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### Egoism: A Case Study of the Relationship Between Self-Interest and Ethics

India Rhodes  
irhodes@trincoll.edu

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Trinity College Department of Philosophy

Egoism:

A Case Study of the Relationship Between Self-Interest and Ethics

A Senior Thesis

India Rhodes

Primary Reader and Advisor: Professor Todd Ryan

Secondary Reader: Professor Kari Theurer

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## INTRODUCTION

Egoism is a philosophical theory that deals with the role of self-interest in human behavior. It comes in various forms with varying levels of strength, but all egoistic theories give self-interest a central role in describing and/or prescribing how people behave. The self is placed at center stage and becomes the most important factor for determining how we do act or how we should act. The three main variants of egoism are psychological egoism, ethical egoism, and rational egoism. Psychological egoism claims that humans always and necessarily act out of self-interest. People do not choose self-interest, they are biologically and/or psychologically incapable of acting disinterestedly. Ethical egoism is the philosophical theory that the morally correct action to take in any situation is the one that best advances one's own self-interest. It treats self-interest as the foundation of morality and claims that self-interest and morality are one and the same. Rational egoism states that the rational action in any given situation is that one that best serves one's own self-interest. Under rational egoism, acting disinterestedly to help others (a common requirement for moral action) is actually irrational. Each type of egoism makes different claims about self-interest and behavior, but all of them believe the self-interest does, or ought to, feature centrally in our actions.

These three theories can be divided into two categories: descriptive and normative. Descriptive theories aim to describe the way the world *is*, whereas normative theories argue for how the world *ought* to be. Descriptive and normative theories may aim to do different things, but there is a connection between the two. It cannot be said that we ought to do something (normative) that we are literally incapable of doing (descriptive). Therefore, incongruence with a descriptive theory can undermine a normative theory. Conversely, if what we ought to do (normative) aligns with what we are able to do (descriptive), then the descriptive theory supports

the normative theory. Of the three main egoistic theories, psychological egoism is descriptive and the other two, ethical egoism and rational egoism, are both normative.

I first encountered egoism as psychological egoism while I was in an ethics class. Psychological egoism was being used as a starting point for various moral theories. What struck me most about its use in moral philosophy was how antithetical it felt to my ideas about the relationship between self-interest and ethics. As I began to learn more about the other forms of egoism, questions about the interaction and possible intersection of self-interest and ethics remained in my mind. The connection between this topic and ethical egoism is rather evident. Ethical egoism is a theory that claims acting in self-interest is the basis for moral actions. With rational egoism, I found myself wondering about what a self-interested conception of rationality implies about other-regarding conceptions of morality. My goal with this thesis is to examine how morality interacts with self-interest using egoism (psychological, ethical, and rational) as a case study to guide my discussion.

In Chapter One, I focus on psychological egoism. Specifically, I look at how the acceptance or denial of psychological egoism affects the formation of ethical theories. I concentrate on the historical discussion of the issue for two reasons. First contemporary debate around psychological egoism intersects heavily with the natural sciences like biology, neuroscience, and psychology. Thinkers and researchers conduct empirical research on the natural world and human psyche to find answers. Philosophers of science like Elliot Sober and David Wilson, for instance, have used evolutionary theory to argue against egoism in support of altruism (the theory that human action can be other-motivated) (Sober and Wilson 200). Currently, psychological altruism enjoys more widespread support than psychological egoism (Timmons 180). Settling this question is not essential to my purposes in this chapter however,

because my focus is not on whether or not psychological egoism is true but how, more broadly speaking, how ideas about human nature can affect the formation of a moral theory.

Psychological egoism is only being used as a useful example of this phenomenon as it relates to self-interest because it offers the most clear and extreme example of self-interest being foundational in human nature. This leads me to the second, related, reason that I am pursuing a historical focus in my first chapter. Because modern philosophical research on psychological egoism has generally been narrowed to empirical investigations about its veracity, the building of a moral theory based on these beliefs generally takes a back seat, if it is present at all. Historical authors, on the other hand, tend to focus on the creation of a moral theory from their beliefs about human nature. In Chapter One, I will outline the arguments and ethical philosophies of two theorists widely regarded as psychological egoists, Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville. Then, I will look at the works of Francis Hutcheson and Bishop Joseph Butler, two opponents of psychological egoism. Throughout the chapter, each of the theories will be compared to all of the others. The similarities and differences discovered, even between theories on the same side of the psychological egoist debate, will demonstrate the various ways that a person's conception of self-interest and human nature can influence her beliefs about morality.

My second chapter continues in a similar vein to my first, but the focus will shift to be on ethical egoism rather than psychological egoism. The goal in chapter two is to thoroughly examine what ethical egoism actually is and what moral duties and/or values can be derived from it. Ethical egoism has been a contentious, and generally unpopular, position in modern philosophical discourse, with its defenders being few and far between. The root of this dislike comes from the fact that it flies in the face of our common-sense, every-day conceptualization of morality, which views the well-being of the other, not just the self, a foundational concern of

moral behavior. In egoism, self-interest and the moral are one and the same, and to say that something is moral is to say that it is self-interested. Other moral theories may accept that doing what is in one's rational self-interest *can* be moral, but egoism says it *is* moral, and depending on the theorist, may even say that acting otherwise is immoral. This fundamental difference between ethical egoism and traditional, other-regarding moralities with regard to the role of self-interest in morality presents a challenge to ethics as it is ordinarily conceived. Nonetheless, various ethical egoists, and even opponents of the theory have asserted that an egoistic framework can result in many, if not most, of the same obligations of other-regarding moral theories.

Investigating what duties and/or values can be derived from ethical egoism and a few key variants on the theory is the main purpose of my second chapter. Ultimately, I will conclude that not only the differences but also the similarities between ethical egoism and traditional, other-regarding morality present a challenge to the common conception of ethics.

Chapter Three focuses on answering this challenge and proving or disproving the veracity of ethical egoism. In this chapter, I will first consider arguments that ethical egoism is logically inconsistent (logical consistency being a necessary condition for any theory to be true), in an attempt to prove outright that ethical egoism is false. When these attempts fail, I then move on to discuss other criteria for a moral theory, both practical and theoretical, to assess how well ethical egoism performs as an ethical theory and whether or not it can be dismissed on any other grounds. In order to better contextualize ethical egoism's performance on these criteria, I contrast it with utilitarianism. I have chosen utilitarianism because both it and ethical egoism are consequentialist theories, but utilitarianism is concerned with the well-being of the other where ethical egoism is not. This allows me to keep as many things constant between the theories as possible in order to isolate the impact of self-interest. In this chapter, my final conclusion is that

there is no clear logical argument that can be provided against ethical egoism other than a self-evident belief that the other matters in ethics.

My fourth, and final, chapter looks at rational egoism and how it interacts with morality. Rational egoism makes no claims about morality, only about motivation and what makes an action rational. As such, it is entirely possible, for example, that a person accepts rational egoism but rejects ethical egoism. Given that rational egoism is a more popular view than ethical egoism, this sort of mismatch is quite possible. There are two possible implications for morality in such a situation. First, it could be that non-egoistic morality is actually in a person's self-interest, thus making other-regarding morality rational. Second, it could be that non-egoistic morality is not in a person's self-interest, thus making other-regarding morality irrational. If the latter is true, what does this mean for morality? In Chapter Four, I consider whether philosophical arguments presented on both sides of this divide are convincing and what the implications of each position may be. In the course of this discussion questions about moral motivation, specifically rationalism (moral truths are perceived with rationality) and sentimentalism (moral truths are perceived with emotion or sentiment) will also come to the fore. My exploration of these ideas leads me to conclude that while there are rational reasons to pursue other-regarding morality, they are not universal and even adopting a sentimentalist position does not solve the problem of self-interest in moral motivation.

By way of conclusion I further connect the ideas of each chapter and give a final analysis of what can be said about the overarching relationship between self-interest and ethics.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A Historical View of the Relationship Between Psychological Egoism and Ethics

My first point of interest is an exploration of the connection between human nature and morality. Psychological egoism, at its most basic, claims that human nature precludes actions motivated by anything other than self-interest. There are modifications on this definition which either strengthen or weaken the position. For example, a stronger version of psychological egoism might say that humans are motivated *only* by self-interest and have no other motivating desires whatsoever. A weaker version might stipulate that while we have other desires, self-interest is the decisive motivator and nothing occurs without a significant and sufficient push from self-interest. Regardless of the strength, psychological egoism centers self-interest as the most important part of human nature.

Looking at the relationship between self-interest and morality, the question arises: What type of morality, if any, is possible if psychological egoism is true? Different philosophers have answered this question in various manners. To look at how the acceptance of psychological egoism affects the logic of a moral system in diverse ways, I will examine the arguments of both Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville. I chose these two philosophers because, although the concept of psychological egoism was not named until after their deaths, both are considered somewhat classic examples of psychological egoists. Moreover, while they share this view of human nature, their actual moral philosophies diverge to a notable extent. Hobbes argues for a morality that is based on self-interest whereas Mandeville takes a position far closer to claiming that there is no legitimate moral system. This difference allows for an interesting discussion about how psychological egoism can interact with other ideas to create divergent conceptions of morality.

In addition to the psychological egoists, I will be discussing two authors who argue against the conceptions of human nature put forth by Hobbes and Mandeville. These authors are Bishop Joseph Butler and Francis Hutcheson. They argue that benevolence, a desire for the well-being of others, both exists and influences our actions. The purpose of including Hutcheson and Butler is not to definitively argue against psychological egoism, although there is an undeniable benefit to discussing both sides of the debate. Rather, the objective is to demonstrate two different moral systems opposed to psychological egoism. Hutcheson and Butler were chosen for this purpose both because they have sufficiently differing moral theories, and because they belong to roughly the same time period as Hobbes and Mandeville.

This section has a historical focus because contemporary debate around psychological egoism tends to focus on empirical studies, rather than “pure” philosophical thought. Moreover, modern philosophers are more concentrated on proving or disproving psychological egoism and often do not develop moral theories beyond this specific question of human nature. In addition, as mentioned above, the purpose of this section is not to prove or disprove psychological egoism, it is to study how the assumption or rejection of psychological egoism affects moral frameworks. This in turn works as an example of how theories about the relationship between self-interest and human nature affect ethics. It is for this purpose that these four philosophers will be studied.

I will begin my discussion with Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) before moving on to Mandeville’s “An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue” (1714). After discussing both psychological egoists, I will turn to Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Morality* (1725) before concluding with Butler’s *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1726). After all of these authors have been discussed and compared, a brief

conclusion summarizes my thoughts and the implications of the ideas outlined throughout this chapter.

## **Hobbes**

Thomas Hobbes wrote his most famous work, *Leviathan*, in 1651. It is ultimately a treatise of political philosophy aimed at describing how the relationship between a sovereign and her citizens ought to function. In the first section of the text, Hobbes undertakes an explanation of human nature in order to lay the foundation for his later arguments. It is in this section that he gives an account of what morality is and how it arises. Although the term ‘psychological egoism’ was not introduced until well after *Leviathan* was written, Hobbes can be interpreted as a psychological egoist. He argues that human actions are motivated by self-interest, which is the central tenet of psychological egoism. Additionally, and importantly, he claims that this self-interest gives rise to a moral code which supports many of the same obligations as more traditional moral systems. Most of this argument comes in Chapters Thirteen, Fourteen and Fifteen of the first section, titled “Of Man.” This is where I will focus my analysis, although there are some important concepts established in earlier chapters that will be incorporated into the discussion.

Two such concepts are the interconnected definitions for ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ Good, according to Hobbes, is “whatever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire” (35). Evil is just the opposite, “the object of his hate” (35). Neither good nor evil are inherent in the object itself; they are derived from the attitude of the person interacting with it (35). This means that there is neither a common good nor a common evil since attitudes about the same object or action may vary between individuals. Before discussing Hobbes theory any further, this has implications for morality. If we consider morality to be good, which most people do (although not all,

Mandeville, for one, might object), then morality is only good insofar as it is desired by an individual. This creates an inherent connection between morality and self-interest. We desire what it is to our advantage to have, what we have an interest in attaining. Therefore morality is good because we view it as in our self-interest. The other possible implication for morality based on what has been said about good and evil is that it is relative. After all, if goodness and evilness are relative to the beholder rather than inherent in the object, and we believe that morality is good, then morality must be relative. Had Hobbes left his theorizing here, this would in fact be true (and still may be true for the lesser moral rules that come closer to everyday manners and social convention), but Hobbes' views on human nature prevent this from being the case. He goes on to argue that, by nature, all humans have certain passions and desires that ought to motivate them to hold certain 'natural laws' of justice/morality to be true (86).

In Chapter Thirteen, "On the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning their Felicity, and Misery," Hobbes details his views on human nature. This is where the bulk of his arguments that can be considered in support of psychological egoism are. Hobbes begins by saying that, in nature, all men are roughly equal (82). There may be some differences in physical qualities, but generally speaking, every man has the ability to kill every other, even if he needs to use secrecy or work with others to do so, therefore making him approximately equal to all others (82). The same rough equality is granted to the mental faculties (82). It is precisely because all men are equal that conflict between them arises in the state of nature. Hobbes says that "[f]rom this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends," and men often desire the same thing as one another (83). It is from this disagreement (or diffidence as Hobbes calls it) over whom, among equals, ought to get the object of his desire, that war arises. The state of nature is described as a state of perpetual war where every man is against all other men (84).

This war is fueled by the fact that, as Hobbes states in Chapter Eleven, “[f]elicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter” (65-66). This general sentiment about desire is narrowed further to a desire for power, and Hobbes claims that humankind has “a perpetual and restless desire for power, that ceaseth only in death” (66). This means the nature of mankind consists of ceaseless desires not only for more benign objects, but for power, which pits us against one another even without the never-ending stream of supplementary desires to fight over. All of this leads back to the state of war which, rather famously, makes life in the state of nature “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (84). This is in part because in such a war there are no rules about what is just or unjust, moral or immoral, only what works (85). Judgements about morality can only be made in a society, not on an individual basis (85). After all, if only one person follows the rules, then that person is at a disadvantage. Nonetheless, it is the nastiness of war, in combination with other natural human instincts or “passions” that drives us to create such societies. At the very end of Chapter Thirteen, Hobbes explains that the fear of death, the desire to live a pleasant life, and the hope to attain these pleasantries by our own industry, all incline humankind to work towards peace (86).

The precise steps needed to achieve this peace are outlined in Chapter Fourteen, “Of the First and Second Natural Laws, and of Contracts.” The Right of Nature, according to Hobbes, is “the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say of his own life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which of his own judgment, and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto” (86). Essentially, the Right of Nature authorizes any person to take any means necessary, according to her own judgment, to protect her life. Related to the Right of Nature is the Law of Nature. The Law of

Nature “is a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which, is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same” (86). Put simply, because humans are interested in their own preservation, reason says that a person should not take any actions counter to this goal. From this Law, and from the facts about life in the state of war, the First Natural Law is derived. It says that “*every man ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps and advantages of war*” (87). Basically, the First Natural Law says that since peace is better for survival than war, whenever possible, peace should be pursued. The “ought” derived from the First Natural Law comes from a logical process of reasoning about one’s self-interest. A person ought to follow it because to do so will be to her benefit. From here, the Second Natural Law follows. It states that “*a man be willing when others are so too... to lay down his right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself*” (87). The Second Natural Law can be seen as the basis for society. It calls for individuals to give over some liberty, when others are willing to do so as well, to create peace, and the ability to live and work together. It is only now that the concepts of duty, obligation, and justice arise. All of these concepts, like the “ought” discussed above, come from self-interest. Hobbes believes that, given sufficient reflection, a person will come to understand that duty and/or justice is in her own self-interest based on their importance to the preservation of society and the benefits that living in a society confers unto a person. Once a person has made a contract or covenant to trade or give away her rights and liberties, it is then her duty not to violate these voluntary agreements; to do so would be unjust (88).

This is essentially the Third Natural Law, explored at the outset of Chapter Fifteen, “Of Other Laws of Nature.” This Law states that “*men perform their covenants made*” (95). The

beginning of this chapter also reiterates that to keep a covenant is just and to break a covenant is unjust (95). This means that where there have been no promises made, there is no room to talk about justice or injustice. Furthermore, Hobbes argues that it is never rational to break a covenant, even when doing so would appear to be more beneficial than keeping it (96). Such an action would only be more beneficial in the short-term. In the long-term, if a promise is broken and the others of a society cannot trust that a person will keep her covenants, then she cannot be received into any society (97). This leads back to the state of war, which is undesirable. From here, Hobbes goes on to detail a variety of other laws that can be derived from the Law of Nature like gratitude, equity, and a need to protect mediators (100-104). Part of the goal is to show that this system of morality, founded on self-interest, can provide many of the same moral precepts as other conventional (Christian) ethics.

There are, of course, more complexities to Hobbes' theories than what has been presented here, but this is sufficient for my current purposes. The picture presented of morality in *Leviathan* is based on Hobbes' understanding of human nature, and his understanding of human nature is far from flattering in many ways. For Hobbes, humans are inherently self-interested, and our actions are all motivated by this self-interest. This is why Hobbes is often considered a psychological egoist. His beliefs, while explicitly stated, are not actually justified in much depth. Rather, he seems to take it as a given that humans are self-interested and act on this interest. His writing on psychological egoism focuses more on how this fact about human nature influences our moral systems. Given that humans are motivated by self-interest, our moral systems must be based on self-interest. Therefore, what is moral is self-interested by default. This can be seen in the case of the definitions of good and evil, as well as just and unjust (which stand in for moral and immoral in most of the sections discussed). Things and actions are good or evil in relation to

our interest in them, and this makes sense if we are motivated entirely by self-interest. The system of morals, presented in the form of Laws of Nature, is founded on the idea that humans have the right to act in their own interest (the Right of Nature). All of the Laws are derived logically from this central tenet in order to combat the dystopian state of war created by unchecked self-interest in the state of nature. Even in the instances where following these laws seems to be counter to self-interest, Hobbes works to show that this is a mistaken belief. He tries to demonstrate that self-interest will always align with morality because morality was born of self-interest. This is incredibly important given that, per the psychological egoist position Hobbes takes, if morality were counter to self-interest no one would ever act morally. Hobbes tries to show that, given the proper understanding, a person will always, or at least ought always, act morally because to do so will be in her best interest. What is moral and what is rational coincide. Hobbes' project in the last few chapters of the first section can be seen as motivated by a need to establish and justify morality given his beliefs about the reality of human nature. Hobbes cannot appeal to a traditional rationale that relies on centering the other because in his understanding of human nature, a person will always act in her own self-interest. Therefore, he must give a different account of how morality arose and, ideally, show that it produces the same outcomes as its traditional (Christian) counterpart. Hobbes' argument essentially tries to derive a moral "ought" based on self-interest (ethical egoism) from a descriptive theory about human nature (psychological egoism).

There is one possible complication of this explanation that I want to discuss. In Chapter Six, where Hobbes defines good and evil, he also defines a number of other terms, one of which is 'benevolence.' Benevolence means "the desire of good to another" (37). The presence of this definition seems to suggest that humans may have desires that are not self-interested. This runs

counter to what he says throughout most of the rest of the text, and it opens the door for two possible interpretations. The first is that since benevolence is only a 'desire' it may indeed be a motivating factor of an action, just unable to create action without or contrary to self-interest. If this is the case, then the picture I presented of Hobbes' theory of human nature only needs to be qualified slightly by saying that self-interest is the decisive motivator of actions, but there are others that may work alongside it. The second interpretation undermines the particular version of psychological egoism I have ascribed to Hobbes to a greater extent by saying that humans are in fact capable of other-motivated actions, even though they are rarely performed (I say rarely based on the relative size of the discourse in support of each position). If this is the case, then it may be incorrect to call Hobbes a psychological egoist. Even if this is true, the relevance of self-interest to his theory of morality and justice still holds. Hobbes bases all of his arguments for morality around self-interest. Benevolent action may be possible, but the majority of people still act from self-interest the majority of the time. For this reason, and because my current goal is to evaluate how beliefs about the nature of humanity in accordance with or in opposition to psychological egoism affect conceptualizations of morality, Hobbes will remain classified as a psychological egoist.

### **Mandeville**

Bernard Mandeville was a doctor and part-time philosopher based in London (Kaye xix). In 1714, he published "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue," which explains how humans were socialized into morality. Mandeville, like Hobbes, can be considered a psychological egoist, although the term did not exist at the time he wrote the text (also like Hobbes) and was therefore never used by Mandeville himself. Nonetheless, he identifies self-interest as the motivating force behind human action. Although there are some other

similarities between Hobbes and Mandeville, their theories of what morality actually is are quite different. Mandeville deviates even more than Hobbes from common conceptions of morality. For instance, he attributes incredible importance to the so-called vices to ensure the success of a society. This is a concept explored in his 1705 poem, "The Grumbling Hive." Both of these works were published together in 1714 in *The Fable of the Bees*. The primary focus of this section is how Mandeville conceives of morality in "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue," but "The Grumbling Hive" will be used for clarification and to enhance the discussion.

"An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue" begins by stating that all animals are only concerned with pleasing or satisfying their own desires (41). The more desires a species has, the less naturally sociable the members of that species are since they are in competition over those desires (41). Humans, with their vast appetites and high intelligence to pursue these desires, ought to be the least naturally sociable animals (41). However, humans are also special because they are the only species that can be socialized (41). Before going any further, it should be noted that the view just expressed is compatible with psychological egoism. Humans (and all other animals) are said to be *only* concerned with their own self-interest, and when they act, they act to fulfill this self-interest. This is where Hobbes and Mandeville may be said to agree most closely. However, how Mandeville proceeds from this point to build his theory of morality diverges very clearly from Hobbes' conception.

For Mandeville, socialization is when moral values are instilled in a person. This means that morality is artificial rather than natural. The key to the socialization of humanity is to convince people that it is in their own self-interests to set aside their desires and behave in a manner beneficial to society (morality) (42). The problem is that there are not "so many real Rewards as would be able to satisfy all Persons for every individual Action" (42). Therefore the

“politicians” (the people to whom Mandeville attributes the role of socializing the masses) “were forc’d to contrive an imaginary one” (42). To create this “imaginary” good, the politicians appealed to humanity's sense of pride and its susceptibility to flattery (42). The first step in the socialization process is to note a distinction between humans and all other animals (43). Humans are flattered with the notion that they are in possession of superior rational faculties and, importantly, are able to control their appetites in favor of a higher, public good in a way that other animals cannot (43). From here a second distinction is drawn between two types of humans. The first group are those humans who are incapable of this type of self-denial. They are framed as “grov’ling Wretches...the Dross of their kind, and having only the Shape of Men, differ’d from Brutes in nothing but their outward Figure” (43-44). The second group are those who are capable of controlling their desires. They are esteemed as “lofty high-spirited Creatures” and “the true Representatives of their sublime Species, exceeding in worth the first Class by more degrees, than that it self was superior to the Beasts” (44). The power of pride and the pleasure derived from flattery mean that all humans want to call themselves members of the second group rather than the first. So much so that Mandeville claims that humans will “endure a thousand Inconveniences, and undergo as many Hardships” so that they may have the pleasure of counting themselves as members of this second class (45). This is why Mandeville states that “Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride” (51).

