

Francis Hutcheson and John Clarke on Desire and Self-Interest

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Abstract: Among the most animating debates in eighteenth-century British ethics was the debate over psychological egoism, the view that our most basic desires are self-interested. An important episode in that debate, less well known than it should be, was the exchange between Francis Hutcheson and John Clarke of Hull. In the early editions of his *Inquiry into Virtue*, Hutcheson argued ingeniously against psychological egoism; in his *Foundation of Morality*, Clarke argued ingeniously against Hutcheson's arguments. Later, Hutcheson attempted new arguments against psychological egoism, designed to overcome Clarke's objections. This article examines the exchange between these philosophers. Its conclusion, influenced partly by Clarke, is that psychological egoism withstands Hutcheson's arguments. This is not to belittle those arguments—indeed, they are among the most resourceful and plausible of their kind. The fact that egoism withstands them is thus not a mere negative result, but a stimulus to consider carefully the ways in which progress in this area may be possible.

1. Introduction

Is every desire fundamentally self-interested? That is, does every desire aim, ultimately if not directly, solely at the agent's *own* happiness, her *own* survival, or some other benefit to herself? My subject is Francis Hutcheson's (1694–1746) contribution to this issue—specifically, his main arguments for the view that not all desires are basically self-interested.¹ The chief critic of these arguments, John Clarke of Hull (1687–1734), receives attention as well. I discuss his objections to several of Hutcheson's arguments.²

Let me say up front that I find Hutcheson's arguments unsuccessful. This is not to say that his thesis is implausible—indeed, not only do many find it compelling on its face, but some contemporary social scientists claim abundant empirical support for it.³ Nor is it to say that his arguments lack force against

¹ The main sources for these arguments are Hutcheson's *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good* (hereafter *Inquiry into Virtue*), which is one of the two essays in Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (hereafter *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*); and Hutcheson's *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions* (hereafter *Essay on the Passions*), which is one of the two essays in Hutcheson's *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (hereafter *Essay and Illustrations*).

² These objections are in Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, the overall purpose of which is to refute the moral theories of Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) and Hutcheson.

³ Perhaps the most prominent of these scientists is C. Daniel Batson. In many articles (e.g., “Testing the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis”) and in two books (*The Altruism Question* and *Altruism in Humans*) he not only denies that all desires are fundamentally self-interested, but contends, on the basis of extensive empirical research, that some desires are fundamentally altruistic. The bibliography in Batson's *Altruism*

every view that might go under the name “egoism.”⁴ It is simply to say that they do not refute their main target: the form of egoism which says that at the most basic level, we desire nothing but benefits to ourselves.

Even so, Hutcheson’s arguments deserve attention. For one thing, they are among the most ingenious and suggestive arguments of their kind; for another, they are important historically, for the question they address—whether every desire is basically self-interested—was one of the most animating issues in eighteenth-century British ethics.⁵ Also, despite their importance, Hutcheson’s arguments are not widely known; the same goes for Clarke’s objections.

Two further points deserve note. First, unlike most treatments of this subject, the following one gives substantial attention to John Clarke, one of the least studied of the British moralists.⁶ By revealing the force of some of Clarke’s arguments I hope to raise interest in this underappreciated philosopher. Second, in those quarters where Hutcheson’s case against egoism is known, a common view is that it succeeds impressively.⁷ The following study is of interest partly because it deviates from this view.

in Humans is a goldmine of research on altruism. Another valuable source is Stich, Doris, and Roedder, “Altruism.”

⁴ I say more about this in section 3.1.1.

⁵ See Darwall, “Egoism and Morality”; Maurer, “Self-Interest and Sociability.” At the time Hutcheson entered the debate over the issue, the arguments of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), which painted (or appeared to paint) human nature as selfish and amoral, were central to the controversy. (Important too were various Christian sources. See Mautner, “Introduction,” 8–14, 35–42.) Lord Shaftesbury (1671–1713) was their main critic, defending the reality of benevolence and a positive view of human nature. Hutcheson entered the debate on the side of Shaftesbury and against Mandeville, as he made clear on the title page of the first edition of his *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue* (Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, xiii, 199).

⁶ Only two other treatments give Clarke substantial attention. The first is Robert Stewart’s important paper, “John Clarke and Francis Hutcheson on Self-Love and Moral Motivation.” On the subjects that Stewart and I both address, our ultimate conclusions are similar. However, because Stewart’s project is topically much broader than mine, covering such things as Clarke’s overall moral theory, Clarke’s *a priori* defense of hedonism, and Hutcheson’s case for the existence of the moral sense, it devotes much less space and detail than mine to Hutcheson’s arguments against egoism. And because its selection of Hutcheson’s arguments differs from mine, it does not discuss what I call Hutcheson’s *garden argument*, *good-and-bad-character argument*, and *extended-benevolence arguments*, all of which I examine. Another difference between my paper and Stewart’s lies in my historical approach: I examine in order Hutcheson’s early case against egoism (and Clarke’s replies) and then his later case to see if it improves on the early one.

Also important is Luigi Turco’s “Sympathy and Moral Sense,” the second treatment that gives Clarke substantial attention. Its third section (82–89) traces the influence of Clarke’s objections on the “deletions, additions and substitutions” Hutcheson made in the third edition of the *Inquiry into Virtue* and on “the strategy adopted by Hutcheson” in the first three sections of the *Essay on the Passions*. Because Turco’s paper focuses on matters historical and textual, it differs greatly from mine. For instance, it need not, and does not, contain a substantial selection or analysis of Hutcheson’s objections to egoism. Nor does it take (or need to take) a stand on whether those objections ultimately succeed.

Further useful sources are Jensen, *Motivation and the Moral Sense*, 14–19; Strasser, *Francis Hutcheson’s Moral Theory*, chap. 4; Mautner, “Introduction,” 31–47, 71–74; Gill, *British Moralists*, 141–50; and Maurer, “Self-Interest and Sociability,” 298–99, 301–2. These authors do not go into the detail I do (at least not on particular arguments), and except for Strasser and Maurer they say little or nothing about Clarke’s objections.

⁷ See Lecky, *History of European Morals*, 1: 20; Garnett, “Good Reasons in Ethics,” 357; Jensen,

Francis Hutcheson is widely familiar, even if his objections to egoism are not. He was a leading figure in the Scottish Enlightenment, especially well known for his theory of the moral sense. John Clarke, as just indicated, is not widely familiar. He was not only a philosopher but also a classical scholar, educational reformer, and, for many years, master of the Hull grammar school. Although his philosophical influence is largely forgotten, it was not negligible in its time. As I observe later in this article, Clarke greatly influenced the development of Hutcheson's case against egoistic views of behavior. Also, Clarke's potent objections to the moral rationalism of William Wollaston (1659–1724) contributed significantly to the downfall of that theory among eighteenth-century philosophers.⁸ For instance, Clarke's objections influenced David Hume's (1711–1776) later, more famous criticisms of Wollaston's position.⁹ And I suspect that Clarke's astute objections to Samuel Clarke's moral rationalism had a similar influence.¹⁰

In his own moral theory, which he never set out systematically, John Clarke tried to harmonize ethical egoism, theological volunteerism, and a concern for the general good, arguing that at bottom they favor the same conduct.¹¹ The important element for our purposes is one of his premises: that people are actuated, ultimately, by nothing but self-interest.¹²

2. Hutcheson's Disagreement with Clarke

Before I discuss Hutcheson's arguments let me say more about his disagreement with Clarke. Here I mean only the disagreement on which I focus, which concerns the view nowadays called *psychological egoism* (hereafter *egoism*).¹³ According to egoism, every fundamental human desire aims solely at a self-benefit. By a self-benefit I mean a personal benefit to the agent (the person who has the desire), such as the agent's *own* health, pleasure, or survival. By a fundamental desire I mean a desire we possess insofar as we want something

Motivation and the Moral Sense, 34; Gill, *British Moralists*, 145; and Filonowicz, *Fellow-Feeling and the Moral Life*, 113. These estimations of Hutcheson's arguments contain nothing that challenges my objections to his arguments. For instance, they do not mention Clarke's objections, reconstructions of which I endorse in section 3. (Possibly, the general inattention to Clarke's objections does much to explain the positive estimations Hutcheson's arguments receive.)

⁸ Clarke, *Examination of Moral Good and Evil*; Tilley, "Wollaston's Early Critics," sec. 3.

