Christian Wolff on Common Notions and Duties of Esteem

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**Abstract:** While contemporary accounts understand esteem and self-esteem as essentially competitive phenomena, early modern natural law theorists developed a conception of justified esteem and self-esteem based on naturally good character traits. This article explores how such a normative conception of esteem and self-esteem is developed in the work of Christian Wolff (1679–1754). Two features make Wolff’s approach distinctive: (1) He uses the analysis of common notions that are expressed in everyday language to provide a foundation for the aspects of natural law on which his conception of natural duties of esteem depends. (2) He develops a non-competitive conception of esteem and self-esteem into a cooperative conception, according to which enhancing the esteem in which others are held is seen as a tool for promoting self-perfection. Wolff’s ideas offer a solution to the well-known problems connected with competitive life-styles, and at the same time assign a central role in moral motivation to the desire of being esteemed and of having high self-esteem. Moreover, due to his emphasis on presenting a philosophical analysis based on common notions, he offers a solution that is meant to be persuasive from the perspective of everyday morality.

**Keywords:** Common Usage, Ontology of Perfection, Natural Law, Natural Goodness, Obligation, Self-Esteem, Competition, Cooperation

1. Introduction

In contemporary discussions of the desire for esteem and self-esteem, there is a remarkable consensus that esteem and self-esteem should be understood as essentially comparative and competitive phenomena. According to such a view, esteem should be regarded as a scarce good that can be gained only by achievements that are significantly above the average performance in a given domain of activity, which implies that the good in question can be gained only by being better than others who would also like to have it.[[1]](#footnote-1) If self-esteem is understood as a stable tendency of self-evaluation according to the same scale of esteemed achievements[[2]](#footnote-2) (in contrast to self-respect in the sense of the willingness to defend one’s needs and rights[[3]](#footnote-3)), then self-esteem, too, is inevitably a matter of comparison and competition. It is easy to see what is attractive about such a view of the nature of esteem and self-esteem—especially its tendency to motivate individuals to pursue what they want to be esteemed for and what they want to esteem themselves for. But critics have been quick to point out the negative consequences of deriving self-esteem from success in competitive activities. For instance, Michael Walzer has argued that, due to its inherently comparative and competitive nature, the desire for self-esteem is fraught with constant status anxiety and the loosening of civic bonds.[[4]](#footnote-4) Similarly, Avishai Margalit has argued that when self-esteem is comparative and competitive, it necessarily provides grounds for unequal treatment of persons in situations where justice demands equal treatment.[[5]](#footnote-5) And Robert Nozick has argued that the negative effects of comparison and competition could only be avoided by giving up the idea that self-esteem could be based on any commonly shared values even within one and the same society.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Approaches to esteem and self-esteem in the early modern natural law tradition may offer insightful alternatives to these contemporary ways of thinking. This is so because those thinkers developed normative conceptions of esteem and self-esteem, that is, conceptions that were meant to analyze the conditions under which esteem and self-esteem are justified. Unsurprisingly, the demands of natural law that those thinkers saw as an expression of human nature and, therefore, as something acceptable to all humans, were used to spell out these conditions under which esteem and self-esteem are justified. Thereby, natural law theories offered a conception of natural goodness that is the justified object of esteem no matter how many other individuals reach the same level of achievement. The value of acting in a naturally good way evidently does not lie in the fact that one is *better* on this score than others. Rather, the estimable quality of such actions is their natural goodness—a kind of goodness that, ideally, everyone could achieve and be esteemed for it. In this sense, natural law-based conceptions of esteem and self-esteem are comparative (in the sense that different individuals realize the duties of natural law in different degrees) but non-competitive (in the sense that the value of naturally good actions does not consist in surpassing others who compete in the same domain of activity).

While there may be something intuitively attractive about this natural law alternative to contemporary ways of thinking about esteem and self-esteem, still it would be rash to take any early-modern natural law-based approach to these issues as an unproblematic solution to an open problem. This is so because early modern natural law theories are a highly heterogenous field, in which both theology and speculative metaphysics play a variety of roles. For very good reasons, we may be reluctant to accept ethical theories that are far remote from everyday morality. And certainly, there are highly speculative approaches to natural law, such as attempts at identifying aspects of natural law with revealed divine law (a position found in late Scholastics and Lutheran natural law thinkers), as well as attempts at deriving natural goodness from a Stoic metaphysics of divine immanence (a position found in the legal humanism of Jacques Cujas).[[7]](#footnote-7) At the same time, some of the most prominent early modern natural law thinkers asserted that the central tenets of natural law could be understood as expressions of natural reason (an idea found, for instance, in thinkers as diverse as Domingo de Soto and Samuel Pufendorf).[[8]](#footnote-8) And it is this strand of thought that makes the views of esteem and self-esteem in early modern natural law still worth being considered from a contemporary perspective.

In the present article, I will examine one particular aspect of this extensive field of discourse: the considerations concerning duties of esteem and self-esteem in the ethical works of Christian Wolff (1679–1754). While Wolff shares with other early modern natural law thinkers a normative conception of esteem and self-esteem, his views are distinctive at least in two respects:

(1) To my knowledge, he is the only figure in this field to use the theory of common notions to analyze the sense in which natural reason plays a role both in the analysis of duties of esteem and in the aspects of ontology and natural law theory on which this analysis depends.[[9]](#footnote-9) As it turns out, the common notions that he has in mind are not only general concepts but also concepts expressed in common language. This is why he takes such notions to be revisable when they are the expression of prejudices—which, he is aware, is a real possibility. At the same time, he is also aware that the more sophisticated theories of moral philosophers are themselves subject to the risk of error—which is why he takes common notions to be the indispensable starting point of his reflections, as long as they can be understood as expressing insights into experiences common to all human beings. The benefit of his methodology is that Wolff not merely stipulates that common-sense morality is usually right; but rather, that he can offer an analysis for why this is so. At the same time, Wolff develops the resources needed to criticize both common notions and philosophical theories, where they are contrary to experiences that are common to all humans. In this way, he develops a normative conception of esteem and self-esteem without incurring the pitfalls of a speculative ethics.

