SELF-LOVE AND THE VICES OF SELF-PREFERENCE*

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The paper explores the extent to which self-love, as understood by Bishop Butler, may be in harmony with altruistic virtue. Whereas Butler was primarily concerned to rebut suspicions directed against altruism, the suspicions principally addressed by the present writer are directed against self-love. It is argued that the main vices of self-preference— particularly selfishness, self-centeredness, and arrogance—are not essentially excesses of self-love and, indeed, do not necessarily involve self-love. It is argued further that self-love is something one is typically taught as a child, for socially compelling reasons. This suggests how a healthy self-love and a healthy commitment to the common good can be integrated and will normally be in harmony.

1. Butler and the Harmony of Self-Love with Benevolence

Is moral virtue altruistic in such a way that there cannot be any place in it for self-love? Or is there a possible harmony of self-interest with altruism and with virtue? Discussion of this topic in English finds a natural starting point is in the work of Joseph Butler, and especially in his famous Sermon XI, "Upon the Love of Our Neighbour," where he argues that it cannot be to our advantage for self-love to absorb us so totally as to leave no room for the love of our neighbor. Butler conceives of self-love as "a regard to [one's] own interest, happiness, and private good" (XI.8),[1] by which he means one's good in the long run, comprehensively considered. Butler distinguishes self- love from "particular appetites and passions," which are desires for objects "distinct from the pleasure arising from them." Indeed the object gives pleasure only because there is a prior "affection or appetite" for it, according to Butler (XI.6). He argues that therefore

> if self-love wholly engrosses us, and leaves no room for any other principle, there can be absolutely no such thing at all as happiness, or enjoyment of any kind whatever; since happiness consists in the gratification of particular passions, which supposes the having of them (XI.9).

It is therefore advantageous to our happiness to have particular passions or desires for objects quite distinct from our happiness. Without them we would have nothing to be happy about.

FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY
Vol. 15 No. 4 October 1998

From the point of view of self-love, Butler argues, benevolence toward another person has this advantage just as much as a desire to be loved or esteemed by the other person—though the latter is commonly seen as a more self-interested desire than the former. He treats benevolence in this context (though not always) as one of the particular passions, having another person's happiness as its object.[2] The other person's happiness can be a source of pleasure or happiness to me, if I desire it and learn of its reality in the other person. "Is desire of and delight in the happiness of another any more a diminution of self-love, than desire of and delight in the esteem of another?" Butler asks. "They are both equally desire of and delight in somewhat external to ourselves: either both or neither are so" (XI.11).

It is not my purpose to examine this justly celebrated argument. Bishop Butler's treatment of the nature and sources of pleasure requires some amendment,[3] which need not be attempted here; and any adequate amendment may well affect the force of the argument. But I do not doubt the correctness of the theses, first, that one can hardly live a happy life without strong and more than merely instrumental desires for ends distinct from one's own happiness, and second, that the happiness or good of other persons is among the ends best suited to play this part in a happy person's life.

We must be clear that such considerations cannot establish an automatic harmony of self-love and benevolence for everyone. At most they provide grounds to believe in the desirability, and to hope in the possibility, of people becoming such that self-love and benevolence are in harmony for them. An attractive story about Butler may help to make this point vivid. It is said that once, being asked for a charitable contribution, and learning from his steward, upon inquiry, that he had £500 on hand, Butler replied, "Five hundred pounds! What a shame for a bishop to have so much money! Give it away; give it all to this gentleman for his charitable plan."[4] One imagines that Butler enjoyed doing this—perhaps more than he would have enjoyed any other use of the money, but it is obvious that someone with different interests might not have enjoyed it. The harmony of self-love with benevolence, as Butler conceives of it, depends on having, and perhaps cultivating, the right interests.

To some extent it may also depend on a relatively unalienated membership in some social group—an advantage sadly inaccessible to some people. Bishop Butler was in many ways at home in his social context, and his main personal projects seem to have been at the same time social or even public projects. He was fortunate to be able to find his own happiness in seeking the good of his church and his people. To a far greater extent than one would gather from Butler, the possible harmony of self-love with benevolence requires social as well as individual foundations,[5] even where it involves a deeper altruism than results from rewarding egoistic individuals for socially useful behavior.

