similar effects,
the one on his own fortune, the other on that of his friend, we
confound the principles from which he acts; we suppose that they
are the same in kind, only referred to different objects; and we not
only misapply the name of love, in conjunction with self, but, in a
manner tending to degrade our nature, we limit the aim of this
supposed selfish affection to the securing or accumulating the
constituents of interest, or the means of mere animal life.

It is somewhat remarkable, that notwithstanding men value
themselves so much on qualities of the mind, on parts, learning and
wit, on courage, generosity, and honour, those men are still
supposed to be in the highest degree selfish or attentive to
themselves, who are most careful of animal life, and who are least
mindful of rendering that life an object worthy of care. It will be
difficult, however, to tell why a good understanding, a resolute and
generous mind, should not, by every man in his senses, be reckoned
as much parts of himself, as either his stomach or his palate, and
much more than his estate or his dress. The epicure, who consults
his physician, how he may restore his relish for food, and by
creating an appetite, may increase the means of enjoyment, might at
least with an equal regard to himself, consult how he might
strengthen his affection to a parent or a child, to his country or to
mankind; and it is probable that an appetite of this sort would prove
a source of enjoyment not less than the former.

By our supposed selfish maxims, notwithstanding, we
generally exclude from among the objects of our personal cares,
many of the happier and more respectable qualities of human nature.
We consider affection and courage as mere follies, that lead us to
neglect or expose ourselves; we make wisdom consist in a regard to
our interest; and without explaining what interest means, we would
have it understood as the only reasonable motive of action with
mankind. There is even a system of philosophy founded upon tenets
of this sort, and such is our opinion of what men are likely to do
upon selfish principles, that we think it must have a tendency very
dangerous to virtue. But the errors of this system do not consist so
much in general principles, as in their particular applications; not so
much in teaching men to regard themselves, as in leading them to
forget that their happiest affections, their candour, and their
independence of mind, are in reality parts of themselves. And the
adversaries of this supposed selfish philosophy, where it makes
self-love the ruling passion with mankind, have had reason to find
fault, not so much with its general representations of human nature,
as with the obtrusion of a mere innovation in language for a
discovery in science.

When the vulgar speak of their different motives, they are
satisfied with ordinary names, which refer to known and obvious
distinctions. Of this kind are the terms benevolence and selfishness,
by which they express their desire of the welfare of others, or the
care of their own. The speculative are not always satisfied with this
proceeding; they would analyze, as well as enumerate the principles
of nature; and the chance is, that, merely to gain the appearance of
something new, without any prospect of real advantage, they will
disturb the order of vulgar apprehension. In the case before us, they
have actually found, that benevolence is no more than a species of
self-love; and would oblige us, if possible, to look out for a new set
of words, by which we may distinguish the selfishness of the parent
when he takes care of his child, from his selfishness when he only
takes care of himself. For according to this philosophy, as in both
cases he only means to gratify a desire of his own, he is in both cases equally selfish. The term benevolent, in the mean time, is not employed to characterise persons who have no desires of their own, but persons whose own desires prompt them to procure the welfare of others. The fact is, that we should need only a fresh supply of language, instead of that which by this seeming discovery we should have lost, in order to make the reasonings of men proceed as they formerly did. But it is certainly impossible to live and to act with men, without employing different names to distinguish the humane from the cruel, and the benevolent from the selfish.

These terms have their equivalents in every tongue; they were invented by men of no refinement, who only meant to express what they distinctly perceived or strongly felt. And if a man of speculation should prove that we are selfish in a sense of his own, it does not follow that we are so in the sense of the vulgar; or, as ordinary men would understand his conclusion, that we are condemned in every instance to act on motives of interest, covetousness, pusillanimitiy, and cowardice; for such is conceived to be the ordinary import of selfishness in the character of man.

An affection or passion of any kind is sometimes said to give us an interest in its object; and humanity itself gives an interest in the welfare of mankind. This term interest, which commonly implies little more than our regard to property, is sometimes put for utility in general, and this for happiness; insomuch that, under these ambiguities, it is not surprising we are still unable to determine, whether interest is the only motive of human action, and the standard by which to distinguish our good from our ill.

So much is said in this place, not from any desire to have a share in any controversy of this sort, but merely to confine the meaning of the term interest to its most common acceptation, and to intimate our intention of employing it in expressing those objects of care which refer to our external condition, and the preservation of our animal nature. When taken in this sense, it will not surely be thought to comprehend at once all the motives of human conduct. If men be not allowed to have disinterested benevolence, they will not be denied to have disinterested passions of another kind. Hatred, indignation, and rage, frequently urge them to act in opposition to their known interest, and even to hazard their lives, without any hopes of compensation in any future returns of preferment or profit.