While it may be obvious why a person of the second, lofty, group abides by the system of values established, it is less clear why a person of the lower class would continue to support the system. To this Mandeville offers three responses. First, a person belonging to the first class could have internalized the ideas of value and be too ashamed to admit that she does not meet the standard (45). Here, a person’s pride turns her into a hypocrite because she publicly espouses

values that she cannot uphold. Second, even if a person does not ascribe to the value system, she may still outwardly support it because she benefits from the societal good created by others given she herself lives in the same society (48). Third, she might support the system because she realizes that the fewer people working toward a self-interested goal, the less competition she has to achieve her own ends (48). Therefore, even those who fail to meet moral standards will accept the manipulations of politicians.

The definitions of virtue and vice are also interconnected with the public good. In accordance with the already established hierarchy of values and actions, a virtuous action is when a person “contrary to the impulse of Nature, should endeavour the Benefit of others,” and vice is that which is injurious to society or renders a person less able to contribute to a society (48). What is incredibly important to notice is that the definition of virtue stipulates that it is “contrary to the impulse of Nature.” A few pages later, Mandeville expands on this idea by claiming that virtue requires the suppression of natural inclinations and self-denial (51). This leads to two possible interpretations. First, given that Mandeville believes human nature is self-interested, when virtue is specified as contrary to nature, this could mean contrary to self-interest. If this is the case, then, given that humans (and all other animals) necessarily act out of self-interest, virtue would be impossible. The second, less extreme, interpretation understands nature as those inclinations humans possess before socialization. Socialization twists a person’s hierarchy of inclinations to place the pride derived from societally beneficial actions above all others. For example, a person may come to value flattery based on their character over financial success, leading them to act contrary to the natural impulse for money in favor of the artificial impulse of morality. Importantly, while a person may believe she is subduing her self-interest, she is not; she simply changes what she derives pleasure from. However, since virtue in this case

would not require disinterested actions, simply actions that align with the societal good over natural, personal interests, virtue remains possible. In either case, the picture presented of virtue is not overly positive. Virtue is either an impossible fiction or it requires a heavy, somewhat duplicitous, distortion of a person's self-interest to her possible detriment (especially where materiality is concerned).

The rest of “An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue” addresses two broad counterarguments. The first, which is of less interest to this thesis, is that ideas of moral virtue arise not from politicians but from religion, more specifically, from Christianity (50). This is rejected because societies like Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome had clear systems of moral virtues and flourished despite the fact that they were largely polytheistic (51). The second, and more important, argument concerns actions that do not appear to be done for the sake of flattery or pride. This argument is further divided into two cases: pity and those virtuous actions performed in secret. Mandeville claims that although pity is vital for the functioning of society, and therefore does not need to be eliminated, it is nothing more than a morally neutral passion (56). It can produce both virtuous and vicious actions (56). He goes so far as to say that “[t]here is no Merit in saving an innocent Babe ready to drop into the Fire” (56). People only do this out of pity because they would be pained if they stood by passively and allowed it to happen (56). Therefore, it is an action compelled by self-interest. In the second case, when a person performs a virtuous action anonymously, although Mandeville briefly considers that it may have been done out of a genuinely non-interested motive, he quickly rejects this and reaffirms the influence of self-interest and pride by saying that this person ultimately benefits from the sense of pride received from contemplating her own worth (57).

The poem “The Grumbling Hive,” tells the story of a highly successful beehive where “every Part was full of Vice, / Yet the whole Mass a Paradise” (24). When Jove, the bee’s god, banishes all vice (27), the entire hive falls apart and industry ceases to function leaving the final bees to fly off to a hollow tree to live the rest of their lives (35). The message, summarized in “The Moral,” is that “Fools only strive / To make a Great and Honest Hive” (36). Essentially, a society cannot be perfectly moral and successful at the same time. It is the vices, like greed, that drive the economy and make society prosperous. There is a possible contradiction here with what is said in “An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue” because if some vice is beneficial to a society, then the politicians would presumably have socialized everyone to believe these vices are good. However, it could also be argued that while some greed is necessary, widespread greed would lead to too much social disharmony, therefore becoming more harmful than helpful. In this case, most people would need to believe that they should not act out of greed and try to live up to this belief, although they may ultimately fail. The politicians simply rely on this failure and those who do not buy into the system to create the right amount of greed. This interpretation is supported in several of the remarks which follow “An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue,” many of which discuss the complex balance between virtue, vice, and society, and affirm a need for both virtue and vice (85-93). Regardless of how the socialization of morality is supposed to achieve this balance, vice is clearly identified as necessary to a prosperous society.

Mandeville’s argument provides a sharp contrast to Hobbes’. Whereas Hobbes argues that morals came into existence strictly because they create a society, which benefits individuals, Mandeville claims that morality alone is actually detrimental to society. Moreover, the chief vice for Hobbes (breaking a promise) is detrimental to society (and the individual). Mandeville, on the other hand, views vice as a central and vital part in ensuring the health of society. The more

fundamental difference that underlies these interpretations is that Mandeville has a far more critical view of the function of morality than Hobbes. Mandeville's theory of morality poses it as something of a trick at best, and a complete lie at worst. Common people are manipulated into viewing morality as a good thing through the influence of politicians. The good promised is both imaginary and artificial because it is neither material nor desired without the external distortion of self-interest and the denial of inclinations that are natural. Moreover, hypocrisy is rife as many people espouse moral virtues without actually embodying them (either intentionally, to promote their interests, or out of shame). This is very different from Hobbes, who establishes morality as derived in a logical progression, un-distorted, from self-interest. Whereas Hobbes can be seen as attempting to establish a justification for morality, Mandeville seems to be providing a description of why people behave morally in spite of the fact that there is no natural justification to do so.

These differences arise despite the fact that both men essentially have psychological egoism as their starting point. Mandeville sees morality as a trick precisely because of his bedrock view that all animals, especially humans, act in accordance with their own interests, and this fact seems at odds with our views on morality and the actions that we take in everyday life. To resolve this conflict, Mandeville chose to reject the naturalness (and possibly the entire existence) of morality rather than the veracity of psychological egoism, or build a sufficient basis for morality from unmodified self-interest like Hobbes did. The fact that Mandeville did not attempt to undertake a project like Hobbes' suggests that he did not find it plausible that all actions called moral find their basis in a pure self-interest. Hobbes also believed that self-interest was the guiding principle of human action, but he believed it was possible, and perhaps desirable, to demonstrate that morality is derived directly from such motivations. For Hobbes,

morality is natural. Which theorist is more correct is not centrally important to my current project, although I tend to find Hobbes' explanation more plausible. What is more interesting is how the same conclusion about human nature logically progressed to two differing views on morality. Both Hobbes and Mandeville are psychological egoists, but beyond this, there are few other points of agreement between their two moral philosophies. The following sections examine the other side of the argument, with Hutcheson and Butler, who are opposed to psychological egoism.

### **Hutcheson**

In 1725, Francis Hutcheson published *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Morality*. Like the title implies, the book attempts to offer an explanation of where our ideas of beauty and morality come from. It is divided into two treatises, *Treatise I* deals with our perceptions of beauty and introduces the idea of an internal sense that perceives beauty apart from our external senses (sight, hearing, touch, etc.). *Treatise II* builds on the idea of an internal sense by claiming that humans have an internal moral sense that responds to benevolence. The moral sense and benevolence, while interconnected, are distinct objects that could, theoretically, exist without each other. Like both Hobbes and Mandeville, Hutcheson's view of human nature is central to his understanding of morality. Unlike Hobbes and Mandeville, Hutcheson cannot in any way be understood as a psychological egoist. In fact, there are several points in the text where Hutcheson directly rebukes the arguments presented by Hobbes and Mandeville relating to the power of self-interest. His view of human nature, while not excluding self-interest, gives significant weight to an innate love of mankind (benevolence). This section will primarily be dealing with Section I, Section II, and the first half of Section III from *Treatise II* where Hutcheson outlines the moral sense, benevolence, and the relationship between the two.

However, a brief explanation of the internal sense of beauty, as outlined in Section I of *Treatise I* will also be given to provide a more solid basis for the moral sense.

I'll start with "Section II: Concerning the Immediate Motive to Virtuous Actions" where benevolence is discussed. The basis of Hutcheson's moral theory is his belief that humans are capable of, and often act upon, truly benevolent intentions. When Hutcheson refers to benevolence, he is referring to a completely disinterested affection for mankind (112). About the origin of this benevolence, Hutcheson writes that it is "some determination of our Nature to study the good of others; or some instinct which influences us to the Love of others" (112). What is most important here is that benevolence, the love of others, is as innate in human nature for Hutcheson as self-interest is for Hobbes and Mandeville. It is not simply that we can be taught to be benevolent against our nature and then sometimes act upon this benevolence. We are inherently benevolent creatures. This is not to say that self-interest does not factor in at all. Hutcheson admits that "as all Men have Self-Love, as well as Benevolence, these two Principles may jointly excite a Man to the same Actions; and then they, are to be considered as two Forces impelling the same Body to Motion; sometimes they conspire, sometimes are indifferent to each other, and sometimes are in some degree opposite" (104). When benevolence is not apparent in the actions or nature of a person, this is not because it does not exist, but because it is being overruled by self-interest (115). Hutcheson is not claiming that benevolence is the sole cause of action, nor is it even that cause of action that always wins out. It is simply a possibility; a person *can* act benevolently, and, according to Hutcheson's view of the world, she often does act on this benevolence. Her actions may be fully or partially motivated by benevolence, but benevolence is responsible, at least in part, for a significant number of actions.

When looking to prove the existence of this benevolence, Hutcheson turns to human experience in every-day life. He begins first with the example of a parent and child. Some philosophers will argue that there is a self-interested connection between parent and child. For instance, a psychological egoist account might claim that a parent cares for a child because the happiness of the child gives her pleasure or because the child will care for her in old age (112). Hutcheson pushes this further by asking *why* the parent feels anything in response to the child's welfare. The answer is that "[the parent's] Love to the Child makes him affected with his Pleasures or Pains" (112). It is a parent's feelings of love, of benevolence, toward her child that ultimately motivates such actions. From here, Hutcheson expands to discuss the feelings of benevolence between neighbors, as shown by the fact that a people, even those who are not close friends, will assist one another in the same community (114). Finally, this sense of benevolence is expanded to all of humankind. The feelings of approbation or dissatisfaction we get from hearing about the triumphs or disasters that befall people around the world we have never met are used as evidence (114). While the dedicated psychological egoist would undoubtedly be able to find self-interest in all of the examples given, the average person would likely side with Hutcheson in at least some of his examples based on her own experiences of the relationships and sentiments between individuals.

In Section I of *Treatise II* Hutcheson lays out his understanding of what he calls the moral sense. To understand this in full, it is necessary to briefly discuss the argument he makes for the internal sense of beauty in *Treatise I* Section I. Hutcheson describes 'sensation' as "[t]hose Ideas which are rais'd in the Mind upon the presence of external Objects, and their acting upon our Bodys" (19). These sensations, occasioned by external objects, are passively received (19). Our senses produce in us, with neither input from our will nor knowledge of the causes, pain and

pleasure (20). Sensations such as heat or cold may produce these effects, but above and beyond these simple ideas are more complex ideas (21-22). Complex ideas that we find beautiful or harmonious are able to produce an even greater pleasure in us than the simple ones (22). Hutcheson uses the example of music and says that “the Pleasure of fine Composition is incomparably greater than that of any one Note, how sweet, full, or swelling soever” (22). Hutcheson calls the ability to receive sensations of these more complex ideas the internal sense of beauty (23). It is called internal to differentiate it from the traditional, external senses (sight, smell, touch, etc.). While the external senses allow a person to identify physical characteristics of an external object, they do not give her the ability to appreciate what she is beholding (23). This higher appreciation is the role of the internal sense of beauty. It is also separated from the external senses because it is able to behold the beauty in objects that are inaccessible to the other senses like mathematical theorems and universal truths (24). Nonetheless, it is still appropriate to call the internal sense a ‘sense’ because, like all other senses, it immediately and passively receives impressions from an external object, and the pleasure or pain derived cannot be controlled by our will nor changed by education or bribery (25).

In the first section of *Treatise II* the moral sense is introduced. The moral sense is defined as the ability to have “other Perceptions of moral actions than those of Advantage” (90). In other words, the moral sense is our ability to perceive actions as either moral or immoral, regardless of whether or not they benefit us. It is called a sense because it fits all of the criteria for a sense as enumerated in the first section of *Treatise I*. It passively perceives ideas of morality in external objects, independent of our will (90). Hutcheson proves that the moral sense is disinterested by pointing to situations where we approve of actions that have either no effect on us (passing moral judgment of fictitious or long-past historical events) (99) or are actually detrimental to us

(admiring the courage and actions of enemy soldiers) (97). He also shows that the reverse is true. There are many actions that we find morally reprehensible that would be to our benefit (stealing money from an orphanage when we stand to benefit) (95). The moral sense cannot be bribed to find our own actions or actions of another to be good simply because we stand to gain (94). Moreover, like the internal sense of beauty, the moral sense does not derive from education, though education may help us better understand the ideas already present within us (99).

In the first half of Section III of *Treatise II* Hutcheson establishes that the moral sense responds to benevolent intention and benevolent intention only, although the picture quickly becomes more complicated. In the opening paragraph he states:

If we examine all the Actions which are counted amiable any where, and enquire into the Grounds upon which they are approv'd, we shall find, that in the Opinion of the Person who approves them, they always appear as Benevolent, or flowing from Love of others, and a Study of their Happiness, whether the Approver be one of the Persons below'd, or profited, or not; so that all those kind Affections which incline us to make others happy, and all Actions suppos'd to flow from such Affections, appear morally Good, if while they are benevolent toward some Persons, they be not pernicious to others. (116)

It is essential to note that the moral sense responds to benevolent *intent*, not actions (116). This means that even if an action has benevolent consequences, it is not judged as moral if we know that it was done from self-interest (e.g. donating to a charity to get a tax break). Of course, since we are not able to know the intentions of many actions, we often respond to benevolent action with the assumption that the intent is also benevolent unless we learn otherwise. This description of the interaction between the moral sense and benevolence is complicated by considering the case of self-interested actions a little more deeply. While actions that come from self-interest are

not perceived as moral, they are not necessarily immoral (122). When actions taken out of self-interest do not harm another person, then these actions are considered, by the moral sense, to be morally neutral (122). Moreover, there are cases where the complete lack of self-interest or self-love would in itself be pernicious to society. For example, if I give away all of my money to charity and am no longer able to support myself, I become a burden on society. Therefore, a person who commits an act of self-love with not only their own benefit in mind but also the benefit of society may also be judged as acting virtuously (122). A further complication might be the person that the benevolent action is aimed at. It does not matter in theory if the recipient of a benevolently-intended action is themselves a good or bad person; the action is still virtuous (124). However, if this benevolence in turn encourages or supports the detrimental behavior of the other person, this “diminishes or destroys the Beauty of the action, or even makes it Evil” (124). Conversely, Hutcheson allows that more moral value may be put on actions that help individuals of particular moral dignity or importance (125). Therefore, although the moral sense responds only to benevolent intent, there are some important caveats and clarifications made.

With the moral sense, Hutcheson provides another level of rebuke towards the self-interested moral systems favored by philosophers like Hobbes and Mandeville. Not only is it the case that humans can, and often do, act out of benevolence, the only things that count as moral are counted as such because of their benevolent intent. Hutcheson’s theory involves two parts, benevolence and the moral sense, that are logically independent from each other. A person could have a moral sense that responds to benevolence, but no one is benevolent, meaning the moral sense only ever disapproves, but exists nonetheless. Similarly we could be benevolent, but have no moral sense to approve it. Each part highlights the divide between self-interest and morality. In a way, Hutcheson’s argument more closely resembles Hobbes’ than Mandeville’s.

Both Hutcheson and Hobbes provide their own theory of how human nature functions and use that nature to explain how morals are derived directly from it. The difference between the two is simply that Hutcheson has a far more optimistic picture of human nature than Hobbes.

Mandeville, on the other hand, develops a theory for how morality functions in spite of his thoughts of human nature. Nonetheless, the views that each philosopher holds on the question of psychological egoism greatly affects their theories on what morality is, how it functions, and its origin.

### **Butler**

Bishop Joseph Butler delivered a series of sermons on human nature and morality, which were compiled and published in 1726 in *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*.

Although all of the authors discussed so far were Christians, Butler's faith comes through more strongly than in any of the other works, due to the fact that, despite their philosophical content, the sermons are actual *sermons* and therefore inherently religious. This religiosity raises questions about how dependent Butler's moral theory is on the existence of Christianity and the Christian God. Nonetheless, the sermons make a clear philosophical argument in favor of a virtuous human nature and sense of morality. Butler, like Hutcheson (and unlike Hobbes and Mandeville), is not a psychological egoist and views benevolence as a key part of human nature, although not the only part. This does not mean that his view of morality aligns perfectly with Hutcheson's; Butler gives self-interest a more central role in his ethical system. Of the fifteen sermons, this section will focus on the first three, where Butler lays out the basics of his understanding of human nature, and Sermons XI and XII, where Butler expounds further on the function of benevolence and its relationship with self-interest.

In Sermon I, Butler begins by stating that he views human nature as a system of parts working together (27). The first part of the system that Butler talks about is benevolence. He defines benevolence as the affection in human nature, “the object and end of which is the good of another” (28). In this section, he also mentions self-love (self-interest), and calls benevolence the counterpart of self-love, as it is concerned with the other instead of the individual herself (28). It is also at this point that Butler first mentions that self-love and benevolence should not be thought of as antithetical (29). Sermon XII further discusses the balance between self-love and benevolence. Butler does this by discussing what is meant by the biblical passage: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (154). He begins by limiting the scope of who can be considered our ‘neighbor’ and therefore how far our benevolence ought to reach. He argues that the entirety of the universe, all of humanity, or even all those in a given country are too vast to be the object of human benevolence (155). Rather, the object of our benevolence is limited to only those people who come “under our immediate notice, acquaintance, and influence” (155). This is a noticeably reduced idea of the scope of benevolence, especially as compared to Hutcheson, who argues that benevolence extends to all humankind. Having determined to whom benevolence is responsible, Butler then asks what it means to love another “as thyself” (156). To this he attributes three possible meanings. First, it could refer to having the same *kind* of love for others as for ourselves (156). Second, it could mean that we ought to have benevolence in some acceptable proportion to our self-love (157). Finally, it could mean that we should have as much benevolence towards others as we hold self-love for ourselves (160). Even if a person chooses the strongest possible interpretation, Butler argues that it would never imply self-neglect because we will always be able to feel certain affections that promote self-love (161). Since moral obligations cannot exceed human ability, and we cannot rid ourselves of these passions, moral

obligation cannot demand this of us (162). As such, self-love or self-interest will always be a motivating factor of various actions even though benevolence is also an important part of human nature.

The second part of human nature is called the passions and affections (29). The passions and affections are the other desires that motivate action like a love of society or a desire for the esteem of others (30). Butler characterizes these as distinct from both benevolence and self-love (30), although at later points benevolence seems to be more closely associated with the other passions/affections (147). The relationship between the passions and self-love is explained with more depth in Sermon XI. Butler establishes a distinction between the passion and self-love and benevolence and self-love, even when they work towards the same action. The object of self-love is one's own happiness, not a specific external object (138). On the other hand, a particular affection is a desire for a specific external object, not happiness in general (139). Pleasure does arise from satisfying these desires, but the pleasure is distinct from the passion that motivates it (139). For example, hunger is a desire for food, not for pleasure itself, although a person gets pleasure from satisfying this desire. It also does not mean that hunger is the same thing as self-love. They are distinct phenomena with different objects. While eating food may be motivated by both, it is possible that a person eats from self-love when she is not hungry, or that she eats from hunger, but has little love for herself. The same dichotomy applies to self-love and benevolence. They are not the same thing, but neither are they in opposition, and in fact often aim at the same target (142). In Sermon XI, benevolence, categorized as a natural affection (like hunger), and leads to a feeling of pleasure when it is achieved (147). As with hunger, this does not mean that benevolence and self-love are the same (147). Therefore, the harmony of self-love and the passions/benevolence, while incredibly prevalent, does not mean that the passions and

benevolence are reducible to self-love. This same dichotomy can also be used to understand, and refute, both Hobbes and Mandeville when they consider cases where an action appears to be motivated by something other than self-interest. Hobbes and Mandeville both claim that since we can find self-interested justifications for such actions they are ultimately, and only, self-interested. This is then used to claim that the existence of other motivations or passions is disproven. Butler, however, shows that the coincidence of a passion or benevolence with self-love does not automatically mean that the passions/benevolence do not exist. Benevolence and the passions remain distinct from self-love.

The final part of human nature the Butler lists in this Sermon I is the conscience (31). The conscience is defined as the “principle in man, by which he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions” (31). The role of the conscience is to reflect on actions that a person has taken, or is planning to take, and pass judgment on whether or not they are good (32). It generally functions to reduce “mischief” and other poor behavior (32). Butler proves its existence by asking a person to reflect on whether helping an innocent person in distress and harming an innocent person would be approved of equally by herself (32). The answer is, presumably, that these two actions would merit different responses, and therefore there is some judging mechanism in human nature. This mechanism is the conscience (32). The conscience works to support the wellbeing of ourselves and others (33). This means it can reinforce both benevolence and self-interest. The view that Butler lays out of human nature, while giving a strong role to benevolence, does not exclude self-interest. This position falls somewhere in between Hobbes and Mandeville on the one hand and Hutcheson on the other. Butler is not a psychological egoist, but his faculty for moral judgment does not exclude self-interested motivations like Hutcheson's moral sense does.