We shall find Butler helpful at several points in the present investigation. Throughout it I shall use the term 'self-love', as he did, to signify the desire for one's own long-term happiness or good on the whole. But my aim here is not properly historical and I offer no systematic exposi-

tion or critique of Butler's moral theory. My focus indeed is rather different from his.

Much of Butler's argument was directed against the egoistic moral theory of Thomas Hobbes, and was meant to commend a life of conscientiousness and benevolence to an audience for whom self-love was "the favourite passion," as he put it (XI.3). In this paper, however, I shall be addressing concerns that come from the opposite direction; for I want particularly to ask how far self-love can be cleared of the suspicion under which it lies in ordinary moral opinion. Karl Barth surely speaks for many when he says of self-love, "God will never think of blowing on this fire, which is bright enough already."[6] So does Iris Murdoch when she declares that "In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego."[7] Even Butler says that "vice in general consists in having an unreasonable and too great regard to ourselves, in comparison of others" (X.6), though he also holds that "self-love in its due degree is as just and morally good, as any affection whatever" (Preface, §39).

Vices of self-preference, such as selfishness and pride, are rightly among the chief objects of moral censure. Our understanding of them is not enhanced, however, by an oversimple dichotomization of morally relevant motivation into desire for one's own good and desire for other people's good. I want to explore here some of the complexity that belies this dichotomy. This complexity, I shall argue, does support a possible harmony of self-love with altruistic virtue.

2. *Selfishness*

One of Butler's insights is that the role of self- love in actual human motivation has been exaggerated. So far as I can see, the main vices of self-preference do not necessarily involve self-love. *Selfishness* is the one we are probably most tempted to identify with a degree of self-love that is too great, either absolutely or in proportion to the strength of one's altruistic and conscientious motivation. This identification cannot be right, however, for selfishness is clearly possible without any degree of self-love at all.

One of the virtues of Butler's account of self- love is that it makes clear that self-love is a rational achievement. One cannot desire one's long- term happiness or good on the whole without having a concept of that good. And that is not an easy concept. This is not the place to expound a full conception, Butler's or mine, of a person's good; and I would not necessarily wish to defend all of Butler's views on the subject. One feature of Butler's conception of a person's good that seems to me clearly right particularly concerns us here; it is that the conception is an instrument of rational self- government, and can play that role because it is a rather comprehensive conception in which many interests, and the person's whole future, are taken into account.

We are not born with such a concept. It is not even among the first concepts we learned. I had the concept of "*my* teddy bear" some time before I had the concept of "my life," let alone the concept of "my long-term good on the whole," and thus before I had the conceptual resources

necessary for self-love in Butler's sense. But by the time I had the concept of "*my* teddy bear" I was certainly capable of being selfish in various ways. That selfishness cannot have been an excess of the self-love of which I was as yet incapable.

What was it then? Or more broadly, what would selfishness be where it is not an excess of self-love (as I will not deny that it can be)? The obvious Butlerian answer is that selfishness can consist in some disorder of the "particular passions"—some lack or weakness of benevolent passions, or some excess of self-regarding passions, or both. These ideas are nicely combined, though without the use of the word `selfishness', in Butler's statement that

> The thing to be lamented, is not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough; but that they have so little to the good of others. And this seems plainly owing to their being so much engaged in the gratification of particular passions unfriendly to benevolence, and which happen to be prevalent in them, much more than to self-love. (Preface, § 40)[8]

The idea of "particular passions unfriendly to benevolence" invites further elaboration. A charge of selfishness implies some lack of due regard to something other than oneself, and this will commonly involve a lack of benevolence. What is benevolence here? A "regard…to the good of others" is easily construed as a concern for the comprehensive, long-term good of at least one other person, if not the even more comprehensive utilitarian "greatest good of the greatest number." It is true that a lack of regard to the comprehensive good of others is apt to be censured as selfish in adults, but that cannot exactly be what constitutes selfishness in very young children. For if their selfishness is a lack, it must surely be a lack of something that is not utterly beyond their conceptual capacities. And they are not capable of regard to the long-term good of other people as such, having no more conception of it than of their own long- term good. If selfishness is a lack in very young children, it must be a lack of some passion more particular than a comprehensive regard to the good of another person. Which unselfish passions of this more particular sort ought not to be lacking in very young children? We might look for concern about the pleasure or pain, satisfaction or frustration experienced at present by another person.[9]