(2) To my knowledge, Wolff is the only figure in this field to take a non-competitive conception of esteem and self-esteem and develop it into a cooperative conception. According to his cooperative conception, many individuals can not only share the same high degree of esteem for acting in a naturally good way but each individual is also naturally obliged to enhance the degree of esteem in which others are held. This duty derives from Wolff’s ontology of perfection, according to which perfection consists in the coherence between the goals of our natural (bodily and mental) activities with the goal of our voluntary actions. In his view, those activities that increase perfection (of oneself or others) are those that deserve to be esteemed. His ontology of perfection thus explains where duties of esteem and duties of self-esteem come from, why they have to be treated as parts of a systematically unified whole, and why they demand cooperation rather than competition. Again, the notions of perfection, natural goodness and natural obligation that Wolff uses turn out to be based on the analysis of our common linguistic usage.

It is worth emphasizing that not *everything* that Wolff says about esteem derives from the analysis of common notions. One aspect that is independent of common notions is his account of what he calls “esteem and honor for humanity” (*existimatio & honor humanitatis*) (PM V, § 484)—that is, esteem and the readiness to express esteem for the quality of being a human being. In Wolff’s view, this attitude follows from understanding that the essence of humans consists in having been created in the image of God (PM V, § 484). Evidently, the view that humans were created in the image of God can derive only from revelation, not from common notions. Does the existence of this theological strand of thought affect the strands of thought that concern the duties of esteem that derive from Wolff’s account of natural goodness? Wolff explicitly claims that his account of natural goodness is entirely independent of theological assumptions and therefore could be accepted by atheists (TN II, § 500). This claim neatly fits his treatment of the concept of perfection, which forms the foundation of his account of natural goodness, and which—as we will see in section 2—does not invoke any theological concepts. If so, then the presence of a theological conception of esteem for humanity does not make other aspects of what Wolff has to say about duties of esteem dependent upon theological views. This holds for those aspects that derive directly from common notions, which will be analyzed in section 3. And it holds for those aspects that invoke the methodological concept of presumption to explain how some duties deriving form common notions can be implemented, which will be analyzed in section 4.

2. Common Notions and Natural Goodness

Wolff’s normative conception of esteem and self-esteem is based on a conception of natural goodness, and the non-speculative character that Wolff ascribes to his conception of natural goodness carries over to his normative conception of esteem and self-esteem. Wolff does not regard his account of natural goodness to be a speculative theory but rather as something that derives from the analysis of common concepts as they are expressed in common usage. As he argues, what makes such an approach recommendable is that, in practical matters, common people tend to be closer to the truth than the erudite:

In the vernacular, which abounds with words and phrases to express whatever thing aptly, the particulars are much clearer, not only in the doctrine of affects, but rather in philosophy in general, and in particular in practical philosophy. For hardly any mental state occurs, to which in the vernacular there is not devoted a particular formula of speech; which the common people often use more correctly than the erudite, whose prejudices concerning terminology separate words from things … (PE § 620, note)[[10]](#footnote-10)

Common usage, thus, is clearer because it expresses a greater familiarity with the problems of practical life, and also because it is less prone to succumb to the prejudices of the learned. This is why Wolff takes an analysis of common notions as expressed in common usage as a starting point of his considerations in moral philosophy. This, however, does not imply that he would take common usage to be perfectly clear or to be immune from prejudices of common people. This is why there is still something to be done for philosophy: “Common notions of moral matters do not enjoy such correctness that nothing erroneous is contained in them. Our task, however, is to reduce them to distinct and determinate concepts, such that we may give no place in them to error-ridden opinions of humans” (JN I, § 820, note).[[11]](#footnote-11) This dual goal—conceptual clarification and, where needed, the correction of errors that are hidden in the confusions inherent in everyday discourse—stands behind the countless passages where Wolff emphasizes that the conceptual analysis that he offers is in accordance with our common notions.

This argumentative strategy is exemplified in Wolff’s analysis of the concept of perfection—a concept from which his concept of natural goodness derives. As he defines it, “Perfection is coherence in variety … Coherence is the tendency toward realizing one and the same goal” (*Ontologia*, § 503).[[12]](#footnote-12) This structure can be found in organic bodies, such as when the parts of an eye tend toward the production of a clear and distinct retinal image. It also can be found in artefacts, such as when the parts of a clock tend toward showing the exact time. Most importantly, it can be applied to human life: “life, in so far as it denotes a complex of free actions, is called perfect if all of these actions tend toward a goal toward which also the natural actions tend” (*Ontologia*, § 503). For example, nutrition is a natural action of bodily organs that function well under particular circumstances, and our free actions (such as choosing nutriments that are physiologically more or less suitable) can be more or less in agreement to what the good functioning of nutrition demands. Wolff also includes natural actions of the soul under the heading of natural actions (*Ontologia*, § 503), thereby suggesting that also the capacities of our soul function well under particular circumstances, to which our free actions can correspond more or less well. Generally, he therefore describes perfection as the coherence between free and natural actions (*Ontologia*, § 503), that is, a situation in which free and natural actions work together in realizing the same goals. In particular, he regards his conception of the perfection of the soul as the coherence between the uses of the different powers of the soul—emotional, volitional, and rational—as a consequence of his ontological concept of perfection (JN I, § 201). Similarly, the perfection of the body does not only presuppose the proper functioning of the various bodily organs but also requires the harmony between soul and body (JN I, § 335). As he explains, the harmony between body and soul requires a bodily constitution apt to provide the soul with reliable perceptions and to transform acts of the will into local motion (JN I, § 336).

Two other concepts central for his practical thought derive from this analysis of the concept of perfection: the concept of intrinsic goodness and the concept of obligation. Wolff defines intrinsically good actions as actions that are determined by the same final causes as natural actions (PPU I, § 125). Intrinsically good actions are therefore actions that tend toward our perfection (PE § 554). What is more, intrinsic goodness brings with it natural obligation. As Wolff explains, “[t]he person obliges us to carry out actions, who connects with them a motivation for wanting to do them” (PPU I, § 127).[[13]](#footnote-13) He argues that this is not only something that human beings can do through their actions; human nature can do it, as well: “the essence and nature of humans and things has conjoined a motivation with intrinsically good and bad actions” (PPU I, § 127).[[14]](#footnote-14) This is why there is obligation to carry out actions that tend toward one’s perfection (PPU I, § 128). More precisely, the obligation in question is described as a “natural obligation,” that is, an obligation that has a sufficient reason in human nature (PPU I, § 129).