⁹ Hume, *Treatise*, 461–62 n. 1; Tilley, "Wollaston's Early Critics," esp. 1100 n. 13.

¹⁰ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 3–40; Clarke, *Examination Relating to Moral Obligation*.

¹¹ Clarke's moral theory is evident from his critical works, esp. Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 8–25, 31–32, 35–38, 39–40, 49, 64, 69–70, 105–6. In the mid-1720s Clarke had plans to write a systematic work on moral theory, but that work never appeared. On this see Clarke, *Examination of Moral Good and Evil*, 62–63; Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 104. For a helpful summary of several of Clarke's philosophical tenets, see Stewart, "Clarke and Hutcheson," 264.

¹² Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 15, 25–27, 53–57.

¹³ Some of Hutcheson's other disagreements with Clarke receive attention in Stewart, "Clarke and Hutcheson," and Turco, "Sympathy and Moral Sense." Two valuable general discussions of egoism are May, "Psychological Egoism," and Sober, "Psychological Egoism."

for its own sake, not simply as a means to something else. Suppose I want to take aspirin because I want to relieve my pain. But suppose I want to relieve my pain for no further reason—I simply want relief from pain. Then the latter desire, my desire for relief from pain, is a *fundamental* desire. My desire to take aspirin, by contrast, is a *nonfundamental*, or *subordinate* desire. Its object is something I want not for its own sake, but because it will serve one of my other ends. In short, its *direct* aim or object (the consumption of aspirin) is not its *ultimate* aim or object (relief from pain).

Given what egoism asserts, a convenient way to put it is to say that every human desire is *fundamentally self-interested*. The latter term indicates that the desire aims, ultimately if not directly, solely at a self-benefit.

Hutcheson opposes egoism for at least two reasons. First, he believes that actions are virtuous if and only if they spring from benevolence—that is, from desires that aim ultimately at the good (happiness, well-being) of others.¹⁴ Hence, were he to accept egoism he would imply, absurdly in his view, that virtuous deeds never occur. Second, Hutcheson believes that moral philosophers should strive not merely to understand morality but to encourage virtuous conduct.¹⁵ This involves, in part, presenting such conduct as possible, which requires showing, Hutcheson believes, that we are capable of genuine benevolence. Hutcheson thinks that because egoism is the most feasible source of objections to the reality of benevolence, to refute egoism is to go a long way toward showing that benevolence, and hence virtue, is no fiction.¹⁶

John Clarke seeks to refute Hutcheson's case against egoism. Clarke holds a form of egoism called *psychological hedonism* (hereafter *hedonism*), which asserts that every fundamental human desire aims, not at just any self-benefit, but solely at the agent's own pleasure, understood to include the absence of pain.¹⁷

Clarke and Hutcheson's debate over egoism divides into three phases. The first consists of Hutcheson's initial attempts to refute egoism. These are in the second section of the first (and second) edition of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue* (1725). The next phase consists of Clarke's response to those attempts, which occurs in Clarke's *Foundation of Morality* (1726). The third phase consists of Hutcheson's effort to overcome Clarke's response—that is, to

¹⁴ See, e.g., Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 116, 132, 152, 224, 229; Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 24–25, 27, 82.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 179; Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 3–5. See also Mautner, "Introduction," 31–33; and Gill, *British Moralists*, 201–3, 309–14.

¹⁶ This is evident from the second section of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue* (Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 101–15), where his case against egoism is the main component of his case for the existence of benevolence. See also Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 6.

¹⁷ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 25–27, 53–57, 63–64; Clarke, *Examination Relating to Moral Obligation*, 36–37; Clarke, *Examination of Moral Good and Evil*, 46–47. Clarke does not always use the word "pleasure" when stating his thesis. He often uses "happiness," "satisfaction," "enjoyment," or other terms. But he seems to regard them as synonyms of "pleasure" or, in some cases, references to species of pleasure.

produce arguments against egoism that avoid Clarke's objections. This effort is in the third (and fourth) edition of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue* (1729), which contains a substantially revised second section. It is also in the first section of Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions* (1728), particularly in its third and fourth articles.

Although I cannot cover this debate in full, I cover important parts of it. These include what I see as Hutcheson's strongest contributions to it. In the next section I discuss five arguments from Hutcheson's initial case against egoism, together with Clarke's objections to them. In section 4 I examine two of Hutcheson's later arguments (and discuss two more in passing).

3. Hutcheson's Initial Case Against Egoism

In the first two editions of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue* the second section divides into eleven numbered articles. The final six contain the bulk of Hutcheson's initial case against egoism. In covering this material I examine what I call the *bribery argument*, the *garden argument*, the *good-and-bad-character argument*, and the pair of arguments that I call the *extended-benevolence arguments*. The bribery argument consumes most of my effort. My treatment of it enables a briefer treatment of the other four arguments.

3.1. Hutcheson's Bribery Argument

Hutcheson states the bribery argument as follows:

But let us here examine our selves more narrowly. Do we only love the Beneficent, because it is our Interest to love them? Or [in other words] do we chuse to love them, because our love is the means of procuring their Bounty? If it be so, then we could indifferently love any Character, even to obtain the Bounty of a third Person; or we could be brib'd by a third Person to love the greatest Villain heartily, as we may be brib'd to external Offices: Now this is plainly impossible.¹⁸

The central idea here is that if our love for "the beneficent," meaning those who have been generous to us in the way of money, material goods and the like, arose only from self-interest, we could be bribed into loving a great villain, which is impossible. We can set out the argument in three steps:

1. If our love for those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested, then if we thought that by loving a terrible villain we could receive goods (money, material things and the like) that appreciably benefit us, we would love that villain.¹⁹

¹⁸ Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 107.

¹⁹ The word "appreciably" is important. Premise 1 is not suggesting, implausibly, that love for the villain can be elicited through an offer of a few pennies. Note the word "bounty" in the quotation.

2. Even if we thought that by loving a terrible villain we could receive goods that appreciably benefit us, we would not love that villain. Genuine love cannot be elicited through a bribe.
3. Therefore, it is not true that our love for those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested.

John Clarke has three objections to this argument. Unfortunately, Clarke is often wordy and redundant; so the structure of his objections, as well as the fact that they divide into three, may not stand out in his text. All the same, his objections have force. To show this I will not only reconstruct them, but at certain points revise the bribery argument in light of them. When the revisions are complete it will be evident that egoism withstands the bribery argument.

3.1.1. Clarke's first objection to Hutcheson's bribery argument

Clarke's first objection is in the following passage:

Benevolence ... a Disposition to do Good to others ... is ... [what] our Author either is, or should be, I am sure, talking of here. And this we must have a Care of confounding ... with ... Complacency or Delight in the Good of others. ... The Kindness of others towards us makes us think of them with Pleasure, think of their being Happy with Complacency and Satisfaction. ... This Perception of Delight, this Complacency in thinking upon a Benefactor and his Welfare ... is disinterested, as certainly as the Perception of Pleasure in the Smell of a Rose. ... Benevolence ... [is] very distinct from ... Complacency. Which, however in a loose and popular Way of speaking, they may be confounded under the common Name of Love, yet in a philosophical Discourse ... [they] ought carefully to be distinguished: which if our Author had done, he would not have fallen into the Mistake, which I apprehend he has.²⁰

Clarke's objection can be put as follows. First, in the bribery argument what does the word "love" mean? The question is not what Hutcheson may intend by it, but what it must mean if his argument is to challenge egoism. Does it denote a *feeling*, such as the pleasant "complacency" we feel in seeing generous people happy? Or does it instead denote a *desire*, the content of which invites the label "love"? The answer is that it denotes a desire, presumably a *desire to help* those who have been generous to us.²¹ By that I mean a desire to contribute to their happiness—or, to use Clarke's language, "a Disposition to do Good to" those people.²² (A second possibility, which for Clarke's purposes differs immateri-

²⁰ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 79–80.

²¹ Either that, or it denotes a *composite* psychological state, one part of which is a desire of the sort just mentioned. This point does not affect the essence of Clarke's objection.