The possibilities for unselfish motives in adults are obviously more varied. One variety that deserves some emphasis here is the possibility of unselfish desires that are not concerned with other people as such, but with common projects.[10] If I am too wrapped up in private concerns to care about the quality of work done in my philosophy department, that may well be regarded as selfish, even though the concern in which I am deficient is not for my colleagues and students as persons, but for a common project in which they are interested. Perhaps the most we can say quite generally about the omission aspect of selfishness is that selfishness necessarily involves insufficient regard for other people or for

something in which other people are interested.

There is more to be said about the "particular passions unfriendly to benevolence" whose *excessive prevalance* would constitute selfishness, and which we have yet to identify. I speak of the excessive prevalence of the passions in question, for I think there are few desires or interests that are inherently or necessarily selfish. Selfishness lies not in caring about one's own comfort or one's stamp collection, but in letting oneself be governed inappropriately or too strongly by such interests. That seems to be the typical relation of selfishness to its motives, though there are doubtless exceptions to the general rule— desires that are inherently selfish. W. H. Auden wrote of the "crude," but in his opinion "normal," wish that "craves...not universal love, but to be loved alone."[11] That certainly seems to be an essentially selfish desire.

Which of the passions that may oppose benevolence can ground a charge of selfishness if one is too much governed by them? Not all, I think. `Malicious' rather than `selfish' seems the word for sheer ill-will toward another person, from which, as Butler notes, one may "rush upon certain ruin for the destruction of an enemy" (XI.11), desiring the other person's pain or loss regardless of what happens to oneself. The motives of selfishness involve wanting something *for oneself*.

In what way must it be for oneself? It seems safe to say at a minimum that motives of selfishness must be *self-regarding* in the sense of having an object involving oneself that is desired or intended at least partly for its own sake, and not merely as a means to some other end. But this is not a terribly restrictive condition. The class of self-regarding motives is very wide—so wide that they are probably involved in almost all our actions. Desiring a relationship for its own sake—whether one desires the continuance of one's marriage, or to be a good parent or friend to so-and- so—is always a self-regarding motive, inasmuch as the relationship essentially involves oneself. Likewise conscientiousness is a self-regarding motive, inasmuch as it is a commitment to act rightly *oneself*—a point that is reflected in recent characterizations of deontological constraints as agent-centered.

A more difficult question is whether motives of selfishness have some necessary connection with the idea of a good for oneself. Let us say that a *narrowly self-interested* motive is one in which one desires or intends something at least partly for the sake of one's own comprehensive, long-term good. It is an expression of self-love in Butler's sense. Even if motives of selfishness must be self-regarding, I have argued that they are not always narrowly self-interested. But it is harder to refute the hypothesis that they must be, if not narrowly, then *broadly self-interested*, in the sense that they must aim at something that is (or is taken to be) *good* for oneself, in the short term or in some respect, if not in the long term and comprehensively.

This hypothesis might be suggested by thinking of *greed*, which is probably the motive most frequently branded as selfish. The child behaving selfishly may be dominated by a desire to control a particular toy, or to eat the whole of a particular piece of cake. Adults are capable of a more comprehensive greed, for money or wealth in general. The

object of greed, particular or general, is not one's own good as such, but it is generally seen as a good, in some way, for its possessor, and as a good that exists in limited supply and is desired by or for other people as well as oneself. The phenomena of greed present us with many cases of selfishness from motives that are broadly but not narrowly self-interested, as when someone who knows he is eating more than is good for him takes more than his fair share of food in order to have the pleasure of eating it.