Clearly, Wolff regards this set of claims not as an instance of speculative, hypothetical reasoning. Rather he maintains that the insight that the nature of humans and the nature of things determine what are intrinsically good or bad actions is a *conceptual* insight (PPU I, § 127). What kind of concepts are at stake here? Wolff answers that the notion of goodness as what has an (essential and accidental) perfection in itself or contributes to the perfection of another being derives from common usage (TN I, § 370). As he argues, this can best be shown with the example of the clock, both when regarded in itself and when regarded as an instrument for some ulterior purpose, as in the case of astronomical observation: We call a clock good, when it shows the time accurately and when it enables us to make accurate astronomical observations (TN I, § 370). Something similar can observed when someone who promotes the perfection of others is said to be good toward them. As Wolff points out, this observation shows that the proposed conception of goodness corresponds to the common notion of goodness (TN I, § 697). Analogously, Wolff claims that the notion of “privatively good actions,” understood as the omission of actions that could impair the perfection of oneself or others (PM II, § 118), is a common notion. And he adds that, as Euclid’s concepts are to be demonstrated on the basis of ontology, so are common notions in ethics to be demonstrated (PM II, § 118, note)—which is exactly what he does when he derives the notion of goodness from his analysis of the ontological notion of perfection.

Similarly, Wolff holds that his proposed definition of obligation corresponds to common usage (TN I, § 973, note). To show this, he invites us to consider the practice of obliging subjects through punishments for transgressors of a particular law. The threat of punishment leads subjects to understand the forbidden act as something bad (for them) (TN I, § 973, note). In this sense, the legislator obliges subjects by connecting a motivation with the action. This is what Wolff, due the role that an action plays in creating a motivation, calls “active obligation” (*obligatio activa*). In his view, “passive obligation” (*obligatio passiva*)—the moral necessity to commit or omit an action—is derivative upon active obligation (TN I, § 973, note). In this sense, passive obligation, understood as what cannot be done without violating the moral rightness of acting (TN I, § 952), is derivative upon the structure of human motivation. Hence, if human nature together with the nature of things create a motivation for wanting or rejecting certain courses of action, this exemplifies the structure of active obligations—once humans reflect upon their nature and the nature of things, they see that some courses of action are naturally good or bad for them.

This is a particular instance of the analysis of ethical concepts that Wolff describes as a process of transforming confused concepts into clear and distinct concepts: “Common notions in common people are merely confused, but with their help they discern easily in a given case good and bad actions, and not rarely they do so more accurately than the erudite who, blinded by prejudices, avert their minds from them” (PM II, § 118, note).[[15]](#footnote-15) And he holds that “if the common notions were collected and taken in the manner of axioms, from them the elements of moral philosophy could be demonstrated and in this way be reduced to common notions …” (PM II, § 118, note).[[16]](#footnote-16) Hence, there is no tension between Wolff’s deductive approach to moral philosophy and his methodology of analyzing and clarifying common notions; rather, the latter is a method for realizing the former.

There can be no doubt then that Wolff did not take the concept of perfection that underlies his natural law theory to be something hypothetical but rather as something grounded in our everyday notions. Wolff analyzes all duties toward oneself as duties that tend toward one’s perfection (JN I, § 170). For instance, he regards the duty of self-knowledge as a necessary condition of self-perfection, since self-knowledge leads to an insight into the degree of perfection of which I am capable (JN I, § 190) and into the degree to which I have realized this potential (JN I, § 192). Wolff adds a duty to know the perfections and imperfections of others, since this leads to insight into the perfections and imperfections that human beings are capable of and insight into the means that they are using for self-perfection (JN I, § 193). He also adds a duty to consult what others have found out about perfection and imperfection of soul and body and the use of human powers in self-perfection, because this also belongs to the means of self-perfection (JN I, § 196). The connection between self-perfection and knowledge of others indicates a sense in which “the entire human species is united by very close bonds, in such a way that one human being can be of use to others and that one needs the assistance of others” (JN I, § 195).[[17]](#footnote-17) Generally, Wolff points out that, as a matter of common experience, everyone needs the help of others for self-perfection (PPU I, § 220)—certainly a point that applies to all activities that can be improved through feedback from others. This is why he holds that there is a natural obligation to promote perfection with conjoined forces (PPU I, § 221). This obligation implies an obligation to contribute as much as we can to the perfection of others (PPU I, § 222), unless others can take care of themselves (PPU I, § 232). He takes this to be a precept of natural law, because it follows from human nature (PPU I, § 223). Likewise, there is a duty to omit actions that have a tendency toward the imperfection of others (PPU I, § 231). Consequently, he formulates the principle that we have the same duties to others as those we have to ourselves, as long as others cannot procure something themselves, and as long as we can provide assistance without neglecting the duties to ourselves (PPU I, § 608). And it may be exactly the view that duties of perfecting oneself can be known by analyzing notions that are common to everyone is what makes Wolff’s frequent usage of “we” in remarks about self-related duties an adequate mode of expression.

3. Common Notions and Duties of Esteem

Wolff’s conception of duties of esteem toward oneself and others derives from his conception of duties of perfecting oneself and others. If the duties of perfecting oneself and others are based on the analysis of common notions, then so is the view that perfections of character are the proper object of esteem. As Wolff defines it, esteem (*existimatio*) is a judgment of others about our perfection, especially about the acquired perfections of our souls (JN I, § 538), that is, our moral and intellectual virtues (JN I, § 548). This implies that esteem is justified exactly when its object is a personal quality that fulfils the natural duties of self-perfection. By using this definition of esteem, Wolff adopts one of two distinct concepts of being held in “good esteem” (*existimatio bona*) that were debated in the early German Enlightenment. One of these concepts can be described as a juridical concept, the other as an ethical concept.[[18]](#footnote-18) According to the juridical concept, a citizen who has not been convicted of any wrongdoing is in the possession of full civic dignity, understood as the possession of full civic rights.[[19]](#footnote-19) Some forms of wrongdoing are sanctioned by punishments that involve infamy in the legal sense of losing certain civic rights (such as being capable of holding political offices or being capable of testifying at court). The right to being held in good esteem in the juridical sense thus consists in the right of being presumed not to have violated the laws in the absence of contrary evidence.[[20]](#footnote-20) By contrast, the ethical concept of good esteem denotes judgments concerning moral and intellectual virtues. Taking acquired perfections of the soul to be the proper objects of esteem, as Wolff does, places his conception of esteem unambiguously on the side of the *ethical* concept of esteem.

