ARE THERE MORAL OBLIGATIONS TO ONESELF?

by

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Abstract

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After showing that the topic of duties to oneself has been de-emphasized in the history of philosophical ethics, I demonstrate that this is due in large part to philosophers embracing the social view of morality (SVM). SVM argues that all morality is interpersonal and that how an agent treats himself may be a matter of prudence but doesn't rise to the level of morality or allow for moral obligations to oneself. I reply that SVM not only fails to disprove the possibility of duties to oneself, but is logically inconsistent for failing to acknowledge that agents can benefit or mistreat themselves in ways strongly analogous to the ways in which they benefit or mistreat others. There are several ways in which this is so. For one, benefiting oneself is similar to beneficence toward others. Also, there are self-regarding virtues like persistence, courage and self-control which it is our obligation to practice, just as we are obliged to practice other-regarding virtues. Agents have further obligations to be prudent and not harm themselves, just as they are obliged not to harm others. In addition to these obligations, there are obligations to keep promises with oneself and not to engage in self-deception.

Preface

It is unsurprising that modern moral philosophers writing about normative ethics have focused on how we ought to behave. This is, after all, the philosophical task of normative ethics. This preoccupation with oughts leads inexorably into a consideration of what our obligations are. But the marching orders that led moral philosophers to examine obligations has led them into terrain more preoccupied with the other-regarding nature of morality. Though this concern with other-regarding morality needn't have caused a neglect of whether self-regarding actions are fit subjects for moral analysis, it has had that effect. Thus, for many, if not most, moral philosophers the conceptual map of ethics does not include a region of self-regarding actions.

To the extent that normative ethics, certainly since the advent of a greater number of utilitarian thinkers in the last two centuries, has been defined as benefiting others, moral philosophy has de-emphasized, ignored or denied altogether the possibility of self-regarding morality. If this is true, it is truer still that a self-regarding morality that includes obligations to oneself has been regarded as well-nigh impossible. But to the extent that this position is held—that is, again, to the degree that the self-regarding aspect of morality has been neglected, denied or de-emphasized—philosophers have failed to appreciate the degree to which matters of self-regard are comparable to matters of other-regarding morality.

This is significant in two major respects, and in some minor ones.

For one, if moral philosophy is the normative attempt to tell us how to live and what constitutes right value, then this certainly includes our obligations toward others—neighbors, friends, countrymen and human beings in general. But this other-regarding

list, cast in order of increasing extension, overlooks the obvious: what obligations do I have toward myself? This matter is conspicuously absent from the social view of morality (SVM), or that approach to ethics that claims that only interpersonal actions can be regarded as moral or immoral. Can any picture of ethics be complete in which the self is omitted?

There is also a metaethical concern. It is legitimate to ask, what is the nature of ethics? What is the definition of ethics? To assume morality is strictly interpersonal may at first glance look like a negligible point, but it is not. For any definition of what ethics is will have implications for what one ought to do. If a definition is to exclude self-regarding morality, then this definition will function as a principle governing cases in which self-regarding actions are involved and proclaims them to be non-moral cases. If this is the conclusion, then it is assumed, not proven.

To appreciate the scope of the importance of this issue, let me employ an analogy. Someone might argue that in describing what literature is, we should leave out all autobiographies. They might defend their position by saying that literature must be about others besides the self. We would reply that "yes" autobiography was principally about the author, but "no" it is wrong, and a bit logically odd, to say it cannot be literature. We could argue this by maintaining that while autobiography was dissimilar to other-regarding kinds of literature, it still had things in common with all literature, namely that it could be well-thought out, well-structured, and contain the universal element so frequently found in good literature. In so doing, we would be showing not that autobiography was identical with other varieties of literature, but that it had enough

elements in common with literature and—this is crucial—enough of those elements to say that it is strongly analogous to and deserving of the name literature.

So it is with self-regarding morality. There is a great deal of self-regarding morality that is deserving of the name moral.

SVM misses the possibility of self-regarding morality. How? By defining it away. SVM has concluded that all morality is interpersonal, never personal. I think there are several reasons for advancing this position. One is that morality is lately identified with what our obligations are. Further, it is argued that there is no intelligible sense in which I can have obligations to myself.

In chapter one I explain the problem of duties to oneself and provide an historical treatment of the matter. In chapter two, I elaborate the views of 13 philosophers, dividing them into those argue for duties to oneself in a weak, derivative sense (for example, maintaining that our duties to ourselves are derivative from our duties to God) and those, like Joseph Butler and Immanuel Kant, who argue for such duties in a strong, non-derivative sense. In chapter three I state and reply to those views of utilitiarian and deontological thinkers who argue against the possibility of duties to oneself. Finally, in chapter four I show how duties to oneself—like the duties to be prudent and keep promises—are strongly analogous to duties to others.

CONTENTS

Chapter One:
The Problem

i

One characterization of normative moral philosophy is that it is the history of what our obligations are. No doubt this brief characterization leaves out a great deal of the richness of moral thought. But I will not spend time on an historical survey of the views of moral philosophers to support or dispute any "history of normative ethics" = "the history of obligations" contention. I would rather point out a problem: to the degree to which such a characterization of the history of moral philosophy is true, that the history of ethics at various points de-emphasizes what it means to have moral obligations to ourselves. 1

There are several possible reasons for the lack of emphasis on self-regarding obligations in the history of ethics. One possibility is that the omission is philosophically unmotivated and that moral philosophers have merely *overlooked* the possibility of duties to oneself. That is, their attentions might well have been so fixed on the myriad other concerns of ethics—so frequently centered on the welfare of others besides the agent—that the issue of obligations to oneself is not part of that purview. Indeed, one might claim that a philosopher can "overlook an issue" the way one might overlook a carpet in the center of a room while focusing at an antique corner table, or look past a stranger because he had his eyes trained on a friend. Surely, we have all had experiences of overlooking in this latter sense. So why couldn't one overlook a philosophical issue in a comparable sense? One answer is that it is possible but unlikely that philosophers would overlook an issue in this way.

For one, moral philosophy proceeds by use of arguments and definitions of terms like “moral,” “duty,” “obligation,” “just,” “good,” and so on. In the course of laying out such definitions it would be well-nigh impossible for a philosopher to overlook whether those definitions implied that obligations to oneself were possible or whether the definitions ruled out such obligations. Thus, to take one example, if a philosopher held the view that all morality was social—so that only actions involving the welfare of others can be described as moral or immoral—this would imply that how an agent treats himself is not a “moral matter” and is thus not subject to moral praise or blame. It would be difficult to say that a philosopher holding this “social view” of morality had “overlooked” duties to oneself. Rather, it would seem more likely that the philosopher understood well the implications of the view; namely, that it effectively excluded duties to oneself and self-regarding morality altogether.

Then again, unless we knew the actual workings of the philosopher’s mind, we could not say for sure whether he had overlooked the issue of duties to oneself or deliberately ignored the issue.

I think it is more accurate to say that many moral philosophers have de-emphasized, ignored or denied duties to oneself, or failed to appreciate the degree to which such duties are comparable to duties to others. Again, it is difficult to divine what occupied a philosopher’s mind who failed to comment on the issue. But there are philosophers, for instance, who have written widely on the virtues—several of which are self-regarding—and yet do not address the issue of whether cultivating virtues is in any sense obligatory. Michael Slote and Christina Korsgaard are two such philosophers who

seem to veer away from the problem of duties to oneself, without directly arguing for or against their existence. 2 The strategy here may be to avoid confronting a more fundamental theoretical problem, like having to commit to whether morality is exclusively social or can be defined in such a way that it involves self-regarding relations as well. It is worth looking at the reasons why some philosophers have objected to the notion of agents having duties to themselves.

Objections to duties to oneself fall into several categories. One kind of objection stems from the view that the scope of morality is exclusively social. If this is true, then obligations are intrinsically other-directed and thus cannot be owed to oneself. I will later argue that this exclusionary view of "morality as social" begs the question by assuming a limiting definition of morality. On this view, the denial of duties to oneself is a derivative position—derived from a more general point about the nature of morality. Thus for Kurt Baier morality "arises out of the relations between individuals." Solitary individuals like Robinson Crusoe can act from self-interest but never from the moral point of view. 3

Related to this view that all morality is interpersonal is a second argument that it *is impossible* for there to be duties to oneself, since it is "self-contradictory for a duty from which one could release oneself at will is not, in any literal sense, a duty at all." 4 On his view, espoused by Marcus Singer, all obligations and duties follow a kind of contractual model and there must be at least two parties to a contract.

A third kind of objection against obligations to self is that no one can be obligated by others to pursue a course of self-development. This is essentially John Stuart Mill's view in *On Liberty*. An agent's virtues and vices are concerns of what Mill calls the "private sphere," but society can only compel an individual's behavior in the public

sphere. According to Mill, a duty is something that one can be compelled to fulfill. "A duty," he maintains, "is a thing that may be exacted from a person as one exacts a debt." [5] And since one cannot exact a duty to oneself from any agent, no one has such duties.

There are other objections. These objections can be countered and, as a defender of duties to oneself, I will counter them. The larger picture is that the problem with de-emphasizing, overlooking, ignoring, or denying duties to oneself is that each of these mindsets shrinks the moral sphere and gives us an incomplete and flawed picture of what our obligations are. To accept the contractual model of duties, to use one example, is to argue that duties are connected with rights, which makes the two concepts interdependent, and the former parasitic upon the latter. Though this seems fine in the legal sphere—"If I've a duty to pay you, you've a right to be paid and vice versa"—this presumed correlativity removes a good deal of what our moralizing and moral life concerns, namely, ourselves.

This contractual model of duties always requires that whenever X has a duty to Y, Y has a right against X. [6] Thus an observed fact about moral language has been elevated to a principle, the principle stating that duties must be connected with rights. Since the notion of `a right to' must involve more than one individual, I can have no duties to myself unless I can have `rights against myself' in certain situations. [7]

From this conclusion it is often further argued that a description of how I treat myself should not even be couched in moral terms. Given the truth of what I've called the contractual model of duties, a description of how I treat myself not only doesn't fall into the realm of duty or obligation relationships, but isn't a moral matter at all. Rather it is at

best a matter of prudence; at worst, a matter of selfishness. On his view, it is the treatment of others—and only others—that counts as moral, immoral, benevolent, supererogatory, and so on. These terms can never have meaning when used as adjectives to describe the way I treat myself. Further implied by those who hold to this contractual model is the view that I often have a moral duty to treat others in a certain way, but this is in no way an obligation to myself. By ignoring the possibility that by fulfilling obligations to others I might also be fulfilling obligations to myself, this contractual model tends to create an asymmetry between self and others with respect to moral obligations. Since morality is solely other-regarding, all that matters is that I fulfill my obligations to others. 8

Such an other-regarding view is not only commonplace in theoretical ethics, but is often presumed in applied ethics as well. In a discussion of whistle blowing, Richard T. De George argued,

> Someone who reports sexual harassment is also sometimes said to blow the whistle on the offender, this is often because simply speaking to the person has no effect. In this case, the charge is about an offense not against an organization or system, but against oneself; the whistle blowing might be called personal, as opposed to impersonal whistle blowing, in which the potential or actual injury is to others or to the organization rather than to oneself. *Personal whistle blowing* is, in general, morally permitted but not morally required. Unless other aspects of the case show that there is immediate danger to others. 9

Amazingly, according to the author, there is no moral obligation to blow the whistle in "personal cases" like sexual harassment, since obligations must involve instances of others wronged beside the agent himself.

Further, the view that there are no self-regarding moral obligations is also assumed by non-philosophers. In his book *The Good, The Bad & The Difference*, which is a collection of his *New York Times* columns, Randy Cohen offers not a single instance of a self-regarding ethical dilemma, despite grouping ethical situations into a broad assortment of categories, like "work life," "social life," "family life," "school life" and so on. 10 If common sense ethical precepts make room for myriad other-regarding concerns but no room for oneself, then the assumed view of moral obligation at work is quite clear: morality is by its very nature other-regarding.

It is odd, but perhaps not exceedingly odd, that people would hold this view about duties to oneself or, as the case may be, overlook such duties. The issue of whether there are such duties is after all once removed from the kinds of matters that surface in applied ethics. In addition, the issue is in part metaethical since it concerns the meaning of terms like "duty" and "obligation."

In the pages that follow I argue against the view that the scope of morality is solely other-regarding. But just arguing against this view alone may not be philosophically contentious or interesting. After all, some of the most prominent moral philosophers have argued that there are self-regarding moral concerns.

ii

The philosophical defense of self-regarding morality extends at least as far back as sixth-century B.C. to Heraclitus in ancient Greece with his discussion of moral restraint or *sophrosein*, and to Confucius in China, in the same century, with his teachings on moral self-cultivation and the life of virtue or *te*. 11 In their discussion of the virtues,

Plato and Aristotle recognized the fundamental importance of the "health of the soul," a condition which obtained when the appetitive part was subservient to the rational part. [12] St. Thomas Aquinas took up the notion of self-regarding morality in his discussion of why the decalogue includes no self-regarding commandments, given that one can commit sins against oneself. [13] Thomas Hobbes argued that agents were "forbidden" to do what was "destructive" of their lives. [14] The German philosopher Samuel Pufendorf acknowledged duties to "strengthen and preserve the powers of the body" and a negative duty not to take one's own life. [15] Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, argued that one had an obligation to be virtuous, which meant having one's self- and other-regarding affections (called "private" and "public affections) coordinated or "balanced." [16] In *A Discourse on Natural Religion* (1706), Samuel Clarke argued for four "rules of righteousness," one of which was the "role of duty toward a man's own self." [17] In his *Fifteen Sermons* (1726), Joseph Butler observed that persons weren't motivated by an excess of self-love but a deficiency of it, and stressed how essential self-love and prudence are to a moral life. [18] In his *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (1754), Scottish philosopher David Fordyce maintained that one unceasing duty to self is prudence, which amounts to choosing whatever "tends to private good or happiness, and to avoid or ward off whatever tends to private ill or misery." [19] British moralists John Balguy and Richard Price discussed duties to care for and develop oneself, analyzing the differences between self- and other-regarding duties. In *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (1758), Price thought there was no controversy at all about obligations to oneself, arguing "It appears absurd to inquire what obliges us to practice virtue" and "To ask why we are *obliged* to practiced virtue, to

abstain from what is wicked, or perform what is just, is the very same as to ask, why we are obliged to do what we are *obliged* to do." 20 (Italics his)

