

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Arthur says that the Divine Command theory should not be accepted even by those who are religious. Why? Do you agree? Explain.
2. In Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* one character says, "Without God, everything is permitted." Explain what the character means and why Arthur rejects this view. Does Mortimer reject it?
3. Arthur holds that ethics is not based on religion. But some have claimed that even if that is true, human beings do not *behave* ethically unless they believe that a divine being demands it. What do you think of this claim?
4. Why, in Arthur's view, should a nonbeliever behave as well as a believing Christian?

Of Benevolence

David Hume

David Hume (1711–1776) was a Scottish philosopher and a leading figure in the European Enlightenment. He wrote major treatises on the theory of knowledge and on ethics that continue to challenge and edify us. Hume was an exceptionally witty and kindly man: his Scottish friends called him Saint David; and in France he was known as "le bon David."

David Hume is first and last an empiricist—that is, he believes that all human knowledge, ethical as well as scientific, is based on observation and human experience. According to Hume, we learn about the nature of morality by attending to our feelings of approval and disapproval. Our feelings vary, and we are sometimes governed by immoral or amoral passions. However, we find in almost all people "some benevolence . . . some spark of friendship for human kind . . . along with the elements of the wolf and serpent." Hume points out that qualities like kindness and public spiritedness are favored universally. In this way, our common humanity provides a universal standard for what we approve and disapprove and gives rise to moral distinctions and judgments. "The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind," which gives rise to an "established theory of blame or approbation."

Having grounded morality in human "sentiment," Hume's ethical philosophy is at odds with the rationalist approach—developed subsequently by Immanuel Kant—which determines right and wrong through the use of reason and not by attending to our emotions.

It may be esteemed, perhaps, a superfluous task to prove that the benevolent or softer affections are estimable; and wherever they appear, engage the approbation and good-will of mankind. The epithets *social*, *good-natured*, *humane*, *merciful*, *grateful*, *friendly*, *generous*, *beneficent*, or their equivalents, are known in all languages, and universally express the highest merit which *human nature* is capable of attaining. Where these amiable qualities are attended with birth and power and eminent abilities, and display themselves in the good government or useful instruction of mankind, they seem even to raise the possessors of them above the rank of *human nature*, and make them approach in some measure to the divine. Exalted capacity, undaunted courage, prosperous success; these may only expose a hero or politician to the envy and ill-will of the public: but as soon as the praises are added of humane and beneficent, when instances are displayed of lenity, tenderness or friendship, envy itself is silent, or joins the general voice of approbation and applause.

When Pericles, the great Athenian statesman and general, was on his deathbed, his surrounding friends, deeming him now insensible, began to indulge their sorrow for their expiring patron by enumerating his great qualities and successes, his conquests and victories, the unusual length of his administration, and his nine trophies erected over the enemies of the republic. *You forget*, cries the dying hero, who had heard all, *you forget the most eminent of my praises, while you dwell so much on those vulgar advantages in which fortune had a principal share. You have not observed that no citizen has ever yet worn mourning on my account. . . . If must, indeed, be confessed that by doing good only can a man truly enjoy the advantages of being eminent. His exalted station of itself but the more exposes him to danger and tempest. His sole prerogative is to afford shelter to inferiors who repose themselves under his cover and protection.*

But I forget that it is not my present business to recommend generosity and benevolence, or to paint in their true colours all the genuine charms of the social virtues. These, indeed, sufficiently engage every heart on the first apprehension of them; and it is difficult to abstain from some sally of panegyric as often as they occur in discourse or reasoning. But our object here being more the speculative than the practical part of morals, it will suffice to remark (what will readily, I believe, be allowed) that no qualities are more entitled to the general good-will and approbation of mankind than beneficence and humanity, friendship and gratitude, natural affection and public spirit, or whatever proceeds from a tender sympathy with others and a generous concern for our kind and species. These wherever they appear seem to transfigure themselves, in a manner, into each beholder, and to call forth, in their own behalf, the same favourable and affectionate sentiments which they exert on all around. . . .

It is sufficient for our present purpose, if it be allowed what surely without the greatest absurdity cannot be disputed, that there is some benevolence, however small, infused into our bosom, some spark of friendship for human kind, some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and serpent. Let these generous sentiments be supposed ever so weak, let them be insufficient to move even a hand or finger of our body, they must still direct the determinations of our mind and, where everything else is equal, produce a cool preference of what is useful and serviceable to mankind above what is pernicious and dangerous. A *moral distinction*, therefore, immediately arises; a general sentiment of blame and approbation; a tendency, however faint, to the objects of the one, and a proportionable aversion to those of the other. . . .