The hypothesis that in selfishness one always aims at some *good* for oneself requires at least some qualifications. Your judgment that someone acts selfishly from a certain desire does not necessarily commit *you* to the view that the object desired is truly good for the desirer even in the short run or in any respect. If you think someone is selfishly controlled by a desire for posthumous fame, it does not follow that you hold the controversial opinion that posthumous fame can be in some way good for a person. If the question is whether *my* quest for posthumous glory is selfish, probably my opinion as to whether it would be a good for me is more relevant than yours. But my opinion is not decisive either, in such a case. Clearly one can be selfishly moved by a desire without having any opinion as to whether the object of the desire would be a good of any sort for oneself, since children can be selfish before they have the concept of something being good for a person in any way (though probably not before they have, at least in rudimentary form, related concepts such as those of pleasure and pain). And surely it may be counted as selfish to be overly dominated by a desire for such objects as pleasure, convenience, wealth, or reputation, independently of any opinion on the part of either the classifier or the possessor of the motive, as to whether the object is truly good in any way, even in the short term, for the person in question, or for anyone else. Of course all these objects are regarded by many as good for a person, at least in the short run or in some respect; so our readiness to accept them as figuring in motives of selfishness might be explained as deference to public opinion, and thus as not shaking the connection of selfishness with the idea of a good for oneself.

One reason for the difficulty of shaking it is that so few self-regarding motives are clearly not broadly self-interested. Perhaps self-destructive motives, such as self-hatred, provide the most plausible case of self-regarding motives that do not aim at anything that is good for oneself from any point of view. Consider, then, the question of selfishness in the following pair of examples. It is often thought selfish to abandon certain responsibilities by committing suicide in order to avoid a situation painful to oneself. Avoiding the pain is a good for oneself, at least in the short run. Would it be thought selfish to abandon the same responsibilities by committing suicide out of sheer self-hatred, desiring nothing that anyone would call a good for oneself? Certainly such action can be subject to moral censure— for instance, as irresponsible. Moreover, it manifests an excessive concern with oneself; it is probably self-centered. In trying to talk the self-hater out of suicide, one might perhaps argue that it would be selfish to abandon the responsibilities in

order to act on one's feelings about oneself. Yet in a cooler hour I might hesitate to call it *selfish*, precisely because the motive is hostile rather than friendly toward oneself. Perhaps it does not matter much whether we avoid the label `selfish' here. Self-destructive behavior is commonly very harmful to other people, and it seems no better morally to engage in it from sheer self-hatred than from desire for some short-term good for oneself.[12]

So I am not sure that selfishness *necessarily* involves a desire for anything regarded by anyone as a good for oneself. But in *some* of our judgments of selfishness it does seem to matter whether the offending motive aims at a good for its possessor. For example, consider someone who always insists on assuming the most burdensome role in any situation, even when there are others who are willing to do it and it is clear that it would be better for all concerned if one of them did it. `Selfish' does not seem the right word for such a person, but it does seem the right word for someone who is too *un*willing to assume burdensome roles; and this contrast applies even when the two attitudes are equally inconvenient for others. The most salient difference between the two cases is that the selfish person is seeking an obvious good for himself, and the other person is not.

One further point is particularly important for the relation between selfishness and self-love. Whether we think people selfish or unselfish often depends less on the strength of their self-love than on the character of the interests or "particular passions" in which they seek their happiness. There are interests in which people find happiness, and whose pursuit therefore is typically both broadly and narrowly self-interested, but which are regarded as *unselfish interests*—for instance, the desire to be a parent, when it is embraced with sufficient maturity. Conversely, people who take no delight in any but the most narrowly self-regarding interests do not have an exemplary unselfish character even if they are willing to sacrifice those interests when duty or the common good demands it. And people with strong enough interests in other people and in public or ideal ends may be notably unselfish even if almost everything they do contributes also to their own happiness, as seems to have been the case in Bishop Butler's life. In this connection one might speak of a selfish or unselfish conception of one's own good.

3. *Self-Centeredness and Vices of Cognitive Self-Preference*

A particularly important self-regarding desire which it usually is not exactly selfish to carry to excess, even at others' expense, is the desire to be a good person, the desire for virtue. It is possible to be overly concerned, or concerned in an objectionable way, with one's own virtue. This is the case in the vices of self-righteousness and moral priggishness. And people who refuse to do something morally questionable in order to attain some great good or avoid some great evil are often accused of selfishness in their desire for "clean hands." I doubt the correctness of the charge of selfishness in such cases, unless the agent is moved by mere delicacy of feeling, rather than by a belief that it would be wrong

to do what he refuses to do. It is never selfish, I think, to refuse conscientiously to do something that really is wrong; and even where a misguided conscientiousness leads one to abstain from an action that really is morally required, `selfish' does not seem quite the right word for one's motivation.