An inventory of later Eighteenth and Nineteenth century moral philosophy turns up several major figures arguing for duties to oneself. No philosopher before or since Immanuel Kant paid greater attention to the matter. Beginning with the *Lectures on Ethics* (1781), based on lectures he gave at the University of Konigsberg, and continuing with his *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant unveiled a veritable catalogue of duties to oneself, maintaining that "Not self-favour but self-esteem should be the principle" of such duties. Maintaining that duties to ourselves are "negative" since they "restrict our freedom in respect of our inclinations," he maintained that proper self-respect, self-mastery, conscience and others are obligatory, while suicide, servility, and misuse of one's sexual impulses are prohibited. 21 In chapter XVII of his *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) and later in chapter XI of his *Deontology or the Science of Morality* (1834), Jeremy Bentham elaborated his view on self-regarding morality. In the former work Bentham states that "Ethics at large may be defined as the art of directing men's actions to the greatest possible quantity of happiness, on the part of those whose interest is in view." A part of this happiness is "prudence," which concerns "the art of discharging one's duty to oneself." In his *Deontology,* he includes under the head of "self-regarding prudence" those virtues taken up by Aristotle, including temperance, continence, fortitude, magnanimity, and veracity. 22

Both Soren Kierkegaard, in *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (1849), and William Kingdom Clifford, in *The Ethics of Belief* (1877), make abundantly clear their view that it is immoral to self-deceive. Both hold to the idea that what we believe and

how we come to our beliefs are moral issues. 23 Henry Sidgwick, a utilitarian who drew out the implications of his theory for duties to oneself in *Methods of Ethics* (1874), argued that "The rationality of self-regard is as undeniable as the rationality of self-sacrifice" and "A universalistic hedonist may reasonably hold that his own happiness is that portion of the universal happiness when it is most in his power to promote, and which therefore is most especially entrusted to his charge." 24

The self-realization theories of both Thomas Hill Green and Francis Herbert Bradley also defend self-regarding morality. In his *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883) Green maintains that the good for persons consists not in "self-satisfaction," (which he considers hedonistic) but the "true development of what is best for man." For Bradley, likewise, agents are ideally in a "ceaseless process of realizing our ideal self." This is a duty that falls on us as agents 25

Arguments for duties to self are also found with Hillary Arthur Prichard and William David Ross. In "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" (1912), Prichard claims that "The apprehension of a moral obligation is immediate, in precisely the sense that a mathematical apprehension is immediate…" Further, "The relation involved in a moral obligation need not be to another at all. Thus we should admit that there is an obligation to overcome our natural timidity or greediness," obligations that involve "no relations to others." 26 W.D. Ross enumerates his own list of *prima facie* duties in *The Right and the Good* (1930). One of these is the "duty of self-development." This class of duties owes to the fact that "We can improve our own condition in respect of virtue or of intelligence." 27 While Ross acknowledges that many persons are not disposed to call such personal goods "duties," he believes that a self-regarding duty is better understood

impartially—that is, if we think of if not as just our "own good" but as one among many "objective goods." 28

It can be argued that the recent flurry of interest in duties to oneself in the late twentieth century traces to Marcus Singer's article in *Ethics* in April, 1959 and Warner Wick's response to that article, specifically Singer's claim that "Taken literally, the idea of a duty to oneself involves a contradiction." 29 From the publication of that article on, it was off to the races; seven philosophers published eight articles in the following five years.

For Wick, self-regarding faults can be moral faults. "To call a self-made derelict, having progressed from folly through various stages of degradation to utter depravity, not immoral but only imprudent or misguided is to put an intolerable strain upon our language," he wrote. To deny all this, Wick maintains, is "to eliminate a whole chapter from the doctrine of morals." 30 In his article "Morality, Self, and Others," W.D. Falk holds a similar view, and takes aim at the notion that all actions done for one's own sake are merely prudential. Acting with wisdom and courage is to act with virtues which are properly called moral, not just prudential. 31 In an article entitled "Treating Oneself Wrongly," Hardy Jones argues that it is a legitimate theoretical and ethical question whether agents can harm themselves or violate their own rights. She concludes that if it is wrong in general to cause unnecessary suffering, then it must also be wrong to cause oneself unnecessary suffering. 32 Likewise, Judith Andre argues, "If pleasure and pain, respect and disrespect, are what matter morally, then consistency demands that self-regarding acts have moral weight equal to that of other-regarding acts." 33 Putting it

another way, she concludes that if it is "what is done to me" that matters morally, then "why should it matter who does it?"

Given the number of philosophers who have made arguments for duties to oneself, I cannot maintain that one more argument for them is contentious or even interesting. More contentious is the manner in which I will argue for self-regarding duties. I will set out to argue for duties to oneself in a "strong sense" by proving three things about them:

(1) *I will argue that such duties are not merely prima facie but absolute*. I mean by this that these duties—like the duty of self-development—are not merely waiting to be overridden by the first other-regarding duty that comes along. Rather, duties to self are genuine duties which very often override what are regarded as duties to others.

(2) *Such duties to self trump considerations of the common good*. This is another way of saying that the concerns of the community do not automatically override the concerns of a single agent. The good of several or many persons, which rational beings can be expected to have duties to promote, do not necessarily override duties of self-regard.

(3) *In arguing for duties that are absolute and which trump the common good I do not commit myself to the truth of egoism*. Rather, I will maintain that the argument that egoism makes about moral obligations is false. My defense of self-regarding obligations is not a defense of selfishness.

A philosopher who holds all three of these tenets is arguing for duties to oneself in the strong sense. On the other hand, philosophers who hold some (or none) of these tenets but not others are arguing for duties to self with varying degrees of weakness.

I need to offer the reason for my distinction between arguing in a weak and strong sense. If one argues that duties to oneself are duties implied by other duties—like the duties owed to God or the duties owed to the general welfare—then one is saying that such duties are derivative from those. Put another way, the duties are owed to God and others directly, but owed to oneself only indirectly. Such duties are duties *concerning oneself,* but not ultimately owed *to* oneself. On the other hand, if one argues that there are duties to oneself that are absolute, and thus not derived from duties owed to God or the general welfare, or others, say, then such duties are being argued for in a strong way. Such duties would not be duties to oneself indirectly but directly.

It should also be noted that my argument about the "strong" sense of duties makes the content of the duty irrelevant. Whether I follow the hedonist in arguing that I have a duty to increase my own pleasure or follow the Thomists in maintaining that my greatest duty is to achieve the *summum bonum* or highest good, by emulating the ways of God, it is not the content of either duty that makes it strong or weak. Again, what makes a duty strong depends on who it is owed to directly. The duty to emulate the ways of God is a duty owed to God directly and to self only indirectly. Likewise, if I have a duty to self-improvement and that duty to self-improvement is not just doing my best because God approves of it, or owed to society since society benefits from more self-improved

individuals rather than less—if the duty is owed neither to God nor the community primarily or anyone in particular except me, then it is a duty to oneself in the strong sense. A duty to oneself is strong or weak independent on the content of the duty.

In the next chapter I will consider the principal thinkers—beginning with Thomas Hobbes—who have argued for duties to oneself. With each of these philosophers I will attempt to show how they ground duties to oneself and whether they are grounded in a strong or weak sense.

In chapter three I will review and counter the arguments of the principal thinkers who have argued against duties to oneself, beginning with John Stuart Mill. Here, too, I will consider how their arguments are grounded and the implications of their ethical views for duties to oneself.

In chapter four I maintain that to argue that there are no self-regarding duties is logically inconsistent. In addition, I argue that one duty to oneself is prudence. Again, I will argue that this duty is absolute, not prima facie, is not grounded in utility but trumps the common good and, finally, is not grounded in an acceptance of egoism. In fact, my argument is that duties to self are grounded intuitively, in a manner comparable to way other-regarding duties are grounded. I also argue that there are duties to uphold promises to oneself and to avoid self-deception.

Before proceeding to the actual arguments employed by moral philosophers for and against duties to oneself, it is important to understand the foundations of their views that makes them accept or reject the possibility of duties to oneself. It could be argued that all moral philosophies can be located within a series of dichotomies. These

dichotomies include but are not limited to, consequentialism and non-consequentialism; egoism and altruism; and the moral and the nonmoral. Depending on which half of the dichotomy they embrace, philosophers will tilt in one direction or another, embracing or rejecting the view that there are moral duties to oneself. The point is an interesting one: if you calculate the lay of the moral landscape, taking care to set out the taxonomy of the principal moral foundations accurately, you should be able to make out where a philosopher stands on issues of self-regarding and other-regarding morality.

While the point about taxonomy is no doubt interesting, it is still not the most interesting point on the issue of duties to oneself. I contend that what it is more interesting is that if we assume the logical underpinnings of most any normative ethical theory, we will find that those underpinnings are consistent with the view that there are moral obligations to oneself. Stated more forcefully, these theories *must* endorse duties to self out of logical necessity. Given that this is the case, it is odd indeed to find so many moral philosophers coming out against the possibility of their being moral obligations to oneself. I will undertake a preliminary examination of several ethical theories and see where those theories might stand on duties to oneself.

iii

Consequentialism

It may well be the case that whether a philosopher is a consequentialist or a non-consequentialist is the single most important determining factor in where he stands on the issues of duties to oneself (DTS). The term "consequentialism," which may have first appeared in G.E.M. Anscombe's article "Modern Moral Philosophy" in 1958, refers to a

moral theory that bases the evaluation of acts solely on consequences. As Michael Slote describes it, "In contemporary philosophical usage, the term is most often used to refer to "act-consequentialism," which is the view that "The rightness (or obligatoriness) of an act depends on whether its consequences are at least as good as (or better than) those of any alternative act available to the agent." [34] Could this stress on "good consequences" have been read most often, but perhaps uncritically, as being equivalent to "good consequences for others?" It would appear so, for how else can we explain the tendency among consequentialists to consistently come out against DTS? [35]

Their opposition is paradoxical. After all, Jeremy Bentham's dictum about ethical calculations—"Everybody is to count for one, nobody for more than one"—implies that an agent acting on his own behalf ought to count no less than any other person he might benefit. Notwithstanding the intuitive plausibility of this reading, John Stuart Mill, G.E. Moore, Marcus Singer, and other consequentialists offer vigorous objections to the possibility of DTS.

Is consequentialism for these and other thinkers to be understood as being exclusively other-regarding? It would seem so. One such exclusively other-regarding consequentialist theory is ethical altruism. Altruism seems to say that an act is right if and only if it benefits a person or persons *other* than the *agent* performing the act. Several definitions of altruism accord with this account. Kristen Renwick Monroe maintains that "Altruism is behavior intended to benefit another, even when this risks possible sacrifice to the welfare of the actor." [36] Thomas Nagel means by altruism "any behavior motivated merely by the belief that someone else will benefit or avoid harm by it." Nagel resists the urge to restrict altruism "only to the variety of noble self-sacrifice often associated with

that epithet." Rather, altruism includes all kinds of "mundane considerateness which cost us nothing, and involves neither self-sacrifice nor nobility—as when we tell someone he has a flat tyre or a wasp on his hamburger." 37 Whatever one's account of altruism, it seems clear that according to these and similar descriptions that on solely altruistic grounds duties to oneself are impossible, for our only moral obligations involve others. Caring for myself would violate the prescription to benefit only others and hence be regarded as immoral. Altruism is consequentialist in nature, even if the reverse is not true: one could not say that all consequentialist theories are altruistic. But one might say that there are consequentialists who have understood their theory to have more than a passing similarity to altruism. They believe that a good action must at the very least have a component of altruism—that is, the only value-making component of an action is other-regarding.

It doesn't require acute reasoning to see that a solely other-regarding brand of altruism is logically odd, even to the point of transcendent absurdity. If the calculus of benefit says that each person is to count for one and none for more than one, then what moral difference does it make if the one is the agent or another? If Jones rushes into a burning building and saves another *and* himself, isn't this act better than if Jones had saved another but perished in his effort? Is the benefit to himself worth nothing from a moral point of view? As odd and arbitrary as the conclusion sounds, a form of altruism is compelled to say "yes"—that any self-beneficial action has no moral value. And so it is with consequentialists in general: it is as if many have taken the calculus of benefit to exclude acts beneficial to oneself. 38

One unsavory effect of this solely other-regarding reading of morality is to dismiss the value of prudence. It was Joseph Butler who argued that concern for our own welfare is a part of virtue. In *A Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue,* Butler wrote:

> It should seem, that a due concern about our own interest or happiness, and a reasonable endeavor to secure and promote it, which is, I think, very much in the meaning of the word *prudence,* in our language; it should seem that this is virtue, and the contrary behavior faulty and blamable: since, in the calmest way of reflection, we approve of the first, and condemn the other conduct, both in ourselves and others. 39

A consequentialist might argue that prudent actions are not virtuous actions, but on what grounds? If a good action A is done for the benefit of a person X, such an action could be regarded as benevolent and the agent virtuous. If the same action is done for Y, in this case the agent himself, how does the action differ, except in the person benefited? The essential nature of the action hasn't changed.

While the consequentliast's denial of self-regarding action is inconsistent, it is a reading that is understandable. Consequentialists are less apt to acknowledge DTS because considering "the consequences of my actions" has often been taken to mean "promoting good consequences for others" or at least "omitting consequences unfavorable to others," or "omitting actions which have consequences which are beneficial only to oneself." On either reading, the ethical thrust of the action is away from the agent and toward others.

But an understandable mistake is still a mistake. After all, it can be shown that duties to oneself follow on both act consequentialist (AC) and rule consequentialist (RC) grounds. Even if AC is read in an extreme way, and one argues one ought always be looking to optimize consequences for the greatest number of people, the formulation

"the greatest number" must, perforce, include the agent. So it is untrue to argue that AC, even in an extreme form, requires of agents that they can never give a thought to their own interests. An agent acting to uphold DTS—say truthfulness, or industry or perseverance or self-control—will tip the balance favorably, since he will increase the net amount of good in the universe and needn't produce any evil effects. If AC holds that the right action depends on the value of the consequences of the act in question, compared with those of anything else the agent can do in the circumstances, and the value of the consequences is at time enhanced by benefiting oneself, then it is right to benefit oneself.

RC theorists argue that agents should follow a rule of action if and only if the consequences of following that rule are as good as following any alternative set of rules would be. Here, too, one could follow a rule of obeying obligations to oneself, perhaps with the qualification that the rule doesn't conflict with more apparently "binding" or "serious" duties to others. Such DTS would be defensible on rule consequentialist grounds, because persons following a rule to observe such duties would also increase the balance of good in the world. Since RC, with its stress on socially beneficial rules, seeks to produce general value, it must be pointed out that this "social duty" subsumes DTS. But the RC defense of duties to oneself would not be a defense of duties to oneself in the strong sense.

Some minimal versions of consequentialism claim that right acts must merely have good consequences, or bring about a greater balance of happiness over unhappiness, without specifying who the consequences should benefit. But for most consequentialists "good consequences" is a broader concept, implying overall

good consequences, rather than consequences good merely for the agent or any other particular person or group. So there is an impartiality requirement that gives equal weight to the welfare of every person. It has often been noted how this requirement of agent-neutrality leads to some of the sharpest differences between common sense intuitive morality and consequentialism.