Avarice, ambition, vanity, and all passions vulgarly, though improperly, comprised under the denomination of *self-love*, are here excluded from our theory concerning the origin of morals, not because they are too weak, but because they have not a proper direction for that purpose. The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it. It also implies some sentiment so universal and comprehensive as to extend to all mankind and render the actions and conduct, even of the persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure, according as they agree or disagree with that rule of right which is established. These two requisite circumstances belong alone to the sentiment of humanity here insisted on. The other passions produce in every breast many strong sentiments of desire and aversion, affection and hatred; but these neither are felt so much in common nor are so comprehensive as to be the foundation of any general system and established theory of blame or approbation.

When a man denominates another his *enemy*, his *rival*, his *antagonist*, his *adversary*, he is understood to speak the language of self-love, and to express sentiments peculiar to himself and arising from his particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on any man the epithets of *virtuous* or *odious* or *depraved*, he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments in which he expects all his audience are to concur with him. He must here, therefore, depart from his private and particular situation and must choose a point of view common to him with others; he must move some universal principle of the human frame and touch a string to which all mankind have an accord and sympathy. If he mean, therefore, to express that this man possesses qualities whose tendency is pernicious to society, he has chosen this common point of view and has touched the principle of humanity in which every man, in some degree, concurs. While the human heart is compounded of the same elements as at present, it will never be wholly indifferent to public good, nor entirely unaffected with the tendency of characters and manners. And though this affection of humanity may not generally be esteemed so strong as vanity or ambition, yet, being common to all men, it can alone be the foundation of morals or any general system of blame or praise. One man's ambition is not another's ambition, nor will the same event or object satisfy both, but the humanity of one man is

the humanity of every one, and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures.

But the sentiments which arise from humanity are not only the same in all human creatures, and produce the same approbation or censure, but they also comprehend all human creatures; nor is there any one whose conduct or character is not, by their means, an object to every one of censure or approbation. On the contrary, those other passions, commonly denominated selfish, both produce different sentiments in each individual, according to his particular situation, and also contemplate the greater part of mankind with the utmost indifference and unconcern. Whoever has a high regard and esteem for me flatters my vanity; whoever expresses contempt mortifies and displeases me; but as my name is known but to a small part of mankind, there are few who come within the sphere of this passion, or excite, on its account, either my affection or disgust. But if you represent a tyrannical, insolent, or barbarous behaviour, in any country or in any age of the world, I soon carry my eye to the pernicious tendency of such a conduct and feel the sentiment of repugnance and displeasure towards it. No character can be so remote as to be, in this light, wholly indifferent to me. What is beneficial to society or to the person himself must still be preferred. And every quality or action of every human being must, by this means, be ranked under some class or denomination expressive of general censure or applause.

What more, therefore, can we ask to distinguish the sentiments dependent on humanity from those connected with any other passion, or to satisfy us why the former are the origin of morals, not the latter? Whatever conduct gains my approbation by touching my humanity procures also the applause of all mankind, by affecting the same principle in them; but what serves my avarice or ambition pleases these passions in me alone and affects not the avarice and ambition of the rest of mankind. There is no circumstance of conduct in any man, provided it have a beneficial tendency, that is not agreeable to my humanity, however remote the person; but every man, so far removed as neither to cross nor serve my avarice and ambition, is regarded as wholly indifferent by those passions. The distinction, therefore, between these species of sentiment being so great and evident, language must soon be moulded upon it and must invent a peculiar set of terms in order to express those universal sentiments of censure or approbation which arise from humanity or from views of general usefulness and its contrary. Virtue and Vice become then known; morals are recognized; certain general ideas are framed of human conduct and behaviour; such measures are expected from men in such situations. This action is determined to be conformable to our abstract rule; that other, contrary. And by such universal principles are the particular sentiments of self-love frequently controlled and limited.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Hume says, "There is . . . some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and serpent." Explain.
2. According to Divine Command theory, are the two views reconcilable? Explain.
3. Which emotions and sentiments are involved in moral judgment? Can anyone be a moral saint? Explain.
4. Hume sometimes talks as if virtues are found in all human beings. What virtues are those that affect Hume's moral theory?
5. In the view of a rationalist moral philosopher like Immanuel Kant, "rests wholly on its pure reason" (it does not borrow the least theoretical support from anthropology), but gives laws a practical force (see the opening pages of the Kant selection). How does Hume's "impure," "anthropological" moral theory differ from Kant's?

Utilitarianism

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a prominent nineteenth-century philosopher. Though he is best known for his definition of utilitarianism, he was also a reformer; while a member of the Utilitarian Society, he advocated for rights to women. His best known works are *Utilitarianism* and *The Subjection of Women*.

Mill defines happiness as pleasure and the absence of pain. He argues that the greatest happiness principle (elsewhere called the principle of utility) is the right in proportion as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.

Some opponents of utilitarianism claim that it is an unworthy ideal ("a doctrine that is worthy only of the lowest and most vulgar of men" by distinguishing higher and lower pleasures). Others claim that it is a doctrine that is worthy only of the lowest and most vulgar of men.

UTILITARIANISM From *Utilitarianism* by John St