Sermon II attempts to establish that the judgment of the conscience aligns with human nature, given that we have multiple other sources of motivation. Butler works with a very specific definition of what ‘nature’ means. He considers it to be neither just some principle in the constitution of humanity nor the strongest passion that we have (44). Rather, ‘nature’ is consistent with whatever principle has supremacy or superiority over the others (44-45). The conscience is considered superior to self-love, benevolence, and the other passions because it is the part of humanity that is able to pass judgment on the actions motivated by all other parts (46). Authority should not be confused with power. Self-love or one of the other appetites might be able to overwhelm the conscience, but the conscience retains the ability to “survey, and either approve or disapprove our own heart, temper, and actions” (48). The conscience is not the only thing with a hierarchical relationship within the human constitution. Self-love and possibly benevolence are above the other passions, although the position of benevolence is less clear as it is characterized as both above and equal to the other passions in different places (30, 147). The conscience remains at the top of the hierarchy. Since the conscience is determined to be the authoritative part of humanity, it is consistent with human nature. Given that the conscience favors actions that benefit both one’s self and other, human nature is to benefit ourselves and, crucially, others.

In Sermon III, Butler offers further justification for why a person should follow their conscience and live according to human nature rather than only out of self-interest. The first argument he makes is to simply state that the conscience, as the superior principle, is akin to the law of our nature, and we have an obligation to follow that law (54). This is perhaps where Christianity becomes most important to Butler’s moral theory. He bases his argument partially on the idea that God created the conscience to judge, and therefore it serves as a guide to God’s will

and should be followed in accordance with the obedience owed to God (54). Removing God from the equation, the question can be asked whether the conscience retains its authority. Assuming we accept Butler's definition of "nature," as provided in Sermon II, I think the answer is 'yes' because the conscience is still able to judge all actions. As the sermon progresses, however, the justifications become increasingly linked to the relationship between the conscience and self-love. First and foremost, it is emphasized that benevolent action, or giving regard to our fellow humans, actually tends to make us happy (55). Moreover, vicious actions generally carry their own punishments outside the determination of the conscience (55). A person who is cruel to all of the people around her will find herself lacking the means to advance her interests because it is impossible to achieve most ends outside a society and without the cooperation of other people. This means that a person following self-interest alone will find that she is compelled to act in many of the same ways that she would be were she to follow her conscience (56). This picture of morality and self-interest is strikingly similar to Hobbes'. Although Butler does not believe that humanity only acts in self-interest, he does support the idea that self-interest can be the foundation of actions that accord with morality (although he would perhaps hesitate to call them moral in themselves). The idea that moral actions spring from self-interest is one of Hobbes' central tenets. Moreover, this appeal to self-interest to motivate compliance with the conscience (and therefore morality) opens Butler up to the possibility that his theory does ultimately rest on self-interest as the primary motivation for moral action. Given what has already been said and what will be discussed shortly, it is highly unlikely that Butler himself would support this position, but his appeal to self-interest allows for the possibility nonetheless.

Butler rejects psychological egoism, but he does not reject the influence, or indeed value, of self-interest in human nature. He affirms that benevolence is a part of human nature that

functions as a motivation for action and is separate from self-interest. That being said, self-interest occupies a space either equal or superior to benevolence, depending on whether benevolence is classified as one of the passions or something separate and above them. To this extent he clearly disagrees with both Hobbes and Mandeville while agreeing with Hutcheson. However, Butler also believes that the conscience, which is the internal mechanism that determines morality, approves of both benevolent and self-interested actions and goes so far as to say that neglecting self-love is immoral. In this, he differentiates himself very clearly from Hutcheson, who excludes self-interested motivations from the purview of the moral sense. This highlights the difficulty of grouping all of those opposed to psychological egoism together. Psychological egoism, in its strong form, stipulates simply that humans are incapable of acting from anything other than self-interest. Opposition to this claim could range from simply saying that there is another, lesser, motivation that sometimes leads humans to actions all the way to denying that humans ever act out of self-interest (although I have yet to find someone to defend this point). There is a large degree of variety and flexibility in how, and to what extent, a theory can disregard psychological egoism. As such, the moral theories that are built upon these ideas also showcase a wide variety of possibilities. In fact, the majority of modern philosophers reject psychological egoism in favor of some alternative, and there exists a great diversity of theory. This variety of moral theory is permitted precisely because psychological egoism is rejected. In philosophy, the common saying is *ought* implies *can*, meaning that, as Butler expressed, a person cannot be morally required to do something that is outside their capabilities. If a person cannot help but act in self-interest, then the horizon of possible moral and ethical theories shrinks considerably, although, as the example of Hobbes and Mandeville from earlier shows, it does not shrink completely.

**Conclusion:**

Psychological egoism is a philosophical theory about human nature and motivation, not about morality. Nonetheless, any moral framework built from a position of psychological egoism will necessarily be limited in what moral obligations can be placed on a person. This does not mean that morality must be forsaken entirely. Hobbes crafted a moral framework from his belief in a form of psychological egoism and managed to derive, at least from his perspective, a wide array of the traditional moral precepts. Mandeville, on the other hand, takes a more cynical view of morality and its basis in self-interest. He clearly does not believe that traditional morality can be loyal to unmodified self-interest. In the most extreme interpretation of his views, psychological egoism and morality are mutually exclusive. On the other side of the equation, Hutcheson goes the furthest in claiming that self-interest and morality are mutually exclusive, and rejects psychological egoism in favor of morality. Butler finds more of a middle ground and, like Hobbes, believes that morality and self-interest can co-exist. Butler, of course, differs from Hobbes because he does not believe that self-interest is the only important part of motivation or morality.

While these philosophers vary greatly in terms of moral theory, all of them are fundamentally driven by their perspective of human nature. What is moral is determined by human nature. This is as true for Butler and Hutcheson as it is for Hobbes and Mandeville. Due to the fact that it is a faculty of humanity, not governed by logic, that determines the morality of actions (the moral sense and the conscience), what a person finds moral remains an effect of their nature. Looking forward, the focus of this thesis will shift from this sort of biological determinism, towards normative ethics. This means that, to a certain extent, all of the theories offered by the philosophers in this section will be put aside. I will be moving forward with the

idea that human nature does not limit our actions to any great extent, and certainly does not determine our moral judgments.

With regard to psychological egoism specifically, I will be, for the rest of this thesis, assuming its falsity. The current consensus of the majority of both philosophers and scientists is that psychological egoism is false, though there are of course still those who study and defend it (Timmons 180). The question may be asked whether it is possible to ever definitively prove that psychological egoism is false. For every phenomenon that is explained by altruism or benevolence, there is some psychological egoist argument that will twist the motivation back to self-interest. For expediency's sake, it is more practical to continue without deeply exploring all of the complexities of the current debate and focus on the other ways in which morality can interact with self-interest. The following chapter begins that discussion with a description of ethical egoism and its implications.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Ethical Egoism: A Challenge to Traditional Morality**

Ethical egoism is a normative theory, rather than a descriptive one like psychological egoism. This means that ethical egoism is focused on what we *ought* to do, not what we actually do. Ethical egoism's central tenet is that "what an individual morally ought to do is what will be in his or her self-interest" (Timmons 164). It can be further characterized as a consequentialist theory, meaning that it evaluates an action based on the predicted consequences that it will have (Timmons 165). In the case of egoism, the consequence of relevance is the effect an action has on the actor herself. This differentiates it from other consequentialist theories, like utilitarianism, because it is agent-relative, meaning that the morality of the action depends on who is benefitted.

An action must benefit that actor, not just any random person, to be considered moral (Timmons 165). A moral action can, and quite often will, tangentially benefit a secondary person, but this benefit is not important to the morality of the action. For example, I may decide not to drive drunk because I risk injuring myself and legal ramifications if I am caught. This decision benefits me, but it also likely benefits a plethora of other drivers who would have shared the road with me. When determining the morality of the action according to ethical egoism, however, it is only relevant that driving drunk would be detrimental to me. If I could know that drunk driving would not harm me, or at least less harmful than whatever my alternative is, then, according to ethical egoism, it would no longer be immoral, whatever the consequences for other people. The idea that an action could be the *least* harmful or *most* beneficial for my interests highlights another aspect of ethical egoism. It is a theory that aims to maximize a person's self-interest (Timmons 165). In most situations in life, there are more than two options, and ethical egoism requires that a person always choose the option that is *most* beneficial to her

self-interest, even if it is simply the best of bad options. Combining all of these ideas, a more complete formulation of ethical egoism can be constructed thusly: “An action A performed by person P is *right* (not wrong) if and only if (and because) P’s performing A would produce at least as much agent utility as would any other action P might perform instead” (Timmons 166). In this definition, “agent utility” refers to how well a given action advances the actor’s self-interest (Timmons 166). This will be the base definition that is used in reference to ethical egoism throughout my thesis.

The definition above still leaves some room for clarification, namely how ‘self-interest’ is determined and defined. Often, self-interest is understood as another way of talking about ‘personal happiness’ and/or ‘personal welfare’ (Kalin 64). Moreover, when an individual acts in her self-interest, she must generally consider both how her actions will affect her well-being in the short-term and in the long-term. This future-concerned view of self-interest may be called ‘prudential’ (Timmons 165). It is also generally accepted that, because there are people whose well-being directly or indirectly affects our own, self-interest will take into account the effect our actions have on some select others. The qualified concern about others based on how they affect us is often called ‘enlightened’ (Kalin 65). Moving forward in this chapter, when I use the term ‘self-interest,’ I will generally be referring to an enlightened, prudential understanding of self-interest, although I will consider two theories that offer significant modifications to this definition of self-interest.

Finally, before beginning my discussion of ethical egoism in earnest, I should distinguish between ‘pure’ ethical egoism and ethical egoism as a theory-of-means. ‘Pure’ ethical egoism is what I have been discussing thus far. It is a moral theory that says the morally correct action in any given situation is the one that most benefits the actor’s self-interest, and benefiting the

actor's self-interest is the ultimate end of the theory. Ethical egoism as a theory-of-means also says that the moral thing to do in any given situation is the self-interested action, however, this is done in service of some greater moral goal, like promoting the most good for the most people (utilitarianism) (Moore, "Is Egoism Reasonable?" 49). This reconceptualization of ethical egoism subsumes it under another moral theory, and it no longer stands on its own. I will devote most of my focus to 'pure' ethical egoism, not ethical egoism as a theory-of-means, as this is generally what philosophers writing on ethical egoism mean, and because ethical egoism as a theory-of-means is not actually, at a deeper level, ethical egoism, or even a moral theory.

Returning to my organizing question, the relationship between self-interest and morality, ethical egoism presents the strongest possible connection between the two. The ethical is defined as those actions that are in our self-interest. It also presents a challenge to traditional morality. Most people recoil almost instinctively from the idea that morality and self-interest are one and the same, that the effects of our actions on others are morally irrelevant. According to Rachels: "The common-sense assumption is that other people's interests *count*, for their own sakes, from a moral point of view" (194). Ethical egoism forces us to reconsider a foundational belief about the nature of morality and its relationship to self-interest. Beyond this, it is worth looking more closely at how the duties derived from egoism may differ from traditional moral theories in order to gain a more comprehensive view of what exactly is at stake if ethical egoism is true, and what a morality of self-interest looks like in practice. This chapter is focused on how ethical egoism practically functions as a normative moral theory, not whether or not it is correct (which is the topic of Chapter Three). In exploring this question, I will look at an example of egoistic thinking in real life, arguments around the duties that can be derived from ethical egoism, and two key

variations on the theory, metaphysical egoism and flourishing egoism, that focus in on the definition of ‘self-interest.’

### **Practical Application**

When considering the consequences of ethical egoism and its challenge to traditional morality, a clear view of how the theory is practically applied is indispensable. For this purpose, I will examine how thought patterns associated with traditional morality and ethical egoism can lead to different outcomes in the real world using the case study of how social attitudes affected masking during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, I will look more closely at what specific duties and values an egoistic framework may be able to produce and debate whether these duties are necessary, or simply possible. In doing so, I will hopefully provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how ethical egoism actually functions and what is at stake if ethical egoism turns out to be true.

#### *Masking: A Case Study*

One way to look at the impact of ethical egoism is to look at instances where egoistic ideas and actions are played out in real life. Although, at least in my experience, we are rarely actively conscious of our moral decisions and/or the philosophical theories underlying them in our daily life, it is still possible to look at general patterns of thought that align with an egoistic morality as opposed to patterns of thought that align with more traditional, other-concerned, moral theories. One such example is the influence of a collectivist mindset vs. an individualistic mindset on mask wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectivism refers to “the tendency to be more concerned with the group’s needs, goals, and interests than with individualistic-oriented interests” (Lu et al. 1). Conversely, individualism is “the tendency to be more concerned with one’s own needs, goals, and interests than with group-oriented concerns”

(Lu et al. 1). Although collectivism and individualism are not identical to traditional, other-oriented, morality and ethical egoism respectively, they can be aligned and associated rather easily. Collectivism, with its group-oriented ideals, relates strongly to traditional, other-oriented morality. Individualism, with its focus on the well-being of the individual, relates strongly to ethical egoism. A recent study by Lu et al. shows that collectivistic cultures had higher levels of mask wearing than individualistic cultures, even accounting for political differences (3). This can be seen both between countries and within national borders (Lu et al. 7).

One example is the difference in the masking response in the United States and South Korea (Kim). In the U.S., there was significantly more pushback against masking than in South Korea throughout the pandemic (Kim). When looking at the United States, the following can be said about anti-mask sentiments.

There are numerous reasons Americans cite for not wanting to wear masks. Some see masks as an attack against their freedom; some think masks make them look weak; some—incorrectly—believe masks will cut off their oxygen supply; and some simply find masks uncomfortable. Underlying these arguments is the strong sense of individualism that Americans trace to the country’s founding... (Kim).

In South Korea, and other Asian countries like Japan, “people more commonly believe that they have a civic obligation to care for one another” (Kim). The presence of individualistic, egoistic reasoning predicts that mask wearing will be more limited, and a collectivist, other/group-centric mentality predicts that more masks will be worn.

It is also important to note that a decision on whether or not to mask has very real consequences. In the United States, the pandemic has killed more people per capita than in South Korea (“Mortality Analyses”). This is not due solely to the decision to wear a mask or not, other

factors, like access to healthcare, are also important (although the United States' strong sense of individualism also affects the healthcare system, and the lack of universal health care (Kim)).

Nor is the difference between collectivism and individualism solely responsible for the divide in masking; trust in government and political affiliation, among other factors, also play a role (Lu et al. 2). Nonetheless, collectivism and individualism remain strong predictors of masking behavior, and universal masking has been proven to significantly reduce the transmission of COVID-19 (Abaluck et al. 6). As such, the difference between individualistic and collectivist mindsets have clear, real-world effects. Because individualism and collectivism can be associated with egoism and other-regarding morality respectively, this also means that whether a person's moral theory considers the 'other' can have clear, real-world effects. This is not an endorsement of one belief or the other, just a demonstration of the importance of differing conceptions about the primacy of the self or others in decision-making.

While this is a useful example, it has its limits. First, as stated earlier, collectivist and individualistic ideologies do not actually map on perfectly to any traditional theory or ethical egoism. An egoist like Hobbes may be very concerned with the well-being of the society as a whole because society is vital to personal well-being. Such an egoist might put a premium on collectivism. Conversely, a utilitarian, who believes that it is always moral to do what is best for the whole, not the individual, may nonetheless endorse ethical egoism as a theory-of-means. In this case, a 'traditional,' other-motivated morality produces an individualistic worldview. Nor do the categories of traditional morality and ethical egoism align cleanly with masking or refusal to mask, respectively. An ethical egoist, genuinely concerned about the risk that COVID-19 poses to her health, would very likely elect to wear the mask, regardless of any individualistic ideas. Conversely, a person may be very concerned with the well-being of others, but believe that

masking requirements pose an even greater risk to personal freedom, and therefore elect not to wear the mask as a form of protest. Another difficulty is that all of the people who choose not to mask for individualistic reasons may not actually believe that morality applies to this particular decision. Masking could be a morally neutral behavior, neither moral nor immoral. As such, rejection of masks is not done on any moral grounds and the connection between anti-masking ideas and ethical egoism is further eroded. The same thing can be said of pro-masking behavior and non-egoistic morality. For all of these reasons, it is practically impossible to directly convert individualism and collectivism in masking to any traditional moral theory or ethical egoism.

While the effects of collectivism and individualism on masking may not map directly onto the differences between ethical egoism and other-regarding moralities, this does not mean the analysis of it serves no purpose. First, it shows how patterns of thought focused on the self versus others can have real-world effects on behavior. This can help visualize the types of differences that might occur between the moral judgements and actions of ethical egoism and traditional morality. It is also useful in showing that, as contrary to morality as ethical egoism might seem, there are clear instances in life where people center their own needs above the collective and, at the very least, see it as morally neutral if not morally positive. Finally, the complications with directly associating one mindset/morality with a single action, namely masking, highlight the ability of reason to produce different outcomes, even within the same ethical framework, an idea that was explored in Chapter One in relation to psychological egoism. What actions you get out of a moral theory will also greatly depend on how 'good' is defined and how a person believes it is best achieved. The extreme agent-relativity of ethical egoism allows for even more variation in 'moral' actions because each person is the arbiter of what is best for herself, and therefore what is moral. More specifics on how this concept applies to ethical

egoism will be explored shortly. For the time being, it is sufficient to see how, on a macro-scale, ideologies that can be associated with ethical egoism produce different results with real consequences than thought patterns associated with other-centric, traditional morality.

### *Duties and Values*

Despite the apparent difference between ethical egoism and other moral theories, like utilitarianism, many proponents of ethical egoism argue that most, if not all, of the same duties derived from traditional morality can be found in ethical egoism. For example, as was discussed in the first chapter, Hobbes attempted to create a moral system based on self-interest that produces the same moral judgements and duties as the predominant (Christian) morality of his time. He argues that gratitude, kindness, forgiveness, humility, equity, etc. are all moral values/duties (Hobbes 100-104). Since Hobbes believes that all actions are necessarily self-interested, morality, and all of these duties, are derived from self-interest. He justifies their inclusion in morality because they are necessary to maintain a society and keep humanity out of the state of nature and war, which helps preserve the well-being of the agent (Hobbes 96-98). This is related to the idea of enlightened self-interest, because the growth and maintenance of a person's self-interest relies on the growth and maintenance of, if not close, at least functional interpersonal relationships. Actions that benefit the other will be instrumentally good from an ethical egoist perspective (Kalin 65). However, since the good derived from other-directed action is instrumental, questions can be raised about how far these supposed duties actually go, and how strong they are. In response to this skepticism, ethical egoists intent on defending their proposed moral duties attempt to show that following them is always in a person's self-interest. This is what Hobbes does when he argues that it is never beneficial, long-term, to break the Laws of

Nature (which govern morality) because it will result in a return to the miserable state of nature/war (Hobbes 86).

“Egoistic Friendship” by Tara Smith goes further and attempts to show that such interpersonal relationships can be rich and fulfilling even though they have an egoistic foundation (263). She argues that all love is egoistic since to ‘love’ someone is to value her and value is based on the degree to which the beloved advances the interests of the lover (265). From here, she differentiates between loving specific qualities that are beneficial to you and loving the overall character of a person, loving the person “for himself” (269). Finally, she challenges common conceptions of objects with instrumental value as easily attained and easily discarded in pursuit of some greater value (272). She points out that although the people in our life may be instrumental to our own happiness, this does not mean that they are easily replaceable, and they often gain so much value that they are actually considered irreplaceable (273). She also tries to show that treating a friend in a purely instrumental manner will backfire by damaging the other person and the relationship you have with her (270). Both of these will lead to the destruction of the value that was originally in the relationship, meaning it is actually counter to the egoist’s goals to treat her friends as though their only value is what can be done for her (270). However, this does not mean that the friend is no longer being treated and valued as instrumental. What is being modified is a person’s understanding of what type of behavior towards her friends will actually be in her best interests, not the instrumentality of the friends. Nonetheless, Smith’s argument centers on the idea that egoistic interpersonal relationships can have real depth and value.

Not all philosophers agree with Hobbes’ and Smith’s conceptions of egoistic values and duties; this is true even for some defenders of ethical egoism. Moreover, there appear to be some

actions that ethical egoism cannot demand, no matter how liberally the theory is interpreted. For an example of the latter, consider a healthy, happy person who sacrifices herself for the good of others, when she would have otherwise gone on to live a good life. Ethical egoism would almost certainly judge this action as immoral since to end one's own life with no benefit to one's self is quite possibly the single worst action for the advancement of self-interest. Other ethical theories generally view this type of action as morally good, if not morally required (Timmons 164). To look at an example of the former, an ethical egoist with a more limited view of the ethical duties provided, I will focus on "In Defense of Egoism" by Jesse Kalin. Kalin argues in favor of ethical egoism with an enlightened and prudential self-interest (65). Nonetheless, he says:

Given this account of ethical egoism plus the proper circumstances, a person could be morally justified in cheating on tests, padding expense accounts, swindling a business partner, being a slum landlord, draft-dodging, lying, and breaking promises, as well as in contributing to charity, helping friends, being generous or civic minded, and even undergoing hardship to put his children through college. (65)

Kalin does not deny that an egoist can take actions that would be considered moral according to most traditional ethical theories (although some, like Hutcheson, require a proper intention, therefore making the actions immoral if performed from the wrong motivation, i.e. self-interest). However, he also admits that various actions that would typically be considered immoral are permitted by egoism depending on the situation. This is precisely what Hobbes, and to a lesser extent Smith, try to show is not true. They aim to prove that there are no situations in which a person benefits, all things considered, from such 'immoral' actions like breaking a promise or manipulating a friend.

One possible response to such allegations is to make a move from act ethical egoism to rule ethical egoism, just like utilitarianism can move from act to rule form (Burgess-Jackson 537). The change from the act form of a theory to the rule form is a change from evaluating the morality of every individual action as an isolated event to evaluating the morality of types of actions or rules (Burgess-Jackson 537). These rules are based on the types of behaviors that, if adhered to all the time, are most likely to produce the ideal outcome, whatever that may be. For instance, a person might set the rule 'do not lie' because honesty is the behavior that, when practiced universally, is the most likely to lead to the desired outcome. This changes the evaluation of situations because I am no longer deciding if I should lie based on how my lying would affect the specific situation, but whether my behavior is in-keeping with the rule I have made for myself. The moral permissibility of a white lie does a good job of demonstrating the difference between act and rule theories. If I am evaluating the individual act, then I would likely judge it as morally good to lie to a friend's dad and tell him that I like the food he cooked. However, if I am evaluating how my behavior fits with my rule, 'do not lie,' then it would be immoral to tell the same lie.