Common sense morality might argue that an agent can be partial to family and friends. But an exceedingly odd corollary of this assumption is that this partiality ticket doesn't extend to oneself. Perhaps this is because some philosophers assume that agents are already inclined to benefit themselves and so it cannot be the case that they have a duty to do what they are already inclined to do. Others, like Joseph Butler and H.A. Prichard, believe there is no inconsistency between duty and interests.

This reading may make the proponent of duties to oneself look like a defender of egoism, a theory which I shall discuss shortly. For now, suffice it to say that there is no reason to conclude that an argument for DTS implies that "good consequences" is reducible to "good consequences solely from the agent's perspective." Indeed, the defender of duties to oneself can argue that good consequences for an agent mean not just good from his perspective, but good consequences overall. After all, good consequences include the agent.

Some opponents of DTS might reject self-regarding duties on the ground that the agent is revealing his own self-partiality. But this needn't be so. Again, there is no incompatibility between the agent's pursuing things good for himself and, at the same time, upholding the interests of others. Thus, a professor's diligent preparation benefits himself and his students. Surely such behavior is self-interested, too, but, as

James Rachels has demonstrated, there is no inconsistency between self-interested behavior and behavior beneficial to others. 40

A belief that there is an inconsistency owes to the confusion between selfishness and self-interest. A person who visits a doctor because he's not feeling well is acting from self-interest, not selfishness. His act of visiting the doctor does not ignore or supplant the interests of others. But a person who hoards food while his neighbors starve is acting selfishly. The latter description has a definite "evaluative flavor" that the former lacks. Likewise, a person observing duties to himself needn't be acting to the exclusion of others. If the agent can produce more good by sacrificing his own or his family's ends and pursuing the ends of others instead, he has an obligation to make the sacrifice on consequentialist grounds. On the other hand, one could argue that if he obeys a *momentous* duty to himself, like spending prolonged time finishing his dissertation—rather than caving in to the wishes of his best friends who implore him to spend social time with them—then he is rightly raising a momentous duty to himself over a *trivial* one to others. It stretches credulity to call such a choice egoistic, as we shall see shortly.

Having addressed act and rule consequentialist grounds and how duties to oneself are consistent with those frameworks, it remains for us to see whether duties to oneself are favored on general utilitarian grounds. According to general utilitarianism (GU) the question is not "What will happen if I do act X in case Y?" or "What rule should I follow?" but rather, "What would happen if everyone were to do X in such cases?" Underlying general utilitarianism is the idea that if something is right for one person to do in a certain situation, then it is also right for anyone else who is similarly situated to

do, and hence that one cannot ask simply what effects one's proposed action will have in a particular case—one must ask what the consequences would be in everyone were to act likewise in such cases. This view has been defended by Marcus Singer. 41 As with RC and AC, GU would not only make acting out of self-regard permissible but obligatory. The person who forgoes a social activity with his friends in favor of completing his dissertation is maintaining, according to GU, that everyone in like circumstances should do as he does. If everyone were to act on duties to oneself, then the benefits would likely be greater than if only a few did.

iv

Egoism

Ethical Egoism (EE) interprets "good results" as meaning "good results for the agent." EE therefore is consequentlialism with a narrower view of obligation—the only obligation being to promote one's own greatest good. To act and rule consequentialism EE adds a condition: an act or rule of action is right if and only if it promotes as least as great a balance of good over evil *for the agent* in the long run as any alternative action would.

If an agent acts to his own detriment, then he is violating his obligation to himself, according to egoism. But as much as EE supports the notion that there are duties to oneself, it is not the only way to cast the argument for such duties. For egoists are concerned solely with their own good. At times, egoism founded on enlightened self-interest may recommend the very same action that a non-egoist arguing for duties to oneself recommends. For instance, both positions would argue that agents have a duty to refrain from drinking alcohol because a long drive home is ahead of them.

But while the duty-to-self defender and the egoist may dovetail in recommending the same actions on some occasions or even frequently, they don't embrace the same theory. For one, the EE views himself as a moral agent with a lone obligation—the obligation to promote his own greatest interests. This needn't be the tenet of those defending duties to oneself. Proponents of duties to oneself are committed to saying no more than it is *sometimes* obligatory for agents to pursue their own interests, not that these interests automatically trump the interests of others in every instance. Put another way, the proponent of duties to oneself is not arguing that all duties are of one kind, but the EE is. The EE is arguing that it is *always* obligatory to pursue one's own interests and that there are no other obligations. The proponent of duties to oneself argues no such thing. After all, duties to self are presumably just a category within the overall class of our duties toward self or others. From the notion that there are duties to oneself it does not follow that they are no other obligations or virtues. The statement that

(1) Jones should obey certain duties to oneself.

in no way implies that

(2) Jones ought to act only in pursuit of his self-interests.

While the EE and the defender of duties to oneself embrace different positions, there is a criticism of EE that might also be regarded as a telling criticism of DTS. For many, the problem with EE is that it recommends, nay requires, a ceaseless attention to my own interests, an attention that conflicts with the other-regarding picture of the moral life described in the Judeo-Christian ethic. True, there is a self-regarding component of that religious ethic—like the recommendation to nurture one's soul, to do

good deeds, and so forth, all of which will benefit the agent in this life and perhaps lead to salvation in the next. But there is an overriding selfless component to this ethic, with its stress on loving others—as in the parable of the good Samaritan, for instance—and it cannot be true on this picture of the moral life that the essence of morality ought to be reduced to self-interested behavior. Far from it, such ceaseless self-interest is the essence of immorality.

v

Deontology

Since deontological theories are often described as first principle or "duty theories" and stress notions such as obligation and duty, deontology cuts a different path than consequentialism. Whereas consequentialism evaluates the rightness or wrongness of actions based on the short- and long-term results the action produces, deontology is non-consequentialist. Among other things, this means that deontologists evaluate actions based upon what kinds of acts they are, irrespective of the consequences they bring into being. In fact, deontologists hold producing good consequences is non-essential and even irrelevant to morality. Thus, a deontologist maintains that it is possible for an action or rule of action to be morally right or obligatory, even if it does not promote the greatest possible balance of good over evil for oneself or others. If a deontologist argues that it is right to keep one's promises, this is so not because of the good results to be attained in carrying out the promise, but because of the duty to carry out the promise.

All of this bears directly on the question of duties to oneself. For the deontologist, acknowledging duties to oneself is less problematic than it is for the consequentialist.

For consequentialists, producing good and bad results is fundamental and agents' obligations are derivative from a consideration of these results. It is therefore open to AC and RC to argue that acts or rules concerning duties to oneself will in some instances—as when an agent acts to promote his self-development instead of dedicating himself to community activities to help the underprivileged—fail to promote the greatest possible balance of good over evil. The action would then not be evaluated favorably since it was not the best alternative under the circumstances. For the deontologist the fact of duty is fundamental. Because the theory ignores the demand that the agent must always produce the best consequences, actions can be right, wrong, dutiful, and so on without regard to what the results of the actions will be. Our obligations are derivative from a consideration of the concept of duty. There is also an implied universality at work. So when I keep a promise I am implying that others in like circumstances should keep their promises, since this sort of truthfulness is universally incumbent on agents.

It isn't hard to deduce the idea that I also ought to keep promises to myself. If, on the other hand, I argue that the agent doing the promising is not so obligated, then I am in effect exempting him from the universality requirement. But on what grounds? For the deontologist, any exemption of the agent's obligations to himself would be inconsistent with the overall requirement to be truthful.

Rules for telling the truth and keeping agreements ought to be upheld. The rules govern particular situations. Thus, Socrates in the *Crito* is considering whether it is moral to escape. If he had tried to answer this question by asking what would be for his own good, he would be acting as an ethical egoist. If he had asked merely whether his

escaping or not escaping would have had the best results for society in general, he would have been a kind of act consequentialist. But his procedure is closer to that of a deontologist, since he simply appeals to a rule, arguing that it is always wrong to do wrong and by a chain of reasoning deduces that escaping from jail would be wrong. Such a general rule—that it is always wrong to do wrong—would be construed to include wronging oneself, and so one could argue that deontology favors duties to oneself, since violating a duty to oneself would be tantamount to wronging oneself.

The objection arises that there can be a conflict of rules. The rule of keeping promises might come into conflict with a rule of helping others in an emergency. But the "conflict of rules" situation needn't be damaging to deontology. First off, it may be the case in normative ethics that no rule or set of rules is immune to criticisms, exceptions and conflicts. Second, W.D. Ross' notion of "prima facie duties" can handle the appearance of conflicts of obligations.

Ross distinguishes between "actual duties" and "prima facie duties," that is, between what is *actually* right and what is *prima facie* right. 42 What is actually right or obligatory is what we actually ought to do in a particular situation. But since, for Ross, every rule has exceptions, this would also include our actual duties. Ross contends that there are exceptionless rules of prima facie duty. Something is a prima facie duty if it would be an actual duty if other moral considerations did not intervene. For example, if I have promised to give extra help in mathematics to a student, then I have a prima facie duty to provide the help if there are no conflicting considerations that outweigh this prima facie duty. If an emergency arises which demands my attention and conflicts with my duties to the student, then the prior prima facie duty is overridden. But if no

such conflicting duty arises, then I have an actual duty to help the student. Accordingly, Ross suggests that one can formulate a number of moral rules that hold without exception as rules of prima facie, though not of actual, duty. That one ought to keep one's promises is always valid as a rule of prima facie duty. 43

This notion of prima facie duties, or conditional duties, has a fundamental application to the issue of duties to oneself. One could argue about the connection between prima facie duties and duties to oneself in the following ways:

(1) Agents have prima facie obligations to observe their self-regarding duties if and only if no conflicting other-regarding obligations override their self-regarding duties. On this picture, duties to self qualify as exceptionless rules of prima facie duty. That is, a rule following duties to oneself is a sound rule, other things being equal; it would be an actual duty if other more "serious" moral considerations did not intervene**.**

(2) *It is false that agents have merely prima facie obligations to observe their self-regarding duties. Rather, certain obligations to oneself are greater than obligations to others and take pride of place in the pecking order of obligations.* On this picture, a duty to self, if sufficiently weighty, might override duties to others. The point can be made more strongly still. While arguing that duties to oneself hold in this prima facie way would be one way of making the argument for duties to oneself. I will argue that there are some duties to oneself which are absolute, and thus cannot be trumped by conflicting, other-regarding obligations.

This view conflicts with the kind of intuitive ranking of duties that W.D. Ross undertakes. Ross, who I discuss at greater length in chapter two, discusses a range of categories, from duties of fidelity and reparation, to duties of gratitude and justice and beneficence. In Ross' pecking order of duties, what he calls "duties of self-improvement" is ranked behind these other duties. How is this ranking grounded? In a word, intuitively. But what if my intuition tells me that my duty of self-improvement outranks duties of beneficence? What could Ross reply, other than that it is self-evident to him that beneficence outranks self-development? But in the eye of a different beholder benevolence could be seen as an episodic or occasional duty, an imperfect duty which can claim no objective superiority over the less-episodic duty of self-development. 44

All one needs to establish is that there are duties to oneself is a single case where such duties aren't overruled by other duties. In this light, duties to oneself can be seen as a counter-example to the universal negative claim that there are none. That is, to the statement "There are no duties to oneself," one needs, to be successful, only a single counter-example to make the case. Again, here is what separates a pro argument for duties to self from egoism. The proponent of duties to oneself needn't assert that one's only obligation is to benefit oneself and that therefore every case where I do benefit oneself is, *ipso facto*, moral. The defender of duties to oneself needs only to accept the particular affirmative claim that, "At least some of the time I ought to follow a duty to myself." He needn't assert the claim that "all duties to self, in all instances, override other duties."

Any mention of deontology should bring into play Kant's version of the theory. The categorical imperative, "Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will to be a universal law," introduces the universality requirement that he considers to be the necessary and sufficient condition for determining what concrete maxims or rules we should live by. Thus if an agent considers breaking a promise because it is in his interest, his maxim is, "When it suits my purposes I will make promises, intending also to break them if this suits my purposes." But one cannot consistently will this maxim to be universally acted on, says Kant, for with such a law there would be no promises at all. Thus my maxim would necessarily destroy itself as soon as it was made a universal law.

Kant concludes therefore that it is wrong to make deceitful promises. By similar arguments, he believes he can also show that it is wrong to commit suicide and wrong to lie to oneself. 45 In addition, we ought to cultivate our natural gifts or talents, and that we ought to help others who are in trouble. Quite apart from the merits of Kant's particular deontology, it is worth noting that the universality requirement seems to favor duties to oneself.

To those who might try to ground duties to oneself on utilitarian grounds, or by appealing to agents' own happiness, Kant offers a far different approach. He argues,

> In fact, the principle of self-regarding duties in a very different one, which has no connexion with our well-being or earthly happiness. Far from ranking lowest in the scale of precedence, our duties to ourselves are of primary importance and should have pride of place; for (deferring for the moment the definition of what constitutes his duty) it is obvious that nothing can be expected from a man who dishonors his own person. He who transgresses against himself loses his manliness and become incapable of doing his duty toward his fellows. 46

Duties to self are grounded in "our worth as human beings" or "humanity in one's own person." I will develop Kant's argument for duties to oneself in chapter two.

It is worth noting that it may be the case that not all duties to oneself possess the characteristics of being absolute and trump considerations of the common good.

vi

Metaethical considerations

Metaethics deals with two sorts of concerns bearing relevance for the issue of duties to oneself. One concern is the meanings of ethical terms or concepts like "duty," "obligation," "right," "good" and so on. A second concern—and one from which the first is derivative—is how the "moral" use of such terms is to be distinguished from the "nonmoral" uses. Philosophers weighing in on the issue of duties to oneself would need to distinguish between moral and nonmoral senses of the terms.

One observation to make is that philosophers denying duties to oneself have often done so because they have a reduced notion of the scope of the moral sphere, a notion that doesn't include self-regarding moral concepts. For them, all morality is interpersonal, never merely personal. But any meaning of terms like "duty," "obligation," and "moral" that rule out duties to oneself would need to be argued for explicitly. So definists who say that "morality" is "solely other-regarding" would not only need to state this but to justify it. I mean by "definists" those who, by employing definitions in a certain way, effectively rule out the possibility of self-regarding duties by definitional fiat. Anyone framing morality this way—as an exclusively other-regarding enterprise—would need to support that view, else they are begging the question.

Notes for Chapter One

1 I maintain that this de-emphasizing of duties to oneself is even true for many of those thinkers who argue *for* duties to oneself, who I have included in chapter two. It is simply that the importance of duties to oneself is reduced inordinately compared to that of the other topics in ethics. This is not to say, of course, that there aren't major ethical thinkers who haven't addressed the issue of duties to oneself. This dissertation provides an account of what dozens of philosophers thought about the issue. But an inventory of all ethical thinkers from the pre-Socratics to the present would reveal that just as many philosophers don't address the issue directly or, by their neglect of the topic, show that for them it is unimportant compared to other problems in ethics.