Perhaps 'self-centered' would be a better description. To want to be a good person is to desire something unquestionably good. One can hardly want it too much. Yet it does seem that this motive can be distorted, and its value compromised, by some sort of excessive consideration of self. The difference between a wholesome and a self-centered desire for virtue, I think, is not primarily in the end that is desired. What is desired in both cases may be the same: to be a good person. The difference is rather in emphasis, or in the place that one's wanting to be good has in a larger pattern of thinking and feeling. If one's desire for virtue is self-centered, one is likely to be thinking often about how good one is, or filled with anxiety about one's moral shortcomings, or comparing one's moral qualities to other people's; whereas a purer love of virtue might be manifested in thinking more about virtue in general, and admiring the good qualities of other people, without reference or comparison to oneself.

This difference in one's thinking, in one's attention,[13] is virtually certain to affect one's judgment on moral issues. The self-centered interest in one's own virtue, we think, is apt to distort judgment, making it likelier that one will be mistaken in one's beliefs about what virtue requires. In this way the difference between a self-centered and a purer desire for virtue is likely to issue in differences in the detail of what one wants for oneself. These differences in the object of desire are not primary, however, but derive from a more fundamental difference in focus.

Self-centeredness is a vice of self-preference that is distinguishable from selfishness. The feature of self-centeredness that most interests me here is that it is not in general to be understood in terms of what one wants. The simplistic dichotomy of egoism and altruism commonly carries with it the assumption that any vice of self-preference is a matter of what one wants. Self-centeredness is a counterexample to this assumption. There may be desires that are essentially self-centered; perhaps the desire to be the center of attention is one such. But most good relationships between oneself and other people, or between oneself and values or ideal ends, can be desired, for their own sake, in both more and less self-centered ways.

A homelier example may help to confirm this point. Suppose Daddy is planning to shoot baskets with Susie. Daddy desires the following state of affairs, and desires it at least partly for its own sake: Daddy and Susie shoot baskets together; both have fun; both take the activity seriously; and both do their best. Daddy will be disappointed if either of them fails to enjoy it, and if either of them does badly. This characterizes Daddy's desire in both of the following versions of the example:

Case (1): As Daddy contemplates the planned recreation, his mind runs to thoughts such as "I'm really being a very good father," "I'm still very good at this, considering my age," "I wish my dad had done this

with me," "Susie will get a kick out of this because I'm spending time with her." He forgets to ask her what she did in school today.

Case (2): As Daddy contemplates the planned recreation, his mind runs to thoughts such as "Susie has so much fun shooting baskets," "She's getting really good at it," "Susie's a neat kid." He remembers to ask what she did in school today.

Other things being equal, these descriptions give reason for saying that Daddy's interest in shooting baskets with Susie is more self-centered in Case (1) than in Case (2). And this does not seem to be primarily a difference in the ends that Daddy desires. Though Daddy desires this recreational activity at least partly for its own sake, it is likely that in both cases he has a number of ulterior ends in wanting it, and that in both cases these include his being a good father, his getting some exercise, Susie's physical and social development, and their having a good relationship. The difference between the two cases is rather a difference in focus. In wanting a largely relational complex of ends essentially involving oneself it is possible for one's interest to be centered overwhelmingly on one's own role in the complex, or much more on other persons, or other features, involved in it. Self-centeredness, as its name suggests, is typically a perversion in this sort of centering.

My account of self-centeredness has emphasized the thoughts one has. In many cases, I think, self- centeredness is a perversion of cognition as much as of the will. And certainly there are vices of cognitive self-preference, such as pride, conceit, or egotism.[14] One of Butler's sermons is largely devoted to the distortions of moral perception and judgment that arise from cognitive "self-partiality" (X,7), particularly as it is manifested in a disposition not to recognize one's own moral faults. Still more offensive than such blindness to one's own sins is the arrogance of thinking of oneself as more important than other people. I mean not merely caring more about one's own good, and one's own projects, than about those of other people, but seeing oneself as objectively more important than others, thinking one's own problems and goals more urgent morally than theirs.