Applying this to ethical egoism, we could say that although an action, like breaking a promise, may be beneficial in that single instance, if a person always broke a promise when it seemed beneficial to her, the consequences would catch up, so a moral rule should be made against such behavior. Ethical egoism can be formulated as follows: "Each agent should attempt to follow that set of general rules of conduct whose acceptance (and sincere attempt to follow) by him on all occasions would produce the best (expected) outcomes" (Burgess-Jackson 537). For instance, a person could be more likely to get found out, given the increase in the sheer number of lies that she could be caught telling. Moreover, while she might be able to excuse one instance

of lying, like the girl who cried wolf, her word would eventually have very little value and this could seriously harm her at some point. Therefore, she should not lie because, evaluated as a rule, it will turn out to be detrimental to her. It has been argued that Hobbes is a rule egoist (Burgess-Jackson 537). He created a list of moral rules (the Laws of Nature) which he claimed should not be broken because to do so would imperil the wellbeing of an individual because society requires these moral rules to survive and society is far preferable to the state of nature/war. The formulation of his argument is, therefore, that there are certain moral rules that should be followed because adherence to them is most likely to advance a person's interests.

The problem with an argument like this, especially as it refers to ethical egoism (I will not get into the debate on its efficacy for utilitarianism), is that we know from experience that people are able to break moral rules and are often better off because of it. First, looking at Hobbes' argument regarding the maintenance of society, while it might be true that if everyone begins to break their promises, harm their friend, etc., then society would suffer, ethical egoism is only concerned with the agent, not everyone. Not everyone behaves egotistically, and even if I break a covenant or some other moral "duty" according to rule ethical egoism, society will not actually devolve because most other people will still be following social rules. This is something that Mandeville recognized when he discussed the benefits of being 'immoral' in a society indoctrinated into a certain idea of morality (Mandeville 48). Second, there are times when others, and perhaps even oneself, get away with 'immoral' actions without any repercussions. For a rather trivial example, I once promised my sister I would not eat the last of the pasta we had for dinner, but later, when I was hungry, ate it anyway. When asked about it, I denied eating it and told her that one of the cats had been licking it, so I threw it away. She was vaguely frustrated with the cat, but she believed me and nothing further came of it. My sister and I remain

as good of friends as siblings can be, and the cat is also perfectly fine. I was able to do something that harmed my sister for my own benefit, breaking a promise in the process, lied about it afterwards, and faced absolutely no consequences. Third, there could be definite consequences attached to my actions, but they are not enough to stop me from pursuing the self-interested reward. This is comparable to when a sports team decides to break a rule in-game, knowing the penalty, but believing that the penalty will be less detrimental than what would have happened if the rule was not broken. Both of these examples also apply at larger, far less frivolous, scales. These three reasons combined mean that an ethical egoist is not as constrained by duties supported by traditional morality as someone like Hobbes or Smith might want or believe. While she may sometimes act ‘morally,’ she may just as often break rules to her own benefit without it damaging her interests.

One final distinction between ethical egoism and other moral theories is that ethical egoism can be viewed as a “private morality” as opposed to a “public morality” (Kalin 86). As Kalin uses these terms, a private morality relies on the “kind of justification [that] can be carried out on the desert island and is not necessarily interpersonal—it does not have as one of its goals that minimal cooperation of some second party” (86). A public morality is one that is interpersonal in character, either through interpersonal goals or through interpersonal publicity of goals (85). Ethical egoism can be considered a private morality because a truly sincere ethical egoist cannot engage in public conversations about her morality (Kalin 84) and “there are typical moral attitudes and emotions which, while perhaps not impossible for an egoist to sincerely have, it is impossible for [her] to sincerely express” (Kalin 83). The first idea, that ethical egoism, if genuinely held, cannot be expressed or advocated for in public, is a relatively common critique expressed by numerous opponents of ethical egoism (Kalin 84). This conclusion is based on the

same argument that Mandeville made about the benefits of being ‘immoral’ in a moral society. If I am the only person (or at least one of the few people) acting in my self-interest rather than for the societal good (assuming, of course, that there is a difference between the two), then I am at an advantage because I will still benefit from the actions of others and, at the same time, have less competition for my actual goals. As such, it is in my interest if as few people as possible are ethical egoists, like myself. This means that I should not share my real ethical beliefs or advocate for them in any way in public (Kalin 80). It also means that I ought not consult anyone for moral advice since, if I ask a non-egoist, I will get faulty moral advice, and if I ask an egoist, it is in their best interest to lie to me so that they do not spread ethical egoism (Kalin 81). Therefore, I cannot enter into any public discourse about morality whatsoever while expressing my actual beliefs (although I could enter the discourse and espouse moral theories that I do not believe are true) (Kalin 81).

In the second point, Kalin goes further by saying that there are actually certain attitudes that I should not sincerely publicly express since they would be to my detriment. These are emotions/sentiments like “remorse, regret, resentment, repentance, forgiveness, revenge, outrage, and indignation, and the form of sympathy known as moral support” (Kalin 83). To demonstrate his point, Kalin works through the example of forgiveness. First, he contends that it is hard to understand how a person can wrong another under ethical egoism because it expresses no duties to others (83). Therefore, if a person, *B*, does something needing forgiveness, it must be because he did not properly pursue his own self-interests (83). Since the ethical egoist, *A*, ought not publicly express her moral beliefs, she should not publicly forgive *B*’s action with any sincerity since it would expose her moral theory and possibly encourage others to become ethical egoists (Kalin 83). In response to this, one could argue that an ethical egoist, *A*, can be upset with a

person, *B*, who harms *A*'s interests, and I would agree that *A* can, and probably is, upset if her interests are harmed, but the judgment could not be made that *B* did something 'wrong' (at least morally) unless *B* also harmed his own interests. *A* can decide she no longer trusts *B*, perhaps even dislikes *B*, or mourn the damage done to her, but she cannot say what *B* did was 'wrong' (excluding if there was some sort of incompetence that led to *B* harming *A*, in which case it could be 'wrong' in that same way that  $2+2=5$  is wrong, but still not morally wrong). Another interesting, and somewhat strange, conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that the ethical egoist, herself seeking forgiveness, must either content herself with self-forgiveness, or else seek forgiveness from *B* for the damage she did to her own interests. Whether or not it seems likely that a person genuinely possesses this type of psychology, the relationship between ethical egoism and public participation in morality is another thing that challenges traditional ideas of morality.

### **Variations**

Before concluding that egoism is incapable of securing many 'traditional' moral duties and judgments, two major variations on the theory are worth considering: metaphysical egoism and flourishing egoism. Both of these theories alter the meaning of 'self-interest' that has been operative thus far. Metaphysical egoism questions the definition of 'self' and offers a far more expansive view of the 'self.' Flourishing egoism, on the other hand, looks at the definition of 'interest' and attempts to show that 'virtue' is almost synonymous with 'interest.' Both of these modifications lead to an expansion of the kinds of actions that can be considered within our self-interest and therefore morally correct according to ethical egoism.

#### *Metaphysical Egoism*

David Brink argues for metaphysical egoism, the idea that people's interests are interconnected and interdependent. He claims that "when the agent's own happiness or interest is

correctly understood, we will see that the good of others is, in the appropriate way, *part* of the agent's own good so that acting on other-regarding moral requirements is a way of promoting his own interests" (Brink 14). At first glance, this theory is not altogether different from enlightened self-interest. Both claim that when a person properly considers what is in her interests, she will find that promoting the well-fare of at least some other people is appropriate. Metaphysical egoism, however, goes much further and conceptualizes the 'other' as a part of one's 'self' (16). Brink explains that this theory is connected to absolute idealism, which is the claim that everything that exists is a part of a single divine consciousness (14). Metaphysical egoism resembles this concept because it breaks down the traditional independence of individuals to view them as a part of a single, greater whole (14-15). He claims psychological continuity, the relationship that exists between different versions of the self across time, is the same kind of relationship that exists between the 'self' and the 'other' (15-16). Brink states:

On this view, a particular person consists of a series of psychologically continuous person stages... And a pair of person stages is psychologically connected just in case they are psychologically similar (in terms of such things as beliefs, desires, and intentions) and the psychological features of the later stage are causally dependent upon the earlier stage. On this view, self-love would seem to imply that I should be concerned about selves that are psychologically continuous with my present self. But I can be psychologically continuous with other selves with whom I share a mental life and interact causally. Interpersonal, as well as intrapersonal, psychological continuity is possible. There will be psychological continuity between any people who share beliefs, values, and goals as the result of their causal interaction. (16)

Basically, similarity and a causal relationship between persons/person stages allow us to call someone psychologically continuous, and psychological continuity is essential to the notion of the ‘self’ and therefore the subject of self-interest. This connection can grow stronger or weaker based on the degree of relationship between the persons/person stages (Brink 16). For example, the continuity between family and friends will be stronger than the continuity between members of a shared community (like Trinity). The continuity will still exist in the second case because, to some degree, common goals and aims are produced through mutual interaction with one another on campus (16). Moreover, because these “other-selves” are seen as a part of the self, their good is not viewed as instrumental, but intrinsic (18). This differs from enlightened self-interest, which, while it advocates for actions beneficial to the ‘other,’ does so based on the instrumental value these actions have in pursuing the agent’s own self-interest. Metaphysical egoism introduces an incredibly wide conception of the ‘self’ that challenges the idea of the independence of persons. Because the ‘self’ of a single person can encompass many other-selves, what is in her self-interest will also directly integrate what is in the interest of those others. This allows for a wide array of traditional, other-directed moral behaviors, done for their own sake, to be encompassed under the heading ‘self-interest’ (18).

Brink is actually not an ethical egoist, he is a rational egoist, and he uses metaphysical egoism to resolve the apparent conflict between self-interest, rationality, and morality (the relationship between rational egoism and ethics will be discussed in the last chapter).

Metaphysical egoism is not a moral (or even rational) theory at all, it is a theory of self and personal identity that has clear and important impacts on ethics and rationality. Looking at the relationship between metaphysical egoism and morality, the adjustments made to traditional conceptions of the self mean that morality and self-interest become more closely aligned by

making the connection between the good of the other and the good of the self more encompassing and direct, without reducing other-directed actions to instrumentality. Metaphysical egoism and ethical egoism are distinct, logically independent theories. However, metaphysical egoism can be combined with ethical egoism to modify the kinds of actions considered ethical and for what reasons. Returning to the example of drunk driving, metaphysical ethical egoism could condemn the action even if I knew I would not be negatively affected because others likely would be, and their well-being is intrinsic, not instrumental because, properly understood, they are actually a part of me. Metaphysical egoism is a modification that can be made to the conception of 'self' in ethical egoism to significantly change the judgments made about the morality of various actions.

The question becomes whether metaphysical egoism offers a compelling argument for its notion of the 'self.' Philosophical debate on the 'self' and what creates a personal identity (if we in fact have one at all) is expansive and complicated. Obviously, I cannot resolve this question here. As such, I will not challenge Brink's idea of what creates identity and the 'self.' Even within this limitation, however, I think that it is possible to see, if not a definitive refutation of metaphysical egoism, at least some serious concerns about its applicability and strength. Brink claims that the psychological states of different persons are interconnected (16). This is, I think, a compelling conclusion. The thoughts, ideas, emotional states, etc. of people can be incredibly contagious (Sauchelli). What is not overly convincing is that interpersonal and intrapersonal continuity are the same thing. We are aware of our continuity within ourselves more directly (Sauchelli). We have memories of our experiences from before. We also have intentions to take actions in the future based on our present selves (Sauchelli). While we may have shared memories of interactions with other people, these memories are not the same memory; my

memory of a conversation with a person, *A*, is not *A*'s memory of the same conversation. Similarly, while I can try to convince, coerce, or physically force *A* to take an action in the future, the causal link between my desire for an action and *A* doing the action is not the same as the causal link between my desire for an action and my doing the action. This seems like, if not a completely different type of continuity, then at the very least vastly varying degrees of continuity. What Brink does not explain, at least not convincingly, is why this variation should not lead to a different conception of 'self' or extreme preference given to my physical person in the same way that I generally give extreme preference to my current well-being over my well-being fifty years in the future.

### *Flourishing Egoism*

Lester Hunt also reinterprets 'self-interest,' but whereas Brink focused on the 'self,' Hunt considers what is meant by 'interest.' He claims that in both ancient Greek and medieval Christian philosophy it was often taken for granted that "the point of ethics is that it is good for you, that it serves your self-interest" (72). The other concept he identifies as prevalent in these eras is the ideas of "virtue," the traits which, if possessed, would make you a good person (73). Hunt argues that there is a close connection between the ideas of self-interest and virtue, stating "I will argue that the notion of happiness or (the term I will use hereafter) 'flourishing' enables us to entertain a much closer connection between virtue and self-interest than modern prejudices will generally allow" (73). For Hunt, flourishing is synonymous with self-interest, and self-interest is pursuing what is of the greatest value (73), and what is of the greatest value is determined by virtue (80). This is because it is virtue that leads a person to living a good life and since living a good life is presumably in our interests, virtue is able to guide our actions (73). Hunt explains that "[s]elf-interest as an ethical standard is connected with action, but the

connection is made indirectly, through the intermediary concepts of value and virtue. One's interests are sustained only by achieving that which is of value, while that which is of value is achieved by means of virtue." (77). Virtue, and therefore morality, become the central object to be desired and pursued, synonymous with self-interest. Hunt believes this provides an egoistic foundation for morality while maintaining the "common-sense view that the good of the other *is* a ground-floor reason for action in that it is worth pursuing in itself" (81).

The synonymy between self-interest and morality is the same thing that traditional egoism posits, but because the definition of 'interest' is modified by flourishing egoism, so is the relationship between self-interest and morality. Whereas in ethical egoism self-interest determines morality, with flourishing egoism morality (or rather virtue) determines self-interest. The relationship has been reversed. Morality and self-interest still collapse into one thing, but in ethical egoism morality is turned into being self-interested, and in flourishing egoism self-interest is turned into being moral. Flourishing ethical egoism allows for all of the same duties as traditional morality, because it essentially adopts traditional morality and claims it is in our interest to do so. What this leaves open, however, is what exactly it means to be moral. I have been using the phrase 'traditional morality' as a stand in for basically all moral theories that enjoy a wider base of philosophical support than ethical egoism, but it is not actually an exact, singular, moral theory. Looking back at a conception of a flourishing ethical egoism, it could be phrased like this: what is moral is what is in my interest, and what is in my interest is to be moral. The question remains: What does it mean to be moral? While flourishing egoism widens our understanding of self-interest, it also widens our definition of morality so broadly that we have lost any clear criteria to determine whether a thing is moral or not. Hunt could point to virtue as supposedly deciding what is in our self-interest, but once again, the question becomes

how do we create virtue (to which the answer is, once again, nebulously ‘morality’) and how does virtue determine what is in our interest (to which the answer seems to be ‘it just does’). There is nothing stopping me from deciding to reverse it once again to say that ethical egoism is the correct moral theory, and that it is towards egoistic goals that my virtue directs me to act. Conversely, I could claim that what is moral is actually a traditional view of utilitarian ethics and then what produces the most good for the most people becomes what virtue directs me towards. What flourishing egoism does, more than provide a moral theory, is to provide a moral motivation, a reason to be moral. The idea of moral motivation will be discussed further in Chapter Four, but for now it is sufficient to note that flourishing egoism does not actually provide any specific moral duties, it simply justifies any and all of them.

While it may be (and I argue is) the case that neither metaphysical egoism nor flourishing egoism are successful at modifying ethical egoism, or more specifically the definition of self-interest to produce new moral duties, there is still valuable insight to be gained from discussing them. They both suggest ways that our understanding of self-interest modifies our understanding of the duties that can be derived from egoism. They function very similarly to the discussion from the last chapter; metaphysical and flourishing egoism illuminate how our understandings of the nature of the relationship between self-interest and humanity impact morality. In the previous chapter, the question being asked was how a belief in psychological egoism affects moral theories. Metaphysical and flourishing egoism offer different formulations of the relationship between humans and self-interest because they reimagine what ‘self-interest’ means. As this is applied to ethical egoism, they both suggest that if we believe it is somehow in our nature to find the wellbeing of others important, non-instrumentally, to our own, either because we understand them as a part of ourselves or because interest means simply to be moral

(and moral is understood as concerned fundamentally with the good of the other), then we will find that ethical egoism permits a far wider array of actions than one might have originally thought. It becomes clear that what it means to act in self-interest depends heavily on what you believe about human nature and what self-interest actually is.

### **Conclusion**

First and foremost, it should be stated that nothing in this chapter proves or refutes ethical egoism, that will be the topic of the next chapter. Rather, I have discussed what ethical egoism actually is as a theory, what it looks like when applied to real life, and how it challenges our traditional ideas of morality. The somewhat underwhelming, and perhaps highly predictable, answer that I have come to is: it's complicated. What ethical egoism looks like is highly dependent on how a person understands a myriad of other concepts including, a person's idea of 'good'/'interest,' how this 'good' is best achieved, and what the 'self' actually is. This is a difficulty that is not limited to ethical egoism; to a certain extent, it extends to all forms of consequentialism which must decide whose good matters and what 'good' is. Nonetheless, these complications have been a focal point and a recurring theme throughout this chapter.

Simplifying the discussion for a moment, it is clear that, in its standard and least complicated form, ethical egoism posits a very different picture of morality and moral duty from standard moral theories by centering the self and disregarding the other, except as a means to further one's own interest. However, depending on the person, situation, and degree to which this person understands others as integral to her interests, ethical egoism can prescribe a large array of traditionally 'moral' actions. It can also prescribe a large number of actions that are antithetical to most other-regarding moral theories. The agent-relativity of ethical egoism allows for an incredibly broad range of actions to be judged moral, but only one universal moral duty (to

best further one's interests). Despite this potential variation in duties, none of the theories presented in this chapter reduced ethical egoism to the common understanding of 'selfishness.' Nor was a descent into something akin to Hobbes' state of war ever considered as a result of ethical egoism. This is because, as Hobbes himself pointed out, self-interest values many things that will work against such a world (86).

The stakes involved in ethical egoism's struggle with traditional morality are real with real consequences of real concern, but it is also important to keep in mind that a part of the challenge ethical egoism poses to ethics is that it often seems able to produce the exact same actions as traditional morality. This is something that even some opponents of ethical egoism, like Kurt Baier (who will be introduced more completely in the following chapter) admit. He allows that "the rules of behavior adopted by the enlightened egoist will be very similar to those of a man who rigidly follows our own moral code" (Baier, "Moral Point of View" 189). The conflict arises, in part, because these demands, while similar, are not identical, and whether this deviation is permissible is important. The defense of traditional morality must show both that ethical egoism is false as a moral theory and why we should follow non-egoistic morality over egoistic considerations.

This chapter has set the stage for the discussion that will come in my final two chapters. In Chapter Three, I will examine the first of the problems listed above: is ethical egoism a sound moral theory? The last chapter will use rational egoism to touch on the second question: why, if ethical egoism is false, should we act morally?

## CHAPTER THREE

### Evaluating Ethical Egoism

Now that I have considered what ethical egoism is and the challenge that it poses to traditional, other-concerned moral theories, it is time to determine whether or not ethical egoism is true. The strong challenge that ethical egoism presents to the assumed paradigm means that “[a]lmost every ethicist has felt it necessary to explain what’s wrong with the theory, as though the very possibility that it might be correct was hanging in the air, threatening to smother their other ideas” (Burgess-Jackson 529). This is unsurprising because the importance of the other in ethics is usually treated as a given and forms the bedrock of most moral/ethical theories. Burgess-Jackson claims that this need to refute ethical egoism has often led to it being “treated with condescension bordering on contempt” rather than being discussed as a serious philosophical theory (530). This condemnation is understandable; if ethical egoism is treated with derision, easily disregarded as false without serious consideration, there is a degree of safety. The relationship between the other and ethics, a principle that most of us, consciously or unconsciously, have believed for the large majority of our lives (likely since we were first introduced to the concepts of ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’) is protected. The impulse to reject ethical egoism out of hand is strong, and I admittedly struggled with this while researching (and writing) this thesis. Even as I read compelling arguments in favor of ethical egoism that I could rationally recognize as valid, the underlying feeling of wrongness remained. In spite of this, I have done my level best to remain open and fair-minded towards ethical egoism, because I can recognize that not all ingrained, implicit beliefs are correct or good (many, like racism and sexism, are actually actively harmful). In this chapter I do my best to consider the arguments in favor of ethical egoism as well as those arguments offered in opposition. While I will ultimately decide

against ethical egoism, it is not a conclusion that should be taken for granted. In order to have a clear discussion, it will be useful to first outline a framework for judging ethical egoism, or any moral theory, that I believe is fair and reasonable.

In his *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, Mark Timmons argues that there are two things that any moral theory aims to accomplish, one practical and one theoretical (13). The practical goal of a moral theory is to “provide a decision procedure whose use by suitably informed agents will reliably lead them to correct moral verdicts about matters of moral concern in contexts of moral deliberation and choice” (Timmons 13). The theoretical aim of a moral theory is to “discover underlying features of actions, persons, and other items of moral evaluation that make them right or wrong, good or bad” (Timmons 13). Put simply, the practical component of a moral theory tells us *what* action we should take to be moral; the theoretical component of a moral theory tells us *why* this is the case. These two criteria are generally thought to be closely related because the answer to one may depend on the answer to the other (Timmons 14). That said, they are logically distinct, and it is possible to have one without the other. This is most obviously the case when considering the instances where a person may know what to do, but not all of the reasoning behind why she ought to do so. Anyone who has ever memorized a mathematical formula without knowing how or why it works is well acquainted with this idea. The reverse, where a person knows the theoretical underpinnings of a moral theory, but is not able to practically apply it, is also technically possible, though less likely. Returning to the example of mathematics, a person may know the theoretical solution to a problem, but be lacking the time, information, or tools to solve it, be unable to use her theoretical knowledge to provide an adequate solution.

When evaluating the merits of ethical egoism as a moral theory, determining whether or not it can satisfy both the practical and theoretical demands laid out by Timmons appears to be a good place to start. This is because any theory that cannot tell you how to act, has no use in everyday life, and can therefore be discarded as superfluous information, no matter how theoretically sound it may be. Conversely, if there is no good explanation for why a person should take any action, then there is no clear reason to take the action prescribed by the theory in the first place, and therefore no reason to put any stock in the theory. In my attempt to evaluate ethical egoism's performance with regard to these two criteria, I have divided each into several subcategories. Under practicality, I consider the determinacy, applicability, and pragmatic consistency of the theory. With regard to theoretical concerns, I focus on external and internal coherence and explanatory power. One feature of theoretical importance that I have singled out is logical consistency, and this is where I will start my analysis.