2 See Korsgaard's *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Slote's *Beyond Optimizing: A Study of Rational Choice*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

3 Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 215.

4 Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 313.

5 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975) p. 80.

6 Marcus Singer, "On Duties to Oneself." *Ethics* 69 (1959), p. 202.

7 I respond to Singer's correlativity argument in chapter 3, arguing that it fails to disprove the possibility of duties to oneself.

8 Marcus Singer and Kurt Baier, for instance, view all so-called self-regarding "morality" as merely prudential.

9 Richard T. De George, "Whistle Blowing" in *Business Ethics: A Philosophical Reader*. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1993), pp. 516-17.

10 Randy Cohen, *The Good, The Bad, & The Difference*. (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

11 On Heraclitus, see Lawrence Becker, *A History of Western Ethics*. (New York: Garland, 1992), p. 5. On Confucius see *Encyclopedia of Ethics.,* ed. by Lawrence and Charlotte Becker (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 196.

12 *Aristotle's Ethics*. ed. by J.L. Ackrill, (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 1103a-b, p. 61. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* ed. by Edith Hamilton (New York: Princeton University Press, 1961) 445b, p. 687.

13 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae.* (London: Washbourne, 1925), pt 1, q. 100, art. 4

14 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Michael Oakeshott (London: Collier, 1974) Ch. 14, p. 103.

15 Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 36.

16 Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 248.

17 Samuel Clarke, *British Moralists. vol. 1*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), p. 202.

18 Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*. (Charlottesville: Ibis Publishing, 1987), p. xx.

19 David Fordyce, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 2003) p. 53.

20 Richard Price, *British Moralists. vol. II.* (Indianapolis: Hack tt Publishing, 1991), p. 165.

21 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 124-125.

22 Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*. (New York: Hafner Press, 1948), p. 312. and *Deontology or the Science of Morality*. vol. II. (Elibron Classics, elibron.com 2003), p. 83.

23 Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart* in *A Kierkegaard Anthology.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 271. W.K. Clifford, *The Ethics of Belie*f. (Roseville: Dry Bones Press), p. 14.

24 Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics.* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981), p. xx.

25 Thomas Hill Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics.* (New York: Thomas Cromwell, 1969), p. 156. F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1951), p. 162.

26 H.A. Prichard, *Moral Obligation and Duty and Interest: Essays and Lectures*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 166

27 W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 172

28 Ibid., p. 175

29 Op. cit., Singer, "Duties to Oneself," 1959, pp. 202-205.

30 Warner Wick, "More About Duties to Oneself" in *Ethics*. January, 1960, lxx, 2, p. 160.

31 W.D. Falk, "Morality, Self, and Others" in *Ought, Reasons, and Morality: The Collected Papers of W.D. Falk.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 200

32 Hardy Jones, "Treating Oneself Wrongly" *Journal of Value Inquiry* 17, 1983, p. 170.

33 Judith Andre, "The Equal Moral Weight of Self- and Other-Regarding Acts," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 17, 1, March 1987, pp. 157.

34 Michael Slote, "Consequentialism," in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2001) p. 304.

35 The view of duties to oneself could vary according to whether one accepts a "optimizing" or "satisficing" version of utilitarianism. If one accepts the optimizing version, then an agent's obligation is to produce the best results one can. This could be construed as sacrificing one's own welfare in order to achieve overall optimality of results. It has been argued by Michael Slote (*Three Methods of Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) that this seems to demand a form of extreme self-sacrifice which "devalues an agent's natural concern for her own projects, her own well-being." By contrast, a satisficing brand of utilitarianism would allow agents more time for "their own personal interests and careers in a world where more good, objectively, could be done sacrificing them." pp. 190-91.

36 Kristen Renwick Monroe, *The Heart of Altruism: Perception of a Common Humanity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 6.

37 Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 16.

38 For the moment I am putting aside the view expressed by Nagel that altruism has its own rationality, since reason dictates that agents treat themselves as just one person among others. For now I will just say that his argument is not inconsistent with the view that there are duties to oneself.

Moreover, as Stephen Darwall has pointed out, the fundamental normative values of consequentialism are agent-neutral. That is, certain states such as pain, suffering, and harm, possess disvalue, apart from who is experiencing them. Also, states such as pleasure and self-fulfillment possess agent-neutral value. Presuming this view of agent-neutral values, agents have an interest in producing good states, irrespective of whether those states are for others or themselves. See: *Consequentialism* ed. by Stephen Darwall, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 2

39 *The Works of Joseph Butler*. ed. by W.E. Gladstone, 2 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), Vol. 1, p. 404. H.A. Prichard, *Moral Obligation and Duty and Interest*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), ps. 201-38.

40 James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1986), p. 70. It should also be pointed out that obeying what F.H. Bradley called the "duties of

station" promotes benefit for both the agent whose duty it is and for those others who benefit from the fulfillment of that duty.

41 Especially in *Generalization in Ethics: An Essay in the Logic of Ethics, with the Rudiments of a System of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961)

42 W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 18.

43 Ibid., p. 21.

44 In his book *Promising*, William Vitek makes a similar point about the ranking of promising over benevolence. Vitek sees the duty of benevolence ranking ahead of promising; Ross sees it the other way around. Vitek concludes that the intuitional approach is "unable to rank our duties or provide a method by which such a ranking could be established and conflicts resolved." Though Vitek doesn't address the morality of promising oneself, or of duties to oneself in general, the point about ranking still applies. Neither intuitionism, nor any other theory of ethics for that matter, can establish that duties to self are secondary to or overridable by duties to others. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993, p. 104)

45 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, translated by Louis Infield (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), p. 118.

46 Ibid., pp. 117-18.

Chapter Two
Philosophers Arguing for Duties to Oneself

In this chapter I will review the positions of thirteen philosophers arguing for the existence of duties to oneself (DTS). I have chosen these philosophers for two reasons. First, it is necessary, though not sufficient, that the philosopher has addressed the issue of self-regarding morality in his work directly and not merely by implication. Second, the philosopher in question cannot be very similar to another philosopher who has written on the subject. For instance, if two philosophers had argued that we have DTS, which actually turn out on closer inspection to be duties to God directly and DTS only indirectly, and the two have made no substantially different arguments for such duties, I chose just one of them since I see no point in treating both philosophers at length.

As discussed in the introduction, I intend to argue for such duties in the strong sense. That is, I will argue that certain duties to oneself are not merely derivative from other duties—for instance, the utilitarian duty to promote general happiness or a moral duty that is ultimately owed to God —are not merely *prima facie duties* but are genuine and therefore trump considerations of the common good. I will argue that these DTS, including but not limited to an agent's commitments and projects, can be grounded philosophically, quite apart from their usefulness to others, though it can also be shown that persons observing duties to oneself do contribute to the general well being. [1] Also, far from defending such duties on egoistic grounds, I will argue that egoism is false.

Further, I will point out another notable feature of this issue. It is interesting that among the philosophers subsumed under the category "defenders of duties to oneself" there are several distinctions to be made. Some of the authors in this chapter defend DTS but not in the strong sense I've distinguished. By way of illustration, Hobbes can be understood as arguing that there are duties to oneself. But, I shall argue, Hobbes' defense

of such duties is at bottom justifiable merely on self-interested grounds. By contrast, Jeremy Bentham argues for DTS without invoking self-interest. But Bentham's defense of such duties is in no way absolute. Duties for Bentham are derivative from a different source: namely, the obligation I have to contribute to the common good and cannot override considerations of that common good. 2 Another philosopher defending duties to oneself in this weaker derivative sense is the eighteenth century philosopher David Fordyce. Fordyce appears to argue that agents have moral duties to themselves, but ultimately they only have such duties because of what they owe to God. Here, too, the duty to self is merely derived from another alleged duty. 3 DTS that derive from our duties to God are, because of the assumptions involved, doubly weak. For one, the existence of God would need to be demonstrated in order to show that I have any duties to him or that such duties as I presently have are actually derived from his existence. Two, even if God's existence could be demonstrated, it wouldn't be at all obvious what specific duties such a God would demand from us.

Others philosophers, like Joseph Butler and Immanuel Kant, argue that DTS hold in the strong sense: the duties are objective, not prima facie; cannot be overridden by considerations of the common good or what is owed to God; and are not defensible merely on egoistic grounds.

I will offer my reason for saying that grounding duties to oneself "merely" on egoistic grounds is not to ground them in a strong sense. In saying that duties to oneself are "absolute," I am maintaining that they are not merely derivative of or dependent upon the existence of some other good, like a duty to promote general welfare, or have their source in some other alleged duty, like the duty owed to God. It is possible for agents to

have duties to themselves. Further, I argue that such self-regarding duties can override the good of one or more other agents, even if his discharging that duty produces fewer overall units of pleasure than some alternative other-regarding action.

What implications does this have for grounding such duties egoistically? If duties to self can trump duties to the common good, then they are not grounded egoistically either, since to ground them egoistically is grounding them in self-interest and would be attributing to that self-interest a value above the general good or interests of others, which I don't accept that egoistic goods have. Put another way, if utilitarian reasons for acting morally are consequentialist reasons and are rated by their overall outcomes, and such overall outcomes do not override duties to oneself, then it follows that egoistic reasons—which are in actuality more "narrow" consequentialist reasons, since egoism rates outcomes by the degree to which they benefit a single agent—cannot override duties to oneself either, since the interests of one cannot, except arbitrarily, outweigh the overall outcomes of more than one. It would be logically inconsistent for me to maintain, on the one hand, that utilitarian considerations don't override duties to oneself, but that selfish interests do.

There is also a sense in which egoism places an "arbitrary" importance on my own happiness. James Rachels has captured this arbitrariness:

> 1. Any moral doctrine that assigns greater importance to the interests of one group than to those of another is unacceptably arbitrary unless there is some difference between the members of the groups that justifies treating them differently.
> 2. Ethical egoism would have each person assign greater importance to his or her own interests than to the interests of others. *But there is no general difference between oneself and others, to which each person can appeal, that justifies this difference in treatment.*
> 3. Therefore, Ethical Egoism is unacceptably arbitrary. 4

Indeed, Rachels argues that egoism, in arbitrarily assigning a greater value to one's own good over the good of others, is akin to racism which assigns "greater importance" to one group over another.

It is my view that DTS grounded arbitrarily in reasons of self-interest are in a sense on an equal footing with such duties being grounded in God's will. Both are grounded weakly: the former because they are grounded in narrow self-interest; the latter, because they are ultimately owed to God and not oneself. Less weakly grounded are duties to oneself that derive from the common good. Here at least the duties follow from something general and tangible—namely, the general good. All DTS—whether grounded in self-interest, to God's will, or to the common good—are grounded more weakly than DTS in an absolute or non-derivative sense.

I will now consider those philosophers with important arguments for self-regarding morality. I will start with those defending duties to oneself in the weaker sense and proceed to those defending duties to self in the strong sense.

i

Philosophers Arguing for Duties to Oneself in a Weak Sense

Thomas Hobbes

It is hardly contentious that Thomas Hobbes argues for DTS. Indeed for Hobbes one has an unceasing obligation to look after one's own interests and he consistently argues for a negative duty: an agent is "forbidden" to do whatever is "destructive" of his life. At bottom, however, I think Hobbes' defense of self-regarding morality is not a

defense of DTS in the strong sense that I've set out. Rather, his very ground for such duties is egoistic.

For Thomas Hobbes, the word "obligation" applies to those circumstances in which one voluntarily lays down or transfers his right. In the *Leviathan* (1651) he maintains that one way of doing this is by a covenant, or contract, in which there is a "mutual transferring of right." [5] Under such contracts agents are "obliged, or bound, not to hinder those, to whom such right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it." [6]

One manner of reading this last statement is to say that one has a principled, other-regarding obligation to keep contracts. But while this is one possible reading, it is not at all clear that Hobbes holds that obligations are binding in this way. After all, he argues, agents are "bound by precepts or general rules, found out by reasons, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same." [7] This can be construed as meaning that even the reasons for performing rather than violating a contract are grounded in self-preservation. Thus, whether or not I ought to fulfill or violate the terms of a contract depends on whether fulfillment or violation conduces to my own interests.

Thus, if one agent, X, upholds his end of the contract to deliver a service to Y, Y is obligated to perform his part of the contract, say, compensate X in a timely manner. But again, going back to chapter XIV, Hobbes argues that agents ought to do what reason in the service of self-preservation directs. How can Hobbes have it both ways? That is, how can Hobbes view a contract as the obligatory transferring of rights, binding on both parties, *and* hold that agents ought to act in a manner that will further their own self-

preservation? The locus of Hobbes' "answer" to this apparent inconsistency lies in the reply to the fool in Book XV.

There the fool raises the issue of whether the breaking of an agreement is against reason. Why? For if it can be argued that breaking covenants is not against reason, then "it is not against justice;" the fool continues, "or else, justice is not to be approved for good." 8 Hobbes agrees to a point: whether an action is in accord with or contrary to right reason depends on whether it accords with right reasoning in the service of self-preservation.

But there is another layer of complexity in Hobbes' view of the matter. Hobbes does not deny contract violations actually benefit the agent occasionally. But the benefit cannot be foretold. Thus he reasons,

> When a man doth a thing, which notwithstanding any thing can be forseen, and reckoned on, tendeth to his own destruction, howsoever some accident which he could not expect, arriving may turn it to his benefit; yet such events do not make it reasonably or wisely done. 9

Here it is essential to understand what he means by what an agent can "reckon on." At times violating a contract may in fact bring a benefit to an agent. This much is empirically true. But it does not follow that agents should opt for the violation, since they can't foretell or "reckon" such results before the fact. This matters for Hobbes, since an agent cannot say that in advance whether or not his violation is reasonable. The example Hobbes uses is of "attaining sovereignty by rebellion." Here, "though the event follow, yet because it cannot reasonably be expected, but rather the contrary; and because by gaining it so, others are taught to gain the same in like manner, the attempt thereof is against reason" 10

Thus runs Hobbes' reply to the fool. Agents may and often do think that prudence dictates violating a contract. But Hobbes' point is a subtle one: the agent may expect that violating a compact will result in an increase in his personal well-being. But there is no rational way of knowing this in advance. Since an agent seeking to maximize his own interests and further his self-preservation has no way of knowing that violating a contract will further this end, it is not in his self-interest.