These faults could be motivated by one's desire for one's own good, or by more particular self- regarding desires. One may not recognize one's faults because one does not *want* to think of oneself as wrong, or perhaps because one fears that guilt would deprive one of the long-term happiness one desires. But it is not obvious that vices of cognitive self-preference always have such an explanation in terms of desire; and they are not themselves forms of any desire. That is, they are not tendencies to go for a particular end, but are rather tendencies to judge in certain ways and form certain views of things. And it may be clearer that certain judgments or views are arrogant, conceited, or egotistic, than that any desires that may motivate them are morally objectionable. If I tend to think of myself more highly than I ought, that vice may well have among its causes a desire to *have* the excellences that I fondly imagine myself as having—a desire that makes it painful to face the sad truth of how far short of them I fall. But that desire seems morally innocent, perhaps even laudable. The vice may have to be located in the cognitive functioning

that responds inappropriately to the desire.[15] There is more than one way in which self can loom too large in one's life. It can loom too large in one's desires, but it can also loom too large in one's thoughts. And neither of these two forms of vice is merely a form of the other.

For this reason it seems to me somewhat strained to characterize these vices as forms of selfishness.[16] The word `selfish' ordinarily signifies something about one's desires, something about the ends one is going for. The vices of cognitive self-preference seem rather to be forms of the sin of pride, or perhaps in some cases of self-centeredness—if indeed they can be reduced at all to a small number of categories.

Since they are not forms of any desire, it follows that these vices are not forms of self-love, if by `self-love' we mean the desire for one's own long-term good. Indeed some of them do not presuppose a conception of one's own good, and hence can in principle exist without self-love—though they may involve in their own way too much cognitive sophistication to exist in very young children.

4. *Unselfish Self-Love*

We have now seen at least two types of case in which vices of self-preference cannot be identified with an excess of that desire for one's own long-term good which Butler called self-love. There are cases—indeed quite typical cases—of selfishness in which the excessively dominant desire is one of what Butler called the "particular passions," whose aims may not agree, in the particular case, with those of a rational self-love. And there are vices of cognitive self- preference which are not forms of any desire. So is self-love innocent, or perhaps even virtuous?

Sometimes but not always, is the short answer. A somewhat longer answer may begin with reflection on children's learning of self-love. We have noted that very young children are incapable of desiring their own long-term good because they have no conception of such a good. Much ethical thought has proceeded on the assumption that self-love is "natural," or even an instinct in human beings. I suppose it is natural, in the rather minimal sense that we have a natural propensity to it, but it is not an instinct. Experience suggests that self-love is something a child is normally *taught* by its elders. None of us invented for ourselves the concept of our own happiness or good, which plays an essential part in self-love. There may be objective facts of human good, but the *concept* of one's own good is a product of human culture and socially transmitted—something we acquired from those who came before us.

Nor did we get it by merely observing their deliberations about their own good. Unless we were very unfortunate in our childhood circumstances, we were brought up by adults who had our long-term good as a project of theirs before it was a project of ours— indeed, before we had any conception of it. They recognized it as a project that could not get very far unless it became our project too. Therefore they taught us the concept of our own good with the intention that we should desire that good, explaining, for instance, that certain things were good for us and others bad for us. Teaching children to conceive of, and care for, their

own good is one of the main ways in which one cares for their good. Conversely, children who are undervalued by those who bring them up are apt to find it harder to adopt their own good with clarity and firmness as a project of their own.

In happier circumstances children's acquisition of self-love is an initiation into a common project, a project they share with adults who love them. Like morally correct behavior, my own long-term good was not something *I* wanted to begin with. I came to want both, with some ambivalence, as I learned about them from people about whom I cared who cared about both, and as I sensed the place of both in a whole network of common projects into which I was being initiated. What was good for me—cod liver oil, for example—was about as likely to be unpleasant as what was morally required. I cannot recall that the appeal to enlightened self- interest enlisted a readier or more enthusiastic cooperation from me than the appeal to righteousness. Both of these appeals had to struggle against what Butler called "particular passions," many of which I had long before I possessed the relatively complex conceptual apparatus necessary for self-love and conscientiousness.

Against this background it should not surprise us that a good deal of self-love, in Butler's sense, is regularly treated as a moral virtue in children. "Be a good boy and take your medicine; it's good for you." "Be a good girl and do your homework; it's important to your future success." In these injunctions an appraisal that certainly feels moral rides on a response to the motive of the agent's own long-term good. In many contexts children who take an effective interest in their own good are "being good," and children who don't are letting the side down, damaging a project in which others have invested much.