²² Clarke often uses the word "disposition" (or "inclination") in his replies to Hutcheson's arguments. I take him to be using it synonymously with "desire." This is partly because Hutcheson defines self-love and benevolence in terms of desires (e.g., in Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 102, 104); hence,

ally from the first, would be a desire simply for the happiness of those people.) The reason for this is that although complacency and similar feelings arise independently of self-interest, that fact is no threat to egoism. Egoism, as Hutcheson knows, is about desires, not about feelings.²³

Let me pause for an important point. I agree with Clarke (and Hutcheson) that complacency and similar feelings arise independently of self-interest. I further agree that that fact is no threat to egoism. Even so, it is an important fact. Consider the view that any psychological state or tendency—for instance, any feeling, sentiment, or urge—that somehow contributes to benefiting others arises solely from self-interest. We sometimes meet people who hold this view, and who use “egoism” broadly enough to include it. Thus, Hutcheson’s bribery argument is valuable. By highlighting the fact that feelings of complacency cannot be produced by the prospect of self-benefits, it refutes the “egoism” just mentioned.

However, to refute that view is not to refute the more common egoism that specifically concerns desires (psychological egoism). That brand of egoism, as Hutcheson knows, retains its importance. For one thing, it implies that on some accounts of virtuous deeds, including Hutcheson’s, such deeds never occur.

So let us return to the point that to make the bribery argument target egoism, meaning psychological egoism, we must read “love for those who have been generous to us” to denote a desire to help those people. (As Clarke would say, such a desire “is ... [what] our Author either is, or should be, ... talking of here.”) That is, in the bribery argument let us replace such terms as “love for” and “loving” with “desire to help,” “desiring to help,” and so on. Premise 1 then becomes this:

- 1'. If our desire to help those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested, then if we thought that by desiring to help a terrible villain we could receive goods (money, material things and the like) that appreciably benefit us, we would desire to help that villain.

In sum, the gist of Clarke’s first objection is that owing to the word “love,” the bribery argument’s first premise is ambiguous, and that to read it properly (so that the argument does not bypass egoism) we must read it as 1'. This objection does not by itself refute egoism. Nor does it purport to; rather, it serves as a preliminary to Clarke’s second objection.

Before proceeding to his second objection, however, let us consider a possible reply to his first one. The reply points out that in that objection, Clarke

Clarke would often be talking past Hutcheson, rather than engaging him, if by “disposition” he did not mean “desire.”

²³ That Hutcheson knows this, and that egoism as thus understood is the main target of his objections, is evident from many passages. See Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 6, 22–23, 134; and Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 102, 222 n.11, 223–25, 228, 229, 232 n. 77.

grants that complacency, a pleasure derived from witnessing the happiness of generous people, arises independently of self-interest. If complacency does that, then is it not plausible that we not only desire, but fundamentally desire, the happiness of those generous people? This fundamental desire would explain *why* we feel complacency even when we expect no further money, material goods, and so on from those people. The explanation is that complacency is a pleasure that arises upon the fulfillment of our desire for those people's happiness. Since that desire is fundamental, subordinate to no further desire for money, gifts, and so forth, the pleasure related to it depends on no prospect of money or the like. This explanation (the reply continues) has more *prima facie* plausibility than any explanation the egoist might give, and hence tilts the scales in favor of non-egoism.

The problem with this reply is in its last sentence. Many egoists will claim, as Clarke does, that owing to our nature we receive an immediate pleasure from knowing of the happiness of those who are generous. This pleasure requires no antecedent desire-fulfillment.²⁴ This claim is not *ad hoc*; many people, including Clarke, find it compelling upon introspection.²⁵ Nor is it any less plausible, *prima facie*, than the explanation of complacency in the above reply. Proponents of that explanation think that nature makes us directly *desire* the happiness of certain people, and thus receive pleasure from seeing them happy. Why is it any less plausible, *prima facie*, that nature makes us directly *receive pleasure* from the happiness of certain people, and thus desire to make them happy? We cannot break the tie between these hypotheses at the *prima facie* or introspective level. Further considerations must come into play, perhaps from social psychology or evolutionary theory. (In fact, such considerations do come into play from those fields. See note 26.) But these would not support the present reply to Clarke's objection. Instead, they would take us well beyond it. Likewise, they would take us well beyond the bribery argument.²⁶

3.1.2. Clarke's second objection to Hutcheson's bribery argument

Recall that Clarke's first objection to the bribery argument led us to revise premise 1 thus:

²⁴ For instance, Clarke likens the pleasure we take in the happiness of generous people to the pleasure caused by the smell of a rose, which depends on no prior fulfillment of a desire. See Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 79–80. See also Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 56–58, 80–81; and note 25, below.

²⁵ That Clarke does so is evident in several passages, including Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 102–3. There Clarke contends that it is “clear as Sun-shine” that the pleasure we take in the happiness of our children is antecedent to our desire for their happiness, and not vice versa. No doubt when Clarke enters his breast things really appear to him this way, “clear as sunshine.” And no doubt they appear to him the same way regarding the pleasure we take in the happiness of those who are generous.

²⁶ To provide such considerations, and to argue that they break the tie in favor of non-egoism, is an aim of much contemporary research, including Batson's empirical research and the evolutionary arguments of Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson. And this research indeed takes us well beyond the bribery argument. See Batson, *Altruism in Humans*; Batson, “Testing the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis”; and Sober and Wilson, *Unto Others*.

- 1'. If our desire to help those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested, then if we thought that by desiring to help a terrible villain we could receive goods (money, material things and the like) that appreciably benefit us, we would desire to help that villain.

Clarke's second objection, in essence, is that premise 1' is false.²⁷ He explains this as follows:

*Do we choose to love them [those who have been generous to us] ... because our Love is the Means of procuring their Bounty? ... is, I think, a very strange Question, wherein Love [our desire to help those who have been generous to us] is confounded with its Effects, or benevolent Actions. And because the latter are Matter of Choice, the former is supposed to be so too; or at least this Supposition is put upon the Objectors [egoists], as an Absurdity their Objection implies; which yet, 'tis visible, it does not; for a Man may maintain that Love rises from Views of Interest ... without being obliged ... to suppose or hold Love to be the Matter of Choice. ... Love being an invisible Disposition of the Mind, is a Means to procure nothing; but outward Actions are.*²⁸

We can put Clarke's point as follows. Suppose, as egoists do, that the antecedent of 1' is true, that our desire to help those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested. What does this mean? No egoist believes, nor is there reason to believe, that it means this: Our desire to help those who have been generous to us stems ultimately from our belief that by *desiring to help* those people we can reap a self-benefit. Rather, what the egoist means by the antecedent of 1'—what any person means by it, if using words in an ordinary way—is this: Our desire to help those who have been generous to us stems ultimately from our belief that by *helping* those people we can reap a self-benefit. To overlook this fact is to commit the error Clarke points out, “wherein Love [*desiring to help ...*] is confounded with its Effects, ... benevolent Actions [*helping ...*].” To put the point more generally, the belief that spawns a subordinate desire to do *x* is not a belief that if we *possessed that desire* we could satisfy one of our more basic desires. Rather, it is a belief that if we *did x* we could satisfy one of those more basic desires.

So the antecedent of 1', properly interpreted, means this: Our desire to help those who have been generous to us stems ultimately from our belief that by *helping* those people we can reap a self-benefit. Since this is its meaning, it does not support this: If we thought that by *desiring to help* a terrible villain we could receive goods that appreciably benefit us, we would desire to help that villain. This proposition, unlike the previous one, contains “desiring to help”

²⁷ I call this Clarke's “second” objection because it is the second of his objections that I cover. Clarke's “third” objection appears in two passages, one of which (Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 81–82) comes slightly before his second objection.

²⁸ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 82–84; see also 84–87.

rather than “helping,” which is why the antecedent of 1' does not support it. But to say that the antecedent of 1' does not support it is to say that 1' is false, that the antecedent of 1', interpreted properly, does not support the consequent.

Let us revise 1' to overcome this problem. First, note that although the antecedent of 1', interpreted properly, does not support the proposition just discussed, it supports this one: If we thought that by *helping* a terrible villain we could receive goods that appreciably benefit us, we would desire to help that villain. At least, it supports this proposition if, through a small addition, we indicate that we regard the act in question, that of helping the villain, as convenient for us, meaning conveniently available and of little difficulty. So let us revise 1' as follows:

- 1''. If our desire to help those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested, then if we thought, first, that by helping a terrible villain we could receive goods (money, material things and the like) that appreciably benefit us, and second, that the act of helping the villain is convenient for us, we would desire to help that villain.