This explains why Wolff emphasizes that what he is talking about is *natural* esteem—that is, esteem for personal qualities—not esteem in civil society, which he takes to depend to a large degree on imagination (JN I, § 538, note). As he notes, civil honors are often introduced in such a way that “the right usage of reason is set aside” (PM II, § 174). Civil honor, in contrast to natural honor, is disconnected from natural perfections and, due to the discrepancy between status and personal qualities, has the detrimental effect of alienating the minds of others (PM II, § 174, note)—an observation that comes very close to what more recent critics of the competitive conception of self-esteem such as Michael Walzer have noted. If it follows the demands of reason, Wolff understands honor as the set of acts through which we signify our judgment about the perfection of others (JN I, § 550). In this way, he distinguishes between esteem and acts that express esteem; still, honor is closely bound to esteem—that is, to acts of the intellect, not to blind responses to status. Accordingly, Wolff embraces a normative conception both of esteem and honor. In his view, only the virtues, not positions in civil life, make someone worthy of esteem and honor (JN I, § 552). Likewise, we have a duty to contribute to our own reputation (*fama*) (JN I, § 554), where reputation is understood as the common discourse concerning someone’s intellectual and moral dispositions (JN I, § 553)—another case where Wolff claims to do nothing other than analyze a common notion (JN I, § 558).

Wolff’s description of duties of esteem toward others can be regarded as a special case of the insight that duties of self-perfection cannot be fulfilled without caring for the perfection of others. In line with his principle that we have the same duties to others as those we have to ourselves, as long as others cannot procure something themselves, and as long as we can provide assistance without neglecting our duties to ourselves (JN I, § 608), Wolff’s analysis of duties of esteem and honor with respect to others is closely analogous to his analysis of self-related duties of esteem and honor. In his view, we have the duty to esteem (JN I, § 647) and honor (JN I, § 648) others as much as they deserve. Again, he is clear that this duty relates to natural honor, not to civil honor, which he takes to consist often only in opinion (JN I, § 648, note). This normative conception implies that others deserve esteem and honor only proportional to the degree of their perfection. Plausibly, the duties of esteem and honor with respect to others can be seen as a special case of our duties of knowing others, which, as we have seen, is regarded as a necessary means for self-perfection.

On the side of attitudes or acts that express disesteem for others, Wolff defines contempt (*ignominia*) as a judgment about the imperfection of others or the external signs for this judgment; in this sense, contempt is the opposite of esteem and honor (JN I, § 811). This is one of the rare occasions where he suggests a departure from common usage. As he points out with a view to the German concept of *Schande*, one finds vagueness and inconstancy in usage—an observation amply confirmed by a look into Grimm’s *Historisches Wörterbuch*.[[21]](#footnote-21) Wolff may thus be right when he claims that, for philosophical purposes, it is necessary to determine a stable signification. If the concept is defined in the way suggested by him, the normative conception of esteem and honor carries over to a normative conception of contempt. Accordingly, Wolff holds that there is a duty to avoid true contempt since the object of true contempt is a real imperfection (JN I, § 820), and we have a duty to avoid imperfection (JN I, § 817). Likewise, we have a duty to take care, as far as we can, that others are not held in contempt since we have the same duties toward others as to oneself (JN I, § 818). This duty implies that we have a duty not to contribute to others’ being held in contempt (JN I, § 819). Wolff is clear that here he departs from the common notion that takes other evils of the mind such as anguish (*angor*) and weariness (*taedium*) to be suitable objects of contempt as well. Wolff objects that those who include these evils among the objects of contempt do not distinguish between the consequences of evils of the souls and evils of the soul that make the soul less perfect (PE § 567). But on careful analysis, it turns out that the reason for anguish and weariness is consciousness of some imperfection (PE § 518). Note, however, that the suggested revision of the common notion of contempt does not amount to replacing it with an entirely different concept, but rather to limiting the concept to one aspect that corresponds to common usage. Also, this revision is based on a non-hypothetical analysis of the connection between weariness and consciousness of imperfection—Wolff holds that one only needs to consult one’s own experience with the necessary degree of acumen (PE § 516, note).

Wolff’s normative conception of esteem has interesting consequences for the question of human equality. On the one hand, Wolff holds that humans are equal in the sense that they have equal natural rights and natural obligations (JN I, § 78). On the other hand, he holds that, in the state of nature, individuals will have to be held in unequal esteem. As he argues, this is so because natural obligations will be fulfilled in unequal degrees since individuals differ from each other regarding their natural dispositions (JN I, § 559). Likewise, he holds that, in the state of nature, individuals do not deserve equal honor (JN I, § 560). But for the very reason that esteem and honor are not deserved without the cultivation of virtue, there are self-related duties connected with esteem and honor.

The first self-related duty that Wolff mentions is the duty to be worthy of esteem and praise. As he argues, every individual has this duty because perfection is what makes us worthy of esteem and praise, and we have a duty of self-perfection (JN I, § 545). Something analogous holds with respect to our duties concerning the desire for honor: we should cultivate modesty, understood as the virtue that regulates the desire for honor according to natural law (JN I, § 563). A further self-related duty consists in the duty of truthfulness in self-ascriptions (JN I, § 575). The corresponding virtue is humility, understood as the virtue that judges truthfully about one’s perfection; this is the virtue that moderates the desire for self-esteem (JN I, § 581). Plausibly, what Wolff has in mind is a consequence of his views concerning self-knowledge as a necessary condition of self-perfection. This is suggested when he places humility between the vicious extremes of pride (JN I, § 583) and self-contempt (JN I, § 585). The latter is described as bad because in this state of mind one ceases to keep the goal of self-perfection in mind (JN I, § 585). As Wolff points out, this attitude becomes more visible in civil society than in the state of nature since someone whose lack of self-esteem expresses itself in neglecting the duties connected with his social position will be censured by everyone—again, an observation that he believes cannot elude anyone (JN I, § 585, note).

Wolff adds a further element to his already complex picture of moral motivation when he points out that the wish for reputation can function as a strong motivation for acting. As he argues, the desire for reputation is connected with susceptibility to shame. This is why true negative judgments of others about ourselves induce sadness (PPU II, § 352). Conversely, he takes the desire for true positive judgments of others about ourselves as a strong motivation for acting (PPU II, § 353). Of course, this raises a question that is also pressing for contemporary accounts of the connection between esteem and self-esteem: the question of whether the esteem of others may not motivate behavior that is merely conformist. Being merely conformist implies that the motivation of action is not a specifically moral motivation. And it is easy to identify situations in which the desire for esteem leads individuals to engage in activities and attitudes without which they would be better off.[[22]](#footnote-22)

This is why it is interesting to see that Wolff clarifies that the form of the desire for the esteem of others that he has in mind does not lead to living a life in conformity with the opinion of others (PPU II, § 353, note). Rather, since *true* positive judgments are bound to the criteria of virtue, seeking the true benevolent judgment of others functions as an incitement for investigating the goodness of one’s own actions. What is more, in the absence of other legal sanctions, the desire for reputation is a crucial motivation for fulfilling duties of natural law. Wolff’s normative approach to self-esteem thus provides criteria for assessing the judgments about one’s own qualities, and also criteria for the extent to which we should rely on the judgments of others: We should take our own judgments and those of others to be reliable to the extent that they follow the demands of natural law. It is thus the normative character of justified self-esteem that provides an antidote against the dangers of conformism.