> He therefore that breaketh his covenant, and consequently declareth that he thinks he may with reason do so, cannot be received into any society, that unite themselves for peace and defense, but by the error of them that receive him; nor when he is received, be retained in it, without seeing the danger of their error; which errors a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security: and therefore if he be left, or cast out of society, he perisheth; and if they live in society, it is by the errors of other men, which he could not forsee, nor reckon upon; and consequently against the reason of his preservation; and so, as all men that contribute not to his destruction, forbear him only out of ignorance of what is good for themselves. 11

Hobbes has provided ample support for his third law of nature, this being the "ought" "that men perform their covenants made." How does this relate to obligations? This much is uncomplicated: for Hobbes says that contracts are by nature obligation-creating agreements. 12 (Kavka calls Hobbes' account of obligation a voluntarist account, since such obligations are freely undertaken). An agent who contracts in the state of nature lays down the right of nature. The right given up is "the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature." This means the liberty "of doing anything, which in his own judgment, and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto." 13 The role of covenants or contracts is essential to the working of civil society and keeping it from descending into a state of nature. Thus, even when contracting parties reasonably believe their interests would be better served by violating

contracts, they have already laid down their rights and have an obligation to perform the contract. This is the definition of obligation in the *Leviathan.*

What implications does this have for the possibility of duties to oneself? One interpretation is that for Hobbes an agent has an obligation to self, an obligation not to violate such compacts. But it doesn't follow that because there are such obligations that they are grounded in the strong sense I have described above. Rather, it appears that Hobbes grounds them in self-interest. The ultimate reason for keeping compacts is that keeping them is more likely to further my own long-term interests than violating them will. Because he grounds such obligations in self-interest, Hobbes cannot escape the characterization that he is an egoist. 14

For Hobbes, negative consequences will follow the violation of contracts and thus it is imprudent for agents to violate. If each agent seeks to gratify his own desires without consideration for others, the result is a state of war in which each is enemy to another. In such a state few if any will have a chance of gratifying their desires. Hobbes' recognition is that all men, whatever their ends may be, need the cooperation of other men in order to attain them. Prudence dictates therefore that these agreements be upheld.

Hobbes' three laws of nature also spell this out. The first law directs agents to "Seek peace and follow it." The second requires "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." 15 The third law requires man to keep his covenants 16 Natural laws have in common that each 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; and to omit that, by which he

thinketh it may be best preserved. 17 So they are moral principles—in fact, Hobbes refers to them as "eternal and immutable laws of nature." That said, the passage just quoted shows that they are grounded in each agent's self-preservation.

Thus, for Hobbes the answer to the question, `Why ought I subordinate my desires to obey society's rules?' is clear. Unless I (and other agents) obey the rules, there will be little chance of gratifying any of my desires. The end for agents is the gratification of desire and the means to that end is cooperation with other agents. Thus Hobbes' has been labeled a "rule egoist." 18

While the literature setting out the distinction between act- and rule-utilitarianism is ample, scant attention has been paid to the possibility of there being a similar distinction applied to egoism. Indeed, in most discussions of egoism the assumption is that we are talking about "act egoism," or that theory that states that the agent's sole moral obligation is to perform that action which leads to the best consequences for him. But it might be more accurate to describe Hobbes' theory as being in the category of rule egoism. This is so because Hobbes' laws of nature constitute a system of prescriptive moral rules, which are justified by a rule egoistic principle (REP) of the following sort:

(REP) Each agent should attempt always 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 for him. 19

Two points need to be made. One, the principle in question is egoistic in that it evaluates rules in terms of the best consequences for the agent. Two, rules are evaluated in terms of the expected consequences of the agent's trying to act on them. Thus agents act on the prior expectations of general adherence to the rules, not their actual consequences.

This last point is of the utmost importance. Agents acting on the REP cannot know in advance what actual consequences acts will bring. As I have argued, it is for this reason that Hobbes urged agents to abide by contracts and attend to the interests of others since they cannot know the results of any apparently advantageous rule violation.

In sum, Hobbes argues that there are duties to oneself. But his is not an argument in the strong sense I've defined above. Since he grounds his argument for duties to self in accord with the interests of each agent, he cannot be read as saying that egoism is completely false. And while he would argue that the only consequentialist reason for upholding such duties is my own interest and not for the betterment of the common good, he has not said or even implied that the common good is to be ignored. In fact, it is only because there is consideration of a common good that I am able to realize my own desires. So the duty of self-gratification doesn't trump the common good but rather presupposes it. In another sense, however, Hobbes holds to at least one duty which is absolute, that being the duty of self-preservation. 20

Samuel Pufendorf

After Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Samuel Pufendorf was the main representative of the modern theory of natural law and offers a natural-law based defense of duties to oneself. Writing in *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law* (1673), the German philosopher Pufendorf argues that among our self-regarding obligations are moral duties to develop our talents, duties to strengthen and preserve the powers of the body with appropriate food and exercise, and a negative duty not to take one's own life.

This set of duties to self are subsumed under what Pufendorf calls "the laws of sociality, laws which teach one how to conduct oneself to become a useful member of human society." 21 These natural laws of sociality, in turn, "get the force of law only upon the presupposition that God exists and rules all things by His providence, and that He has enjoined the human race to observe as laws those dictates of reason which He has Himself promulgated by the force of the innate light." 22 Thus I will argue that what Pufendorf called duties "to ourselves" are rather better understood as duties "concerning ourselves," since Pufendorf thinks that these duties are ultimately grounded in our obligations to our fellow citizens and to God. Hence, while Pufendorf defends DTS, he is not defending them in the strong sense that I have characterized.

Since "Man's capacity for the mutual infliction of injury is very powerful," Pufendorf says that "in order to be safe" it is necessary for man to be sociable and "join forces with men like himself." From this realization a "fundamental natural law" arises:

> Every man ought to do as much as he can to cultivate and preserve sociality. Since he who wills the end also wills the means which are indispensable to achieving that end, it follows that all that necessarily and normally makes for sociality is understood to be prescribed by natural law. All that disturbs or violates sociality is understood as forbidden. 23

Since man has an instinctive drive for survival, he has an obligation to follow this "law of sociality." From this general law, obligations to self are deducible.

Thus we have a general obligation to care for the education of our soul, "the ruler," and the body, "the servant" and instrument of the soul. The mind must be educated to perform this function of self-government; the body, for service. But the mind's care is paramount. Thus we must be educated to form the right "love of duty and goodness."

Again: what Pufendorf characterizes as a duty to oneself is better construed as a duty concerning oneself whose source is our duties to others. 24

Pufendorf adds that since the mind's good functioning depends upon the body, the needs of the latter cannot be neglected. We have a negative duty not to weaken the body "by intemperance in food or drink or by unseasonable or unnecessary toil or by any other means." Thus Pufendorf inveighs against "gluttony, drunkenness, excessive sex, and so on." These exhortations to be temperate naturally extend to the emotions, too, since "powerful and disordered emotions not only drive a man to disturb society, but also do harm to him as an individual." These emotions include not only rage and envy but also those like fear. Courage is a manifest obligation, since "many dangers can be repelled if faced with spirit." So one must endeavor to "reject unmanliness and strengthen the mind against the fear of danger." 25

Again, these duties "to oneself" are grounded in natural law. And how is natural law grounded? For Pufendorf it is grounded in the will of God. No doubt the "law of sociality" has a "clear utility," Pufendorf claims. But the precepts subsumed under this law do not get their force of law from utility, but from God.

> For otherwise though they might be observed for their utility, like the prescriptions doctors give to regulate health, they would not be laws. Laws necessarily imply a superior, and such a superior as actually has governance of another. 26

With Pufendorf, then, we encounter another way in which duties to oneself are grounded. The intermediate ground for duties to oneself is their social utility, which in turn is derived from and "gets its force" from being grounded in God's will. Thus for Pufendorf the duties to self he enumerates are not absolute, since they do not trump concerns of the

common good. In fact, he doesn't mention a single duty to self which isn't grounded socially.

For Pufendorf, even an agent's drive for survival owes to God. Agents have self-love that "compels" them to care for themselves and "get all the good" they can in every way. But, he adds, it seems superfluous to "invent an obligation of self-love." He then argues,

> from another point of view man surely does have certain obligations to himself. For man is not born for himself alone; the end for which he has been endowed by his Creator with such excellence is that he may celebrate His glory and be a fit member of human society. He is therefore bound so to conduct himself as not to permit the Creator's gifts to perish for lack of use, and to contribute what he can to human society. 27

And in discussing man's duty to self-preservation he adds:

> No one gave himself life; it must be regarded as a gift of God. Hence it is clear that man certainly does not have power over his own life to the extent that he may terminate it at his pleasure. He is absolutely bound to wait until He who has assigned him this post commands him to leave. 28

But though suicide is impermissible

> it may be quite correct for a man to choose what will probably shorten his life in order to make his talents more widely available to others. For he can and should exert himself to serve the needs of others; and a certain kind or a certain intensity of labour may so wear out his strength as to hasten the onset of old age and death earlier than if he had lived a gentler life. 29

It is clear that Pufendorf acknowledges self-regarding moral duties. It is just as clear that these duties are duties in the weak sense: they do not trump social goods and they are ultimately grounded in their duties to God.

Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury

Unlike Pufendorf and others in the seventeenth-century natural law tradition, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, developed an ethical view notable for its psychological focus on things internal to the agent, such as character, motive and sentiment. He argues in a distinctive way for DTS.

Shaftesbury holds that agents have an obligation to be virtuous and thus acknowledges that there are self-regarding duties. While his view is well-argued, I will show that this obligation, as he describes it, is not defended in the strong sense. That is, the obligation to be virtuous for Shaftesbury doesn't trump concerns about the common good. Rather, to be virtuous a person must have his self- and other-regarding affections coordinated or, in Shaftesbury's words, "balanced." Since the very notion of virtue is constitutive of the common good, it cannot override that good.

For Shaftesbury, having the self-affections, which he often calls "self-passions," is good if and only if these are consistent with and promote the public affections. Both are essential to moral goodness. Indeed it is by having them both that agents fulfill what he calls the obligation to be virtuous. The ways in which one fails in one's obligation to virtue is the same way in which one fails one's moral obligations generally—by having an imbalance of self- and public-affections. Before advancing my argument, I will explain Shaftesbury's view further.

Shaftesbury's moral view, at least as developed in his *Characteristics,* might well be understood as a reversal of Thomas Hobbes' view. For Hobbes, what are referred to as an agent's other-regarding moral concerns are in actuality a means to an agent's self-regard, or the agent's interest in his self-preservation; for Shaftesbury, by contrast, self-regarding morality is a means to promoting the public good. 30 Agents are moral or

immoral depending upon what he calls their natural "affections." He writes, "When in general all the affections or passions are suited to the public good, or good of the species, then is the natural temper entirely good." 31

In *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit,* (1699, later revised and included in his *Characteristics* in 1711), Shaftesbury addresses "what virtue is and to whom the character belongs" in the first book and "what obligation there is to virtue, or what reason to embrace it" in the second. The relevance for DTS is how Shaftesbury argues for this obligation to virtue.

At the outset it is important to mention that despite his frequent discussion of "the public good" and the good of "the species," for Shaftesbury such other-regarding affections do not have the public good as an end to the exclusion of the private good. He criticizes private good only when it is extreme and "injurious to the society." Such extreme self-love is "unnatural," but that appellation is not reserved for self-regarding affections only, but also for extreme forms of other-regarding affections. Thus, even "kindness and love of the most natural sort (such of that of any creature for its offspring), if it be immoderate and beyond a certain degree," is unnatural. 32

It is important to distinguish not only the "natural" from the "self" affections, but both of these from the "unnatural" affections. The natural affections are social and benevolent, while the self affections include love of life, bodily appetites and the like. Neither of these is pernicious for Shaftesbury, but unnatural affections—like various forms of malevolence—are. 33

For Shaftesbury, unlike Hobbes, we can find no starting point for ethics in the individual. Agents are part of a "system" and derive their greatest happiness from that

which promotes society and the common good. But in this system self-affections are not only permissible but necessary. In addition, it is possible to be excessive in our natural affections. The good of all tends to become realized through the efforts of each agent to attain his own happiness. Virtue obtains not when one set of impulses triumphs over the other, but when a proper balance is struck between self-and natural affections. Put another way, it is only when an agent's natural affections are "fitted" or "suitable" to the good of all that virtue obtains. "To deserve the name of good or virtuous," Shaftesbury concludes in Book II, "a creature must have all his inclinations and affections, his dispositions of mind and temper, suitable, and agreeing with the good of his kind, or of that system in which he is included, and of which he constitutes a part." 34

Affections are surely immoral when they are inconsistent with the interests of others.

> Thus if there be found in any creature a more than ordinary self-concernment or regard to private good, which is inconsistent with the species of public, this must in every respect be esteemed an ill and vicious affection. And this is what we commonly call selfishness, and disapprove so much in whatever creature we happen to discover it. 35

But this denunciation of selfishness cannot be construed as a denunciation of "self-concern" in general.

Far from it. In fact, attention to one's "private good" is not merely an option for Shaftesbury. Rather, it is a moral requirement.

> On the other side, if the affection towards private or self-good, however selfish it may be esteemed, is in reality not only consistent with public good, but in some measure contributing to it; if it be such, perhaps, as for the good of the species in general every individual ought to share; 'tis so far from being ill or blamable in any sense, that it must be acknowledged absolutely necessary to constitute a creature good. 36

Shaftesbury's use of the word "necessary" to describe the cultivation of one's private good demonstrates that he thinks an agent's self-concern is obligatory.

It must also be added, however, that he is not arguing for self-regarding morality in any absolute sense. Indeed, he thinks that obligations to virtue hold in only a *mitigated* way; namely because they contribute to the public good.

This is further evident in the specific kinds of obligations he mentions. He seems to think that an agent fails in a self-regarding sense if he disregards his well-being and the well-being of the "species."

> For if the want of such an affection as that towards self-preservation be injurious to the species, a creature is ill and unnatural as well through this defect as though the want of any other natural affection. And this no one would doubt to pronounce, if he saw a man who minded not any precipices which lay in his way, nor made any distinction of food, diet, clothing, or whatever else related to his health or being. The same would be averred of one who had a disposition which rendered him averse to any commerce with womankind, and of consequence unfitted him through illness of temper (and not merely a through a defect of constitution) for the propagation of his species or kind. 37

Thus, at bottom, Shaftesbury is interested in the agent's self-preservation since a disregard for it—in one case or the aggregate of all such cases—is "injurious to the species."

In referring to the obligation to virtue, Shaftesbury discusses whether there is an obligation to virtue that is independent of legal obligations. As stated, it is in Book II that he discusses the issue of whether there is an obligation to virtue by asking "what reason is there to embrace" the virtuous life. By the end of Book II he has concluded that the best life for the agent is a virtuous one.

It is indeed odd for Shaftesbury to claim that this obligation to virtue—or whether the virtuous life is a reasonable one—turns on whether it furthers the agent's own good.