But now, to preserve the validity of the bribery argument, we must revise premise 2 to say this:

- 2'. Even if we thought, first, that by helping a terrible villain we could receive goods that appreciably benefit us, and second, that the act of helping the villain is convenient for us, we would not desire to help that villain.

At this point we can see that Clarke's first two objections have force. They do so because they require us to replace 2 with 2', and 2' is disputable. The egoist (and others) can plausibly reject it. Are there really people who, if they had the beliefs 2' describes, would have *no* desire, not even a very weak, easily defeasible one, to help the villain? Even if the villain were Ted Bundy or an equally sadistic serial killer, would they lack even an *infinitesimal, easily-overridable* desire to help him? Perhaps they would have no liking or esteem for him, but that is not the question. The question is whether there are people who, even if they thought they could benefit themselves substantially by doing the villain an easy favor, would be *utterly* unmoved to help him even if their self-interested reason or motive, the one furnished by the benefits of helping him, were *completely* unopposed by reasons or motives not to help him.

Arguably, no such people exist. Indeed, Hutcheson himself implies that none exist. An element of his view of motivation is that owing to human nature, if we consider something beneficial to us (or good in just any way), we invariably desire it to some extent.²⁹ Equally important, even if such people exist, they

²⁹ Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis*, 28–29, 44; Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 18, 50, 51. A

are very rare, in which case their existence does not help the bribery argument. That argument succeeds only if it is about a significant portion of the human race, not merely about exceptional cases. Let me give three reasons for this, after which I will return to my main point.

First, Hutcheson's chief point about motivation, the one his objections to egoism subserve, is that real benevolence exists. This he advances as a truth about human nature, and hence about the psychology of ordinary people.³⁰ Thus, in his hands it is about the vast majority of people.

Second, and more important, if the bribery argument were about the desire to help those who have been generous to us only as that desire occurs in a few of us, it could not achieve one of Hutcheson's aims. That aim is to dissuade us from thinking that efforts to cultivate virtue—that is, to cultivate desires aimed ultimately at benefiting others—are futile, that they are bound to fail because humans are basically self-interested.³¹ To achieve this aim the argument must refute not only egoism itself but the egoist's natural fallback position, according to which the fundamental desires of any *ordinary* person, even if not of *any* person, are self-interested.³² The gist of this position is that being fundamentally self-interested is a bit like having an adult height of more than three feet: Although we can find people who lack this property, every normally constituted person, and thus nearly every person, possesses it. If egoism discourages efforts to cultivate virtue, this fallback position does so as well. For it implies that the vast majority of us, including, presumably, the vast majority of Hutcheson's readers, are incapable of desires that aim ultimately at the good of others. And of course this fallback position is untouched by the claim that a *few* people have (or are capable of having) desires of that kind. To refute it one must show that a *great many* people have such desires.

Third, no objection to egoism succeeds, at least not in a full-blooded sense, unless it refutes not only egoism itself but the egoist's fallback position. For the most important implications of egoism are carried also by the fallback position. I gave an example in the preceding paragraph; let me give another. Egoism implies that insofar as people are instrumentally rational, moral arguments

qualification: if the thing in question has already been (or is sure to be) attained, done, or brought into existence, our automatic response to it, Hutcheson thinks, is not to desire it but to feel "joy" over it. See Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis*, 28–29; Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 49–51.

³⁰ See Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 104, 112, 113, 160, 179, 229, 244; Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 6, 25, 28, 37, 39, 64, 67, 83, 130, 188.

³¹ Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 3–5; Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 179.

³² Although this is indeed a natural fallback position for most egoists, some egoists would not see it as such. Here I mean *agency egoists*, egoists who hold that it is a necessary fact about genuine agency that every fundamental desire is self-interested. (The term "agency egoism" comes from Darwall, "Egoism and Morality," 384. My use of it differs slightly—but only slightly—from his.) But this is a small point; the important point is that to serve Hutcheson's aims, the bribery argument must succeed not just against agency egoism but against psychological egoism in general, the most common version of which takes it to be an empirical fact about human psychology, not a necessary fact about agency, that our desires are fundamentally self-interested. No argument fully succeeds against that version unless it refutes what I call the fallback position.

about, say, alleviating world hunger can produce significant change only if they persuade us (their audience) that alleviating world hunger furthers *our* health, or *our* pleasure, and so on. The egoist's fallback position has this same implication. For if that position is true, the overwhelming majority to whom moral arguments are addressed are bound to be fundamentally self-interested, and hence to be unmoved by arguments unconnected with their own interests.

To return to the main point: If the word "we" in premise 2' denotes either all people or a large portion of them, then 2' is too disputable to make the bribery argument succeed. If, however, the word "we" does not denote one of those groups, then not only is 2' still too disputable, but even if it were true it would concern too few people to make the bribery argument succeed. Thus, by forcing us to replace 2 with 2', Clarke's objections show that egoism withstands the bribery argument.

3.1.3. Clarke's third objection to Hutcheson's bribery argument

Given the force of Clarke's first two objections to the bribery argument, perhaps his third objection is unnecessary. Even so, it is worth examining, for it pertains not just to the bribery argument but to some of Hutcheson's further arguments. It occurs in at least two passages, including this one:

Tho' we should allow our Author's Reasoning to be just, yet it only proves that we cannot love the Beneficent, from the Hopes of procuring their Bounty by it, or rather (to speak more properly) by the outward Expressions of it. But [it] still falls short of what he proposed, which was to shew that our Love of Persons flows not at all from Self-Interest: For if there be an Interest, besides their Bounty, to be obtained, by the Practice of Benevolence, as he himself allows there is, *viz.* a concomitant Pleasure, inseperable from it, tho' no further Bounty be expected, his Argument does not reach it, and the Disposition to Acts of Benevolence may arise from a View to that Pleasure, and so flow from Self-Interest notwithstanding.³³

The point here is that step 1'' of the bribery argument requires revision. To say that a person's desire to help those who have been generous to her is fundamentally self-interested is not to say that her desire stems from her belief that by helping those people she could obtain *goods* (money, material things, and the like) that benefit her. It is to say something more general: that her desire to help those people stems from her belief that by helping them she could reap a self-benefit. This is more general because self-benefits include more than the self-benefits we receive from material goods and the like. For example, they include the pleasure we receive directly from seeing others happy or from making them happy. Clarke and Hutcheson both hold that we receive such pleasure, that it is part of our nature to do so.³⁴ In Clarke's view, when our

³³ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 87–88; see also Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 81–82.

³⁴ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 56–63, 82, 87–88; Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 114, 227; Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 23, 75, 95.

desire for this pleasure is our ultimate motive for helping others, our deeds are “benevolent” in the ordinary sense. But of course those deeds are also self-interested, having arisen from a desire for a species of our own pleasure.³⁵

The upshot is that in 1'' we must replace the phrase “receive goods ... that appreciably benefit us” with the broader phrase “receive appreciable self-benefits.” If we then revise 2' to preserve validity, the resulting premise is this:

2''. Even if we thought, first, that by helping a terrible villain we could receive appreciable self-benefits, and second, that the act of helping the villain is convenient for us, we would not desire to help that villain.

This premise is questionable, perhaps even more so than 2'. Are there really people who, believing that they could receive, say, considerable pleasure by doing a villain an easy favor, would lack even an infinitesimal, easily defeasible, desire to do the favor? More important, are there great numbers of such people? A “yes” answer is far from obvious.

Allow me one more word about the bribery argument.³⁶ It harks back to an earlier, parenthetical remark.³⁷ Suppose that when we first observed the ambiguity of “love for” we had read it to mean, not “desire to help,” but “desire for the happiness of.” Then our later revisions to the argument would have transformed premise 2 not into 2'', but into this: “Even if we thought that the happiness of a terrible villain would somehow appreciably benefit us, we would not desire his happiness.” We can raise essentially the same questions about this premise that we raised about 2' and 2''. And as before, a “yes” answer is far from obvious.

3.2. *Hutcheson's Garden Argument*

Hutcheson's garden argument directly follows his bribery argument:

Is not our Love always the Consequent of Bounty, and not the Means of procuring it? External Shew, Obsequiousness, and Dissimulation may precede an Opinion of Beneficence; but real Love always presupposes it, and shall necessarily arise even when we expect no more, from consideration of past Benefits. Or can any one say he only loves the Beneficent [those who have been generous to us], as he does a

³⁵ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 55–56, 64–65, 67–68, 79.