Finally, Wolff describes what motivates us to fulfil the duties of self-perfection and truthful self-ascription as an interest in happiness. Generally, Wolff holds that the desire for happiness is the ultimate motivator for fulfilling duties of natural law (PPU II, § 326). In his view, this is something that we experience in ourselves when we direct our attention to it (PPU II, § 326, note). In particular, he analyzes this experience as a special kind of pleasure and understands pleasure as an intuitive cognition of a true or apparent perfection (PE § 511). But he points out that we have a genuine interest in experiencing pleasure about true perfections. This is so, he argues, because intuitive cognition of a true perfection, in contrast to intuitive cognition of an apparent perfection, is constant in the sense that it does not carry with it an intrinsic reason of change (PE § 515). Again, he claims that this is something that we can experience in ourselves when we do not lack acumen (PE § 516, note). This is why he concludes that the desire for acquiescence with oneself plays a central role in our moral life (PPU II, § 354). He describes this experience as the joy experienced from having acted well, based on an inner sense or self-consciousness (PE § 749). He admits that this cannot be the motivation that, in the first instance, induces us to act rightly; however, it can provide a strong motivation for perseverance in acting well—one needs to have experienced the sweetness of this affect (PE § 751, note). As Wolff describes it, when we represent to ourselves something that we have done well, we are conscious of a perfection of our own condition or of another’s perfection that we have promoted (PE § 554). And he claims that inner experience shows that this passion is the most pleasurable when compared with other passions (PE § 753, note). This is why he takes the notion of acquiescence with oneself to be a common notion (PE § 754). By contrast, he understands shame as the affect that arises when we represent to ourselves the bad things that we have done as being known by others (PE § 779) and remorse as sadness arising from our judgment that we have done something bad (PE § 755). Again, he claims that these notions correspond to common usage (PE §§ 760, 780). Hence, what motivates us to avoid doing things that we recognize as being naturally bad is our wish to avoid two disagreeable experiences—fearing the contempt of others and wishing that one had acted differently. And what motivates us to do things that we recognize as being naturally good is our wish to have the most agreeable experience of all—feeling well about ourselves. In this way, his discussion of the affective dimension of moral motivation is based on an analysis of the common notions of acquiescence, shame and remorse. As he remarks: “In these matters, critics cannot know more than common people, and therefore they had only the common notions that constitute the signification of common terms” (PE § 760, note; see Logica § 139).[[23]](#footnote-23)

Common notions are also central for Wolff’s analysis of our duties concerning expressing true negative judgments about others publicly. The case is problematic since here it is not obvious that others thereby are esteemed less than they deserve. Wolff takes a subtle stance that distinguishes between duties that relate to the judgment itself and duties that relate to the expression of the judgment. On the one hand, he holds that knowing contemptible character traits of others is not illegitimate, as long as knowing others is used in order to learn what one should avoid (JN I, § 826). In this sense, knowing the imperfections of others can be used as a means to promote one’s own perfection. Doing so is useful for oneself without being in any way detrimental for others (JN I, § 826). On the other hand, he distinguishes between drawing the attention of a friend to an imperfection—which Wolff regards as a legitimate part of promoting the perfection of others (JN I, 848, note)—and making such negative judgments public. He maintains that there is no right to make imperfections public that would contribute to others’ being held in contempt, except for situations in which one’s own rights or natural liberty is impaired (JN I, § 828).

To support this claim, he offers the following chain of reasoning: True contempt leads to sadness (JN I, § 829) since it involves true negative judgment (PE § 775), and sadness arises out of the opinion concerning a present evil (PE § 625). This understanding of sadness corresponds to common usage since “no one does not infer from the sadness of another that something bad happened to this person” (PE § 625, note).[[24]](#footnote-24) Sadness belongs to the affects that displease (PE § 542); hence, true contempt triggers hate against the one who causes such an unpleasant experience (PE § 674), where hate is analyzed as a disposition to feel pleasure about the unhappiness of another person (PE § 661)—another instance of common usage (PE § 678). Finally, hate leads to hostility (PE § 626), which clashes with the natural duty to avoid hostility that derives from the natural society among all humans (JN VII, § 146). Abstaining from expressing true negative judgments about others, except where one’s own rights and liberties are at risk (JN I, § 854), thus provides an antidote against conflicts arising from impairing the self-esteem of others.

But abstaining in such cases from publicly expressing true negative judgments is not only a means for preventing conflict; it is also a sign for respecting the natural liberty that all humans have by nature (JN I, §§ 144-146). As he argues, natural liberty demands that one leave it to the conscience of others what they decide to do (JN I, § 157). If others do not violate our rights and liberties, then we do not have a right to demand from others that they give a reason for why they are acting in the way they do (JN I, § 158). Wolff argues that this is a common notion, even though those who write about natural law usually do not pay attention to it (JN I, § 854, note). That the nature of liberty is accurately described in this way is suggested by the conscience of competent persons and shown by how they respond when they are asked to justify actions that they take to be innocuous: “I do what pleases me. I am not held to give you reason for why I do it. Who has made you my judge? It is not up to you to give orders to me. In this way all are speaking, in order to refuse negative judgments about themselves, no matter whether they are true or not” (JN I, § 854, note).[[25]](#footnote-25) Wolff draws the conclusion that natural liberty involves a right to demand that (unless their rights and liberties are at risk) others abstain from publicly expressing negative judgments, even if they are true (JN I, § 855).

4. Presumptions and Duties of Esteem

Wolff did not overlook how demanding duties of esteem toward others are seen from a cognitive point of view. Unlike in the case of true negative judgments, in many other cases it is not definitively decidable whether or not someone possess certain good personal qualities. A conceptual framework that goes beyond common notions is required to explain what realizing the duties of perfecting oneself and others demands in such situations. As it turns out, the notion of presumption offers the clue for Wolff’s account of how duties of esteem toward others can be implemented in situations in which we are uncertain about their estimable qualities.

