

“Samuel Pufendorf on Esteem: From the State of Nature to Civil Society”

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The view that the desire for esteem is a powerful motivating force of moral action has been prominent in early modern philosophy and has been recently revived in Geoffrey Brennan's and Philip Pettit's conception of a 'moral economy of esteem'. Such approaches to moral motivation have to struggle with three difficulties, though: (1) How can the desire for esteem lead beyond a merely conventional form of morality? (2) How can the desire for esteem be operative in situations of oppression? (3) How can the desire for esteem be operative in situations of secrecy? In the present paper, I will argue that Samuel Pufendorf's natural-law based conception of justified esteem may give hints at how these difficulties could be handled. In particular, he maintains that in the state of nature, esteem should be bound to the fulfilment of natural duties, and that natural law puts limits on the permissible ways in which civil society can manipulate the norms of esteem.