Section III Of the principles of Union among Mankind

Mankind have always wandered or settled, agreed or quarrelled, in troops and companies. The cause of their assembling, whatever it be, is the principle of their alliance or union.

In collecting the materials of history, we are seldom willing to put up with our subject merely as we find it. We are loth to be embarrassed with a multiplicity of particulars, and apparent inconsistencies. In theory we profess the investigation of general principles; and in order to bring the matter of our inquiries within the reach of our comprehension, are disposed to adopt any system, Thus, in treating of human affairs, we would draw every consequence from a principle of union, or a principle of dissension. The state of nature is a state of war or of amity, and men are made to unite from a principle of affection, or from a principle of fear, as is most suitable to the system of different writers. The history of our species indeed abundantly shews, that they are to one another mutual objects both of fear and of love; and they who prove them to have been originally either in a state of alliance, or of war, have arguments in store to maintain their assertions. Our attachment to one division, or to one sect, seems often to derive much of its force from an animosity conceived to an opposite one: and this animosity in its turn, as often arises from a zeal in behalf of the side we espouse, and from a desire to vindicate the rights of our party.

'Man is born in society,' says Montesquieu, 'and there he remains.' The charms that detain him are known to be manifold. We may reckon the parental affection, which, instead of deserting the adult, as among the brutes, embraces more close, as it becomes mixed with esteem, and the memory of its early effects; together with a propensity common to man and other animals, to mix with
the herd, and, without reflection, to follow the crowd of his species. What
this propensity was in the first moment of its operation, we know not; but
with men accustomed to company, its enjoyments and disappointments
are reckoned among the principal pleasures or pains of human life. Sadness
and melancholy are connected with solitude; gladness and pleasure with
the concourse of men. The track of a Laplander on the snowy shore, gives
joy to the lonely mariner; and the mute signs of cordiality and kindness
which are made to him, awaken the memory of pleasures which he felt in
society. In fine, says the writer of a voyage to the north, after describing a
mute scene of this sort, 'We were extremely pleased to converse with men,
since in thirteen months we had seen no human creature.' But we need
no remote observation to confirm this position: The wailings of the
infant, and the languors of the adult, when alone; the lively joys of
the one, and the cheerfulness of the other, upon the return of
company, are a sufficient proof of its solid foundations in the frame
of our nature.

... But neither a propensity to mix with the herd, nor the
sense of advantages enjoyed in that condition, comprehend all the
principles by which men are united together. Those bands are even
of a feeble texture, when compared to the resolute ardour with which
a man adheres to his friend, or to his tribe, after they have for some
time run the career of fortune together. ... Whatever proofs we may
have of the social disposition of man in familiar and contiguous
scenes, it is possibly of importance, to draw our observations from
the examples of men who live in the simplest condition, and who
have not learned to affect what they do not actually feel.

Mere acquaintance and habitude nourish affection, and the
experience of society brings every passion of the human mind upon
its side. Its triumphs and prosperities, its calamities and distresses,
bring a variety and a force of emotion, which can only have place in
the company of our fellow-creatures. It is here that a man is made to
forget his weakness, his cares of safety, and his subsistence; and to
act from those passions which make him discover his force. It is
here he finds that his arrows fly swifter than the eagle, and his
weapons wound deeper than the paw of the lion, or the tooth of the
boar. It is not alone his sense of a support which is near, nor the love
of distinction in the opinion of his tribe, that inspire his courage, or
swell his heart with a confidence that exceeds what his natural force
should bestow. Vehement passions of animosity or attachment are
the first exertions of vigour in his breast; under their influence,
every consideration, but that of his object, is forgotten; dangers and
difficulties only excite him the more.

That condition is surely favourable to the nature of any
being, in which his force is increased; and if courage be the gift of
society to man, we have reason to consider his union with his
species as the noblest part of his fortune. From this source are
derived, not only the force, but the very existence of his happiest
emotions; not only the better part, but almost the whole of his
rational character. Send him to the desert alone, he is a plant torn
from its roots: the form indeed may remain, but every faculty droops
and withers; the human personage and the human character cease to
exist.