Wolff prepares his readers for this argumentative step by noting that esteeming others relative to the degree of their perfections is opposed to the widespread rashness in judging others (PM V, § 477 note). But even where rashness is avoided, one has to rely on signs that, at best, can confer some probability on our judgment (PM V, § 478). Wolff gives a number of examples for such signs that indicate the presence of virtues or vices. For instance, as to signs for virtues, abstaining from causing unpleasant experiences to an offender is a sign for the readiness to forgive the offence (PM V, § 281); the easiness of forgiving is a sign for the readiness for reconciliation (PM V, § 302); the same holds for receiving someone who seeks reconciliation with joy (PM V, § 310). Wishing to make a benefactor happy is a sign of gratitude (PM V, § 440), and the same holds for the feeling of love, the experience of commiseration and the wish to liberate the benefactor from misery (PM V, § 441). Conversely, the futile attempt to defend one’s own reputation by using vulgar insults against detractors is a sign of a deficit with respect to the ability to moderate rage and to abstain from the desire of taking revenge (PM V, § 274). Still, the signs in question are never unambiguous (PM V, § 478, note); this is why Wolff invokes the idea that what is needed, in addition to the interpretation of signs, are presumptions in favor of the good personal qualities of others: “But since one has to acquiesce in probabilities, if there is some necessity of honoring or praising someone, one should stand by presumptions, as long as the truth is not obvious …” (PM V, § 478).

Again, some context will be helpful to make clear what is distinctive about Wolff’s proposal. Among the adherents of an ethical concept of esteem in the early German Enlightenment, there was no consensus about the question of whether, in the absence of decisive evidence, there is a duty of presuming that individuals possess estimable personal qualities. For instance, a dissertation about the presumption of goodness supervised by Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) gives a negative answer: “Everyone … is presumed to be bad until he has given the proof of the contrary through what he achieved in life, or through a truly virtuous life.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Wolff’s own attitude toward the ethical conception of esteem differs from the distrustful attitude propagated in this dissertation. As Wolff explains, forming presumptions about the personal qualities of others requires experienced persons who have a clear understanding of the relevant perfections, who apply diligence in collecting information about the case at hand, who do not let themselves succumb to the temptation of presuming that the other has achieved what he wanted to achieve, and who are determined not to let themselves be guided by their emotions (PM V, § 478, note). What is more, Wolff’s non-competitive, cooperative conception of duties of esteem leads him to the view that the relevant presumptions always have to be formed *in favor* of virtuous qualities of others. As he puts it, “the external action must be presumed to have been motivated by virtue, until the contrary has been proven” (PM V, § 478, note).[[27]](#footnote-27) Or again, “in matters of civil law, attention is paid only to the external action; in moral matters also the right will is required, which is presumed as long as the contrary is proven” (PM V, § 576, note).[[28]](#footnote-28)

Clearly, this presumption differs from the presumption that someone has not violated the law unless there is contrary evidence—the presumption that underlies the legal concept of being held in good esteem in the sense of being in the possession of full civil rights. Rather, it relates to the quality of the will that, in others, can be gathered only through external signs. In this sense, the presumption at hand relates to the ethical concept of esteem as a judgment about personal qualities. Wolff, however, says precious little about what should make such a presumption rational. Certainly, from the perspective of the dissertation supervised by Thomasius, one could object that the presumption could be regarded as being irrational when it comes to prudence. After all, it may be prudent to anticipate the bad will of others even if there are no decisive signs of their bad will. However, plausibly Wolff is so brief about this point because he uses a well-entrenched argumentative figure.

To see this, it will be useful to de-dichotomize the distinction between the legal and the ethical sense of esteem. There is a group of presumptions that clearly relate to personal qualities but at the same time is part of the early modern legal tradition. Andrea Alciato (1492–1550) has formulated rules that are meant to guide the formation of such presumptions. Particularly relevant here are his first and his third rule that regulate the formation of presumption in favor of persons. The first rule discussed by Alciato advises us to presume that “a quality that inheres naturally in a human being is always presumed to be present.”[[29]](#footnote-29) This rule is based on an understanding of what the natural qualities of humans are. Among these qualities are natural emotional reactions,[[30]](#footnote-30) natural rational capacities,[[31]](#footnote-31) and natural-law based rights.[[32]](#footnote-32) The third rule advises us always to prefer the more benign interpretation.[[33]](#footnote-33) For instance, due to this rule, it should not be presumed that someone wants to injure the rights of another but rather to use his own rights.[[34]](#footnote-34) Likewise, everyone is presumed to be good.[[35]](#footnote-35) As Alciato explains, “this is a presumption of nature, since naturally everyone is good.”[[36]](#footnote-36) And for the case that his readers may not be persuaded by this factual claim, he gives a normative turn to the foundations of this presumption: “since [everyone] is obliged to be good, [everyone] can legitimately be presumed to be so.”[[37]](#footnote-37) But also presumptions against persons can be formed on what is natural. For instance, a frequently cited rule has it that “Who has been bad once is presumed to be bad now.”[[38]](#footnote-38) As Alciato makes clear, this applies at least to actions that belong to the same kind of badness.[[39]](#footnote-39) For instance, who has committed perjury once is presumed to commit perjury now—which is why such persons are excluded from giving testimony.[[40]](#footnote-40) Here, consideration concerning the nature of a particular kind of mental dispositions—moral vices—is what gives plausibility to the presumption that someone will succumb to a vice of a different kind in the future. Presumptions formed according to these rules have in common is that they are both ethical (since they concern the moral qualities of persons) and legal (since they form part of juridical argumentation informed by natural law).

What Wolff says about particular presumptions in the fifth part of the *Philosophia Moralis* follows these specific argumentative patterns. For example, Wolff maintains that “[i]n the defense of one’s reputation, one is supposed not to have the intention of injuring the reputation of the person who injures one’s reputation …” (PM V, § 271).[[41]](#footnote-41) He argues that this should be so because it is a precept of natural law not to injure the esteem, honor or reputation of anyone (PM V, § 271; see JN I, § 883). This is an instance of forming a presumption on the basis of what individuals are naturally obliged to do. Conversely, if someone does something that is both contrary to natural law and by itself inept for defending one’s reputation—such as using words that are meant to draw attention to an imperfection in the person of the detractor (PM V, § 273)—then there is a presumption that these words are used with the intention of insulting the detractor (PM V, § 274, note). This can be regarded as an instance of forming a presumption on the basis of the consideration of what is natural for certain words to indicate about mental states. More generally, Wolff invokes the natural function of language to justify the presumption of truthfulness:

Because … speech has been invented that we may be able to signalize to others our thoughts, which is evident by itself; we presume that, as often as we speak with someone else, when no necessity of saying something is imposed upon us, we have the intention of signalizing something to the other that we have in our mind and that we want him to know.[[42]](#footnote-42) (PM V, § 540)

Plausibly, then, Wolff shares with jurists such as Alciato the view that what makes such person-related presumption rational is that the good personal qualities that are ascribed to individuals correspond to human nature, that the bad personal qualities that are ascribed to individual are naturally signified by their behavior, and that all these presumptions can be revised in the light of contrary evidence.