### **Consistency**

When it comes to evaluating a moral theory (or any theory), logical consistency is often considered the single most important factor for determining that a theory is false. Timmons explains the idea of consistency by saying that “[a] moral theory should be consistent in the sense that its principles, together with relevant factual information, yield consistent moral verdicts about the morality of actions, persons, and other objects of moral evaluation” (21). Therefore, a moral theory is inconsistent when the same set of facts and principles can lead to different moral judgements. Logical inconsistency is important to the theoretical viability of a theory, especially in the case that the inconsistency leads to a direct conflict. Contradiction in a theory means that it cannot possibly be true because two contradictory things (e.g. ‘A’ exists & ‘A’ does not exist) cannot both be true at the same time, and, since they are a part of the same

theory, the entire theory cannot possibly be true at the same time. One part of the theory will always be false according to some other part of it. I am looking at logical consistency by itself at the outset, despite the fact that it can be grouped with the other theoretical concerns, because it is a minimal requirement for any theory to be true. If ethical egoism is logically inconsistent, then it is a false theory, and my consideration of it may end there. Moreover, consistency is important to the practical aim of a moral theory because if a theory produces different, possibly directly contradictory, results given the same circumstances, then it is not able to direct a person on how she should act because there are multiple answers that may not all be possible to perform at the same time. For these reasons, I am beginning this chapter with logical inconsistency, despite the fact that the other theoretical concerns will not be discussed until later. This section is focused mainly on the efforts of three philosophers, Moore, Baier, and Campbell, to prove that ethical egoism is logically inconsistent and the arguments that other philosophers have made against their claims.

### *Moore*

In 1903, G.E. Moore published the *Principia Ethica*. In part of this text, he offers an argument against ethical egoism on the grounds that it produces contradictory results. Moore defines ethical egoism as “the doctrine which holds that we ought each of us to pursue our own greatest happiness as our ultimate end” (“Is Egoism Reasonable?” 48). As I understand him, Moore’s refutation of ethical egoism goes as follows. For something to be “my own good” it must mean that either the thing in itself is good or that my possessing it is good (50). ‘Good’ itself cannot belong to me (50). This good, either in the object or my possession of the object, must be absolutely good, otherwise I would not have a reason to aim for it (51). But, if it is absolutely good that I have some object, then everyone else has as much reason as I do to want

that I have it (Moore 51). Therefore, my own good is the sole, “Universal” good (51). Ethical egoism states that every person should pursue his own good, and this logical process can be replicated for every person. A contradiction is created within ethical egoism because what it “...holds, therefore is that *each* man’s happiness is the sole good— that a number of different things are *each* of them the only good thing there is” (“Is Egoism Reasonable?” 51). In short, ethical egoism holds that a person should only pursue his own good while also holding that every person should pursue his good because it is the Universal good, and there are as many sole Universal goods as there are people. Before ending his argument, Moore considers a possible refutation that he borrows from Sidgwick, which is to claim that a person's own good is the “ultimate rational end to [the egoist] himself,” and “[i]t cannot be proved that the difference between his own happiness and another’s happiness is not *for him*, all important” (51). Moore views the phrase “ultimate rational end for himself” as a contradiction in terms (51). This is because for the good to be ‘ultimate’ must mean that the end is good in itself, and the fact that it is ‘rational’ tells us the end is truly good (51). Therefore, for a thing to be the ultimate, rational end means that it must be truly good in itself, and therefore a part of the Universal good (Moore 51). If something is a part of the Universal good, then it cannot be qualified with modifiers like “for himself” or “for him” (51). Since this contradiction cannot be resolved, Moore concludes that ethical egoism is self-contradictory and ought to be discarded.

In response to Moore’s argument, Michael Smith challenges the idea that ‘good’ is agent-neutral rather than agent-relative. Smith begins by reconstructing Moore’s argument into two premises: (1) “if being *F* is good for some person, *A*, then this entails that *A*’s possession of the property of being *F* is good in an unqualified sense”; and (2) “if *A*’s possession of the property of being *F* is good in the unqualified sense, then everyone, both *A* and everyone else,

ought to do what they can to make  $A$  be  $F$ " (580). Therefore, ethical egoism says both that each person should only do what is in her interest, and that she should do what is in every other person's interests, as every other person should do what is in hers. He then discusses how C. D. Broad refuted Moore's argument by focusing on the second premise and pointing out that ethical egoism does not itself state that a person ought to pursue the Universal good. That is a condition that Moore himself introduces (Smith 582). Therefore, ethical egoism is not *self*-contradictory. Smith then offers his own argument against Moore, which focuses on the first premise. He asks the reader to consider that "the goodness possessed by my being happy presupposed the existence of some sort of relation between my being happy and me..." (583). He reformulates the statement " $x$ 's being happy is good" to " $x$ 's being happy is good <sub>$x$</sub> " with the subscript denoting to whom the 'good' belongs (583). Essentially, Smith challenges Moore's assertion that 'good' is something that can only belong either to the object or my possessing the object, rather than to myself directly; 'good' becomes agent-relative (584). Looking back at Moore's argument, it becomes clear that if the 'good' of a person is not an unqualified 'good' for all, then other people do not have a reason to aim for this good anymore. The contradiction of a multitude of sole, Universal goods is dissolved into individualized, agent-relative, personal goods. What must be compared is whether Moore's agent-neutral 'good' is more compelling or Smith's agent-relative 'good <sub>$x$</sub> '.

Looking purely at how we use the term 'good' in daily life, it would appear that the lay-person understanding of the word aligns more closely with Smith's (or at least recognizes that his conception is possible). After all, we often recognize that something that is good for one person is not good for another, or even most other people, but this does not negate the goodness received by the first person. For instance, we can understand that it may be good for an oil

executive if we continue to over-consume fossil fuels, but that it will be bad for humanity, and most other species on earth, if we do not curb consumption. It is still good for the oil executive, especially if he is old enough or rich enough to avoid the worst consequences of climate change. This is not to say that we do not use 'good' in the way that Moore understands it. What is morally good is generally considered to be agent-neutral, with ethical egoism being the obvious exception. However, even in this case, a distinction can be made between the *type* of actions that egoism says are good (those that advance self-interest) which are Universal and agent-neutral, and the specific actions that are actually pursued, which may vary depending on the agent. Moore, however, views this second 'good' as Universal also, ignoring or disregarding the other possible meaning of 'good.' This is a problem because, even if Moore's definition is correct, and 'good,' properly understood, is only Universal, a word still needs to be assigned to the concept of 'good<sub>x</sub>' since it is clearly used in daily life. Whatever this word is, it can then simply be inserted into the formula for ethical egoism, thus averting the contradiction Moore claims. Understanding the difference between a relative and Universal 'good,' and how each is generally applied/understood, allows it to become clear that Moore's argument does not actually show that ethical egoism is self-contradictory. This concludes my discussion of Moore, and in the following sections, I will consider other philosophical arguments to prove that ethical egoism is logically inconsistent.

### *Baier*

In "The Moral Point of View," Kurt Baier argues that ethical egoism is inconsistent because it leads to contradictory moral obligations in the event that the interests of two individuals conflict. He uses the example of two people, K and B, who are both running for president. It is assumed that being president is in the self-interest of both K and B, and that only

one can win. If K were to win, it would be in her best interest, but against B's and vice versa.

Ethical egoism says that a person ought to do what is in her self-interest, therefore K ought to "liquidate" B in order to win and B ought to prevent K from doing so, and vice versa. However, it is also morally wrong to prevent another person from completing her moral duty.

Consequently, it is also K's duty not to prevent B from becoming president, and it is also B's duty not to prevent K from becoming president. The same action, preventing the opposition from winning, is judged in two different ways. The inconsistency created is problematic because "the same act (logically) cannot be both morally right and morally wrong" ("Moral Point of View" 189-190). If Baier is correct, then ethical egoism is logically inconsistent. The problem with Baier's argument is that not all of his premises are actually derived from ethical egoism itself (Rachels 198). Baier uses the premise that it is immoral to prevent another person from doing her moral duty (Rachels 198). While this may be a reasonable moral requirement, it is not actually a part of ethical egoism, which only says that a person ought to do what is in her best interests (Rachels 198; Timmons 181). Ethical egoism, therefore, cannot be said to be logically inconsistent and/or self-contradictory on these grounds.

This does not mean that Baier's critique has no value. First, the premise 'it is immoral to prevent another person from doing her moral duty' is concerned with how my actions affect other people; it is itself a duty to an 'other.' This is exactly what ethical egoism denies. A premise that looks neutral on its face actually comes from the fact that we, generally speaking, are not ethical egoists, and believe that the 'other' is important in moral decision-making. Baier's use of this premise highlights both how deeply ingrained our expectations that morality is, to some degree, other-regarding, and the subsequent difficulty that we may encounter when trying to fairly evaluate ethical egoism with neutral criteria. Second, it shows one of the limitations of

ethical egoism. Even if it is accepted that the ability to peacefully resolve conflicts is not a requirement of a moral theory, and that Baier's premise is actually fundamentally biased against ethical egoism, a person may still believe that a moral theory furnished with a more robust conflict resolution system is preferable to one that is not. If this is the case, then while Baier may not prove that ethical egoism is logically inconsistent, his argument could still do some damage to the theory. The relative impotency of ethical egoism in providing conflict resolution is a problem that will be discussed in more depth in the section on practical considerations. For now, however, I will move on from Baier to the final philosopher in this section.

### *Campbell*

Richmond Campbell's "A Short Refutation of Ethical Egoism" is the final attempt to show that ethical egoism is inconsistent that I will examine. Campbell's argument is very similar to Baier's with a slight modification. Like Baier, he focuses on the potential problem created when the interests of two people conflict. His argument is constructed as follows: [I] If an agent, *A*, ought to do *X* in a situation *S* and another agent, *B*, ought to do *Y* in *S*, then it cannot be logically impossible for both *A* to do *X* and *B* to do *Y* in *S*. [II] There exists a situation, *S*, where *A* would benefit most from doing *X* and *B* would benefit most from preventing *A* from doing *X*. [III] If ethical egoism is true, *A* ought to do *X* and *B* ought to prevent *A* from doing *X* in *S*. [IV] If *A* ought to do *X* and *B* ought to prevent *A* from doing *X* in *S*, then it cannot be logically impossible for both *A* to do *X* and *B* to prevent *X* in *S*. [V] It is logically impossible for *A* to do *X* and *B* to prevent *X* in *S*. Therefore, ethical egoism is inconsistent and cannot be true (Campbell 250-251).

Campbell's argument, unlike Baier's, does not say that *A* has a moral duty not to prevent *B* from doing *Y*. Instead, he claims that, if *A* ought to do *X* and *B* ought to do *Y*, it must be

possible for *A* to do *X* and *B* to do *Y* at the same time, and that this is not possible in ethical egoism when the interests of *A* and *B* conflict. So it is not that *A* herself has two contradictory moral obligations, to do *X* and to not do *X*, but that the world is not such that *A* can both do *X* and be prevented from doing *X* at the same time. Since both *A*'s doing *X* and *B*'s prevention of *A* doing *X* are prescribed by the same theory, and both cannot happen at the same time, the theory, ethical egoism, is logically inconsistent. Moreover, there is also an underlying, though unstated, use of the fairly standard premise: ought implies can. This was discussed in Chapter One with regard to the limiting factor of psychological egoism on moral theories. The basic idea is that in order to say that someone ought to do something, she must first be able to do it. In Campbell's argument, this principle is applied to say that ethical egoism requires that *A* ought to do *X* and *B* ought to prevent *X*, then it should be the case that both can do these actions. However, since it is logically impossible for both *A* and *B* to perform the actions that they ought to in cases of conflict, ethical egoism cannot be true.

The obvious counter-argument to what Campbell says is to point out that while it is not possible for both *A* and *B* to successfully do *X* and *Y* at the same time, it is possible for *A* to do *X* and *B* to do *Y* individually. This is a critique that Campbell himself anticipates and responds to in his paper. He argues that such an objection comes from "a conflation of hypothetical and categorical uses of 'ought'" (252). The hypothetical use of 'ought' allows for contradictory ends and/or means to be used in a situation (252). To borrow Baier's example, if *K* wants to be president, she ought to win the election, the same goes for *B*. However, with a hypothetical 'ought' this can be understood more as directions to becoming president than as a binding moral obligation. In this sense, it can be true that both *K* and *B* ought to win the election. This is the 'ought' used in the objection above (252). The categorical 'ought' requires that something should

be done unconditionally and is the one demanded in moral situations because when an action is moral, it is always, unconditionally, moral (252). Further, it “entails that both  $X$  and  $Y$  ought to be done, together, and hence that it is possible for both to be done either simultaneously or in sequence” (252). Because ethical egoism is a moral theory, the ‘ought’ that it requires should be the categorical ought, rather than the hypothetical ought. Therefore, the defense of ethical egoism by showing that both  $X$  and  $Y$  are possible, just not at the same time, fails.

One question about Campbell’s argument is whether or not ethical egoism (or morality in general) actually entails a categorical ought. At the very least, it can be said that the categorical ought is not an explicitly stated requirement in ethical egoism, although it may be a requirement for all ethical theories more broadly. Investigating this debate is not necessary, however, because there is a relatively simple solution to resolve the apparent problem that Campbell raises. The definition of ethical egoism can be modified slightly to eliminate any concerns that  $X$  and  $Y$  may not both be possible at the same time in  $S$ . Campbell defines ethical egoism as “the view that *everyone* ought (morally) to do what will benefit him most in any given situation” (249). By changing “do” to “pursue” (and adding some qualifying language) the conflict is resolved, and the new definition reads: everyone ought (morally) to *pursue* what will benefit him most, and he may reasonably expect to attain, in any given situation. The added clause clarifies that a person ought not to pursue things that are completely unattainable, even if it would be in her best interests to have it. After all, fruitlessly pursuing any outcome will likely be counter to a person’s self-interest in reality, even if the theoretical outcome would be good. While it may not be possible for  $A$  to do  $X$  and  $B$  to prevent  $X$  in  $S$  simultaneously, it is possible for  $A$  to pursue  $X$  and  $B$  to pursue the prevention of  $X$  in  $S$  at the same time. Both  $A$  and  $B$  can do what they ought simultaneously, thus, even assuming the validity of the necessary connection between the

categorical ought and morality, Campbell cannot show that ethical egoism is logically inconsistent and/or self-contradictory.

### *Conclusion*

The desire to prove a logical contradiction is strong because it is the most definitive way to prove that a theory is wrong. It also affects both the practical and theoretical aims of a moral theory. Moore, Baier, and Campbell all tried to show that ethical egoism was logically inconsistent and therefore incorrect. However, all three philosophers failed, for various reasons, to prove this inconsistency. Although inconsistency/self-contradiction offer the strongest, and most decisive, condemnation of a theory, there are other criteria that can be used to weigh the efficacy of ethical egoism. The rest of this chapter looks at the other arguments, both practical and theoretical, in favor of and opposed to ethical egoism.

### **Practical Criteria**

The first part of a moral theory that I will look at in more depth is the practical aim. As a reminder, the practical goal of an ethical theory is to guide moral deliberations and choices on which actions to take in daily life (Timmons 13). The three key factors that I will be examining in terms of practicality are determinacy, applicability, and pragmatic inconsistency. Each of these elements provides a different lens for considering how well ethical egoism performs as a moral theory. Before entering into this analysis, it is important to note that the goal here is not to show that ethical egoism is logically inconsistent, as the previous section did, thereby definitively disproving it, rather, the focus is on how well ethical egoism performs as a moral theory. It may turn out that while ethical egoism is logically consistent as a *theory*, it still fails to meet some criteria to be considered a *morality*. To aid and enrich this analysis, I will compare ethical egoism's performance on these various criteria to that of a "traditional" moral theory:

utilitarianism. My use of the term ‘utilitarianism’ in this chapter will broadly refer to the idea that “[a]n action A is right if and only if (and because) A would produce as high a utility as any alternative action that the agent could perform instead” (Timmons 110). Utility is defined as the net intrinsic value of the consequences of the action on the well-being of all individuals (Timmons 109). I chose utilitarianism because it, like ethical egoism, is a consequentialist theory. However, it aims for the greatest good for the most people, instead of the self-interest of a single individual. The conceptual similarities between utilitarianism and ethical egoism allow me to focus more narrowly on the major difference between the two theories: the importance of self-interest.

#### *Determinacy and Applicability*

Having said this, I will begin by examining determinacy and applicability. I have grouped determinacy and applicability together because they are both required for a person to successfully use a moral theory in everyday life to judge an action. However, they are not exactly the same thing. Determinacy is the ability of a moral theory to “...yield definite moral verdicts about the morality of whatever is being evaluated” (Timmons 22). A moral theory might fail to be determinate by being too vague or lacking decision-making procedures (Timmons 22). On the other hand, “[t]he principles of a moral theory are highly determinate when those principles, together with the relevant facts, yield definite verdicts about the rightness or wrongness of actions in a large number of cases, if not in all cases” (Timmons 181). While a lack of determinacy can indicate an insufficient understanding of why something is right or wrong, therefore making it a theoretical concern, we notice failures of determinacy most often in our actual, practical use of a moral theory in our daily lives. For this reason, I have decided to group it with the practical criteria for a moral theory. Applicability, while similar to determinacy, is

slightly different. In order for a moral theory to be applicable, the information required to make a decision must be information that a person can be reasonably expected to be able to attain (Timmons 22). If a moral theory requires more information than a person will typically have access to in order to produce ethical decisions, then it will not be a very practical theory, since a person will not actually be able to use it. For example, if my moral theory says that every action ought to actually (not just predictably) maximize the well-being of every cat in the world, while I may know exactly how to judge an action in theory, I will not actually be able to judge my actions in practice since no one has access to all of the information it would require to determine whether or not an action is moral. Hence, determinacy and applicability work together to allow a moral theory to function practically, but are not exactly the same thing.

Beginning with determinacy, ethical egoism is highly determinate, although perhaps not as determinate as utilitarianism. The theory of ethical egoism, combined with the relevant facts, will yield moral verdicts on actions (Timmons 181). The relevant facts in this case are how actions will affect the agent's interests. The only complicating factor being how exactly self-interest is understood. Various formulations of this were discussed in Chapter Two, but generally speaking, it is widely accepted that self-interest is prudential and enlightened (Timmons 165). Whatever the definition of self-interest is, so long as the actor has a definite conception in mind, then ethical egoism, combined with relevant facts about the effect of actions on the agent, yields clear moral verdicts; the ethical action is the one that best advances the agent's self-interest. Utilitarianism is similarly able to definitively render moral verdicts on actions (Timmons 159). The relevant information to utilitarianism is the total utility of an action for all individuals. Again, ideas of how the well-being of individuals should be measured may differ, but so long as the agent has a clear idea of her conception of utility/well-being, then

utilitarianism will be able to determine which actions are moral; the ethical action is the one that best advances the well-being of the most people.

However, there is one possible complication with this analysis that comes from Baier. Earlier, I showed that Baier's attempt to prove that ethical egoism is inconsistent ultimately failed, but he raised an important concern about the ability of ethical egoism to resolve interpersonal conflicts. In a situation where the interests of two individuals conflict, like when K and B both wanted to be president, ethical egoism advises both to "liquidate" the other in pursuit of their own goals. In "Egoism" Baier focuses in more on the conflict resolution aspect of his critique and says:

...ethical egoism cannot be sound, for it precludes the interpersonally authoritative regulation of interpersonal conflicts of interest, since such a regulation implies that conduct contrary to one's interest is sometimes morally required of one, and conduct in one's best interest sometimes morally forbidden to one. Thus, ethical egoism is incompatible with ethical conflict-regulation. It allows only personally authoritative principles or precepts... (202)

In essence, ethical egoism fails to determine whose interests should be most important when the interests of two or more individuals conflict. This is a problem that utilitarianism does not have. If the interests of two or more people were to conflict under a utilitarian framework, then presumably it would be resolved by looking at which outcome has the greatest overall utility. In the example of K and B both wanting to be the president, if K being the president will have the greatest utility, then K ought (morally) to liquidate B and B ought (morally) to allow herself to be liquidated, and vice versa. The conflict of interests has been adjudicated by morality.

The ethical egoist can respond by pointing out that ethical egoism is still determinate because it tells both K and B what she ought (morally) to do. Competition between individuals and their interests is a fundamental part of life, and the competition itself will adjudicate between whose interests prevail, even if there is no moral reason why one should take precedence over the other. This is true, but it does not erase the fact that ethical egoism lacks the ability to determine, morally, which person's interests should win out, an ability that utilitarianism has. If a mechanism for conflict resolution is desired in a moral system, even if it is not required, then ethical egoism finds itself at a disadvantage in comparison to some other moral theories, in this case utilitarianism. While ethical egoism is determinate on a personal level, interpersonally, it is less able to resolve conflict than utilitarianism.

Applicability is also complicated, but ethical egoism comes out slightly better off than utilitarianism. Both ethical egoism and utilitarianism are consequentialist theories, and, as such, they run into the same problem that all consequentialist theories do. If the morality of an action should be judged by the consequences it will bring about, not some overarching rule (like a deontological theory would advocate), and it is not possible to know exactly what consequences an action will cause before taking it, then how is a person to decide the morality of an action proactively rather than retroactively? This problem is solved in utilitarianism by modifying the theory slightly to say that the moral action is the one with the best *expected* consequences (Timmons 181). Ethical egoism can adopt a very similar argument and say that what a person ought to do in any given circumstance is the action that she expects will result in the greatest benefit to herself.

A second problem with applicability is the time required for deliberation. In utilitarianism, because the moral action is the one that is best, however that is defined, for the

most people, and there are a lot of people and ways they can be affected by any given action, the time it would take to properly consider all of the relevant consequences of any given action could be prohibitively long. In response to this concern, Stuart Mill created a two-level approach to ethics (Timmons 129). He claims that we, as humans, have developed over time a fairly good sense of what kinds of actions best serve the interests of humanity, and these actions have been passed down as common sense moral rules (e.g. do not lie, do not steal, etc.) (Timmons 129). Generally, following these rules will align with utilitarian morality. However, there are some situations, like where these moral guidelines conflict, that a person must deliberate more carefully on what actions actually produce the most utility (Timmons 130). For example, a rule about not lying might conflict with a rule about not hurting others if telling the truth could hurt someone. This two-level process, while similar to rule utilitarianism, is not actually the same thing because the moral 'rules' are taken as guidelines, but the ultimate morality of an action is still determined by its own utility rather than its compliance with a rule. It can be used in a similar way to reduce deliberation time, but some deliberation will still be required.