Men are so far from valuing society on account of its mere
external conveniencies, that they are commonly most attached where
those conveniencies are least frequent; and are there most faithful,
where the tribute of their allegiance is paid in blood. Affection
operates with the greatest force, where it meets with the greatest
difficulties: In the breast of the parent, it is most solicitous amidst
the dangers and distresses of the child: In the breast of a man, its
flame redoubles where the wrongs or sufferings of his friend, or his
country, require his aid. It is, in short, from this principle alone that
we can account for the obstinate attachment of a savage to his
unsettled and defenceless tribe, when temptations on the side of ease
and of safety might induce him to fly from famine and danger, to a
station more affluent, and more secure. Hence the sanguine affection
which every Greek bore to his country, and hence the devoted

5 Collection of Dutch Voyages.
6 Charlevoix, History of Canada.
patriotism of an early Roman. Let those examples be compared with
the spirit which reigns in a commercial state, where men may be
supposed to have experienced, in its full extent, the interest which
individuals have in the preservation of their country. It is here
indeed, if ever, that man is sometimes found a detached and a
solitary being: he has found an object which sets him in competition
with his fellow-creatures, and he deals with them as he does with his
cattle and his soil, for the sake of the profits they bring. The mighty
ingine which we suppose to have formed society, only tends to set
its members at variance, or to continue their intercourse after the
bands of affection are broken.

[omitting the sections on War and on Intellectual Powers . . .]

Section VI Of Moral Sentiment

Upon a slight observation of what passes in human life, we
should be apt to conclude, that the care of subsistence is the
principal spring of human actions. This consideration leads to the
invention and practice of mechanical arts; it serves to distinguish
amusement from business; and, with many, scarcely admits into
competition any other subject of pursuit or attention. The mighty
advantages of property and fortune, when stript of the
recommendations they derive from vanity, or the more serious
regards to independence and power, only mean a provision that is
made for animal enjoyment; and if our solicitude on this subject
were removed, not only the toils of the mechanic, but the studies of
the learned, would cease; every department of public business would
become unnecessary; every senate-house would be shut up, and
every palace deserted.

Is man therefore, in respect to his object, to be classed with
the mere brutes, and only to be distinguished by faculties that
qualify him to multiply contrivances for the support and
convenience of animal life, and by the extent of a fancy that renders
the care of animal preservation to him more burdensome than it is to
the herd with which he shares in the bounty of nature? If this were
his case, the joy which attends on success, or the griefs which arise
from disappointment, would make the sum of his passions. The
torrent that wasted, or the inundation that enriched his possessions,
would give him all the emotion with which he is seized, on the
occasion of a wrong by which his fortunes are impaired, or of a
benefit by which they are preserved and enlarged. His
fellow-creatures would be considered merely as they affected his
interest. Profit or loss would serve to mark the event of every
transaction; and the epithets useful or detrimental would serve to
distinguish his mates in society, as they do the tree which bears
plenty of fruit, from that which serves only to cumber the ground, or
intercept his view.

This, however, is not the history of our species. What comes
from a fellow-creature is received with peculiar attention; and every
language abounds with terms that express somewhat in the
transactions of men, different from success and disappointment. The
bosom kindles in company, while the point of interest in view has
nothing to in flame; and a matter frivolous in itself, becomes
important, when it serves to bring to light the intentions and
characters of men. The foreigner, who believed that Othello, on the
stage, was enraged for the loss of his handkerchief, was not more
mistaken, than the reasoner who imputes any of the more vehement
passions of men to the impressions of mere profit or loss.

Men assemble to deliberate on business; they separate from
jealousies of interest; but in their several collisions, whether as
friends or as enemies, a fire is struck out which the regards to
interest or safety cannot confine. The value of a favour is not
measured when sentiments of kindness are perceived; and the term
misfortune has but a feeble meaning, when compared to that of
insult and wrong.

It is pleasant to find men, who, in their speculations, deny
the reality of moral distinctions, forget in detail the general positions
they maintain, and give loose to ridicule, indignation, and scorn, as
if any of these sentiments could have place, were the actions of men indifferent; and with acrimony pretend to detect the fraud by which moral restraints have been imposed, as if to censure a fraud were not already to take a part on the side of morality.  

Can we explain the principles upon which mankind adjudge the preference of characters, and upon which they indulge such vehement emotions of admiration or contempt? If it be admitted that we cannot, are the facts less true? or must we suspend the movements of the heart until they who are employed in framing systems of science have discovered the principle from which those movements proceed? If a finger burn, we care not for information on the properties of fire: if the heart be torn, or the mind overjoyed, we have not leisure for speculations on the subject of moral sensibility.