Wolff goes beyond the early modern legal tradition by integrating the presumption of goodness into his account of duties of esteeming others as duties of perfecting others and oneself—that is, the duties that are based on his analysis of common notions. He introduces the presumption of goodness to explain how the virtue of esteeming others as much as they deserve can function in situations in which we have to rely on uncertain signs (PM V, § 478)—that is, in almost all situations. Wolff regards esteeming others as much as they deserve—even if this most frequently takes the form of presumptions—as something that is useful both for others and for ourselves: “The praise through which we express esteem ignites the ardor in progressing further in what is good, reconciles the minds of others with us, and excites the emulation of others” (PM V, § 479, note).[[43]](#footnote-43) Esteeming the good personal qualities of others—even if in a presumptive mode—is thus meant to increase the perfection of those who are esteemed, to increase the perfection of those who take those who are esteemed as role models, and to improve our personal relations with others. If esteeming others as much as they deserve is largely a matter of presumptions, then the presumption of goodness functions as an *enabler* for fulfilling the natural duties of perfecting others and oneself that derive from Wolff’s analysis of the common notion of perfection.

5. Conclusion: Toward a Cooperative Conception of Esteem and Self-Esteem

Wolff’s analysis of duties of esteem and self-esteem offers a fascinating alternative to contemporary accounts that regard esteem and self-esteem essentially as the outcome of quasi-economic mechanisms of competing for a scarce good. To be sure, for its very normative nature, Wolff’s conception of esteem and self-esteem is necessarily comparative and, consequently, leads to differentiated degrees of esteem and self-esteem. This is so because different individuals, due to their different natural capacities, will fare unequally well in fulfilling natural obligations. In this sense, Wolff combines the conception of equal dignity of all humans deriving from their having the same natural rights and obligations with a conception of unequal levels of what he calls “natural esteem.” However, Wolff separates the idea of comparison from the idea of competition. His conception of esteem and self-esteem is radically non-competitive because it derives from the insight that one cannot realize self-perfection on one’s own. The value of being esteemed thus does not derive from a situation in which many individuals compete for a rare good and can achieve what they desire only if they perform above the average. Rather, the value of being esteemed derives from the natural value of the personal qualities for which someone is esteemed. And these qualities can be best developed if all contribute as much as necessary and possible to the perfection of others. This implies that self-esteem can be best enhanced by enhancing the personal qualities for which others are esteemed.

Wolff thus offers a conception of esteem and self-esteem that, in principle, allows for the possibility that everyone can be held in high esteem and develop high self-esteem. This is so because the striving for perfection can be realized only by joining forces to contribute as much to the perfection of others as is needed and as is possible. These mutual duties of perfection involve mutual duties of esteem—duties of esteeming others as much as they deserve (even if the uncertainty of our knowledge concerning the perfection of others makes it advisable to take the attitude of presumption) and duties of contributing as much as possible to other’s deserving esteem (in contrast to deriving satisfaction from diminishing the reputation of others). Fulfilling esteem-related duties enhances social bonds for several reasons: It is meant to recognize the good personal qualities of others; it is meant to trigger the striving for moral and intellectual self-perfection in those who are esteemed; and it presents those who are esteemed as a role model to be imitated by others. And these beneficial effects can be achieved even when the esteem in which others are held is based on presumptions.

What makes such a non-competitive conception of esteem and self-esteem plausible is Wolff’s insight that the cooperative aspects of our striving for self-perfection, as well as the cooperative esteem-related duties deriving from them, are grounded to a significant extent in the analysis of common notions. This holds for his analysis of the notions of intrinsic goodness that derives from his concept of perfection, for his conception of natural obligation, for his conception of natural duties of perfecting oneself and others, for his analysis of esteem-related affects, and for his notions of esteem, reputation and honor. To be sure, the notion of presumption derives from the context of legal argumentation, but Wolff uses it to explain how duties of esteem that derive from our common notions can be implemented in situations of uncertainty. The only point where he suggests a revision of common notions as found in the vernacular is concerning the notion of contempt. But even in this respect, he does not entirely replace an everyday notion with something speculative, but rather narrows the everyday field of meanings down to a notion that fits with other common notions.

In Wolff’s view, an adequate analysis of duties of esteem and self-esteem requires drawing our attention to what we already have in our minds. In this sense, his normative account of esteem and self-esteem is meant to be a piece of common-sensical, non-hypothetical piece of reasoning. If so, then the quasi-economic approaches to esteem and self-esteem may have overlooked aspects of how we value ourselves and others, aspects that are deeply rooted in our everyday intuitions. In one sense, his approach leaves us where we always have been. In another sense, however, drawing out the consequences of what we always knew turns out to be contrary to attitudes deeply entrenched in present-day culture. And this is why thinking about common notions still can be thought-provoking.