³⁶ Two actually, one of which is that I can think of an objection to my treatment of the bribery argument. Although not likely enough to warrant discussion in the text, it deserves mention. It asserts that my two revisions of the bribery argument's second premise should have ended not with the phrase “we would not desire to help that villain,” but with something like the following, which makes the premise more plausible: “we would not strongly desire to help that villain” or “we would not desire to help that villain as much as we desire to help those who have been generous to us.” My reply is that to revise the bribery argument this way is to make it closely resemble, in its flaws as well as its content, an argument soon to be addressed: Hutcheson's good-and-bad-character argument.

³⁷ See the text accompanying note 22—or rather the parenthetical sentence following it.

Field or Garden, because of its Advantage? His Love then must cease toward one who has ruin'd himself in kind Offices to him, when he can do him no more.³⁸

The nub of this argument is that although we cease to love a garden when we can no longer receive benefits from it, we do not cease to love a generous friend in similar circumstances. So the second form of love, unlike the first, does not spring solely from self-interest.

We can formulate the argument as follows:

1. If our love for those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested, then if we found that we can no longer receive favors, material benefits, and the like from those who have been generous to us, our love for them would cease.
2. Even if we found that we can no longer receive favors, material benefits, and the like from those who have been generous to us, our love for them would remain. Our love for them differs greatly from our love for a productive garden.
3. Therefore, it is not true that our love for those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested.

Clarke's critique of the garden argument comes not after his critique of the bribery argument, but in two earlier passages. Neither of them quotes or paraphrases the garden argument, but their wording reveals, pretty clearly, that Clarke has that argument in mind.

Benevolence to Friends, or such as have discovered a great Degree of Kindness and Affection for us, ... is ... founded upon Self-Love, and proceeds from it. I do not mean, that it is always or entirely built upon the Views of future Benefits, or further Kindnesses to be received, ... because it is visible, this Disposition of Mind towards a Friend, a hearty Concern for his Welfare, oftentimes continues, when all Prospects of such Advantage from it, are at an End. ... But then the concomitant Pleasure of Gratitude, the Hopes of Applause from Men, or a Reward from God, for a Conduct so agreeable to his Will, visibly support and keep up that Disposition.³⁹

A man, that has not, by indulging himself in the most ill-natur'd Passions, lost all Sense of Humanity, is naturally delighted in the Thought of his Benefactor, and his Happiness, rejoyses to see him pleased, and is naturally disposed to please and oblige him. And tho' this Temper and Disposition of Mind may be thought to proceed from Views of Interest, and the Expectation of further Kindnesses, ... yet

³⁸ Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 107.

³⁹ Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 62–63.

there is a real Pleasure and Delight in his Happiness, entirely separate from, and independent upon any Views or Expectations of that kind.⁴⁰

These remarks resemble Clarke's third objection to the bribery argument. Their main point is that a self-interested desire need not be a desire for such things as favors or material goods. It can be for just any personal benefit.

So Clarke apparently sees the garden argument as open to his third objection to the bribery argument. Also, he surely sees it as open to his first objection to that argument. I say this not because of any comment in the passages just quoted, but because the garden argument, like the bribery argument, contains the problematic word "love." Hence, we can formulate Clarke's opposition to the garden argument as a pair of criticisms, each similar to one of his objections to the bribery argument. First, in premise 1 we should replace "love for" with "desire to help." This change requires a further change to make premise 1 plausible, or at least to make it precise: we must replace the phrase "from those who have been generous to us" with "from helping those who have been generous to us."

Next, we must revise premise 1 so that it no longer refers specifically to favors, material benefits, and the like. It must reflect the fact that a desire is fundamentally self-interested as long as its sole ultimate object is a self-benefit of some kind, such as health or pleasure.

If we make these changes to premise 1 and then revise 2 accordingly, the results are these:

- 1'. If our desire to help those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested, then if we found that we can no longer receive self-benefits of any kind (e.g., pleasure) from helping those who have been generous to us, our desire to help them would cease.
- 2'. Even if we found that we can no longer receive self-benefits of any kind from helping those who have been generous to us, our desire to help them would remain.

We now see the problem for the garden argument. Revised so that it accommodates Clarke's points and thus engages the egoist's account of our desires to help others, it begs the question against that account. Premise 2' is essentially a negation of the egoist's account; it basically says that we have a desire to help others that is not fundamentally self-interested. Perhaps this would not matter if, from the perspective of introspection and common observation, 2' were acceptable to virtually everyone. But from that perspective it is not acceptable to virtually everyone, or else there would be no *debate* over egoism. Certainly when Clarke enters his breast or reflects on his experiences, he sees a picture of desire far different from the one in 2'. Consider these passages:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 76–77.

Happiness ... is the ultimate End of all our Aims and Designs, all our Wishes and Desires. ... And for the Truth of this I appeal to the inward Feeling and Experience of all Mankind.⁴¹

That all Inclination and Aversion take their Rise from a View to Pleasure and Pain of some kind or other, and those only, is a Truth so very obvious, so much confirmed by constant and universal Experience, that no Man who can think at all, and is not strangely blinded by Prejudice, can miss seeing it, I should think.⁴²

In reading these passages we have no reason to doubt Clarke's sincerity, to think he is alone in the way he sees things,⁴³ or to dismiss his reflections as confused. The only feasible solution is to go beyond introspection and ordinary experience—for example, by showing that the egoist's account of our desires to help others, the account 2' contradicts, has the weight of *scientific* evidence against it. But this would be to produce a new argument against egoism, an argument much different from the garden argument.

3.3. Hutcheson's Good-And-Bad-Character Argument

Hutcheson's next argument is his good-and-bad-character argument:

And then again, our Love would be the same towards the worst Characters that 'tis towards the best, if they were equally bountiful to us, which is also false. Beneficence then must raise our Love as it is an amiable moral Quality. ... Bounty from a Donor apprehended as morally Evil ... will not procure real Love.⁴⁴

The core of this argument is in its first sentence. We can set out the argument thus:

1. If our love for those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested, then if (in our view) the favors, material benefits, and the like we receive from a person we deem morally very bad were equal to those we receive from a person we deem morally very good, we would love the first person as much as we love the second.
2. Even if the favors, material benefits, and the like we receive from a person we deem morally very bad were equal to those we receive

⁴¹ Clarke, *Examination of Moral Good and Evil*, 47.

⁴² Clarke, *Examination Relating to Moral Obligation*, 10.

⁴³ For example, Archibald Campbell (1691–1756) thinks that egoism needs no evidence, that anyone attentive and clearheaded can see its truth (Campbell, *Enquiry into Moral Virtue*, 97–98). Consider also the well-known story about Hobbes, who claimed to have given money to a beggar only to relieve his, Hobbes's, pain at seeing the beggar's misery (Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 253). Assuming the story is true, it is likely that Hobbes was sincere in his claim, that upon introspection it really appeared to him that he acted from self-interest.

⁴⁴ Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 107–8.

from a person we deem morally very good, we would not love the first person as much as we love the second.

3. Therefore, it is not true that our love for those who have been generous to us is fundamentally self-interested.

Everything Clarke says about the garden argument applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to this argument. (It is thus no surprise that Clarke does not address the argument explicitly.) Accordingly, in step 1 let us replace “love for” with “desire to help.” Having done so, we must replace “receive from a person” with “receive from helping a person.” Next, we must replace “favors, material benefits, and the like” with the broader term “personal benefits.” With these changes made and the rest of the argument revised accordingly, the second premise is this:

- 2'. Even if the personal benefits (e.g., the pleasure, comfort) we receive from helping a person we deem morally very bad were equal to those we receive from helping a person we deem morally very good, we would not desire to help the first person as much as we desire to help the second.

It is tempting to say that this premise begs the question against egoism. But strictly speaking it does not, for egoism is about the *ultimate object*, not about the *strength*, of subordinate desires.⁴⁵

Even so, premise 2' is disputable, enough so that it cannot stand unsupported. Many will oppose it with a two-part position: First, although we indeed want to help a good person more than we want to help a bad one, this is because we find pleasure (comfort, self-satisfaction) in helping the good one; displeasure in helping the bad one. Equally important, we find pleasure in the *thought* of helping the good one; displeasure in the *thought* of helping the bad one.⁴⁶ Second, if this situation were altered, if the degree of contentment, self-satisfaction, and so forth connected with the act and thought of helping were exactly the same in the two cases, then the strength of our desire to help would be exactly the same as well.