Similar things can be said about adults. Butler remarks

> that there are as few persons who attain the greatest satisfaction and enjoyment which they might attain in the present world; as who do the greatest good to others which they might do: nay, that there are as few who can be said really and in earnest to aim at one, as at the other (I.14).

For it so often happens that "cool self-love is prevailed over by passion and appetite" (I.14), whereas "self-love ∴ is, of the two, a much better guide than passion" (Preface, §41). A failure to pursue one's own good is perhaps less apt to be subjected to moral censure in adults than in children. But I think there is often a distinctly moral flavor to criticism of adults who neglect their own good through indiscipline or indolence.

Differences in our attitudes toward a lack of self-love in adults and in children are connected with issues of responsibility and ownership. Part of what I learned about my own good as a child was that it was a project that was to belong to me in a special way: that as I got older I would have more and more responsibility for it, and others would take less and less responsibility for it. Linked with this was the fact that the form the project would take would be increasingly up to me. Likewise it would be more my own business if I neglected the project. Taking my own

good as a project that is mine in a special way was part of my learning and accepting my moral position in a complex web of rights and responsibilities. At least in a broadly liberal Western society, one acquires more ownership of one's good, and it becomes less of a common project, as one grows to adulthood.

But it never ceases entirely to be a common project in any society that is not completely heartless. If I am found near death in the street, I will be taken to a hospital. If I am starving and there is food around, an effort will probably be made to provide me with some. If I am threatening to throw myself off a tall building, those responsible for public safety will try to talk me out of it. And if I am fortunate enough to have other people who are close to me, they will normally concern themselves more comprehensively and more deeply with my welfare. It goes with this that other people who count my good to some extent among their projects may be angry or reproachful if I neglect it too much.[17]

My good was a common project when I first learned about it; it was also not a completely autonomous project. As my parents' project, my good was not neatly isolated from all their other projects—from the good of the family, from the common good of the human race, or from their commitment to Christianity. My good was for them a part of God's will, a part of the common good, a part of the family's good. Making my good a project of theirs was not clearly distinct from accepting me as part of the family and part of the community. In one sense of community, one becomes part of a community precisely by having one's good accepted by the other members of the community as a project—a project not totally separate from the common good—and by accepting the good of the community and of each other member as, to some degree, a project of one's own (if one is competent to form such projects).

Still, making my good a project is not just a matter of factoring something about me into one's conception of the common good; it involves regarding me as a somewhat independent focus of value, so to speak. An individual's good is always a project or sub-project that can come into competition with other projects. There are contexts in which it is important to consider my good (or your good) separately. This is obviously the case where issues of distributive fairness arise, and where parents want to take each of their children's good "equally" into account (perhaps not simply or exactly as a matter of fairness).

It is possible for this separateness to be carried to an extreme, by others or more likely by the person in question. I could make it my project that *I* have a good life—and let the rest of the world go hang. That would be an alienated way of taking my own good as a project of mine. It would also be a form of selfishness, which clearly can in this way consist in a corruption of self-love. (As Butler argued, of course, it would be an unpromising project too, unlikely to result in a very good life for me, by any plausible standard.)

I need not make my own good such a separate project, however. It can be for me rather the project that I have a good life in a flourishing human community. That is much more like the project into which I was intiated by my elders when I first learned to care for my own good. The

tendency of much moral philosophy is to insist on distinguishing two separate projects here: my flourishing and the flourishing of the community. But we might do better to see two foci in a single project—or perhaps two projects, but each having the other as a part.

This is not to deny that there are heroic forms of altruism that involve self-sacrifice, and situations in which it would be selfish not to make some self- sacrifice. Circumstances can certainly place my desire for my own good in conflict with my desire for the common good. Such a conflict will arise in most circumstances, indeed, if the two projects are conceived as absolutely maximizing my own good, as in strict egoism, and absolutely maximizing some common or general good, as in strict utilitarianism. In an approach that seems to me healthier, however, in which one pursues important *goods* without worrying whether they are the *best*, it will often be unnecessary to break down one's desire for a good life in a flourishing community into separate self-interested and altruistic desires.