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1. This line of argument has been developed in Geoffrey Brennan and Philip Pettit, “Hands Invisible and Intangible.” *Synthese* 94 (1993), pp. 191–225; “The Hidden Economy of Esteem.” *Economics and Philosophy* 16 (2000), pp. 77–98; *The Economy of Esteem: An Essay on Civil and Political Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For an analysis of self-esteem as an empirical, non-normative concept, see Robert Yanal, “Self-Esteem.” *Noûs* 21 (1987), pp. 363–379. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This conceptual distinction has been analyzed in David Sachs, “How to Distinguish Self-Respect from Self-Esteem,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10 (1981), pp. 346–360. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice. A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1985, 274–276 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, translated by Naomi Goldblum, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1974, 244–245. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On these early conceptions of natural law, see Merio Scattola, *Das Naturrecht vor dem Naturrecht. Zur Geschichte des ‘ius naturae’ im 16. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. On de Soto, see Andreas Blank, “Aquinas and Soto on Derogatory Judgment and Noncomparative Justice.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29 (2012): 411–427; Andreas Blank, “Domingo de Soto on Doubts, Presumptions, and Noncomparative Justice.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 32 (2015): 1–18; on Pufendorf, see Kari Saastamoinen, “Pufendorf on Natural Equality, Human Dignity, and Self-Esteem,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (1): 39-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Astonishingly, the importance of the theory of *notiones communes* for Wolff’s metaphilosophy has not found much attention by his commentators. Francis Ruello gives some detailed considerations to the relation between Wolff’s usage of scholastic maxims and the theory of common notions (Francis Ruello, “Wolff et la scholastique,” *Traditio* 19 (1963), pp. 411-425). Common notions are briefly mentioned in Juan Ignacio Gómez Tutor, *Die wissenschaftliche Methode bei Christian Wolff*, Hildesheim: Olms, 2004, pp. 155-156, and in Michael Albrecht’s annotated translation of Wolff’s text in Michael Albrecht and Christian Wolff, “De differentia intellectus systematici & non systematici: Über den Unterschied zwischen dem systematischen und dem nicht-systematischen Verstand.” *Aufklärung* 23 (2011), pp. 229-301, at p. 237 and p. 255, note 13. Reference to common notions is entirely absent from Stefanie Buchenau, “La connaissance des principes moreaux chez Christian Wolff.” *Archives de Philosophie* 65 (2002), pp. 133-149. For an overview of early modern usages of the concept of common notions, see Mogens Laerke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz. Controverses avec Huet, Bayle, Regis et More*, Paris: Garnier, 2015, pp. 138-140, pp. 151-158; for conceptual history, see Johannes Schneider, “Notiones Communes,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* Basel: Schwabe, 1984, vol. 6, pp. 938-940. On the role of common notions in Wolff’s logic and metaphysics, see Andreas Blank, “Metaphilosophie und das Prinzip des Widerspruchs: Leibniz, Wolff und Du Châtelet.” In *Émilie Du Châtelet und die deutsche Aufklärung*. Edited by Ruth Hagengruber and Hartmut Hecht. Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019, 79–98. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “In vernaculo sermone, qui verbis ac phrasibus abundat ad res quasvis apte exprimendas, multo clarius singula patent non modo in omni affectuum doctrina; verum per universam philosophiam, praesertim practicam. Vix enim occurrit aliquis mentis status, cui indigitando non destinetur peculiaris quaedam loquendi formula; qua vulgus saepius rectius utitur eruditis, quorum de phraseologia praejudicia verba a rebus separant, veritate significatus neglecta.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “Notiones communes rerum moralium non ea rectitudine gaudent, ut nihil prorsus erronei iisdem insit. Nostrum vero est, qui eas ad distinctas & determinatas revocamus, ut opinionibus hominum, quibus error adhaeret, in iisdem locum nullum demus.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “Perfectio est consensus in varietate … Consensum vero appello tendentiam ad idem aliquod obtinendum.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “nos obligat ad actiones committendas, qui motivum volitionis cum iisdem connectit …” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “ipsa essentia atque natura hominis rerumque motivum cum actionibus intrinsece bonis atque malis copulavit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Notiones communes vulgo nonnisi confusae sunt, sed earum beneficio actiones bonas & malas in dato casu facile discernunt, & haud raro rectius eruditis, qui praejudiciis occoecati animum ab iis avertunt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “si notiones istae communes colligerentur, & per modum axiomatum sumerentur, posse ex iis elementa philosophiae moralis domonstrari & hoc modo eandem ad notiones communes reduci …” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “totum humanum genus arctissimo vinculo colligatur, ut homo unus prodesse possit ceteris & unus indigeat alterius auxilio …” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Gottfried Achenwall and Johann Stephan Pütter, *Elementa Iuris Naturae*, Göttingen: Sumptibus Bibliopolii Academici, 1750, §§ 96-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See *Digest*, 50.13.5.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For detailed discussion, see Joachim Hruschka, “Existimatio: Unbescholtenheit und Achtung vor dem Nebenmenschen bei Kant und in der Kant vorangehenden Naturrechtslehre,” *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik* 8 (2000), pp. 181-195. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm. *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. 32 vols. Trier: Universität Trier, 2004, vol. 14, pp. 2127-2136. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For a detailed argument, see Richard H. McAdams, “Conformity to Inegalitarian Conventions and Norms: The Contribution of Coordination and Esteem,” *The Monist* 88 (2), 238-259, esp. pp. 252-256. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “certum est Criticos ea in re ultra vulgus non sapere potuisse, consequenter nonnisi notiones communes, quibus communis vocabulorum significatus constat (§. 139. *Log*.), habuisse.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “Nemo non ex tristitia alterius colligit, accidisse ipsi quidpiam mali …” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “Facio, quod lubet. Non teneor tibi rationem reddere, cur faciam. Quid te constituit judicem meum? Tuum non est mihi imperare. Ita loquuntur omnes, ut sinistra aliorum de se judicia amoliantur, nullo attento discrimine, utrum vera sint, nec ne.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Christian Thomasius [praeses] & Jakob Friedrich Ludovici [respondens], *Dissertatio de praesumtione bonitatis*, Halle: Salfeld, 1700, § 11: “Quilibet … tamdiu malus praesumitur, donec fructibus vitae suae, seu vita vere virtuosa, contrarium probatum dederit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “actum externum ex virtute profectum praesumi debere, donec contrarium fuerit demonstratum …” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. “in civilibus tantummodo attenditur actio externa; in moralibus autem recta quoque requiritur voluntas, quae tam diu praesumitur, donec probetur contrarium.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Alciato, *De Praesumptionibus*, p. 34: “qualitas quae naturaliter inest homini, semper adesse praesumitur.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., pp. 34–42; 65–71; 103–108. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid., p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., pp. 45–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., p. 237: “semper fit praesumptio in meliorem partem.” [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., p. 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., p. 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid.: “ista est praesumptio naturae, quia naturaliter quilibet est bonus.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., p. 245: “cum debeat esse bonus, merito debet etiam praesumi.” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. “In defensione famae non supponitur animus injuriandi eam laedentis …” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “Quoniam … sermo est inventus, ut alteri cogitationes nostras significare possimus, quod per se patet; quotiescunque cum altero loquimur, quando nulla loquendi necessitas nobis imposita, animum habemus alteri aliquid significandi, quod mente tenemus, & ipsum nosse velle praesumimus.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. “Laus vero, qua existimationem declaramus, incendit ardorem in bono ulterius progrediendi & animos aliorum nobis conciliat, aliorumque aemulationem excitat.” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)