If it be true, that men are united by instinct, that they act in society from affections of kindness and friendship; if it be true, that even prior to acquaintance and habitude, men, as such, are commonly to one another objects of attention, and some degree of regard; that while their prosperity is beheld with indifference, their afflictions are considered with commiseration; if calamities be measured by the numbers and the qualities of men they involve; and if every suffering of a fellow-creature draws a crowd of attentive spectators; if even in the case of those to whom we do not habitually wish any positive good, we are still averse to be the instruments of harm; it should seem, that in these various appearances of an amicable disposition, the foundations of a moral apprehension are sufficiently laid, and the sense of a right which we maintain for ourselves, is by a movement of humanity and candour extended to our fellow creatures.

What is it that prompts the tongue when we censure an act of cruelty or oppression? What is it that constitutes our restraint from offences that tend to distress our fellow-creatures? It is probably, in both cases, a particular application of that principle, which, in presence of the sorrowful, sends forth the tear of compassion; and a combination of all those sentiments, which constitute a benevolent disposition; and if not a resolution to do good, at least an aversion to be the instrument of harm.

It may be difficult, however, to enumerate the motives of all the censures and commendations which are applied to the actions of men. Even while we moralize, every disposition of the human mind may have its share in forming the judgement, and in prompting the tongue. As jealousy is often the most watchful guardian of chastity, so malice is often the quickest to spy the failings of our neighbour. Envy, affectation, and vanity, may dictate the verdicts we give, and the worst principles of our nature may be at the bottom of our pretended zeal for morality; but if we only mean to inquire, why they who are well disposed to mankind, apprehend, in every...
instance, certain rights pertaining to their fellow-creatures, and why they applaud the consideration that is paid to those rights, we cannot perhaps assign a better reason, than that the person who applauds, is well disposed to the welfare of the parties to whom his applauses refer.

When we consider, that the reality of any amicable propensity in the human mind has been frequently contested; when we recollect the prevalence of interested competitions, with their attendant passions of jealousy, envy, and malice; it may seem strange to allege, that love and compassion are the most powerful principles in the human breast: but they are destined, on many occasions, to urge with the most irresistible vehemence; and if the desire of self-preservation be more constant, and more uniform, these are a more plentiful source of enthusiasm, satisfaction, and joy. With a power, not inferior to that of resentment and rage, they hurry the mind into every sacrifice of interest, and bear it undismayed through every hardship and danger.

...Mankind have felt, they have talked, and even acted, as the keepers of their fellow-creatures: They have made the indications of candour and mutual affection the test of what is meritorious and amiable in the characters of men: They have made cruelty and oppression the principal objects of their indignation and rage: Even while the head is occupied with projects of interest, the heart is often seduced into friendship; and while business proceeds on the maxims of self-preservation, the careless hour is employed in generosity and kindness.

Hence the rule by which men commonly judge of external actions, is taken from the supposed influence of such actions on the general good. To abstain from harm, is the great law of natural justice; to diffuse happiness is the law of morality; and when we censure the conferring a favour on one or a few at the expense of many, we refer to public utility, as the great object at which the actions of men should be aimed.

After all, it must be confessed, that if a principle of affection to mankind, be the basis of our moral approbation and dislike, we sometimes proceed in distributing applause or censure, without precisely attending to the degree in which our fellow-creatures are hurt or obliged; and that, besides the virtues of candour, friendship, generosity, and public spirit, which bear an immediate reference to this principle, there are others which may seem to derive their commendation from a different source. Temperance, prudence, fortitude, are those qualities likewise admired from a principle of regard to our fellow-creatures? Why not, since they render men happy in themselves, and useful to others? He who is qualified to promote the welfare of mankind, is neither a sot, a fool, nor a coward. Can it be more clearly expressed, that temperance, prudence, and fortitude, are necessary to the character we love and admire? I know well why I should wish for them, in myself, and why likewise I should wish for them in my friend, and in every person who is an object of my affection. But to what purpose seek for reasons of approbation, where qualities are so necessary to our happiness, and so great a part in the perfection of our nature? We must cease to esteem ourselves, and to distinguish what is excellent, when such qualifications incur our neglect.

A person of an affectionate mind, possessed of a maxim, That he himself, as an individual, is no more than a part of the whole that demands his regard, has found, in that principle, a sufficient foundation for all the virtues; for a contempt of animal pleasures, that would supplant his principal enjoyment; for an equal contempt of danger or pain, that come to stop his pursuits of public good. 'A vehement and steady affection magnifies its object, and lessens every difficulty or danger that stands in the way.' 'Ask those who have been in love,' says Epictetus, 'they will know that I speak truth.' ...