This may help us to see self-love as positively rather than negatively related to community. Fully accepting my own membership in a community involves taking my own good as a project, both as a common project of the community and as part of the common good. At the same time my good is a project that the community regards, and expects me to regard, as mine to care about in a special way (though not necessarily *more* than about the good of others or in isolation from the good of others). Being willing to be special to myself in this way is appropriately responsive to my place in communities (not to mention my place in the universe). This is a relatively unalienated and unselfish way of taking my own good as a project.

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NOTES

* This paper originated as the Joseph Butler Memorial Lecture delivered in Oxford on the three hundredth anniversary of Butler's birth, 18 May 1992. I am grateful to Oriel College, Butler's college, for the invitation to give the lecture and for their generous hospitality on the occasion. Versions of the paper have also been presented to the philosophy department of the University of Vermont and to a conference on virtue ethics at the University of Santa Clara, and as the Ruth Evelyn Parcelles Memorial Lecture at the University of Connecticut, 21 April 1994, and the Franklin W. Matchette Lecture at Brooklyn College, 5 May 1994. I am indebted to discussants on those occasions, and especially to Marilyn McCord Adams for her comments on a draft of the paper.

1. References in this form are to a sermon, and a paragraph thereof, in Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, edited by T. A. Roberts (London: S.P.C.K., 1970). Roberts claims to follow J. H. Bernard's edition of Butler's works in paragraph numbering, as in other matters.

2. Cf. Terence Penelhum, *Butler* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 79f. Butler sometimes (e.g., in I.7) treats benevolence as distinct from "the several passions and affections," and more parallel to self-love, though no less

distinct from it. Among Butler's notable admirers, C. D. Broad regards the position suggested by I.7 as Butler's real or characteristic view, one in which benevolence is seen as a "general principle" and "a rational calculating principle," while Henry Sidgwick reads the dominant tendency of Butler's thought (more accurately, in my opinion) as one in which benevolence is less parallel to self-love. Benevolence, according to Sidgwick's Butler, "is not definitely a desire for general good as such, but rather kind affection for particular individuals." See C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1930), pp. 61, 71-73; and Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 195.

3. Some indication of what is needed may be found in Broad's critique in *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 66-67.

4. Ernest Campbell Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason: A Study in the History of Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 11.

5. A similar point is made by Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 75-76. Cf. also Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 204-7; Nagel, less complacent than Butler, rightly stresses the need for political changes to which such considerations point. Butler, of course, also believed in religious foundations that would assure the harmony of virtue with self-love for everyone. I share Butler's belief on this latter point, and think it important, but my discussion here, like much of his, will not appeal to it.

6. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I/2, translated by G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 388.

7. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 52.

8. References in this form are to Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*.

9. Butler may have meant to comprehend such passions under the heading of "benevolence" here. He may sometimes have thought of benevolence as a pre- rational "affection" (XII.2) manifested in particular passions, and needing further "to be directed by...reason" (XII.27) rather than as itself a principle of rational self-government. (Cf. also Sermon V.) This is one way in which benevolence may not be fully parallel to ("cool" or rational) self- love; cf. note 2 above.

10. This point is discussed at length in Robert M. Adams, "Common Projects and Moral Virtue," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 13(1988): 297-307.

11. W. H. Auden, "September 1, 1939," in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945), p. 58f.

12. I am indebted to Marilyn McCord Adams for particularly helpful discussion of the topics of this paragraph, as well as for comments on the lecture in general.

13. In using this word I am mindful of Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, pp. 17-42,55f.; but I refer to something that is commonly less intentional than the "attention" of which Murdoch wrote.

14. The `t' in `egotism' marks an important difference: egotism is primarily a matter of one's opinion of oneself; egoism, a matter of one's aims.

15. Some would argue that the vice, if any, should be sought rather in a voluntary failure to make sufficient efforts at self criticism. I have argued elsewhere against that view. See Robert M. Adams, "Involuntary Sins," *Philosophical Review*, 94 (1985): 3-31, especially pp. 11-14, 17-21; the whole article is relevant to issues discussed in this paragraph.

16. Though Butler seems to do this (X,6).

17. Cf. Adams, "Common Projects and Moral Virtue," pp. 305-307.