

Hobbes. Human Nature. Ch. 9, Sec. 10.

Pity is imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense of another man's calamity. But when it lighteth on such as we think have not deserved the same, the compassion is greater, because then there appeareth more probability that the same may happen to us: for, the evil that happeneth to an innocent man, may happen to every man. But when we see a man suffer for great crimes, which we cannot easily think will fall upon ourselves, the pity is the less. And therefore men are apt to pity those whom they love: for, whom they love, they think worthy of good, and therefore not worthy of calamity. Thence it is also, that men pity the vices of some persons at the first sight only, out of love to their aspect. The contrary of pity is hardness of heart, proceeding either from slowness of imagination, or some extreme great opinion of their own exemption from the like calamity, or from hatred of all or most men.

Hobbes. Leviathan, Ch. 6, Sec. 24

Grief for the calamity of another is pity; and ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himself; and therefore is called also compassion, and in the phrase of this present time a fellow-feeling: and therefore for calamity arriving from great wickedness, the best men have the least pity; and for the same calamity, those have least pity that think themselves least obnoxious to the same.

Butler. Sermon V: Upon Compassion

--Rom. xii. 15 "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Every man is to be considered in two capacities, the private and public; as designed to pursue his own interest and likewise to contribute to the good of others. Whoever will consider, may see, that in general there is no contrariety between these; but that, from the original constitution of man, and the circumstances he is placed in, they perfectly coincide, and mutually carry on each other. But, amongst the great variety of affections or principles of action in our nature, some in their primary intention and design seem to belong to the single or private, others to the public or social capacity. The affections required in the text are of the latter sort. When we rejoice in the prosperity of others, and compassionate their distresses, we, as it were, substitute them for ourselves, their interest for our own; and have the same kind of pleasure in their prosperity, and sorrow in their distress, as we have from reflection upon our own. Now, there is nothing strange, or unaccountable, in our being thus carried out, and affected towards the interests of others. For if there be any appetite, or any inward principle besides self-love; why may there not be an affection to the good of our fellow creatures, and delight from that affection being gratified, and uneasiness from things going contrary to it?

[Footnote: There being manifestly this appearance of men's substituting others for themselves, and being carried out and affected towards them as towards themselves; some persons, who have a system which excludes every affection of this sort, have taken a pleasant method to solve it; and tell you, it is not another you are at all concerned about,

but your self only, when you feel the affection called compassion: i e. Here is a plain matter of fact, which men cannot reconcile with the general account they think fit to give of things; they, therefore, instead of that manifest fact, substitute another, which is reconcileable to their own scheme. For, does not every body by compassion mean, an affection the object of which is another in distress? Instead of this, but designing to have it mistaken for this, they speak of, an affection, or passion, the object of which is ourselves; or danger to ourselves. Hobbs defines pity, imagination, or fiction, of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense (he means sight, or knowledge) of another man's calamity. Thus, fear and compassion would be the same idea, and a fearful and a compassionate man the same character; which every one immediately sees are totally different. Further, to those who give any scope to their affections, there is no perception, or inward feeling, more universal than this; that one who has been merciful and compassionate throughout the course of his behaviour, should himself be treated with kindness, if he happens to fall into circumstances of distress. Is fear, then, or cowardice, so great a recommendation to the favor of the bulk of mankind? Or, is it not plain, that mere fearlessness (and therefore, not the contrary) is one of the most popular qualifications? This shows that mankind are not affected towards compassion as fear, but as somewhat totally different.

Nothing would more expose such accounts as these of the affections which are favorable and friendly to our fellow-creatures, than to substitute the definitions which this author and others who follow his steps, give of such affections, instead of the words by which they are commonly expressed. Hobbs, after having laid down, that pity, or compassion, is only fear for ourselves, goes on to explain the reason why we pity our friends in distress more, than others. Now, substitute the definition instead of the word pity in this place, and the inquiry will be, why we fear our friends? &c. which words (since he really does not mean why we are afraid of them) make no question, or sentence at all. So that common language, the words to compassionate, to pity, cannot be accommodated to his account of compassion. The very joining of the words to pity our friends, is a direct contradiction to his definition of pity: Because, those words, so joined, necessarily express, that our friends are the objects of the passion; whereas his definition of it asserts, that our selves (or danger to ourselves) are the only objects of it. He might, indeed, have avoided this absurdity, by plainly saying what he is going to account for; namely, why the sight of the innocent, or of our friends in distress, raises greater fear for ourselves than the sight of other persons in distress. But had he put the thing thus plainly, the fact itself would have been doubted; that the sight of our friends in distress, raises in us greater fear for ourselves, than the sight of others in distress. And, in the next place, it would immediately have occurred to every one, that the fact now mentioned, which, at least, is doubtful, whether true or false, was not the same with this fact, which nobody ever doubted, that the sight of our friends in distress raises in us greater compassion than the sight of others in distress, every one, I say, would have seen that these are not the same, but two different inquiries; and; consequently, that fear and compassion are not the same. Suppose a person to be in real danger, and, by some means or other, to have forgot it, any trifling accident, any sound might alarm him, recall the danger to his remembrance, and renew his fear. But it is almost too grossly ridiculous (though it is to show an absurdity) to speak of that sound, or accident, as an object of compassion; and yet, according to Mr

Hobbs, our greatest friend in distress is no more to us, no more the object of compassion, or of any affection in our heart. Neither the one nor the other raises any emotion in our mind, but only the thoughts of our liableness to calamity, and the fear of it; and both equally do this. It is fit such sorts of accounts of human nature should be shown to be what they really are, because there is raised upon them a general scheme, which undermines the whole foundation of common justice and honesty. See HOBBS of Hum. Nat. c. 9. sec. 10.

There are often three distinct perceptions, or inward feelings, upon sight of persons in distress: real sorrow and concern for the misery of our fellow creatures; some degree of satisfaction, from a consciousness of our freedom from that misery: and, as the mind passes on from one thing to another, it is not unnatural, from such an occasion, to reflect upon our own liableness to the same or other calamities. The two last frequently accompany the first, but it is the first only which is properly compassion, of which the distressed are the objects, and which directly carries us with calmness and thought to their assistance. Anyone of these, from various and complicated reasons, may, in particular cases, prevail over the other two; and there are, I suppose, instances where the bare sight of distress, without our feeling any compassion for it, may be the occasion of either or both of the two latter perceptions. One might add, that if there be really any such thing as the fiction or imagination of danger to ourselves, from sight of the miseries of others, which Hobbs speaks of, and which he has absurdly mistaken for the whole of compassion; if there be any thing of this sort common to mankind, distinct from the reflection of reason, it would be a most remarkable instance of what was furthest from his thoughts, namely, of a mutual sympathy between each particular of the species, a fellow-feeling common to mankind. It would not, indeed; be an example of our substituting others for ourselves, but it would be an example of our substituting ourselves for others. And as it would not be an instance of benevolence, so neither would it be any instance of self-love; for this phantom of danger to ourselves, naturally rising to view upon sight of the distresses of others, would be no more an instance of love to ourselves, than the pain of hunger is.]