Though he is no psychological or ethical egoist, and though he lays greater stress on the other-directed affections such as kindness and pity, he maintains that the virtuous life is reasonable because it accords with the agent's interest. But what separates Shaftesbury from Hobbes on the issue is that the former believes that the virtuous life itself involves being motivated by considerations other than the agent's good.

So while the basis of the virtuous life depends upon it being best for the agent, Shaftesbury is surely not saying that the obligation to virtue is solely self-regarding. Thus he writes, "A man of good breeding, whatever else he be, is incapable of doing a rude or brutal action. He *never* deliberates in this case, or considers of the matter by prudential rules of self-interest and advantage." 38 (my emphasis). He points out that a good life will be one in which we express a concern for others for their sakes.

There is for Shaftesbury a coincidence of virtue and the agent's own good. He writes,

> We know that every creature has a private good and interest of his own, which Nature has compelled him to seek, by all the advantages afforded him within the compass of his make. We know that there is a right state and a wrong state of every creature, and that his right one is by nature forwarded and by himself affectionately sought. … Now, if by the natural constitution of any rational creature, the same irregularities of appetite which make him ill to others, make him also ill to himself, and if the same regularity of affections which causes him to be good in one sense, causes him to be good also in the other, then is that goodness by which he is useful to others a real good and advantage to himself. And thus virtue and interest may be found at last to agree. 39

And again in Book II:

> …to be well affected towards the public interest and one's own is not only consistent but inseparable; and that moral rectitude or virtue must accordingly be the advantage, and vice the injury and disadvantage of every creature. 40

His point about the interdependence of the "natural affections," which lead to the good of the public, and the "self affections," which lead only to the good of the private, is what separates him from his successor Hutcheson, who would equate virtue with benevolence. Moreover, it is on this very point that Shaftesbury tips his hand on the issue of duties to oneself; for Shaftesbury the psyche is a system in which affections, unless they be ordered between self- and other-regarding, can destroy the balance required for a good and happy life.

Thus, as one would expect, his concept of vice applies to both natural and self affections. For Shaftesbury, one can be deficient in being neglectful of his obligation to cultivate self affections.

> Now as in particular cases public affection, on the one hand, may be too high, so private affection may, on the other hand, be too weak. For if a creature be self-neglectful and insensible of danger, or if he want such a degree of passion, in any kind as is useful to preserve, sustain or defend himself, this must certainly be esteemed vicious in regard of the design and end of Nature. 41

It is implied that there are several combinations in which one fails in one's obligation to virtue.

Shaftesbury lists three combinations of public and private goods, claiming that these combinations explain the "plainer and more essential part of vice" These defining marks of vices are:

> (1) When either the public affections are weak or deficient
> (2) Or the private and self affections too strong
> (3) Or that such affections arise as are neither of these, nor in any degree tending to the support either of the public or private system.

"Otherwise than thus," Shaftesbury claims, "it is impossible any creature can be such as we call ill or vicious." 42

In another place Shaftesbury confirms this by giving both the public and private affections their due in saying:

> To be wanting therefore in those principal affections which respect the good of the whole constitution, must be a vice and imperfection as great surely in the principal part (the soul or temper) as it is in any of those inferior and subordinate parts to want the self-preserving affections which are proper to them. 43

But toward the end of the *Inquiry* he seems to tilt away from the view that virtue equals a balance of public and private affections toward a different view. He announces that "Our business, therefore, will be to prove—

> 1. That to have the natural, kindly, or generous affections strong and powerful towards the good of the public, is to have the chief means and power of self-enjoyment and that to want them, is certain misery and ill.
> 2. That to have the private or self affections too strong, or beyond their degree of subordinacy to the kindly and natural, is also miserable.
> 3. And that to have the unnatural affections (viz. such as are neither founded on the interest of the kind or public, not of the private person or creature himself) is to be miserable in the highest degree. 44

It is evident from proposition (1) that public affections are the most important (or "chief means") to self-enjoyment. This is supported further by (2), which emphasizes too-strong private affections as a source of misery, but not emphasizing any bad consequences resulting from those same affections being too weak. Therefore, a too-weak self-regard is not seen as vicious, though a too-strong self-regard is.

Has Shaftesbury contradicted his earlier view that emphasized the need for a "balance" of public and private affections? Is he now shifting his thesis and saying that balance as a prescription for virtue is secondary, but what is primary is having one's self-affections "subordinate" to "the kindly and natural" affections? No, he has not contradicted but qualified his earlier view. He has said that the "chief means" of self-

enjoyment is to have these public affections and to lack them is to have misery. Thus his pecking order of affections places the public affections ahead of the private ones.

What he says here about the primacy of the public affections can be reconciled with what he said before. There he emphasized the importance of private affections.

> And thus the affections toward private good become necessary and essential to goodness. For though no creature can be called good or virtuous merely for possessing these affections, yet since it is impossible that the public good or good of the system can be preserved without them, it follows that a creature really wanting in them is in reality wanting in some degree to goodness and natural rectitude, and may thus be esteemed vicious and defective. 45

The private affections are important, but secondary in importance to the public affections.

Finally, there is yet another sense in which people are obligated to virtue. Shaftesbury refers to our "sense" of right and wrong and bears much in common with the moral sense theorists.

> Now as in the sensible kinds of objects the species or images of bodies, colours, and sounds are perpetually moving before our eyes, and acting on our senses even when we sleep; so in the moral and intellectual kind, the forms and images of things are no less active and incumbent on the mind, at all seasons, and even when the real objects themselves are absent. 46

We are thus capable of forming "general notions of things" and thus not only objects but actions themselves—including the affections of pity, kindness, gratitude, and their contraries—offer themselves to sense. 47 And thus only conduct that is related to the agent's "sense of right or wrong" can have merit or be properly called virtuous. Possessing such a moral sense, agents have sufficient motivation to be virtuous and are obligated to be virtuous since they autonomously determine and are the authors of their own conscience.

Shaftesbury doesn't argue for DTS in an absolute sense. For

Shaftesbury, self-regarding morality is obligatory because grounded in the public affections. It is a means to promoting the public good.

Samuel Clarke

Like Pufendorf, Samuel Clarke ends up grounding DTS in God's will. But what makes Clarke singular is that morality has three branches and four classes of duties which follow from them, one of which is the duties we owe to ourselves. The most sustained exposition of Clarke's ethical views is found in his work *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (1705), his second set of Boyle lectures. His avowed aim was to prove the "reasonableness and certainty" of the Christian revelations and the eternal and immutable obligations of morality "incumbent on men from the very nature and reason of things themselves." 48

Morality essentially has three branches, covering our duties toward God, other humans, and oneself. From this division flow four "rules of righteousness." (1) There are rules of piety toward God; (2) duties toward others that are governed by equity, demanding that one deal with other persons as one can reasonably expect others to deal with one; and (3) duties of love or benevolence, which demand that one further the happiness of all persons; and (4) duties towards oneself, or what Clarke calls "sobriety," demanding that one preserve one's life and spiritual well-being so as to be able to perform one's duties.

Suicide, then, is wrong. This duty to self he further explains thus:

> For whoever acts contrary to this sense and conscience of his own mind, is necessarily self-condemned; and the greatest and strongest of all

> obligations is that, which a man cannot break through without condemning himself. 49

He then explains the content of the obligation to oneself:

> With respect to ourselves, the rule of righteousness is; that every man preserve his own being, as long as he is able; and take care to keep himself at all times in such temper and disposition both of body and mind, as may best fit and enable him to perform his duty in all other instances. That is: he ought to bridle his appetites with temperance; to govern his passions, with moderation; and to apply himself to the business of his present situation in the world, whatsoever it be, with attention and contentment. That every man ought to preserve his being as long as he is able is evident; because what he is not himself the author and giver of, he can never of himself have just power of authority to take away. 50

Thus the primary duty to self is self-preservation. A derivative duty, temperance, aids the execution of the first duty.

The duty to preserve oneself follows from the notion that no man is his own creator. Thus, since no one has ownership of his own being, no one is entitled to do as he wants with it. Since God's will, unlike the human will, is uncorrupted by self-interest or passion, divine volitions and moral commands ought to be equivalent.

Had Clarke argued only in this manner, his characterization of a duty to oneself would have been weak—at least in comparison to the strong sense that I believe such duties can be grounded—since it would have been grounded in an obligation to God. In this respect he bears a resemblance to Pufendorf.

But Clarke went further. Clarke's emphasis on the virtue of *sophrosyne* is not unlike what any number of Cambridge Platonists held, with the exception that Clarke seems to stress perseverance, sometimes called constancy, as well. Perseverance arises in the context of Clarke's discussion of applying oneself with contentment to one's station

in the world. 51 This duty to endure one's situation is an extension of the duty of temperance, stressing moral toughness.

Clarke's rule of self-treatment is analogous to the rule by which we ought to treat others:

> In respect of our fellow creatures, the rule of righteousness is; that in particular we so deal with every man, as in like circumstances we could reasonably expect that he should deal with us; in general we endeavor to promote the welfare and happiness of all men. 52

For Clarke, this rule of righteousness is bi-directional, for treating other men justly is a rule that subsumes treatment of oneself. These rules are binding, binding on all rational wills but ultimately binding because they are laws of God. When Clarke talks about mans' duty toward himself, it involves the preservation of one's life and the control of passions and appetites as a means to one's performance of duty to God.

Jeremy Bentham

In defending his principle of utility in *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Jeremy Bentham argues unmistakably for the existence of duties to oneself. He does this in one way in *The Principles* (1789) and another in the *Deontology* (1834). In the *Principles* his argument for duties to oneself derives from his utilitarianism; in the *Deontology,* from his discussion of personal virtue. Bentham begins the former work with a bold stroke.

> Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. Pleasure and pain are prescriptive and determinative: telling us what we ought to do and determining what we shall do. 53

From this view of pleasure he derives his principle of utility, which becomes his measuring rod for good and bad actions. He writes:

> By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency it has to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or oppose that happiness. 54

This passage alone shows that Bentham's "greatest happiness" principle confers approval on actions beneficial to oneself. If by following obligations to myself I "augment" my happiness, then according to the principle of utility I have done a good action. Likewise, if I am the "party whose interest in question" is at issue—especially so when I am the only party—then I not only may but must act to benefit myself.

On what Bentham has said so far, he is arguing for duties to oneself in a strong sense. Given the principle of utility as a ground, it follows as night follows day, that I must pursue my own happiness. Indeed, the direction of the arguments runs not only from the broader ground of utility to the duty of some agent, but runs the other way, as well: it is by benefiting myself that I enhance the common good.

Further evidence concerning his view on self-regarding morality can be found in chapter XVII of the *Principles,* "Of the Limits of the Penal Branch of Jurisprudence." Bentham there states that "Ethics at large may be defined as the art of directing men's actions to the greatest possible quantity of happiness, on the part of those whose interest is in view." 55 He then inquires about those actions a man has a power to direct. "They must be his own actions or those of other agents," he surmises. "Ethics, in so far as it is the art of directing a man's own actions, may be styled the art of *self-government* or *private ethics*." 56 Thus the larger picture is that Bentham accepts the notion of private ethics, quite apart from whether private behavior affects others.

Further, according to the principle of utility I am *obligated* to benefit myself. Since the felicific calculus includes the interests and happiness of all persons, then it includes myself, since I am a member of the class of all persons. For a utilitarian to claim the opposite, and argue that there are no obligations to benefit myself, would be to utter a direct contradiction to the internal logic of his own theory. If an agent is acting and his interests alone will be affected by the consequences of some act, then that agent is obligated to benefit himself.

This point is most evident in chapter IV of the *Principles,* entitled "Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to be Measured." In section IV.2 he considers a person *by himself* (his italics), the value of a pleasure or pain *by itself*, will increase or decrease depending on its *intensity*, *duration, certainty* or *uncertainty*, and its *propinquity* or *remoteness*. He adds *fecundity* and *purity* to take account not of the properties of the pleasure and pain itself, but the tendency or property of the *act* by which such pleasure or pain has been produced. In discussing what he calls these six "elements or dimensions of value" in a pleasure or pain, Bentham has not qualified his calculus by saying that they apply solely to other-regarding acts. Quite the contrary: again, in reviewing each of them, he is considering the agent "by himself."

Then he changes the picture slightly. In IV.4 he adds that when a number of persons are involved, that we must use in our calculation the previous six elements and a seventh—*extent*. Extent refers to the number of people affected by a pleasure or pain. In the most straightforward kind of case, an agent must take into account his *own* happiness *and* that of others. Here the point about "whose interest is in question" has been enlarged to include others. So here the duty of a single agent owed to himself is derived from the extent

or number of total agents considered. A single agent's happiness does not override the happiness of many others. Thus the duty to oneself is no longer a duty in the strong sense.

Still, for Bentham agents have duties to themselves. If by taking his own happiness into account an agent tips the extent to four persons instead of three, he thereby follows the principle of utility by the letter. Nowhere does Bentham say, either in IV.4 or IV.5 (where he elaborates on the "general tendency of any act"), that an agent should exempt himself in summing up the pleasurable and painful tendencies of an act.

He offers another layer to his argument for self-regarding ethics in his discussion of prudence.

> As to ethics in general, a man's happiness will depend, in the first place, upon such parts of his behavior as none but himself are interested in; in the next place, upon such parts of it as may affect the happiness of those about him. In as far as his happiness depends upon the first-mentioned part of his behavior, it is said to depend upon his *duty to himself*. (his italics) Ethics, then, in as far as it is the art of directing a man's actions in this respect, may be termed the art of discharging one's duty to one's self: and the quality which a man manifests by the discharge of this branch of duty (if duty it is to be called) is that of *prudence*. 57

So prudence is a duty, even if Bentham exhibits some hesitancy in calling it such. Further, his grounding in utility, as I have already argued, requires that he conclude that self-concerned actions are duties.

He also casts the argument for self-regarding morality in a slightly different fashion, stressing the similarity and coincidence of private ethics and legislation.

> Now private ethics has happiness for its end: and legislation can have no other. Private ethics concerns every member, that is, the happiness and the actions of every member, and any community that can be proposed; and legislation can concern no more. Thus far, then, private ethics and the art of legislation go hand in hand. 58

Bentham concludes this section by saying, “Every act which promises to be beneficial upon the whole to the community (himself included) each individual ought to perform of himself” and “Every act which promises to be pernicious upon the whole to the community (himself included) each individual ought to abstain from of himself.” But he continues in saying that the legislator ought not to compel him to perform or abstain from such acts.