Ethical egoism encounters a similar problem and can use a similar solution. Because self-interest can be enlightened and prudential, considering whether or not an action would be in a person's long-term self-interest could be incredibly complex and time-consuming, making it impractical to actually use in everyday life. In response, like utilitarianism, the ethical egoist can claim that over time, "one hopefully learns how to guide one's behavior in ways that are likely to promote one's self-interest" (Timmons 182). Once this occurs, an ethical egoist can stick to certain "rules of thumb" and reasonably expect them to benefit her self-interest so that she does not have to spend time in a lengthy deliberation every time she needs to decide what actions will be moral (Timmons 182). While it would not be immoral to break these "rules of thumb," there

will still inevitably be circumstances where these rules will fail to indicate the best action, and as such, a degree of deliberation is still required in these situations.

The required secondary deliberative process for ethical egoism would almost certainly be more simple and accessible than that of utilitarianism. For ethical egoism, when the moral rules are insufficient for the situation, the subsequent deliberation only needs to take into account how the relevant actions would affect the agent herself. Utilitarianism requires the agent to consider how her actions could affect every other person as well as herself. While it may be difficult to gauge which action would be in our own best interest, ethical egoism only requires one judgment to be made, and it is made about oneself, the person whom the agent likely knows best. Utilitarianism, conversely, requires calculations to be made about far more people, many or even most of whom the agent will have very little knowledge about. As such, while not perfect, ethical egoism is more easily applicable than utilitarianism.

Looking at the criteria of determinacy and applicability, both ethical egoism and utilitarianism are able to satisfy them with varying degrees of success. Utilitarianism comes out ahead on determinacy because it can regulate interpersonal conflict. Ethical egoism is more applicable because it only requires the agent to think about one person. What exactly this means for ethical egoism and morality in general will be discussed in more depth in my conclusion. For now, it is time to move onto the last consideration of practicality for ethical egoism.

### *Pragmatic Inconsistency*

Unlike logical inconsistency, which tries to show that a theory is self-contradictory, pragmatic inconsistency occurs when a person does or says something that contradicts her stated beliefs (Harrison 595). According to Jonathan Harrison, “[p]ragmatic inconsistency commonly occurs when one is putting forward a philosophical view that is unnecessarily paradoxical”

(595). At the very least, the presence of pragmatic inconsistency raises questions about how practical the principles of a theory actually are if even those individuals who maintain a belief in them cannot successfully follow the dictates of the theory. Bertrand Russell used the example of a woman who believed in solipsism, but also questioned why more people besides herself did not believe the same thing (Harrison 595). The inconsistency here is that solipsism posits that one is alone in the universe, and yet her statement implied that other people exist. In “Ethical Egoism, Utilitarianism and the Fallacy of Pragmatic Inconsistency” Jonathan Harrison claims that advocates of both ethical egoism and act utilitarianism commit various forms of pragmatic inconsistency, and these pragmatic inconsistencies should count against them. However, looking more closely at his arguments, it becomes clear that ethical egoism has a bigger problem than utilitarianism does.

With ethical egoism, there are two types of pragmatic inconsistencies that can be committed. First, a person who publicly espouses ethical egoism may actually harm her own interests, and therefore contradicts what she claims to believe (Harrison 599). Second, it may turn out that ethical egoism itself actually requires a person to believe that egoism is wrong or imply that another, incompatible, theory is right (Harrison 600). The first iteration of pragmatic inconsistency can be restated as the problem of publicity or universalization. Various philosophers have put forward the idea that an ethical egoist cannot universalize her theory without running into contradiction (Frankena 17). This is because, as was discussed earlier, more people believing in ethical egoism means more competition for the egoist in achieving her interests. Therefore, it is best, and most moral, for her to publicly espouse moral beliefs that she does not actually hold (Kalin 84; Mandeville 48). A connection can be drawn from this pragmatic inconsistency to Kalin’s idea of a private morality that was discussed in the previous

chapter. It also means that, in theory, every author who has genuinely written in defense of ethical egoism, including Kalin himself, has committed this version of a pragmatic inconsistency. This does not mean that they were necessarily acting irrationally, or do not genuinely believe in ethical egoism (Harrison 600). A substantial monetary reward, combined with the knowledge that, given the deeply and widely held bias against ethical egoism, their arguments were unlikely to sway enough people to significantly negatively impact their well-being, might convince an ethical egoist to commit the pragmatic inconsistency while still acting rationally and holding conviction in their theory. While this is possible, the more simple, and straight-forward reason a person might publicly defend ethical egoism is because she genuinely believes it (or at least believes that she believes it), in which case, this pragmatic inconsistency is a major blunder that has serious implications for how well ethical egoism can be applied to daily life.

The second possible type of pragmatic inconsistency involves the idea that following ethical egoism is not actually the most effective method to actually attain the ends it pursues. One possible problem with ethical egoism is that there are times when straight-forwardly pursuing one's interests may actually make them harder to attain (Hunt 75). For example, if other people realized that I valued them only for their contribution to my well-being, then it is entirely possible that they would decide not to continue their relationship with me, leaving me worse off than I would be, had I valued them intrinsically. As such, developing a genuinely intrinsic, rather than instrumental, understanding of my friends will likely lead to a better outcome for me (Hunt 75). Conversely, many philosophers have associated virtue with self-interest (Hunt 72), and there are certainly people who appear to be doing very well for themselves who are not (or at least would not claim to be) ethical egoists. This is not to say that the best way to achieve one's self-interest is to completely neglect it; there may be (and likely is) a happy medium. Perhaps, to

put it metaphorically, the best way to get boiling water is to put water on the stove and do something else while waiting rather than watching it intently. A person might seek out friends because she believes having friends is in her interests, but once she has found a person, decide to focus on valuing the other intrinsically, rather than fixating on her own interests, which will provide a more stable friendship, with a less agonizing wait. Of course, the philosophers like Tara Smith, who I discussed in the previous chapter, would likely object to such a negative view of egoistic friendship, but it remains true that fixating on something can sometimes make it more difficult to attain, and there are plenty of non-egoists who seem to be doing quite well in life. Nonetheless, there are also undoubtedly egoists who are also doing rather well. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that, while ethical egoism may not be necessary to satisfy a person's interests, it is also not impossible to do so using ethical egoism. Therefore, this second claim of pragmatic inconsistency is not overly compelling.

Harrison charges utilitarianism with the same two versions of pragmatic inconsistency as ethical egoism, but to a lesser degree, and introduces a third kind of pragmatic inconsistency: indirect pragmatic inconsistency. First, it may be the case that sometimes, espousing a utilitarian ethical philosophy will actually be harmful to the aim of utilitarianism (Harrison 602). It might be more expedient to the aims of utilitarianism not to disclose the theory to children, for instance, who would be more likely to behave in ways that benefit the whole given simple moral rules rather than a complex moral theory (Harrison 602). However, it is not true that openly advocating for utilitarianism is always pragmatically inconsistent, as it is with ethical egoism, meaning that utilitarianism comes off better in this specific category.

Second, it could sometimes be the case that believing in utilitarianism is not the most effective way to accomplish the greatest good for the most people. The example Harrison uses is

that of a person who believes in blurring the line between the self and others like Parfit suggests leads to him disregarding his own well-being, which, if this occurs on a large scale, could lead to worse results for everyone (Harrison 602). (I have not discussed Parfit, but his argument is similar to that of Brink's metaphysical egoism.) This is an argument that I only find marginally convincing because it seems likely to me that, as Butler suggests, humans have certain passions and the principle of self-love that will prevent them from completely neglecting their own needs (Butler 162). As such, this argument for pragmatic inconsistency in utilitarianism is even less convincing than it was for ethical egoism.

Finally, there is indirect pragmatic inconsistency. Harrison explains that an indirect pragmatic inconsistency occurs when "the end the principle one is recommending enjoins one to seek would not be brought about if everybody were to do what one is recommending" (603). For example, on an individual level not paying taxes to give more to the poor may lead to a greater amount of total utility, but if everyone stopped paying taxes to help the poor, the government would lack sufficient funds to pay for programs that make everyone's lives better off, including the poor (603). Harrison avoids this problem by advocating for "Cumulative Effect Utilitarianism" which says that you should only do an action if the cumulative effect of everyone performing that action would lead to the greatest utility (603). Although he does not mention it, a move to rule utilitarianism could also help to solve this problem by requiring agents to determine the morality of actions based on the moral rules most likely to create the best outcome when followed by everyone, rather than based on the utility of individual actions. Nonetheless, the utilitarian seems to have tools to avoid this pragmatic inconsistency as well.

For both ethical egoism and utilitarianism, there is some concern about the pragmatic inconsistency of publicly espousing the belief, but other forms of pragmatic inconsistency can be

avoided and/or disproven. However, utilitarianism fares better under this first type of pragmatic inconsistency than ethical egoism. Pragmatic inconsistency can be used as an indicator that the theory is “unnecessarily paradoxical” and calls into question the sincerity of the proponent’s belief. This means that utilitarianism is likely the less paradoxical theory to adhere in daily life, and that a person is probably better able to sincerely believe in it.

*Conclusion:*

Ethical egoism, as a practical theory applied to every-day moral decision-making, performs well relative to utilitarianism on applicability and very similarly on determinacy, although it could not provide mediation of interpersonal conflict. However, it does worse than utilitarianism with regards to pragmatic inconsistency. Before considering whether or not these defects should be considered fatal, I will first look at the remaining criteria for what makes a moral theory theoretically useful. This will complete my consideration of important features of a moral system and determine if any theoretical failings on the part of ethical egoism are sufficient to disprove the theory.

**Theoretical Criteria**

Finally, ethical egoism’s success as a moral theory can be judged by how well it meets theoretical demands. The theoretical aim of any moral theory is to “discover those underlying features of actions, persons, and other items of moral evaluation that make them right or wrong, good or bad” (Timmons 13). Often, the biggest consideration in the theoretical performance of a morality is whether or not it is logically consistent. Given the importance of logical consistency, and its ability to overrule all other considerations, I chose to have this discussion at the outset of this chapter rather than wait. As such, this section will focus on other factors. When considering ethical egoism’s theoretical performance, I will use three criteria: external coherence, internal

coherence, and explanatory power. As with the practical criteria, I will compare ethical egoism's performance to utilitarianism to provide a richer analysis.

External coherence is the idea that "... a moral theory ought to be consistent with (if not be supported by) well-established theories and assumptions from other fields of enquiry" (Timmons 182). External coherence is categorized as a theoretical concern because if part of the explanation of a theory contradicts established ideas external to moral philosophy, then it is highly unlikely that it accurately accounts for why things are moral since it contradicts the way that the world functions. If psychological egoism, discussed in Chapter One, were true, then it would be very convincing evidence in favor of ethical egoism, because not acting out of self-interest would be impossible, and all non-self-interested moral theories would be externally inconsistent. The ability to argue from psychological egoism to ethical egoism is another reason, aside from the assessment of how human nature and morality interact, that the discussion in Chapter One was useful. However, as noted at the end of that chapter, most scientific evidence seems to work against psychological egoism (Timmons 182). If we continue with the assumption that psychological egoism is false, does this disprove that ethical egoism is as well? The answer is no. Ethical egoism is a normative theory, it claims that even though people *can* act from non-self-interested motivations, they nonetheless *should* pursue their own well-being. The question may be asked about why and for what purpose we have an ability to act out of other-directed motivations when it is best (morally, and probably rationally) to act instead out of self-interest, but answering this question is not the job of ethical egoism, and its existence does not prove ethical egoism wrong. Therefore, while it cannot be said that ethical egoism is supported by psychological egoism, because psychological egoism is likely false, ethical egoism is not in contradiction with any external theories.

Utilitarianism finds itself in a similar position to ethical egoism, although somewhat reversed. If psychological egoism were true, then utilitarianism would have to be false according to the principle that ought implies can. As we have already discussed, psychological egoism is not true, meaning that utilitarianism is not disproven. What would work in the theories favor is if human nature could be shown exclusively altruistic or that we intrinsically, and non-morally desire utility, as it refers to the attaining the best possible outcome for the most people. Mills attempted to prove this type of theory at one point, but, for a number of reasons that I will not get into here, ultimately failed (Timmons 159). Further, it can be said that utilitarianism fails to understand the fact that “[h]uman beings are, by nature, strongly self-interested and partial to their circle of family and friends” (Timmons 159). Nonetheless, the fact that we can and/or often do act in self-interest does not mean that a moral theory prescribing other-regarding actions is necessarily wrong so long as non-egoistic motivations are possible. Therefore, while there are some aspects of external, non-moral theories that suggest possible problems with both ethical egoism and utilitarianism, neither is definitively refuted (or supported) by any external theory.

I will group internal coherence and explanatory power together because they both deal with how ethical egoism stacks up against commonly held beliefs about morality. Internal coherence asks whether a moral theory is able to produce commonly held philosophical beliefs about morality, how consistent it is with ideas internal to ethics (Timmons 23). Explanatory power also deals with ethical egoism’s relationship to commonly held beliefs, but it wants to know how well a theory can explain why we believe actions are moral (Timmons 23). The relevance of these two categories to the theoretical validity of the theory comes from an expectation that a theory should be able to explain and account for our pre-existing moral evaluations.

The entirety of my second chapter can be understood as an answer to these two questions for ethical egoism. The upshot of which is that ethical egoism often conflicts with our commonly held beliefs of morality, but does not necessarily produce radically different actions. However, ethical egoism can also be used to justify a wide range of actions that would almost certainly be considered immoral by most other-regarding theories because what ethical egoism demands will depend on the specific agent and the situation that she is in. Therefore, internal consistency is severely lacking. This is both because it allows a wide array of actions that we generally consider immoral and because the central tenet of ethical egoism, that it is self-interest and self-interest alone that determines morality, is highly inconsistent with traditional moral beliefs. On the other hand, ethical egoism actually has the potential to explain a large number of, if not all, actions that we typically consider moral. What it will not do as good a job of explaining is our commonly held beliefs about immorality because the only categorically immoral action in ethical egoism is violating one's own self-interest, whereas traditionally, far more actions fall under that umbrella. Overall, ethical egoism's performance on these criteria is probably the most deficient of the criteria discussed.

This becomes especially clear when comparing ethical egoism to utilitarianism. Utilitarians often face critiques that appeals to "the greater good" can lead to actions usually considered immoral being justified as moral (Burgess-Jackson 535). For instance, utilitarianism might claim that framing a person to end a race riot is the morally correct action because more people are better off if the race riot is ended (Burgess-Jackson 535). Framing an innocent person for a crime that she did not commit is not considered moral by most theories, and this causes a problem from utilitarianism with internal consistency. There are, however, a number of strategies that utilitarians can deploy to avoid making these internally inconsistent moral judgements

(Timmons 158; Burgess-Jackson 533). One of which is the move from act to rule utilitarianism. This is a concept that I have already introduced in the context of rule ethical egoism. In this discussion, I ultimately decided that rule ethical egoism was not convincing. Whether or not the argument for rule utilitarianism is similarly unconvincing, I will not attempt to determine here. All that needs to be said is that utilitarianism does not perform perfectly on the test of internal consistency either, although it does better than ethical egoism. This is because, at the very least, utilitarianism accepts the importance of the other in ethics. In terms of explanatory power, the most likely place that utilitarianism would fail is that it ascribes the explanation of the morality of an action purely to its consequences (Timmons 159). This is far from a universally accepted proposition, but, given that ethical egoism is also a consequentialist theory, it works equally against both theories. Therefore, in terms of explanatory power and internal inconsistency, utilitarianism performs far better than ethical egoism.

It is valid to ask, however, whether or not we should be using commonly held beliefs about morality to judge a theory as though those beliefs are themselves unassailable. There was a time, for instance, where it was widely considered moral to own people of color as slaves in the United States. The ability of a moral theory to justify slavery, I would argue, should be seen as a failure, not a confirmation of that moral theory. Moreover, the assumption that a theory will actually provide a clear set of duties is also somewhat erroneous, as Chapter Two shows the duties a theory provides depend on a range of things. This is not to say that there is no value in considering how well a certain action aligns with commonly held moral beliefs. That it is wrong to commit a random act of murder against an innocent person is also a long-held belief (although definitions of 'person' and 'innocent' have changed over time), and I would argue that it should be maintained. The criteria themselves, however, do not offer any way to distinguish between

“good” moral beliefs and “bad” ones. As such, while internal consistency and explanatory power might be definitive criteria when crafting a descriptive theory, I do not think that they are very useful by themselves if the goal is to describe how a person ought to act. Since ethical egoism is a normative theory that makes arguments about how we *should* behave, the failure to meet these standards should not be considered problematic in themselves. What this tension between long-standing beliefs about morality and ethical egoism should do, however, is cause genuine reflection on whether or not our commonly held beliefs are correct, or whether we have gotten something wrong.

James Rachels tries to answer this question in his refutation of ethical egoism. Before discussing ethical egoism, he looks first at what makes beliefs like racism bad. He claims that it is a part of “a whole family of moral views that have this in common: they all divide people into groups saying that the interests of some groups count for more than the interests of other groups” (198). The problem with such views, Rachels claims, is that rational arguments cannot be offered for *why* preference should be given to one group over another (199). A racist may try to claim that all Black people are lazy, stupid, evil, etc., but these claims are factually incorrect (199). According to Rachels, ethical egoism is the same type of view, but instead of justifying differential treatment of individuals based on race, it draws a division between oneself and everyone else (199). This difference cannot be maintained because “*there is no general difference between oneself and others to which each person can appeal, that justifies this difference in treatment,*” and ethical egoism is therefore considered “an arbitrary doctrine in the same way that racism is arbitrary” (199). While it may be true that, from a neutral perspective, there are no differences capable of justifying different treatment between one’s self and others, a person has a different type of relationship to herself than she does to others purely by virtue of

the fact that she is the only one that can only actually experience her own existence directly. It is often recognized that a person has different duties to the individuals in her life based on her relationship to them (e.g. a parent has special duties to a child). The question then becomes whether or not a person's special relationship with herself is enough to justify her duty to herself superseding any possible duty she could owe to another. Traditional morality says 'no' whereas ethical egoism answers 'yes.' Again, the fundamental difference that ethical egoism places on the relative values of the self and others becomes a clear, unbreachable divide.

### **Conclusion**

Having laid out the arguments for and against ethical egoism, and considering carefully what exactly ethical egoism is, it is now time to decide whether the commonly held belief that morality ought to be concerned with the other is actually correct, or if the strength of ethical egoism proves that the collective 'we' have been mistaken. I will admit that from the start of this thesis, there was a part of me that desperately wanted to find some logical inconsistency in ethical egoism so that the refutation could be clear and decisive. Yet, here I am; ethical egoism is logically consistent, and satisfies, depending on the definition of morality used, both the practical and theoretical requirements for a moral theory to at least some degree. This is a problem that Moore himself realized later in his career when he wrote *Ethics* where he says:

“...it is a question of practical importance, whether, in such cases of conflict, it is always a duty, or right, for us to prefer our own good to the general good. And this is a question which, so far as I can see, it is impossible to decide by argument one way or another. If any person, after clearly considering the question, comes to the conclusion that he can never be under any obligation to sacrifice his own good to the general good...it is, I think, impossible to prove that he is not mistaken. But it is certainly equally impossible

for him to prove that he is not mistaken. And for my part, it seems to me quite self-evident that it must always be our duty to do what will produce the best effects *upon the whole*, no matter how bad the effects upon ourselves may be and no matter how much good we ourselves may lose by it.” (231-232)

The place of the other in ethics is self-evidently true meaning that no logical argumentation will be able to convincingly show its veracity if a person does not recognize it for herself; there is no clear argument to prove the ethical egoist wrong, logically, if she does not agree that morality ought to take the well-being of others into consideration. There is a fundamental divide between how ethical egoism understands what morality is and how morality is traditionally understood. Whether or not ethical egoism is wrong depends on which side of that divide a person comes down on. This means whether or not morality and self-interest are the same thing comes down to either a self-evident belief that it is or that it is not. Most people believe that morality and self-interest, while they may coincide, are not actually the same thing, but some, ethical egoists, disagree. This conclusion feels rather like ending up in the same place where we started, but this circularity elucidates an important point. There is no single, universally agreed-upon definition that precludes self-interest. As the theoretical and practical aims showed, a moral theory tries to determine what actions are right/wrong and why; there is no mention of self-interest or others. Ethical egoism forces a person to debate definitions of morality itself and whether the deeply-held belief that morality ought to be concerned about the well-being of others, that it should be able to resolve interpersonal conflict, that it should be public, not private, etc. become the focal pieces of the arguments made.

The role of the ‘other’ is a fundamental question that can be answered in various ways. There are a few philosophers that have sided completely with self-interest, these are the ethical

egoists. The overwhelming majority of moral philosophers however, have found some room for the importance of the 'other' in their theories. I myself side with the latter group. The question then becomes why so many people have chosen other-concerned moralities rather than straightforwardly pursuing their own interests. Personally, I choose to reject ethical egoism because I do not want to also reject all of the principles that could cause it to be self-contradictory or arbitrary, but a more complete discussion of why people may choose a 'traditional' morality over a self-interest morality will occur in the next chapter where I will discuss rational egoism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Rational Egoism and Moral Motivation

Having now concluded my discussion of ethical egoism, I will move on to the last topic of this thesis: Whether rational egoism can be used as a theory for the justification of other-regarding moral behaviors, and what the relationship between rational egoism and morality says about the connection between morality and self-interest more broadly.

Rational egoism is, like ethical egoism, a normative theory that claims that the best, or most correct action in any given situation is the one that most benefits a person's self-interest. The difference is that rational egoism does not purport to be a *moral* theory, and argues that the self-interested action should be taken because it is always *rational* to do so. The strong form of rational egoism can be formulated as follows: "An action A performed by person P is *rational* (in the sense of being rationally permissible) if and only if (and because) A is the action which produces at least as much agent utility as would any other action P might perform instead" (Timmons 168). Weaker forms of rational egoism maintain that while it is always rational to act in one's interests, it is "not necessarily never rational...not to do so" (Baier, "Egoism" 16) or say that rationality comes in degrees and that "each person acts rationally if and only if, and to the degree that, he acts compatibly with the promotion of his long-term interests (Lemos 149). There is a striking similarity between the definitions for rational and ethical egoism, the difference being that rational egoism does not attempt to say that self-interest is moral, only rational. Morality generally prescribes the 'right' way to behave, but rationality gives a reason to do so. Despite the fact that both normative theories claim we should act from self-interest, the distinction between the rational and moral 'ought' seems inherently different to most people, and rational egoism enjoys greater support than ethical egoism does. However, while the adoption of

rational egoism (and the rejection of ethical egoism) may “purify” self-interest from morality, it still leaves open the question of whether morality is ultimately motivated or justified by self-interest, even if it is not itself self-interested. Considering the connection between morality and self-interest through the lens of rational egoism and moral justification/motivation means that the relationship between the different parts of the theories and the modifications that can be made to them have slightly different implications that, as I will show, can produce different conclusions.