Whether this position ultimately stands up or not, it is too plausible to be dismissed out of hand. Nor can we refute it, or show it to be inferior to its rivals, at the level of common sense, introspection, or ordinary experience. This

⁴⁵ Some philosophers, I suspect, would say that I am being too charitable to 2', arguing that egoism, properly formulated, implies that the strength of our desire for *x* increases with the degree of self-benefit we think *x* will bring us. But I will let this pass.

⁴⁶ An important point is implicit here. When attracted or repelled by a choice owing to the pleasures or pains it holds out for us, we need not, and typically do not, consider only the pleasures likely to come in the wake of the choice. If the thoughts associated with a choice (e.g., our thought of the choice itself or our knowledge of its likely results) are such that we receive pleasure (or pain) from the very act of making the choice or from the deliberations leading to it, then we reasonably regard *that* pleasure, no less than the pleasures that follow as consequences of the choice, as part of the total pleasure connected with the choice. For pertinent discussion see Sober, “Psychological Egoism,” 156–59; and Sober and Wilson, *Unto Others*, 281–87.

is because many sincere people, including Clarke, will find it convincing at that level—they will put the burden of proof on its competitors.⁴⁷ To overcome the position, and thus make 2' compelling, we must counter the position with sophisticated, preferably scientific, evidence. The good-and-bad-character argument contains no such evidence.

3.4. Hutcheson's *Extended-Benevolence Arguments*

The following two arguments, similar enough to be treated as a pair, can be handled quickly. They are open to objections already considered.

If we observe any Neighbours, from whom perhaps we have receiv'd no good Offices, form'd into Friendships, Familys, Partnerships, and with Honesty and Kindness assisting each other; pray ask any Mortal if he would not be better pleas'd with their Prosperity, when their Interests are no way inconsistent with his own, than with their Misery, and Ruin; and you shall find a Bond of Benevolence further extended than a Family and Children, altho the Ties are not so strong.⁴⁸

Again, suppose a Person, for Trade, had left his native Country, and with all his Kindred had settled his Fortunes abroad, without any View of returning; and only imagine he had receiv'd no Injuriys from his Country: ask such a Man, would it give him no Pleasure to hear of the Prosperity of his Country? Or could he, now that his Interests are separated from that of his Nation, as gladly hear that it was laid waste by Tyranny or a foreign Power? I fancy his Answer would shew us a Benevolence extended beyond Neighbourhoods or Acquaintances.⁴⁹

Clarke does not address these arguments explicitly, probably because he sees no need to. For they are vulnerable to a point he makes concerning the bribery argument: that we must not confuse a *pleasure* we take in the happiness of others with a *desire* for such happiness or for its promotion. The two arguments purport to show that the pleasure people receive from seeing their neighbors happy arises independently of self-interest. This is not to refute egoism, for it is not to show that any *desire* arises independently of self-interest.

For example, the second argument concerns a person who knows that the fortunes of his native country can no longer affect his own fortunes. The argument asserts that despite this knowledge (and assuming his native country has not injured him), this person would receive pleasure from knowing that his native country is prospering. This assertion does not rule out egoism, for it is

⁴⁷ For indications that Clarke thinks the strength of a desire for *x* varies with the degree of self-benefit expected from *x*, in which case he would reject 2', see Clarke, *Foundation of Morality*, 13, 59, 61, 62–63, 82. Clarke apparently finds this view just as obvious, just as needless of proof, as he finds egoism. Schlick holds a roughly similar view and clearly considers it the default view of motivation, bordering on a self-evident (though non-tautologous) truth. See Schlick, *Problems of Ethics*, chap. 2, esp. 38–39, 41, 46–47, 50–53. See also Barr, *Summary of Natural Religion*, 69–70.

⁴⁸ Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 114.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

consistent with the view that a person's desire for his native country's prosperity subserves his desire for pleasure, namely, the pleasure he takes in his countrymen's happiness. And if we revise the assertion to remove this flaw, the gist of it is that despite the person's knowledge that his native country's prosperity can bring him no self-benefits, not even pleasure, he desires his native country's prosperity. This assertion resembles step 2' in the garden argument, and encounters the same problems. For instance, it begs the question against egoism.

4. Hutcheson's Later Case Against Egoism

As I have argued, Clarke's objections succeed against several of Hutcheson's initial arguments against egoism. Hutcheson took Clarke's objections seriously.⁵⁰ As a result, the third edition of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue* contains revisions to the second section, many of them designed to overcome Clarke's objections. These revisions include some new arguments against egoism.⁵¹ Some of these arguments appear also in the first section of Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions*, and one of them is in Hutcheson's later inaugural lecture at the University of Glasgow.⁵²

I am limited by space; so I will focus on two of Hutcheson's new arguments, discussing others in passing. Their direct purpose is to show that not all desires for another's happiness have the agent's own pleasure as their ultimate object. In short, it is to refute the *hedonist's* account of such desires. However, Hutcheson considers them forceful against a more general target: the *egoist's* account of such desires, and with it egoism itself.⁵³ I will thus reconstruct them as challenges to the view that every desire for another's happiness is fundamentally self-interested. The first one I call the *wager argument*; the second the *offer-from-the-deity argument*. I believe that egoism withstands both arguments.

4.1. Hutcheson's Wager Argument

The wager argument appears in each of the following two passages.

⁵⁰ This is explicit in Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 6.

⁵¹ With the exception of the good-and-bad-character argument, the core of which ("Our Love would be the same ..., which is also false") is absent in the third edition, the revisions do not involve a deletion of the arguments I discussed in section 3. Those remain, along with new arguments prompted by Clarke's objections. Interestingly, the arguments retained from the earlier editions undergo some minor changes in wording, possibly in response to what I earlier called Clarke's "first" objection to the bribery argument. See Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 231–32, notes 52, 53, and 55.

⁵² Hutcheson, "Inaugural Lecture," 139–40.

⁵³ Hutcheson apparently thinks that among egoistic accounts of our desires to benefit others, the hedonist's is the only serious contender. In one place he says "there are two ways in which some may deduce Benevolence from Self-Love" (Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 223). He then presents and challenges two versions of the hedonist's way, one of them John Clarke's. He apparently thinks that no third, non-hedonistic way requires attention.

To shew that this Scheme [according to which “we desire the Happiness of others, as conceiving it necessary to procure some pleasant Sensations which we expect to feel upon seeing others happy”] is not true in Fact, let us consider, that if in our Benevolence we only desired the Happiness of others as the Means of this Pleasure to ourselves, whence is it that no Man approves the Desire of the Happiness of others as a means of procuring Wealth or sensual Pleasure to ourselves? If a Person had wagered concerning the future Happiness of a Man of such Veracity, that he would sincerely confess whether he were happy or not; would this Wagerer’s Desire of the Happiness of another, in order to win the Wager, be approved as virtuous? If not, wherein does this Desire differ from the former?⁵⁴

Now ’tis certain that sometimes we may have this *subordinate Desire* of the Happiness of others, conceived as the *Means* of our own; as suppose one had laid a *Wager* upon the Happiness of a Person of such Veracity, that he would own sincerely whether he were happy or not. ... In such cases one might have this *subordinate Desire* of another’s Happiness from Self-Love. But ... we ... are sensible that this *subordinate Desire* is not that virtuous Affection which we approve.⁵⁵

Before putting this argument in a step-by-step format, some preliminaries will help. To begin, suppose Maude makes a bet with Ralph that Paul will be happy—continuously happy or nearly so—between now and some future date. If, on that date, Paul has been happy since the day of the bet, Maude wins the bet. In that case Ralph, who never reneges on his debts, will pay Maude a large sum of money. Maude knows this, and knows also that on the designated date it will be easy to see whether Paul has been happy. Paul is honest enough that she and Ralph can simply ask Paul if he has been happy; his reply to the question will settle the issue.

Maude is now in this position: she believes that if Paul is happy between now and the later date, this fact will further her desire for her own good. It will bring her the self-benefits money can buy. She thus has a belief-desire pair from which a further desire arises: a desire that Paul be happy. Similarly, from this desire together with beliefs about what sort of deeds can make Paul happy, a still further desire arises: a desire to do those deeds.