Bentham then takes a different approach in the *Deontology* (1834), based on his manuscripts and published two years after his death. In the Introduction he states that “This work has for its object the pointing out to each man on each occasion what course of conduct promises to be in the highest degree conducive to his happiness: to his own happiness, first and last; to that of others, no farther in so far as his happiness is promoted by promoting theirs.” 59

If Bentham’s larger concern in the *Principles* was what ought to be done in legislation or government to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, his task in the *Deontology* had shifted. He now thought there was a task for private ethics—or as he called it, private deontology—which consisted in recommending to individuals what would maximize their own happiness. In general, he recommends benevolence, which he refers to as “extra-regarding prudence.” Mendacity and disingenuousness toward others are to be shunned, as are insincerity and disagreeable conversation. “Truthfulness and sincerity are among the virtues which extra-regarding prudence takes under its care,” Bentham says. 60

The point he makes about extra-regarding prudence is how it coincides with self-interest. The reasons Bentham gives for doing benevolent actions are self-regarding reasons. Thus the obligation for doing other-regarding actions is self-regarding. Is this like

the Bentham of the *Principles* who would argue that my obligations to myself are derivable from my obligation to produce the general happiness? Though the argument here is cast in different terms, the answer is yes. Here the obligations are still social in nature and such obligations are "recommended" because they conduce to an agent's happiness. Again, "private deontology," in Bentham's sense, instructs me what it is in my interest to do. He writes,

> Take any object of desire—power, for example—power as a source of pleasure, which it undoubtedly is, and inquire how it is best obtainable, in so far as other men are concerned. There are two courses of action—namely doing good to them, or doing evil to them; for non-action will, of course, produce no results. By doing evil to them you make enemies; by doing good to them, you make friends: now which, in reference to your own good, is preferable? 61

These recommendations to practice goodness and benevolence and act virtuously are not a reversal of the general happiness that Bentham had in mind in the *Principles*. He still endeavors to show that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is a true standard in morality, but in the *Deontology* he stresses that this is not at odds with the happiness of individuals. Benevolent behavior, far from being opposed to self-interest, promotes an agent's interests. That said, Bentham is not arguing for duties to oneself in the strong sense, since such duties in no wise supersede the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Henry Sidgwick

Writing his *Methods of Ethics* 85 years after Jeremy Bentham wrote the *Principles*, Henry Sidgwick presents as clear an acceptance of self-regarding duties as his utilitarian predecessor did. In Book IV of the *Methods* he proclaims that utilitarianism rests on an intuitional basis.

Before addressing two specific duties to oneself, he tips his hand about the matter in a series of remarks. Considered in the aggregate, the statements he made in the *Methods* (1874) support the existence of self-regarding oughts. He wrote, "The rationality of self-regard is as undeniable as the rationality of self-sacrifice." 62 And "A universalistic hedonist may reasonably hold that his own happiness is that portion of the universal happiness when it is most in his power to promote, and which therefore is most especially entrusted to his charge." 63 And "Is there a connection between happiness and duty? Do both my self-regarding and social duties promote my happiness? I would have to argue that yes they do." 64 And going by his definition that "duties are right actions or abstinences … the adequate accomplishment of which a moral impulse is conceived to be at least occasionally necessary" then duties to oneself would certainly fill the bill. From these kinds of statements one can piece together Sidgwick's view of the matter, a matter he rarely addresses directly.

In Book III, in which he discusses intuitionism, he presents arguments for two specific duties to self. "We recognize a general duty of self-control," Sidgwick urges, in speaking of appetites of the table, for sex and of other impulses. He grounds this notion about self-control—and ideas about self-regarding virtues in general—in the intuitive morality of what he calls "common sense." He equates this cardinal virtue with "a habit of resistance to desires and fears" and it links with other duties like wisdom and the duty to act courageously by controlling the promptings of fear and pain.

Sidgwick holds to a kind of unity of the self-regarding virtues and his analysis of temperance extends to a second "negative" duty, the prohibition against suicide. This prohibition is absolute, Sidgwick reasons, "even in the face of the strongest pain and the

likelihood that the remainder of a man's life will be both miserable and burdensome to others." 65 This prohibition, too, is grounded in "the common sense of our age and country."

In addition, while Sidgwick agrees with Kant that since everyone seeks their own happiness it can't be a duty, and thus prudence cannot be a duty, he still talks as if other virtues are moral, not merely self-interested. 66 Again, contrary to how temperance is "currently thought of as self-regarding," for Sidgwick it is actually "the cardinal virtue that controls the particular appetites." By contrast, its opposite "self-indulgence sometimes leads to the loss of some greater gratification and interferes with the performance of duties." 67

In keeping with his principle of utility, it seems that duties to oneself follow of necessity. Even in speaking of prudence, which many would label a self-interested virtue or no virtue at all, Sidgwick cannot avoid bringing up the connection between this and utility.

> The form in which the rule of prudence practically presents itself is "a smaller present good is not to be preferred to a greater future good," since prudence is generally exercised in restraining a present desire on account of the greater consequences of gratifying it. 68

Even prudence follows a dutiful rule and, by utilitarian lights, this "self-regarding virtue" is every bit as obligatory as other-regarding ones.

As a corollary of his utilitarian thinking, self-regarding obligations are further deducible from Sidgwick's principle of benevolence. Sidgwick was aware that Samuel Clarke regarded his four "rules of righteousness" as self-evident as mathematical axioms, so too does he regard the principle of benevolence as axiomatic.

> Since the self-evident principle if "that the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view of the (1) universe, than the good of any other…" and (2) "it is evident to me as a rational being that I am bound to aim at good generally, so far as it's attainable by my efforts, not merely as a particular part of it…" (3) From these two rational intuitions we may deduce, as a necessary inference, the maxim of benevolence in its abstract form: viz, that one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own—unless in so far as he judges it to be less, when impartially viewed or less certainly knowable or attainable by him. 69

If Sidgwick's urging with this last maxim is to establish benevolence as a principle on a par with one's own good, then it is clear that the latter is as obligatory as the former. Regarding "the point of view of the universe," the good of the agent is every bit as important as the good of another and at times greater.

Sidgwick's self-evident principles include benevolence and justice, with the latter, he explains, extending to prudence.

> In short, the self-evident principle strictly stated must take some such negative form as this; `it cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner in which it would be wrong for B to treat A, merely on the ground that they are two different individuals, and without their being any differences between the natures or circumstances of the two which can be stated as a reasonable ground for difference of treatment.' 70

Does this regulative principle, which applies to all our moral relations to others, apply also to all our conduct which affects ourselves? Unavoidably, the answer is that it must. It is not only a principle that regulates our behavior toward others but also toward ourselves. For in the passage previously quoted, "The good of any one individual is of no more importance than the good of any other." This being the case, his principles of

justice and benevolence imply his proposition that "one ought to aim at one's own good, which is sometimes given as the maxim of Rational Self-love or Prudence." 71

But, as with Bentham and his principle of general happiness, it doesn't follow from Sidgwick's principles or justice that an agent's own good overrides the general good. Thus while Sidgwick is arguing for duties to oneself he is not arguing for such duties in the strong sense.

Sidgwick's last proposition that agents are "morally bound to regard the good of any individual as much as his own unless he judges it to be less" is his most suggestive on the issue of self-regarding morality. Sidgwick's argument for duties to oneself can be extracted.

> (1) An agent is morally bound to regard (i.e., take into account) the good of others if he judges the good of others to be greater than or equal to his own.
> (2) In at least some instances an agent can assume the standpoint of an impartial observer and judge that the good of others is neither greater than *nor* equal to his own good.
> (3) Thus, in at least some instances, an agent is not morally bound to regard the good of others.

This *modus tollens* reveals several things about Sidgwick's argument. (1) An agent can make the judgment that his own good can supersede that of others, with the condition that an impartial observer would do the same. This implies (2): if an impartial observer judges that the agent's good does not supersede that of others then the agent cannot regard his own good as greater in importance.

Thus, Sidgwick is not asserting that agents are morally bound to place their 'personal' goods above the goods of others in *all* cases. Since as a utilitarian—Marcus Singer points out how Sidgwick is regarded as the "last of the outstanding utilitarians of the nineteenth century"—he acknowledges that such personal goods do not override

'social' goods in all cases, he cannot be construed as arguing for duties to oneself in the strong sense I've described. 72 The general good can and does override an agent's own personal good, at least on Sidgwick's view. (3) Agents are "bound" to regard their own goods on his view. Simply put, if I am "bound to regard" the goods of others, and an impartial observer notices that my own good, at least in some instances, can be elevated in importance above those goods of others, then, *ipso facto*, I am morally bound to regard my own good as overriding that of others in *some* cases.

Finally, in speaking of utility and common sense, Sidgwick makes a point about the suppression of egoism and how common sense moral reasoning praises the agent who sacrifices his own good for that of others.

> We perhaps admire as virtuous a man who gives up his own happiness for another's sake even when that happiness that he confers is clearly less than that which he resigns, so that there is a dimunition of happiness on the whole. But it seems doubtful whether we altogether approve of such conduct. 73

Indeed, whatever common sense counsels agents about disregarding their own happiness in favor of the happiness "for another's sake," this serves to show the shortcomings of the logic of common sense morality. For from a strictly utilitarian view, free of the admixture of common sense, an agent cannot sacrifice a greater self-regarding good for a lesser other-regarding good. Moreover, ignoring one's own good for the sake of another can never be recommended by utility, since the theory cannot automatically prefer the good of one agent to another. On the calculus of felicity, it is morally neutral whether I as an agent am benefiting myself or another. For Sidgwick self-regard can be every bit as binding as the regard of others.

William David Ross

Claiming that many of the conclusions that comprise his view owe to H.A. Prichard's "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake," W.D. Ross enumerates his own list of *prima facie* duties in his book *The Right and the Good* (1930). In the *Foundations of Ethics*, written in 1939, he answered some of the objections occasioned by the first book. Ross holds a consistent position on *prima facie* obligations in the latter work: such an obligation—like the obligation created by a promise to meet a friend for lunch—is binding unless it is overridden by another obligation that is more stringent. 74

Ross exhibits a different method of thinking about our obligations. For Ross, who maintains that intuition tells us that certain normative propositions are self-evidently true, each of the six duties he lists "rests on a special circumstance which cannot seriously be held to be without moral significance." Here are the five:

1 *Duties resting on previous acts of my own*--Ross includes here two kinds: duties of *fidelity*, which owe to some previous promise; and duties of *reparation*, which owe to some previous wrongful act.

2 *Duties of gratitude*—Those resting on acts and services done by others to me.

3 *Duties of Justice*—Those resting on the distribution of pleasure or happiness in accordance with the merit of the persons concerned.

4 *Duties of beneficence*—Those relating to the fact that there are other beings in the world whose condition we can make better in respect of virtue, or intelligence or pleasure.

5 *Duties of self-improvement*—Those resting on the fact that we can improve our own condition in respect of virtue or intelligence.

6 *Duties of non-maleficence*—Those summed up under the title of not injuring others. 75

Pertaining to the fifth duty, Ross later develops his notion that both virtue and intelligence are intrinsically good. It is implied here that if they are intrinsically good, then they worth cultivating for all persons. Before reaching that conclusion, Ross argues that virtuous dispositions and actions are intrinsically good.

> It seems clear that we regard all such actions and dispositions as having value in themselves apart from any consequence. And if any one is inclined to doubt this and to think that, say, pleasure alone is intrinsically good, it seems to me enough to ask the question whether, of two states of the universe holding equal amounts of pleasure, we should really think no better of one in which the actions and dispositions of all the persons in it were thoroughly virtuous than of one in which they were highly vicious. 76

If Ross has argued successfully that these are intrinsic goods—he argues principally for virtue, knowledge, and pleasure—then it would follow that they are goods even if they are self-regarding.

But Ross is aware that common sense expresses skepticism that the promotion of goods for themselves—for example, pleasure—is a duty. He provides a psychological account of this notion. In order to provide a complete sense of Ross' understanding of our attitudes about self- and other-regarding duties, I have quoted him at length in what follows.

> The case of pleasure is difficult; for while we clearly recognize a duty to produce pleasure for others, it is by no means clear that we recognize a duty to produce pleasure for ourselves. This appears to arise from the following facts. The thought of an act as our duty is one that presupposes a certain amount of reflection about the act; and for that reason does not normally arise in connexion with acts towards which we are already impelled by another strong impulse. So far, the cause of our not thinking of the promotion of our own pleasure as a duty is analogous to the cause which usually prevents a highly sympathetic person from thinking of the promotion of the pleasure of others as a duty. He is impelled so strongly

> by direct interest in the well-being of others that he does not stop to ask whether it is his duty to promote it; and we are impelled so strongly towards the promotion of our own pleasure that we do not stop to ask whether it is a duty or not. But there is a further reason why even when we stop to think about the matter it does not usually present itself as a duty: viz. that, since the performance of most of our duties involves the giving up of some pleasure that we desire, the doing of duty and the getting of pleasure for ourselves come by a natural association of ideas to be thought of as incompatible things. 77

So Ross provides an ordinary morality account of why people are prone to disconnect getting pleasure for oneself from duties to oneself.

Having provided the account, however, he proceeds to dismantle the argument that maintains there is a necessary chasm between self-regarding actions and duties. Further, Ross replies that paradoxical consequences follow from the argument that there is a *prima facie* duty to produce good for others but no corollary duty to provide pleasure which will be enjoyed by ourselves. For one, it would follow from this argument that if a man enjoyed producing pleasure for others or working for their betterment, it could not be his duty to do so. But this is exceedingly odd. Any view that seeks at all costs to separate 'the pleasure derived from doing X' from 'the duty to do X' must be mistaken since it leads to absurd consequences.

Ross believes that self-regarding duty is better understood if we think of it not as just our "own good" but as one among many "objective goods." 78 If we viewed our own good as an objective good—the kind of good an impartial spectator might recognize—then we would be able to see that securing that good is a duty. Ross allows that we don't "habitually think of it in this way."

Further, Ross believes, contrary to ordinary thinking, that the duties of beneficence and of self-improvement rest on the same ground.

> No difference principles of duty are involved in the two cases. If we feel a special responsibility for improving our own character rather than that of others, it is not because a special principle is involved, but because we are aware that one is more under our control than the other. 79

Both duties fall under the general principle that we should do as much good as possible. Whether that good is self-regarding, as in the case of self-improvement, or other-regarding, as in the case of benevolence, both are productive of objective good. Despite the tendency of ordinary moral thinking to discount self-beneficial actions for not qualifying as duties, there are prima facie self-regarding duties.

It is worth asking, if such duties are "only" *prima facie*, are they duties to oneself in the strong sense? That is, are they absolute or overriding and do they trump concerns of the common good? I think that the answer is clearly no. For Ross, a *prima facie* right or wrong holds in the absence of overriding considerations. But *prima facie* duties can be overridden by more stringent duties. As such, duties to self for Ross are analogous to what they are for the utilitarian: conditional goods. They are assumed to be duties unless they come into conflict with a greater duty.