This chapter is focused on various philosophical responses to the question of rational egoism and how it relates to the motivation of ethics. ‘Morality’/‘ethics’ are being used, unless otherwise specified, to refer to “common sense morality.” Bernard Gert claims that there are ten moral rules in common sense understanding of morality:

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Do not kill.                | 6. Do not deceive.          |
| 2. Do not cause pain.          | 7. Keep your promises.      |
| 3. Do not disable.             | 8. Do not cheat.            |
| 4. Do not deprive of freedom.  | 9. Obey the law.            |
| 5. Do not deprive of pleasure. | 10. Do your duty. (Gert 20) |

Beyond these moral rules, there are also moral ideals, which “encourage people to prevent or relieve the harms that the moral rules prohibit them from causing”(Gert 23). These moral ideals are encouraged, but not required, for an action to be moral (Gert 23). Adherence with the moral rules, however, is necessary for moral actions unless there is a good reason to break them. For instance, following a moral ideal can provide an adequate justification for breaking a moral rule, like when you tell a white lie to avoid hurting a person’s feelings. Acceptable reasons for breaking a moral rule are less clear (Gert 57), but generally speaking self-interest, excluding the

possibility of serious, irreparable personal harm, is not an acceptable reason to break a moral rule as impartiality is encouraged in compliance with these rules (Gert 116).

With regard to rational egoism and morality specifically, some philosophers argue that rational egoism provides a clear justification for other-directed moral actions, and claim that acting morally is always in one's best interest, thereby making it rational. Most of these arguments have been discussed earlier, albeit not within the specific framing of rational egoism and the motivation of ethical actions. The arguments of this type that I will be looking at are metaphysical egoism, flourishing egoism both introduced in Chapter Two, and Hobbes' justification for morality, which was introduced in Chapter One and expanded on in Chapter Two. For each of these arguments, I will reframe them as they are related to the central question of this chapter and decide whether or not understanding them as a facet of rational egoism changes my previously established analysis of them. A second group of philosophers argue that rational egoism cannot support morality. These philosophers can be further divided into those who choose to reject an egoistic conception of rationality and those who deny that moral justifications are founded in rationality all together. For a discussion of the former, I will focus on "Morality and Rationality" by Ramon Lemos and "Ethics and Rationality" by Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp. A discussion of the latter will begin with "Why Should I Be Moral?" by Kai Nielsen and conclude with consideration of sentimentalism.

Before starting my discussion of whether or not rational egoism supports morality, I should further clarify on what exactly that means. Morality, generally, allows for a number of actions that are considered morally neutral. These are usually those actions that do not harm others, but also do not directly benefit them. My choice of clothing, the type of music I listen to in my headphones, closing my window blinds, choosing one font over another to type a paper,

etc., are all generally considered morally neutral. Ethical egoism, as a moral theory, has far more purview over all these sorts of actions because it is concerned with what will most benefit a single individual, which, in the case of clothing, music choice, etc., can be determined far more readily for a single self than for a multitude of ‘others.’

Rationality is not like morality in that we generally do not consider things to be ‘rationally neutral.’ This does not necessarily mean, however, that all actions are either categorically rational or irrational. Different people might find that the same actions are either rational or irrational based on their own situations and individual desires. Rational egoism, because of its specificity to the individual, is very likely to recommend different actions to different people. This leaves three possible relationships between rational egoism and morality. (1) Moral actions could be universally rational for all people, regardless of circumstance, based on rational egoism. (2) Moral actions could be universally irrational for all people, regardless of circumstance, based on rational egoism. (3) Morality could be rational for some people and irrational for some people, depending on the circumstances and the person, based on rational egoism. Of these three possibilities, (1) provides the strongest proof for the connection between rational egoism and morality, but (3) also shows that rational egoism can be useful in understanding and justifying and/or motivating morality. Only (2) completely disproves any connection between rational egoism and morality. Since rational egoism centers on self-interest, the same relationships can be restated with ‘self-interest’ being substituted for ‘rational egoism.’ In that case, proving (1) or (3) proves some degree of connection between self-interest and moral justification/motivation, and (2) completely disproves any connection between the two. The first section of this chapter will look at arguments for (1) and (3). The second section will look at arguments for (2).

### **Rational Egoism in Support of Morality**

There have been various attempts to show that morality is supported by a self-interested conception of rationality (rational egoism). Philosophers like Baier have adopted Hobbes' argument for the creation of morality to show that being moral is in our self-interest (and therefore consistent with rational egoism). Brink's concept of metaphysical egoism was actually advanced as a solution to the problem of the rational authority of morality. Finally, Hunt's claims about flourishing egoism can also be repurposed to align rationality with morality.

#### *Why Should We Be Moral?*

First, in "Why Should We Be Moral?" Kurt Baier borrows Hobbes' argument for morality from self-interest to show that being moral is in accordance with rational egoism/self-interested reasoning. He says, "[w]e should be moral because being moral is following rules designed to overrule reasons of self-interest whenever it is in the interest of everyone alike that such rules should generally be followed" (163). Since Baier borrows Hobbes' argument to do exactly the same thing that Hobbes does, he is open to the same critiques, namely, that there will be some times that what is directly in an agent's favor is to break a moral rule. Hobbes tries to counter this by showing that such an act is contrary to the agent's long-term interests, even though it serves her in the short term. In Chapter Two, I discussed reasons why this argument does not work, namely that in reality there are many cases where a person can act immorally and not face any repercussions. Baier's response to this objection is similar to, but not exactly the same as, Hobbes'. He says that information about personal gain is "simply irrelevant in cases where moral rules apply. Moral rules are not designed to serve the agent's interests directly" (164). The implication being that an agent indirectly

benefits from following the moral rules, and therefore we have a reason to follow them, even when we could directly benefit from breaking them.

In response to Baier, Kai Nielsen wrote “Why Should I Be Moral? Revisited.” In this paper, he points out that while Hobbes’/Baier’s arguments may prove why *we*, as a society, should be moral, they do not show why *I*, as an individual within that society, should be moral (84). Reasons for action, he says, can be agent-neutral or agent-relative. Agent-neutral reasons are those that are “held in common” whereas agent-relative reasons are those that are specific to a certain person (84). The question then becomes “why should I abandon the agent-relative viewpoint” in favor of the agent-neutral one (85)? If enough people in a society have bought into traditional ideas of morality that it is in no danger of dissolving, then a moral version of the free-rider problem introduced where the “immoralist free-rider” is able to benefit from things like social stability, created by the moral actions of others, without committing herself to moral action all the time or necessarily risking her self-interest (85). This means that Hobbes’ argument, even with Baier’s slight modification, cannot provide a rational basis for an individual to act morally, although it may be successful in showing that a society as a whole ought to maintain morality.

#### *Metaphysical Egoism: Revisited*

David Brink’s article “A Puzzle About the Rational Authority of Morality” is focused on trying to reconcile four statements that each encapsulate a common idea about morality or rationality. The “puzzle” that Brink presents is about how morality and rationality relate, given a view of morality that is universal and other-regarding and a view of rationality that is agent-relative and self-interested. The four statements that he lists are jointly inconsistent,

meaning that at least one must be disregarded in order to form a coherent theory. The statements are as follows:

- I. Moral requirements—including other-regarding obligations—apply to agents independently of their aims or interests.
- II. Moral requirements necessarily provide agents with reasons for action.
- III. Reasons for action are dependent on the aims or interests of the agent who has them.
- IV. There is no necessary connection between the other-regarding action and any aim or interest of the agent. (Brink 1)

Statement one (I) asserts that moral obligations, including obligations that are other-regarding, apply universally, regardless of the agent's interests. Statement two (II) expresses an internalist perspective on ethics, where the moral judgment itself necessarily entails a motive for action. Statement three (III) says that a reason will direct different people to do different things based on their situation and their interests. III, is another way of saying that rationality is based on self-interest, which is the central idea of rational egoism, because it claims that reason is based on what each individual agent's interests/aims. Finally, statement four (IV) claims that the interests of the agent do not necessarily consider the wellbeing of the other. On their own, there is nothing inherently problematic about any of the statements, but combined they create an incoherent theory. If I, II, and III are true then IV must be false because a necessary connection between interest of the agent and others must be formed for morality to universally apply and motivate actions given that reason depends on the goals of the agent. If I, II, and IV are true, then III must be false because reason cannot be dependent on the aims of each individual agent if there is no connection between the interests of the self and others and morality, which is

concerned with the other, is necessarily motivating. The same process can be performed for the other two statements as well. Only three can be jointly true without creating a logical inconsistency in the theory.

Throughout the article, Brink tries to reject each statement in turn, but his ultimate solution to the puzzle is metaphysical egoism (which rejects IV for the reason explained above). I first introduced metaphysical egoism as a way to reconcile ethical egoism with the duties of other-regarding morality in Chapter Two, but Brink's usage focuses on reconciling rational egoism with traditional morality, not ethical egoism. As a quick refresher, metaphysical egoism is the idea that there is a psychological continuity between the self and others, which may vary in strength, and justifies other-focused actions as self-interested because the idea of 'self' is expanded (16). In the context of rational egoism and morality, metaphysical egoism justifies morality using a rational egoist framework by broadening the notion of the self.

In Chapter Two, I ultimately dismissed metaphysical egoism because the psychological continuity is clearly far stronger and/or a different type of continuity when it is between a single person across time than between different persons. The question becomes whether or not the recontextualization of metaphysical egoism changes the conclusion reached in chapter Two. At first glance, the answer is 'no.' Both efforts, trying to find traditional moral duties in ethical egoism and trying to justify traditional morality with rational egoism, are attempting to do the same basic thing: support in self-interest traditional, other-regarding morality. However, while metaphysical egoism may not prove that an other-directed moral action is in a person's *best* interest, it could show that such an action is in her interests nonetheless. This gives a reason for her to do this action, even if it is not the reason that will ultimately be judged to be best. A distinction is being drawn between 'rational' and 'reason.' Rationality is a judgment about the

best course of action to produce some outcome based on reasons and/or logic processes. In any given situation, there can be a number of conflicting reasons for different actions. The role of rationality is to discriminate between the reasons provided and decide on the best action in a given situation. Metaphysical egoism may not be able to say that the rational thing to do is always what is moral, but it does provide a self-interested reason for doing moral things in situations where self-interest is not usually evident. Nonetheless, rational egoism claims that what is rational, what should be done in any given situation is what is most in accordance with one's interests, and as such, metaphysical egoism cannot bridge the gap between rational egoism and other-regarding moral actions; it is not rational to actually perform such actions, even though there are possible reasons to perform them.

#### *Flourishing Egoism: Revisited*

Flourishing egoism, also introduced in Chapter Two, can also be used to justify traditional morality using rational egoism. Flourishing egoism claims that morality is actually what is in a person's interests, because virtue leads us to a good life (Hunt 72). In Chapter Two, flourishing egoism was ultimately dismissed because it only said that morality was in our best interest, not what morality actually is, meaning that ethical egoism could easily be substituted for morality and create a circular pattern of reasoning. Now, however, morality has been defined, albeit very loosely, as concerned with the well-being of the 'other.' Looking again at flourishing egoism, this changes the equation. Virtue leads us to morality and a good life, and the morality that creates this good life is an other-regarding morality. As such, pursuing other-regarding morality is in our interest. The question now becomes whether flourishing egoism is correct in claiming that the regular compliance with traditional moral rules will actually lead to the best life for an individual.

Before addressing this, however, I should note that in the previous paragraph I have used terms like “moral rules,” but this language is not strictly correct for Hunt’s arguments. Hunt’s theory is his use of ‘virtue’ implying an invocation of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics, which I have not discussed thus far, is concerned with what it means for someone to be a good/moral/virtuous *person*, rather than what it means for something to be a good/moral/virtuous *action* (Timmons 244). A virtuous person might be one who is honest, and/or kind and/or brave, etc. (Timmons 246). Virtue ethics conceivably offers more freedom of action because it is not actually concerned with any individual actions, just the person as a whole. It is not improbable that a person who tells the truth 98% of the time but lies 2% of the time would still be considered honest/virtuous. The lies that this person tells, while dishonest, would not be immoral, and she would presumably still be considered honest/virtuous so long as the number and severity of her lies remains relatively low. While we certainly talk about people as good or virtuous, as Gert’s rules from the beginning of this chapter show, we also generally believe that actions themselves have moral value and dishonesty is immoral. None of the other authors that I discuss use virtue ethics, but I do not believe that their arguments and Hunt’s are irreconcilable. In order to be virtuous, a person must practice virtuous actions (Timmons 246). This means that, generally speaking, the virtue ethicist will still have reason to follow the moral rules that other ethicists do.

Philosopher Kai Nielsen argues in part that it is not the case that an immoral person cannot have a “flourishing” or fulfilling life. This argument works well with virtue ethics because he is talking about the character of the person, not just the actions. He claims that “[w]hether or not it is in your true interests to be moral depends on what sort of person you happen to be” (87). He uses the example of a classist amoralist who knowingly treats those of a different economic/social class as nothing more than a means to an end, while simultaneously

treating those of his class as intrinsically valuable (Nielsen 88). He would still be able to enjoy all of the benefits of interpersonal connection, one of the common marks against the amoralist or ethical egoist, while being knowingly immoral (88). Nielsen claims:

A person, so reasoning and so acting, is unfair, and knows he is unfair, but, *among his peers*, he could very well be scrupulously fair, and, after all, he could say, perfectly correctly, that he didn't make the world. He just grew up in a society so structured. After all, do not many of us in this uncomfortable situation tell ourselves analogously comforting stories and make our little adjustments? (88)

The beginning of this quote summarizes what has already been said about Nielsen's objection to morality/virtue being required for a good life, it is the latter half of this quote that deserves additional attention. The second half of the quote begins with a possible self-justification for an action that is known to be unfair and ends by pointing out that we, as humans, often justify actions/situations that we should disapprove of morally. This reference to the process of justifying immoral behavior to ourselves contradicts some other parts of his argument. Nielsen claims that the classist immoralist *knowingly* behaves unfairly/immoral and is not bothered by it. Justifying the action, however, seems to point to the idea that the action may not actually be framed as immoral inside the mind of the classist immoralist. If this is true, then it may not be the case that we must actually behave morally to have a flourishing life, but the *belief* that we are moral may in fact be necessary.

Humanity's psychological need to consider themselves moral is supported by science. Most people, even when they act immorally, do not actually consider themselves to be immoral or doing anything immoral. We do not generally cast ourselves as the villain, even if that might be objectively the case. This is supported by a well documented psychological phenomenon

called ethical dissonance, which is the idea that people use a variety of mental strategies to justify behavior that they know is immoral both before and after a behavior has been done (Barkan et al. 157). Although there have undoubtedly been individuals who knowingly and happily did immoral things while believing them to be immoral, these individuals are the exception, not the rule. The vast majority of people try to be moral. In the conclusion of their paper, Barkan et al. explain that ethical dissonance “holds a promise” that “people wish to be moral and consider honesty central to their self-image” (159). Being a moral person is important, and maintaining a moral self-identification is vital to a person’s mental well-being.

Returning to the question of moral motivation, ethical dissonance can help to show that while flourishing egoism is not sufficient to prove that a person must actually be moral to have a good life, it is clear that, generally speaking, a person must believe that she is moral to have a good life. Since, as discussed in chapters two and three, most people believe in non-egoistic moralities, it will be true for most people, most of the time, that rational egoism provides a reason to act in accordance with the other-regarding morality, or at least however we conceptualize it. Therefore, rational egoism will be sufficient to motivate a large number of people, although not all people, to act in accordance with their understanding of other-regarding moral obligations.

### *Conclusion*

All of these theories have failed to definitively show that rational egoism necessarily leads to moral behavior. Lemos (who I will discuss in more depth shortly) has argued that it is actually impossible to derive morality from any form of self-interested, rational obligation (Lemos 155), and Nielsen goes one step further by claiming that no rational reason, self-interested or otherwise, can be given to rationally require moral actions (91). Both of these

ideas will be examined later in this chapter, for now, I will turn my attention back to the contents of this section to evaluate for myself to what degree these theories have succeeded in aligning rational egoism with traditional moral obligations. While it cannot be said that any of these theories demonstrated that rational egoism requires moral behavior in all cases for all people, or even the belief that you are acting morally, for any single individual, I believe that it has been shown that moral behavior is not counter to rational egoism. Hobbes/Baier could not show that morality is rationally required for any given individual by rational egoism, this argument does show that societies have a rational, self-interested reason to be traditionally moral, and the individuals within those societies should, under rational egoism, should want the societal 'we' to be moral. Metaphysical egoism was able to establish that there are self-interested reasons for following other-directed moral duties. This, combined with a weaker reading of rational egoism, could lead to a situation where these duties are rationally justifiable. Finally, flourishing egoism, slightly modified to mean that a belief that you are living virtuously is required for a good life, proves that anyone who believes in a traditional theory of morality has a clear reason to follow it to the best of their understanding, and would be doing so rationally in accordance with rational egoism.

I first introduced all of these arguments for completely different purposes, and they were discussed in other chapters. The ability to repurpose various arguments should not be overly surprising. Rational and ethical egoism say very similar things, and if a person is looking to rational egoism to support morality, then the connection between the two becomes even stronger. This raises the question to what degree arguments of this type are actually different from ethical egoism in terms of the relationship between self-interest and morality. A similar concern was raised with regard to Butler's justification of moral actions using self-interest in Chapter One. If

the ultimate justification to do any given action is self-interested, then does morality once again become absorbed by self-interest? Ethical egoism says that the moral thing to do is the thing that most advances one's self-interest. Arguments that try to sustain morality with rational egoism can be outlined thusly:

1. We should be moral because it is rational to do so.
2. What is rational is what best advances a person's interests.
3. If morality is rational, then it must be because it best advances a person's interests.
4. The moral action is the one that best advances a person's interests.

This conclusion (4) is essentially just ethical egoism. While there are extra steps to reach this conclusion, the two theories amount to the same thing. There is a difference, however. Rational egoism allows for a more open definition of what morality is, and the connection between morality and self-interest can be a bit more abstract since a number of steps must be taken to get there. Ethical egoist theories, on the other hand, as was seen in Chapter Two, have to work with different definitions of 'self-interest' rather than morality. Moreover, rational egoism also permits the same definitional moves with self-interest as ethical egoism does. The end result is more freedom to convincingly justify a wider range of behavior. Nonetheless, the reliance on self-interest in both means that attempts to justify morality with self-interest still align and subsume morality under self-interest. In ethical egoism this is direct, in rational egoism, this occurs because rationality is seen as superior to morality in that it is what judges and justifies morality. It is this dynamic between rationality and morality that is challenged directly by philosophers like Lemos and Nielsen.

### **Against Rational Egoism**

This section focuses on arguments that oppose rational egoism as the justification for morality. The first half looks at the arguments of Lemos. Lemos' ideas are then countered, at least partially, by Clayton and Knapp. The end of the section looks at the implications of Nielsen's paper and sentimentalism.

### *Lemos*

Rational egoism is not a foregone conclusion. There are numerous philosophers who oppose rational egoism for a variety of reasons. The most interesting ones for my purposes are those that oppose rational egoism based on morality. "Morality and Rationality" by Lemos presents an incredibly straightforward version of this argument.

Lemos begins by pointing out the kind of blatantly immoral actions that can be justified under rational egoism. For example, a person could be rationally justified in preferring and (assuming she could actually accomplish it) pursuing the end of the world after her death if she found it to be in her best interests (150). While ethical egoism, depending on how it is formulated, may not actually have a problem with this, all, or nearly all, other-concerned moral theories would certainly object to and condemn such behavior. The question of whether or not morality is rational (assuming rational egoism) is not a problem for the ethical egoist, but it does present a problem for essentially all other moral theorists (150-151). Lemos, however, objects to the question "is it rational to be moral?" in favor of the question "is it moral to be rational?" (152-153). This is because this first question "implies, or at least suggests, that it is more important that we be rational than that we be moral and that we can be justified in acting morally only if it can be shown that it is rational so to act" (153). This view is called the "rationalist position" and it is contrasted with the "moralist position," which places a greater value on being moral than being rational. According to the moralist position, we are justified in being rational if

and only if being rational does not conflict with morality, and where there is a disconnect (i.e., instances where the two norms conflict), this presents a problem for our concept of rationality, not morality (153).

The rationalist will often face a more difficult task since, although rationality is given preference, most rationalists do not actually want to abandon other-regarding morality, and therefore must struggle to show that rational egoism and traditional morality fit together (153). This is a task that Lemos views as utterly impossible because other-concerned morality will always require that we do certain things that are against our self-interest, while at the same time rational egoism requires that we always do what is in our best interests (Lemos 155). This puts the rationalist in the tough position of giving up other-centered morality, which, as mentioned above, is highly unpalatable for most. A supporter of the moralist position, on the other hand, faces less pressure since giving up a self-interested view of rationality does not feel like as much of a loss as giving up an other-centric view of morality. As such, the moralist is free to openly and easily disregard rational egoism in favor of some other system of rationality. Lemos' ultimate argument is indeed that we should take a moralist position and reject rational egoism based on its inconsistency with the values of non-egoistic morality.

There are two qualifications I want to make for Lemos' argument. First, one approach not discussed to resolve the apparent conflict is to use the same reasoning Mandeville does in "The Grumbling Hive" and say that "vices," like greed, are actually necessary to make society better. In this case, the conflict between concerns about rational egoism's inability to categorically mandate that all people be moral all the time is a non-issue because the 'other' actually benefits from the instances of immorality as a member of society. If this is true, then the rationalist can maintain a commitment to the well-being of the other without being concerned that rationality

does not always require morality. Discerning whether or not Mandeville's claims about vice and society are true would almost certainly require an extensive study of capitalism and social theory that I will not get into now. However, if Mandeville is correct, it certainly does not cover any and all vice. *Some* forms of vice in *certain* situations, to a *degree*, may be useful to society. Greed leads the industrialists to create factories and drive the economy, but it is hard to see how random acts of violence, like slapping random people on the street, would benefit society. Assuming a person benefitted from slapping others (maybe she derives some form of pleasure), and is unlikely to be caught, rational egoism would not limit her actions. However, most people would, I assume, not consider slapping non-consenting strangers for personal pleasure to be moral. Therefore, while a Mandevilian approach may provide some help to the rationalist, it is unlikely that it would completely eliminate the concern about conflict between rationality and morality.