We now can state the wager argument in three steps:

1. Whereas Maude’s desire for Paul’s happiness, as just described, does not win moral approval (at least, not the moral approval of ordinary humans), many desires for another’s happiness do win such approval.
2. If every desire for another’s happiness were fundamentally self-interested, premise 1 would be false; the asymmetry it describes would not exist. For if every desire, *D*, for another’s happiness were

⁵⁴ Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 227.

⁵⁵ Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 26–27.

fundamentally self-interested, then in no *morally* relevant respect could *D* differ from Maude's. Its psychological source (self-interest), its propositional content (that So-and-so be happy), and its consequent desires (to do things that make So-and-so happy) would all be similar to hers. So either Maude's desire and *D* would both win moral approval, or neither would.

3. Thus, not every desire for another's happiness is fundamentally self-interested.

This argument is questionable at its second step. Contrary to that step, premise 1 may be true even if every desire for another's happiness is fundamentally self-interested. To see this, assume momentarily that egoism is true, and hence every other-regarding desire, every desire for another's good, is like Maude's: it is self-interested at bottom. Consistent with this assumption are several feasible hypotheses, none of which Hutcheson refutes, that would explain the fact in step 1: that many desires for another's happiness, though not Maude's, win moral approval.

One such hypothesis is that although egoism is true, most people do not accept it, at least not at the deepest level. Either that, or they accept it but slip back into non-egoistic reactions and thought patterns, at least in their everyday lives. At any rate, at the everyday level they proceed as if egoism were false. In particular, they feel moral approval toward many other-regarding desires (e.g., Mother Theresa's), and in that sense treat them as fundamentally benevolent (unlike Maude's). The case is similar to one regarding (hard) determinism, the view that people never act freely. In their everyday thinking, determinists, including those who think that only free actions can be virtuous, slip into libertarian thought patterns and reactions. They morally approve of some actions (e.g., Mother Theresa's), and in that sense treat them as free. And of course many other people morally approve of those actions. Hence, even if determinism is true (and even if only free actions are virtuous), we should expect that whereas some actions win no moral approval, many others do win such approval, even from hard determinists.

Another hypothesis, consistent with the first, is that people tend to approve morally at least some species of the other-regarding desires that stem ultimately from self-interest.⁵⁶ These desires have features that distinguish them from other fundamentally self-interested desires, features which, in addition, typically arouse moral approval.⁵⁷ Among such desires are other-regarding desires which, unlike Maude's, have the following properties: first, they are

⁵⁶ This paragraph is indebted to Stewart, "Clarke and Hutcheson," 276–77.

⁵⁷ Hutcheson, of course, would reject this hypothesis. He thinks that moral approval has but one object, namely benevolence. But of course he cannot assume the falseness of the hypothesis as a means of supporting step 2; otherwise, the wager argument is circular. To support 2 he must refute the hypothesis on independent grounds. But I find no refutation of it in his works.

subordinate to the desire for the delight that comes directly from seeing others happy; and second, they spring from that desire automatically or habitually; they involve no conscious self-interested reasoning. Note that it serves the general welfare if the tendency to approve such desires is common, and hence if society conditions us to have it. For the resulting approval, which pleases its recipients, reinforces the desires, which not only benefit society but do so in ways not likely to result from most other basically self-interested desires.

Whether ultimately true or not, these hypotheses are too viable to be dismissed without evidence. Also, they logically comport with egoism, and each would explain the asymmetry noted in premise 1. Hence, contrary to step 2, even if every desire for another's happiness is fundamentally self-interested, premise 1 may well be true.

How might we repair step 2? Since it refers to step 1, the best way, I think, is to revise that step. However, I find no revision of step 1 that helps the wager argument. Consider this example:

- 1'. Whereas Maude's desire for Paul's happiness is not virtuous, many desires for another's happiness are virtuous. That is, they do not merely win moral approval; they are truly virtuous or morally good.

This revision does not help the wager argument. First, there are feasible options, consistent with egoism, for explaining 1'.⁵⁸ But I will let this pass, for a further problem is that 1', unlike 1, is disputable. Many philosophers, including various error theorists and expressivists, will reject 1' on the grounds that although many desires receive moral approval, no desire is *truly* virtuous. Such philosophers cannot be dismissed out of hand; their theories are much too defensible. The general point is that the wager argument is disappointing if, to accept it with confidence, we must first settle many thorny issues in metaethics, such as whether moral objectivism is true. Egoism is a *psychological* thesis, unlikely to stand or fall with metaethical conclusions.

4.2. Hutcheson's Offer-From-The-Deity Argument

We now come to Hutcheson's offer-from-the-deity argument. In the third edition of the *Inquiry into Virtue* it appears in a passage worth quoting in full, and worth breaking into three parts:

We often feel the Pain of Compassion; but were our sole ultimate Intention or Desire the freeing ourselves from this Pain, would the Deity offer to us either wholly to blot out all Memory of the Person in Distress, to take away this Connection, so that we should be easy during the Misery of our Friend on the one

⁵⁸ A hint as to one of them is in a passage a few paragraphs back: Even if every other-regarding desire stems ultimately from self-interest, perhaps some desires of that kind differ from the rest in ways that qualify them as virtuous. Perhaps they do so concerning the ways in which they benefit society, warrant reinforcement, or arise from self-interest.

hand, or on the other would relieve him from his Misery, we should be as ready to choose the former way as the latter; since either of them would free us from our Pain, which upon this Scheme is the sole End proposed by the compassionate Person.—

Don't we find in ourselves that our Desire does not terminate upon the Removal of our own Pain? Were this our sole Intention, we would run away, shut our Eyes, or divert our Thoughts from the miserable Object [our friend's misery], as the readiest way of removing our Pain: This we seldom do, nay, we crowd about such Objects, and voluntarily expose ourselves to this Pain, unless calm Reflection upon our Inability to relieve the Miserable, countermand our Inclination, or some selfish Affection, as Fear of Danger, over-power it.

To make this yet clearer, suppose that the Deity should declare to a good Man that he should be suddenly annihilated, but at the Instant of his Exit it should be left to his Choice whether his Friend, his Children, or his Country should be made happy or miserable for the Future, when he himself could have no Sense of either Pleasure or Pain from their State. Pray would he be any more indifferent about their State now, that he neither hoped or feared any thing to himself from it, than he was in any prior Period of his Life?⁵⁹

In these three parts of the passage we find three similar arguments. In the first part we find the offer-from-the-deity argument. In the second and third we find, respectively, what I call the *divert-our-thoughts argument* and the *post-annihilation argument*.

The divert-our-thoughts argument appears not only in the third edition of the *Inquiry* but also in the first two editions.⁶⁰ John Clarke does not address it. Perhaps he feels no need to, for the argument, if not implausible, is incomplete. The fact that we crowd around a friend in distress, that we try to ease his suffering, invites egoistic explanations (or explanations consistent with egoism) that Hutcheson does not consider.⁶¹ For example, to ease our friend's suffering is a good way to ease our *own* suffering, meaning the suffering we feel at our friend's plight. This is not true of running away, shutting our eyes, and so forth, for such things will not erase our knowledge of his plight. (In the language of contemporary psychology, although *physical escape* from our friend's plight is possible without helping him, this is not so of *psychological escape*, escape from the painful awareness of his plight.)⁶² Also, even if running away would

⁵⁹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry into Beauty and Virtue*, 227–28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶¹ Stewart, "Clarke and Hutcheson," 272.

⁶² This point, particularly as it concerns people with whom we empathize greatly, bears not just on Hutcheson's argument but on much contemporary research. See Stich, Doris, and Roedder, "Altruism," 182–83, who press the point against some of Batson's early research on altruism. (For discussion of that research, see Stich, Doris, and Roedder, "Altruism," sec. 4.4; and Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, chap. 5.) Suppose, however, that we could achieve psychological escape just as well without helping our friend as we could through helping him. Hutcheson's position predicts that we would still be inclined to help him. For it posits a fundamental desire on our part for our friend's well-being, which would go unfulfilled were

erase that knowledge, the decision to run away would be very painful; so too would be the process of reaching it. For we would know that such a decision is effectively a choice to let our friend suffer.