Second, It should be noted that Lemos is disregarding the ability of rational egoism to justify traditional moral behaviors for the large majority of people, which I showed in the previous section, in favor of an absolutist view where the failure of rational egoism to require other-regarding moral actions for all people in all situations is seen as a complete failure of the theory that requires the abandonment of either this type of morality or this type of rationality. This is not an idea that I completely agree with, since there are plenty of people who undoubtedly, and contradictorily, hold both. Nonetheless, the idea to start with morality and move from there towards rationality is intuitively appealing. It is true that there are often times in life when we can appreciate that a person's action was incredibly rational and technically advanced her interests, while also believing that she should not have performed that action because it was immoral. To return to the example of slavery from the end of chapter three, I can recognize that it was in the interests of the white slave owners in the United States to keep their

slaves and treat them as subhuman. However, I, and I would hope most other people, do not believe slavery was moral, that it was a good thing that *should* have been done. Morality appears to limit what rational actions we approve or disapprove of.

*Clayton and Knapp*

On the other hand, committed rationalists argue that it is the job of rationality itself to determine what is moral. If this is true, to say that morality checks rationality sounds patently absurd. In “Ethics and Rationality,” authors Clayton and Knapp work to show that traditional ideas of morality are not only justified with, but actually derived from rationality. Before going any further, it should be noted that their argument is actually targeted at proving rationalism more broadly in the face of cultural relativism, rather than specifically arguing for or against rational egoism. Clayton and Knapp are answering the charge that, since moral values, at least as they are actually practiced, are demonstrably relative, and since rationality should be able to yield the same result, morals are not rational (151). In response to this, they argue “(1) that rationality in general, properly understood, involves evaluation against the standards of a community of inquiry (and there are multiple such communities); (2) that *practical* rationality involves an ongoing evaluation of an agent’s reasons for action, reasons that can only be evaluated against the standards implicit in each agent’s particular self-conception” (151). Rationality requires checking a self-conception against community standards because these standards are what allow a person to check/know whether or not she has actually achieved the self-conception that she wants (154).

‘Self-Conception, or SC, is defined as the sense of who I am, “*the kind of agent I am*” (152). A self-conception is essential to rationality because without an idea of the type of person I am aiming to be/become, I cannot know what actions would best achieve this goal. To create a

self-conception, a person must consult with a community relevant to the ideal self-conception. This community does not have to actually exist presently, but a person must still take into account what members of this community would say if they did exist. The first Marxists, for example, would not have had a community yet to check their self-conceptions, but could have still envisioned the standards their ideal community would uphold. Clayton and Knapp use the example of a person, “Martha,” who rationally believes she is a successful philosopher (154). Martha can only be said to hold this position rationally if she is open to the feedback of her relevant peer group. This is called the “Feedback Principle” and it is required because without feedback from the community that collectively decides what constitutes a successful philosopher, she cannot say she holds her belief rationally (154). The idea of self-conception also applies to our thoughts of morality because a key part of self-conception is the idea that we are a good/moral person, as was discussed with ethical dissonance. Since rational discourse and the incorporation of feedback from a relevant community or communities is required to build a self-conception, and a self-conception includes ideas of being a moral person, morality is determined, at least in part, by rationality.

Before going any further, it must be noted that Clayton and Knapp are very clearly not using rational egoism to define rationality. Their definition of rationality is limited to the procedural requirements for rational agency of the SC and the Feedback Principle. This understanding does not exclude self-interested reasoning from rationality, it is a process for reasoning designed to serve the creation of a self-conception, but what exactly the goal of this self-conception, and therefore the entire rational process, should be is not specified. Although they do claim that some self-conceptions could be logically inconsistent based on the requirements of rationality (158), no examples are specified, and for a number of reasons that

will be discussed shortly, I find it difficult to believe that such a self-conception actually exists. Even if such restrictions did exist, no positive goal is provided as the ideal end. I could include in my self-conception that I am a rational person and believe rationality is equivalent to rational egoism. So long as I engage in a feedback cycle with a relevant community, perhaps other rational egoists or philosophers in general, then I am rational in assuming this much. From here, I can essentially go back to the beginning of this chapter and re-start the discussion over whether or not rational egoism justifies morality. This entire chapter can be considered a conversation, including relevant feedback from a community of philosophers engaged on this issue as to the relationship between rational egoism and morality which leads to this point, where I would start over again. However, rationality is not limited to this narrow conception and non-self-interested theories could also be rationally established in the same way. This conversation is beginning to hint at the problems with using Clayton and Knapp to establish any normative system, rational or moral. The only clear duties that Clayton and Knapp provide are the ones directly necessitated by the rational process they lay out.

In the rest of the paper, Clayton and Knapp build on this idea further by trying to establish a set of minimum conditions for rational agency which create a rational foundation for the universal acceptance of a number of general ethical principles. Their argument is unconvincing for a variety of reasons that I will not get into here. What is important is that they offer a conception of morality where moral precepts are formed by rationality. We do, generally speaking, seem to engage in feedback cycles, even if they are only with ourselves, to better understand what is moral and what is immoral. Given this reality, disregarding our current form of rationality any time it conflicts with our previously-held moral judgements means that his process of rational reflection is lost. As such, Clayton and Knapp give a fairly convincing

argument for why we may not want to disregard rationality whenever it conflicts with morality like Lemos suggests because rationality actually helps to create moral standards.

*Nielsen and Sentimentalism*

Where does this leave my investigation into the relationship between morality and rational egoism? The final argument that I want to briefly touch on is implied by the concluding thoughts in Nielsen's "Why Should I Be Moral? Revisited." While he does not explicitly state it throughout the article, the definition of rationality that Nielsen works from is rational egoism. Whenever he discusses rationality and its connection to morality, it is clear that rationality does not align with morality because morality is concerned with the well-being of the other, and what is rational is what is in the agent's best interests. This comes through rather clearly with questions like "Can it be shown that...my long-term self interest is more likely to be satisfied if I...am doing what morally speaking is the right thing to do...?" (85). Nielsen's conclusion, like Lemos', is that this kind of rationality, rational egoism, does not rationally require that a person be moral, and may in fact require, depending on the type of person, that she act immorally (90). Unlike Lemos, Nielsen's response is not to reject rational egoism or modify his concept of rationality, but rather to reject that rationality itself can motivate moral actions.

I have already referenced Nielsen's two arguments against a rational basis for morality in the refutation of Baier and in my discussion of flourishing egoism. In the former he showed that a Hobbsian approach only explains why *we* should be moral, not why *I* should be moral. In the latter Nielsen showed that there is no good reason why *I* must be objectively moral, although he does not succeed in showing that, at least most people, do not need to *believe* they are moral. I am bringing Nielsen up again in order to discuss the implications of his ultimate conclusion: "reason (human intelligence and understanding) without the collaboration of *moral sentiment*

does not require that moral reasons be taken as overriding” (90) because “pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality” (91). While Nielsen does not directly reference it outside of this one quoted line, the idea underlying his argument is that sentimentalism, not rationalism, motivates moral action.

Sentimentalism is the idea that “morals have a motivational force that reason alone cannot produce” (Gill 16). Sentimentalists have often compared morality to beauty (Gill 19). This is the same comparison that Hutcheson made to justify his conception of the moral sense in Chapter One. The basic idea is that just as our perceptions and judgements of beauty are not subject, or at least not entirely subject to our will or to reason, and neither are our moral perceptions and judgements. Instead, moral judgements and/or motivation comes from a non-rational sentiment in humans (Gill 20). Hutcheson is a sentimentalist with a two-part theory. The moral sense judges the morality of actions, not based on reason but some innate part of our nature (Hutcheson 90). Benevolence, the love of others, is what motivates action and compels us to act morally (Hutcheson 112). Benevolence is also a non-rational feeling that points us towards morality. The moral sense responds to benevolence (Hutcheson 116), therefore both moral motivation and moral judgements are, for Hutcheson at least, derived from non-rational sentiments. Hume, perhaps the most famous sentimentalist, talks about moral approval and disapproval in terms of pleasure/pain that we feel at the site of the pleasure/pain that others have caused someone (Slote 4). This sentimental response leads to moral judgements for Hume. Slote extracted from Hume that this pleasure or pain is ultimately caused by human empathy, and human empathy forms the basis of moral judgements (Slote 7). These are just a few of the possible conceptions of sentimentalism. Whatever their differences may be, all forms of

sentimentalism reject rationality as the basis of moral judgements and/or motivations in favor of sentiment.

If sentimentalism is correct, then the entire project of asking to what extent rational egoism motivates morality is misguided because rationality in general is not what motivates moral actions and judgements. It may help direct us to the correct moral action, but it does not offer the basic moral motivation and/or judgement. Unfortunately, I have neither the time nor space to fully investigate the differences between rationalism and sentimentalism and render a well-reasoned argument in favor of one or the other. Nonetheless, I can say that even adopting a sentimentalist position and disregarding the question of rational motivations for ethics, self-interest is not definitively eradicated from moral motivation. The debate only moves the debate to a different level: human nature. What a person believes about human nature may change what she believes sentiment will respond to. A philosopher that conceives of humans as fundamentally, or primarily, self-interested could claim that what our moral sentiment responds to are actions that benefit our interests. The issue of how human nature relates to ethics was the subject of my first chapter. Therefore, accepting sentimentalism simply refers us back to the beginning to contend with human nature all over again.

**Conclusion:**

At the end of my third chapter, I came to the conclusion that, ultimately, whether or not ethical egoism is true comes down to a self-evident conviction either that morality is concerned with the well-being of the other, or it is not, that there is no argument that can be presented that can more thoroughly convince a person in either direction other than what is self-evidently true to her. In this chapter, I tried to determine whether rational egoism could provide some clarity on the motivation and rationality behind traditional, other-regarding ethical theories. What I found

was a mixed bag. On the one hand, I found no convincing argument for the universal rational necessity of such actions in rational egoism. Given the conclusion of my previous chapter, and the conceptual similarity between ethical and rational egoism, that they both try to root morality in self-interest, perhaps it should not be surprising that I failed in this task. On the other hand, I was able to find, in metaphysical egoism, reasons for moral actions, if not that morality is actually rational. A Hobbsian argument presented by Baier highlighted once more why the collective ‘we’ should observe morality. Finally, flourishing egoism, slightly modified, took me one step closer and furnished reasons that, for the right type of person, rational egoism does seem to rationally require, if not an objective observance of moral rules, then at least a subjective one. Returning to the question of ultimate justification, even if it is not reason, but a sentiment that forms the foundation of moral judgements and/or moral motivation, the extent to which self-interest affects moral motivation can still be contested at the level of human nature.

Lurking in the background of this conversation has been a broader question, discussed briefly, about what all of this implies for the relationship between self-interest and morality. At one level, the general prevalence of rationalist explanations for why, once we have accepted an other-concerned morality, we ought to be moral, and, more specifically, the fairly common appeal to egoistic conceptions of rationality, mean that even non-egoistic moral theories become underpinned with self-interest for many people. That is not to say that it is this way for all people. There are philosophers, like Lemos, who reject an egoistic conception of rationality, and Nielsen who reject rationality all together. Nonetheless, the dismissal of ethical egoism is not the end of the relationship between self-interest and ethics; a person’s views on how morality is motivated can also lead to self-interest creeping back into morality and taking up residence, once again, at the very foundation of moral and ethical theories.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I am now at the end of my thesis, and it is time to clarify and analyze the overarching connections between the ideas offered in the body of my thesis. Once I have recapped the ideas of this thesis and how they flow together, I will offer some final conclusions on the nature of the relationship between self-interest and ethics.

In my first chapter, I looked at psychological egoism and how its acceptance or denial can affect the formation of ethical theories. When discussing philosophers who advance a psychological egoist perspective, I explored the moral frameworks created in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) and Bernard Mandeville's "An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue" (1714). On the other side of the argument, I used Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Morality* (1725) and Bishop Joseph Butler's *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1726). These philosophers were chosen because of the importance their moral theories gave to the relationship between self-interest and human nature, their relative historical proximity to one another, and because of the interesting comparisons that could be made between all four of them.

Among the psychological egoists, Hobbes and Mandeville, despite their similar conceptions of human nature, wound up with considerably different pictures of morality. From his beliefs of psychological egoism, Hobbes created a moral theory that is furnished with many, if not most, of the same moral virtues and duties as the more traditional, other-regarding morality of his time. For Hobbes, self-interest leads directly to ethics. Mandeville, on the other hand, finds psychological egoism at odds with ethics, and argues that our conceptions of self-interest must first be manipulated and modified before a person acts morally.

On the other side of things, both Hutcheson and Butler reject psychological egoism, but Hutcheson's theory goes much farther in refuting the connection between self-interest and ethics than Butler does. Hutcheson's moral sense only responds to benevolent (love of others) intent, and self-interest is actually antithetical to morality. He is more similar to Mandeville than Butler in this regard because both believe there is some conflict between self-interest and ethics; they simply differ in how this conflict is resolved. Conversely, Butler, like Hobbes, believes that there is a good deal of accord between self-interest and benevolence/morality, although Butler stops short of Hobbes' assertion morality is purely based in self-interest.

The underlying similarity for all of these theories is, as stated above, the central importance of their views on human nature to their views on ethics. Our ideas about the extent to which self-interest and human biology/psychology are intertwined affect how we think about morality. Moreover, depending on what the actual truth about humanity and self-interest is, some moral theories may be more plausible than the other, and some moral theories may be completely impossible. Given the current scientific and philosophical consensus leans against psychological egoism (Timmons 180), all other-regarding moralities are not necessarily precluded by human nature. However, varying ideas about the portion of self-interestedness to benevolence and how that relates to morality is less settled. This is the same division that can be seen between Hutcheson and Butler. Additionally, these differences between the theorists on the same side of the argument, especially where psychological egoism is concerned, show that ideas about human nature do not necessarily lead to a single conception of ethics. Hobbes and Mandeville's psychological egoist beliefs offer a very specific and similar account of humanity and self-interest. The differences in their final theories exemplify that, while ideas about human nature may lay a foundation, the actual moral theory that emerges can vary significantly.

My second and third chapters focused on ethical egoism. The second chapter was primarily interested in exploring what a moral theory based entirely on self-interest actually looks like, in order to determine how ethical egoism compares to traditional ideas about other-regarding morality. Arguments by philosophers like Tara Smith and Hobbes try to show that ethical egoism can provide, if not the exact same, then at least highly similar moral duties and obligations to those of the non-egoist. Their attempts ultimately fail to prove that any such duties are universally required by ethical egoism because, in the real world, people are regularly able to act contrary to traditional understandings of morality and are just fine. This does not mean that the ethical egoist is incapable of such actions, only that they are not required by ethical egoism. As Kalin points out, an incredibly large array of actions, both traditionally 'moral' and 'immoral' can be justified under ethical egoism depending on how they directly impact the agent. Kalin also highlights an irregularity in ethical egoism in that it seems to preclude the agent from participating genuinely in a number of common sentiments (like forgiveness) and interpersonal conversations about morality. Finally, in the course of this discussion, I found that modifying ideas about what exactly self-interest is, by reconceptualizing either the 'self' or 'interest' can lead to divergent ideas about what sorts of duties and values a self-interested moral theory, (i.e., ethical egoism) provides. Despite the variability in what types of duties and values ethical egoism can provide, the underlying idea that morality does not concern the well-being of the other remains antithetical to most ethical thought. The challenge presented to traditional ethical theories is, therefore, both to prove that ethical egoism is an incorrect moral theory, and why morality is preferable to self-interest, especially given that self-interest seems capable of providing a lot of the same actions as morality does. Providing answers to these two issues became the project of my last two chapters.

My third chapter addresses the question of whether or not ethical egoism is true. After showing that ethical egoism is not logically inconsistent, I moved through an analysis of several other factors related to the practical and theoretical aims of a moral theory while comparing ethical egoism to utilitarianism. At the end of the chapter, I came to the conclusion that a person must either believe that the importance of the 'other' to ethics is self-evident, or there is no logical way to disprove the theory. However, the general consensus among philosophers (and people in general) is that the other does matter in ethics. This leads to two consequences for the relationship between self-interest and ethics. First, there is nothing inherent in the definition of ethics itself that precludes self-interest or requires any degree of disinterested, other-regarding actions. Morality itself is neutral in the face of self-interest. What is very much not neutral is how people actually feel about the relationship between the two. This is the second point: despite the fact that morality itself does not require other-regarding actions, we, as people who practice morality, have, by and large, chosen to add that stipulation nonetheless. We, generally speaking, do not believe that morality and self-interest are one and the same and that morality does not need to consider the other. This leads to a final question: why? Why do we choose to include the other over ourselves and enshrine the importance of the other in morality?

My final chapter tries to address this question through the lens of rational egoism. First, it is claimed that being non-egotistically moral actually, in a roundabout way, serves one's self-interest. The answer is then that we are non-egotistically moral because it is rational. While I did not ultimately agree that we are rationally required to perform other-regarding moral actions, facts about human psychology, namely ethical dissonance, support the idea that, if we believe in an other-regarding conception of morality, we have reason to try and behave in accordance with this belief. Given that the majority of people do believe in the importance of the other in ethics,

rational egoism can give us a reason to act non-egotistically moral. However, this justification for moral action has a flip side. Because we only have a reason to be moral based on self-interest, morality can be reduced, once more, to self-interest. Therefore, the assertion that the other matters in ethics, which most people seem to believe in, to some degree, is once again undermined. Believing in the importance of the 'other' becomes instrumental to my own interest, and self-interest once more forms the foundation of ethics.

One way to avoid this conclusion is to reject rational egoism. Ramon Lemos argues that rather than asking "why should we be moral?" we should ask "is it moral to be rational?". This reframing of the question means that morality is given preference over rationality, and when the two disagree, it is rationality's job to change, not morality's. Given an other-regarding view of ethics, rational egoism, which may prescribe 'immoral' actions in the name of self-interest, must be disregarded. Other philosophers, like Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp try to show that devaluing rationality as it relates to morality, like Lemos does, is problematic because rationality ultimately determines what is moral. I agree with their assertion that rationality plays a vital role in helping us determine what is moral. A feat that would not be possible if, any time our pre-existing ideas about morality and rationality disagreed, we dismantled rationality.

The challenge still remains, then, how to give a reason for being moral that does not fall back on a self-interest through conceptions of rationality. Kai Nielson takes the approach of completely dismissing rationality as capable of requiring moral action. In the place of rationality, sentimentalism is what determines us to be moral. This aligns well with the conclusion at the end of my third chapter, that whether or not the other is important to morality is either self-evident to you or it is not. There is no logical argument that can change this belief, it is something that you either immediately recognize is true, or it is not. Nielsen goes one step further and claims that

what actually determines us to act morally, especially when morality is defined as other-regarding, is a sentiment. Rationality may help us decide what is moral, but the decision to be moral comes from sentiment. However, this does not mean that self-interest has been excluded from morality. Sentimentalism relies on ideas about human nature and the kinds of things that it responds positively (and negatively) to. A person who believes that human nature is largely self-interested, could argue that our sentiment motivates us to behave morally because of self-interest. The debate about the relationship between morality and self-interest has not been resolved, simply changed the level at which it operates. Moreover, the posing of this question about how human nature affects morality has now brought me full circle, back around to the topic of Chapter One.

The relationship between morality and self-interest is complicated and involves various questions that intersect and loop-back on one another. There are, nonetheless, some final conclusions I would like to make about this relationship. First, it seems incredibly unlikely, no matter how hard we may try, to actually banish self-interest from ethics entirely and make the two mutually exclusive. Even in theories that purposefully exclude self-interested actions from the purview of morality entirely, like Hutcheson, perhaps the most ardent opponent of mixing self-interest and ethics that I have discussed, admits that actions that directly benefit the self can be moral so long as there is also some consideration for the other. He also never actually claims that being self-interested is immoral (assuming that you are not harming anyone else). Most of the opponents of egoism in its various forms take a milder approach than Hutcheson and many, like Butler, even view various self-interested actions as moral without need for the other to be considered at all. Self-interest can also sneak in at the level of rationality/moral motivation and our ideas about human nature.

Second, and conversely, it is equally, if not more, unlikely that concern for others will ever actually be excluded from ethics. Self-interest is generally regarded as enlightened, in that it understands that functional relationships with others are required to maintain one's self-interest. The well-being of the other will always have, at least instrumental, value to ethics, even for the dedicated ethical egoist. Additionally, philosophers like Tara Smith assign great value to interpersonal relationships and the other in conceptualizing self-interest, and therefore morality. This means that, even without other-regarding conceptions of morality constraining our behavior, self-interest itself would provide a similar, if different and likely reduced, constraint on how we treat others and function as a society.

Third, regardless of whether morality actually requires concern for others, the majority of people still believe that the other matters in ethics. Even advocates of egoism (especially ethical egoism) recognize that they are not arguing for a popular position. The popularity of other-regarding morality demands some sort of explanation. Philosophers like Baier, Brink, Hobbes, etc. try to show that this commitment to other-regarding morality comes from rationality. Mandeville also subscribes to this position, but he differs in that he believes morality must be indoctrinated because self-interest is manipulated to favor morality rather than the process occurring naturally. Other philosophers, like Nielsen and Hutcheson, reject rationality and turn towards ideas of sentimentalism as the source of moral judgements and/or moral motivation. Regardless of what answer is given, there must be some account for why most people do not, given that morality itself does not actually preclude it, decide to follow ethical egoism.

Fourth, and finally, the relationship between self-interest and ethics is complicated. This is perhaps both the most obvious and the most important conclusion I have reached. Despite the

natural aversion that most of us have to reducing ethics to self-interest, an actual understanding of the issues at play is far from simple. I entered into this thesis expecting there to be some obvious and ingenuous refutation of egoism generally (and especially ethical egoism). What I got instead was a lot of half-answers, about a hundred pages of trying to figure everything out, and no straight-forward, definitive, refutation. Despite my moments of exasperation at the result, and the knowledge that there is undoubtedly more to read and write on the subject, I am satisfied with leaving my argument here with this final conclusion: morality and self-interest are a lot like siblings, often in conflict, but eternally related.

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