The post-annihilation argument appears not only in the above passage, but in Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions* and his inaugural lecture at Glasgow.⁶³ I will not discuss it, partly because it is similar in essence to the offer-from-the-deity argument. In fact, the two arguments are so similar that what I show about one of them applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other.

Let us return to the offer-from-the-deity argument, this time as it appears in the *Essay on the Passions*:

Don't we find that we often desire the Happiness of others without any such selfish Intention? Were it our only View, in *Compassion* to free our selves from the *Pain of the publick Sense*; should the Deity propose it to our Choice, either to obliterate all Ideas of the Person in Distress, but to continue him in Misery, or on the other hand to relieve him from it; should we not upon this Scheme be perfectly indifferent, and chuse the former as soon as the latter?⁶⁴

In considering this argument I will begin as I did with the wager argument: first some preliminaries, then a step-by-step argument.

Suppose a friend of ours is in great pain, which, of course, causes us distress. Suddenly God appears, offers us two choices, and promises to honor our choice. We can choose that our friend's suffering ceases; alternatively, we can choose that her suffering continues, but with no awareness, memory, or suspicion of it on our part. Suppose also that no self-benefits other than pleasure, in the form of relief from distress, are at stake in the case. And let us stress that because *God* is the source of our two options, we have absolute confidence that he will keep his promise.

Now for the step-by-step argument:

1. If every desire to relieve another's suffering is fundamentally self-interested, then upon receiving God's offer we would be indifferent

we not to help him. Interestingly, some recent research seems to support, tentatively, a prediction of this kind. See Stocks, Lishner, and Decker, "Altruism or Psychological Escape," 649–65. (For helpful discussion of this article, see Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 140–45; and Stich, Doris, and Roedder, "Altruism," 183–84.) But let me stress the word "tentatively." The researchers stress several limitations of their experiments, e.g., that whereas they "employed deliberate, cognitive instructions to manipulate psychological escape ... , psychological-escape concerns [the concern that except by helping the person in need, psychological escape is unlikely] need not be deliberate or available to conscious awareness ...; [they] may operate without a person being aware of them at all" (663). Also, even if this research were conclusive it would not by itself refute egoism; nor do its authors claim that it would. The hypothesis the research challenges, roughly put, is that we help a person in need because our empathy for him is painful and we thus want to reduce it. This is a natural hypothesis for egoists to advance; hence, the research of Stocks and his colleagues is certainly relevant to the debate over egoism. However, the hypothesis just mentioned is not the only one egoists might advance, consistently with their theory, to explain our helping the person in need. For one of several others, see the next two sentences in the text.

⁶³ Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 27–28; Hutcheson, "Inaugural Lecture," 139–40.

⁶⁴ Hutcheson, *Essay and Illustrations*, 27.

between the two options he grants. After all, the two are equivalent from the perspective of self-interest.

2. Upon receiving God's offer we would not be indifferent between the two options he grants. We would prefer the termination of our friend's suffering to the mere termination of our knowledge of it.
3. Thus, not every desire to relieve another's suffering is fundamentally self-interested.

Possibly, this is Hutcheson's strongest objection to egoism. Even so, if the test of its success is whether it can rationally force egoists, or even neutral observers, to reject egoism, it does not succeed. It is open to a two-part objection.⁶⁵

First, let us grant that in the case presented, most of us would prefer the termination of our friend's suffering to the mere termination of our knowledge of it. This, however, is plausibly explained consistently with egoism. The explanation, or one akin to it, was touched on when I discussed the divert-our-thoughts argument. Arguably, from the perspective of self-interest the decision to relieve our friend's suffering is the better of our two options. It differs from the decision to become ignorant of our friend's suffering in that the latter decision, as well as the process of reaching it, would be very painful.⁶⁶ For it would involve knowing that our friend's misery will continue—indeed, that it will continue owing to our choice.

Thus, step 1 of the offer-from-the-deity argument is too questionable to make the argument refute egoism. If, consistently with holding egoism, we can plausibly explain why we would prefer the termination of our friend's suffering to the mere termination of our knowledge of it, then egoism does not entail that we would be indifferent between those options. To repair step 1 we must embellish the imaginary offer to which it refers. We must add something like this:

Before making his offer God affects our minds in such a way that the very act of choosing the second option is exactly as pleasant, exactly as non-distressing, as the act of choosing the first. Also, he affects us in such a way that the deliberative process connected with the second option is no more painful or uncomfortable than the one connected with the first. Finally, he ensures that we have no doubts about these parities between our options, that we know with full assurance that the options are equivalent in the ways just described.

This completes the first part of the objection. The second part is this: If premise 2 was not questionable to begin with, we have made it that way through our

⁶⁵ For similar objections see Stewart, "Clarke and Hutcheson," 277; and Sober's critique of Robert Nozick's "experience machine" argument, in Sober, "Psychological Egoism," 156–59.

⁶⁶ Note 46 is relevant here.

repairs to step 1. For we have made the imaginary situation even more removed from actual experience than it previously was. It is now so removed from such experience that were we to present the egoist with the offer-from-the-deity argument, she would likely say this (as would many non-egoists):

Given the imaginary situation in question, I cannot assent to premise 2, which claims that we would not be indifferent between the two options. I cannot do so even if the word “we” refers solely to you, the person presenting me with the argument. My point is not that imaginary situations are useless, that thought experiments always lack force. My point is that the thought experiment behind premise 2 involves a picture not just of our options, but of our very selves—e.g., of our feelings, knowledge, decision processes, and capacities for pleasure and pain—radically alien from the selves and world we know, radically different from anything on which we normally rely in predicting behavior. It is so alien that I doubt that anyone, even you, can reliably predict that in the situation presented, you—or rather the alien version of you—would not be indifferent between the options. No one, I suspect, has the requisite knowledge and insight to predict such a thing reliably, either about himself or about others. Such an ability would be most remarkable.

A person can plausibly maintain this view. There is no evident mistake in it, no unreasonableness involved in holding it. Even if it does not force the non-egoist to convert to egoism, this does not affect the point. The point is that the egoist—the neutral observer as well—can reasonably withhold assent from premise 2, and hence from the offer-from-the-deity argument.⁶⁷ The offer-from-the-deity argument does not rationally compel a rejection of egoism.

5. Conclusion

I have examined seven of Hutcheson’s arguments against egoism, examining two others in passing. My conclusion, reasonable even if somewhat tentative, is that egoism, the view that every desire is fundamentally self-interested, withstands Hutcheson’s arguments. I say “somewhat tentative” because I have lacked space to cover everything Hutcheson says against egoism. However, I have sought to cover his strongest and most representative objections to it.

Despite their differences, those objections encounter the same general problem. Once we formulate them satisfactorily—for instance, once we repair those in which Clarke finds flaws—each has at least one problematic premise, a premise that begs the question or otherwise fails to compel assent.

⁶⁷ What would be appealing here is scientific evidence for premise 2, evidence strong enough to make the offer-from-the-deity argument command assent. But even if such evidence could in principle be produced, I find none in the literature. The experiments cited in note 62 have some relevance, but given the details of the imaginary offer to which premise 2 refers, those experiments do not bear on 2 directly. And as note 62 says, the results of the experiments are tentative.

It may seem that my project has been wholly negative. However, not only do I consider its negative aspects important, I consider it positive in at least two ways. First, I have given substantial attention to an underappreciated British moralist, John Clarke of Hull. The force of his arguments, which concern an essay of major importance (Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Virtue*), shows that his work is far from negligible.

Second, my discussion brings to light the following fact. The objections to egoism that I have covered appeal to no sources of evidence beyond the philosopher's standard fare: introspection, thought experiments, *a priori* arguments, and so forth. And therein, I suspect, lies the problem for them. For that standard fare, I speculate, can neither settle the debate over egoism nor tip the scales strongly to one side of it. Of course, it will always have important uses, as illustrated by Clarke's use of it to challenge Hutcheson's arguments.⁶⁸ However, unsupplemented by sophisticated empirical research it will not go far in resolving the debate over egoism.

Although the latter point is speculative, it receives some support from this article. Hutcheson's philosophical attempts to refute egoism are among the most resourceful and plausible of their kind. The fact that egoism withstands them is thus not a mere negative result, but a stimulus to consider carefully the ways in which progress in this area is possible.

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⁶⁸ Clearly, to plausibly criticize philosophical arguments for or against egoism, although important, is not to establish or refute egoism itself.

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