Thomas Nagel

According to Thomas Nagel, agents have reasons for promoting the well-being of others that are every bit as interested as the reasons for promoting their own interests. He argues that

> The general thesis to be defended concerning altruism is that one has a *direct* reason to promote the interests of others—a reason which does not depend on intermediate factors such as one's own interests or one's antecedent sentiments of sympathy and benevolence. This is both a claim of ethics and a claim about what happens when someone is altruistically motivated. 80

There is a formal link between prudence and altruism and reasons for both are capable of motivating us to action.

An agent can view himself from the personal standpoint (viewing himself as "I") and the impersonal standpoint (as "merely another habitant of the world.") It is the view of egoism "That it is rational to care about what one has reason to do oneself, but not rational to care at all about the reasons of others." 81 But Nagel opposes this view. There are agent-neutral and other-regarding reasons for action. "In any situation in which there is a reason for one person to promote such an end, we must be able to discover an end which there is reason for anyone to promote." 82

So there is no great chasm between self-interest and altruism. Nagel argues that prudence requires that I provide for my own future interests and that such a motivation needn't be explained by intermediate present desires or any other intermediate motive. Since there is a parallel in acting on behalf on other persons and acting on behalf of my future self, if I can understand motives of self-interest then I can just as easily understand altruistic motives.

Nagel can therefore launch an argument for obligations to oneself in either of two ways. One, I have an obligation to benefit my future self and this is not the same as saying I have an obligation to benefit only myself, which is the form that egoistic arguments take. Two, since it is the interests of others that I am seeking to benefit in acting altruistically, and since it is my interests they are benefiting when they act altruistically, there is no difference in structure between self-interested and other-regarding motives and an obligation to the latter implies an obligation to the former.

Nagel employs the first argument in his discussion of prudence and a person's changing values over time.

> It may happen that a person believes at one time that he will at some future time accept general evaluative principles—principles about what things *constitute* reasons for action—which he now finds pernicious. Moreover he may believe that in the future he will find his present values pernicious. What does prudence require of him in that case? Prudence requires that he take measures which promote the realization of that for which there *will* be reasons. Do his beliefs at the earlier time give him any grounds for judging what he will have reason to do at the later? It is not clear to me that they do, and if not, then the requirement of prudence or timeless reasons may not be applicable. 83

Though there are changes in preferences for individuals—"my preferences in food will be different in the future from what they are now," Nagel thinks—one might view his present and future preferences as expressible as "timeless reasons" for self-regard. The same agent may have a different view about the matter:

> Suppose for example that he now believes that in twenty years he will value security, status, wealth, and tranquility, whereas now he values sex, spontaneity, frequent risks, and strong emotions. A decisive response to this situation could take either of two forms. The individual may be strongly enough convinced of the worthlessness of his inevitable future values simply to refuse them any claim on his present concern. He would then regard his present values as valid for the future also, and no prudential reasons would derive from his expected future views. On the other hand he may treat both his present and future values like preferences, regarding them each as sources of reasons under a higher principle: `Live in the life-style of your choice.' That would demand of him a certain prudence about keeping open the paths to eventual respectability. In either case, his position would be formulable in terms of timeless reasons. 84

It is in following these timeless reasons an agent would be giving a special, objective status to reasons for action that mere preferences don't have.

On Nagel's model the possibility of altruism requires that the interests of others—their projects, needs, values and so forth—*are* my interests and are, *ipso facto*, no more or less important than my own. On his view there is a kind of egalitarian treatment of self- and other-interests. The upshot of this is that Nagel is not arguing for self-regarding morality in the strong sense, for that would mean that my own interests had some absolute and inviolable status compared with those of others and would trump the interests of some other and even the common good. The possibility of altruism is grounded in the possibility of seeing myself impartially and seeing my interests as one among many sets of interests.

Judith Andre

In her argument for duties to oneself in the article "The Equal Moral Weight of Self- and Other-Regarding Acts," Judith Andre argues at length against the assumption that self-regarding acts have "less moral weight" than parallel other-regarding acts. 85 She concedes that there *can* be a difference in moral weight between self- and other-regarding acts, but the only time there is a difference is when that difference owes not to the agents concerned—whether myself or another—but from substantive differences in the actions themselves.

Andre concedes that "some acts benefiting others seem better than the same acts benefiting oneself. Pleasing myself, protecting myself, seem in a different moral category than pleasing or protecting another." 86 This apparent difference in goodness rests on the presumption that certain human goods, like love and community, exist only where two or more people are involved, with each concerned for the other's interests. Thus while

"pleasing myself and pleasing another both bring about someone's happiness," it is only that pleasing another that "brings about as well a bond between the two people." 87

Still, one might question whether bringing about such a bond is a greater good than bringing about my own well-being. After all, we need to know the answer to a crucial question: does it merely "seem" that producing the good of others is deserving of greater moral worth than producing my own good, or is it really true that developing the good of others *is* more morally worthy than developing the good of myself?

For Andre, it is mistaken to make the assumption that the good of others always outweighs my own good. Any asymmetry in giving praise to other-regarding behavior, on the one hand, and praise to self-regarding behavior, on the other, must be because the acts being praised differ in themselves, not because benefiting others is intrinsically more worthy than benefiting oneself. A view held by W.D. Falk is illustrative of the kind of error that Andre is pointing out.

Falk claims that there is not only a difference in "felt obligation" between those acts involving oneself and those involving others, but he maintains there is an objective difference. He contends that there is a kind of 'double ought' in other-regarding moral imperatives but only a 'single ought' in self-regarding ones. Falk compares two moral imperatives.

(1) "I ought to work hard, as I want to succeed."

Is different regarding its commitment than

(2) "I ought to work hard as I ought to provide for others."

Says Falk,

> The first is an ought only once; it says that one ought to take steps for an end with regard to which one is at liberty. … The second ought subjects one to a regimen which is complete. It requires not only forethought and consistency, but also the ability to appreciate an end as committing by reason of its own nature, which, among other things, requires sympathetic understanding and imagination. 88

But Andre finds two problems with Falk's understanding of the problem.

Her first objection is that Falk has begged the question—perhaps one is not at liberty to ignore one's own good any more than one is at liberty to ignore the good of others. But Andre's main focus is that Falk has erred in treating two oughts—which she calls "success and subsistence"— as if they were morally equivalent. Clearly they are not: "success, whether my own or someone else's, is not as important as basic support." In short, Falk's mistake is treating morally different oughts as if they were comparable in importance and assuming that the difference in moral seriousness owes to the one being self-regarding and the other being other-regarding.

In Andre's opinion, there are two manners of defending a claim that some circumstance is morally relevant—one consequentialist, the other deontological. Since consequentialists point out that actions result in pleasure or pain, a rich or more impoverished life, then we must concede self-regarding acts have these consequences. Deontologists focus on how to treat persons. Here, too, I can treat myself with respect or disrespect. Thus she concludes, "If pleasure and pain, respect and disrespect, are what matter morally, then consistency demands that self-regarding acts have moral weight equal to that of other-regarding acts." 89

In addition, the very consistency that we demand of moral language and concepts requires that self-regarding morality is as binding as other-regarding morality. In Sidgwick's words,

> If a kind of conduct that is right or wrong for me is not right or wrong for someone else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases, other than the fact that I and he are different persons. A corresponding proposition may be stated with equal truth in respect of what ought to be done to—not by—different individuals. 90

Andre concludes that if it is "what is done to me" that matters, then "why should it matter who does it?"

For my purposes it is of the utmost importance to point out that Andre's concept of self- and other-regarding actions being on an equal footing implies that she is not saying that self-regarding obligations are absolute in the sense of always trumping other-regarding obligations. What she is denying is that the good of others *always* outweighs my own good. There are cases, however, where other-regarding reasons have greater weight—to borrow her terminology—than self-regarding reasons for acting. As she contends, there are two ways of defending a claim that some circumstance is morally relevant—deontological and consequentialist reasons. Using these moral systems, it is possible to establish that my own good is at times equal to or greater than the goods of others. But there are occasions when my own good is of less weight than the goods of others, a weight that would be determined by deontological or consequentialist reasons.

ii

Philosophers Defending Duties to Oneself in a Strong Sense

Joseph Butler

Bishop Joseph Butler was the first modern philosopher to compose an elaborate argument for self-regarding morality in the strong sense. For Butler, duties are absolute,

given his understanding of our ideal human nature. In addition, such duties cannot be trumped by obligations to the common good. Regarding egoism, Butler surely doesn't ground such duties in self-interest alone; in fact, few philosophers, if any, inveighed against egoism as vigorously as Joseph Butler.

Butler can be construed as arguing for obligations (a word he employs more than duties) to oneself in three ways. One way emerges from his view of self-love, which he opposes to the immoderate pursuit of particular passions; the second from his discussion of the supremacy of conscience; the third from his thoughts on self-deception. He cites three kinds of self-deception—which he frequently refers to as "self-partiality"—and in so doing provides an example of a negative obligation to self. Butler is convinced that by self-partiality an agent is willfully blind and thus overlooks and excuses much that is wrong about himself. So this tendency toward self-partiality is the source of much immorality.

Before getting to his specific arguments, some preliminary points about Butler's manner of proceeding are in order. In the preface to his *Fifteen Sermons* (1726), Butler suggests that there are two ways in which the subject of morals may be treated. The first proceeds by "inquiring into the abstract relations of things" and the second "from a matter of fact, namely, what the peculiar nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine the course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature." 91 In the former method the conclusion is that "vice is contrary to the nature and reason of things" and in the latter that vice is "a violation or breaking in upon our own nature." Butler insists that both ways lead us to the same conclusion: "our obligations to the practice of virtue." 92

Butler then suggests that the *Sermons* follow from the second method. That is, his discourses are "intended to explain what is meant by the nature of man, when it is said that virtue consists in the following, and vice in deviating from it; and by explaining to show that the assertion is true." He adds that the "ancient moralists had some feeling or other" that man "is born to virtue, that it consists in following nature" (which for Butler means his ideal nature), and thus that vice is "more contrary to this nature than tortures or death." [93]

I will first consider his analysis of self-love. From the onset of Butler's discussion of self-love it is evident that he argues for the existence of self-regarding morality. His view about self-love can be found in his *Fifteen Sermons*, delivered at the Rolls Chapel in London, and *A Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue*, which is one of the appendices to his *Analogy of Religion* (1736). For Butler self-love cannot be overridden or even compromised by other-regarding considerations. Put another way, one sees in Butler the requirements that denote obligations to oneself in the strong sense I've elaborated. He is not arguing that there is an obligation to the common good and thus a derivative obligation to ourselves because as agents we are a subset of that common good. However one wishes to classify Butler, he is surely not a utilitarian arguing that self-interest is secondary to or derivative from the interests of others. [94]

In addition, in his discussion of self-love Butler does not argue for duties to oneself by assuming egoism to be true. Far from being a proponent of egoism, Butler, perhaps to a greater degree than any eighteenth century philosopher, employs arguments to reject egoism. In a famous passage from the Preface he writes,

> 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 most prevalent in them, much more than to self-love. 95

The egoist—that person "engaged in the gratification of particular passions"—doesn't posses an excess of self-love. Rather, it is precisely because of his undue attention to various particular passions "unfriendly to virtue" that he is paradoxically deficient in self-love. In short, he does not know in what his happiness consists.

Butler's manner of thinking on the matter is reminiscent of Plato. 96 Appetites often get the better of agents. Agents do at times allow particular passions to overrule what is in their genuine self-interest. Under the influence of strong impulses, like rage or envy or any number of desires—even affections for others—men will often act in ways they know are imprudent.

Butler is in disagreement with those—like Kurt Baier and Marcus Singer, who I will discuss in chapter three—who would argue that it is in the nature of morality that all duties must be other-regarding. This view that morality is social in nature presupposes that persons are predisposed toward their own well-being and that all that is needed to fulfill their moral obligations is to help others. On the contrary, Butler goes to great pains to point out that persons often act in ways that go against their own well-being.

In contrast with the picture he paints of an agent who frequently succumbs to passions, on Butler's view genuine self-love might be understood as a kind of reflexive benevolence; or benevolence directed toward oneself. There is nothing in Butler's *Sermons* arguing that agents must suppress their self-love. On the contrary, they have an obligation to cultivate proper self-love or what he frequently calls "cool self-love," the word "cool"

implying something calm and rational. Butler thus stands a tired view on its head—the view that says that love of oneself is essentially egoistic and therefore necessarily opposed to benevolence. Rather, cool self-love and love for others are coincident. As such, self-love is not a morally neutral option for agents. Cultivating self-love is every bit as obligatory as what are sometimes referred to as the other-regarding virtues. The effect of cultivating self-love is that it is bound to "prevent numberless follies and vices." 97

Butler argues that agents possess an ideal human nature in which four components must be ordered. It is necessary to understand the place of these four in our nature before fully understanding his argument for self-love. The first of these components are particular passions or affections. By this he means "all particular movements towards particular external objects; the appetites of sense, resentment, compassion, curiosity, ambition, and the rest." 98 For Butler these surely include hunger, sexual desire, anger, envy, sympathy, and others. Though some of these passions and affections benefit oneself and some benefit others, this fact alone doesn't prove self-love in the first case, or benevolence in the latter. This is because Butler believes that affections, impulses and passions must be checked by self-love.

People confuse self-interest with self-love, Butler thinks. But while all actions springing from self-love are interested, the reverse would not be true. Not all interested actions are truly illustrative of self-love.

By "interest" Butler means that which promotes our happiness, not some momentary payoff or gratification or ephemeral pleasure which may in reality be opposed to our interests. This is why when Singer says in speaking of duty to oneself, "What we have here is an appeal to self-interest disguised in the language of duty," Butler would

disagree, but only in part. 99 Surely, such duties—whether the talk is of our own well-being, self-love, or the importance of carrying out our own commitments and projects—are often couched in terms of self-interest. But for Butler there is no necessary opposition between duty and interest. Indeed, genuine self-love and self-interest are perfectly coincident. Thus for someone like Singer the following argument is valid:

(1) It is always the case that to act out of self-interest is different than acting out of duty
(2) Jones acted out of self-interest.
(3) So, Jones didn't act out of duty.

But Butler rejects the major premise, asserting that self-interest and duty are not mutually exclusive. When Jones acts in accord in with his real self-interest, he is acting in accord with his ideal nature and thus acting morally and out of duty.

The person activated by self-love is prudent; he acts in accord with a calculating principle. This "cool" or "settled" selfishness Butler opposes to "passionate" or "sensual" selfishness. To draw a conceptual divide, he labels the former "self-love" and the actions issuing from self-love "interested;" the latter, actions that "are not love to ourselves, but movements towards somewhat external: honor, power, the harm or good of another."

This is not to say, of course, that Butler is opposed to all passions. Mankind is not "wholly actuated by either" self-love or particular passions, for both have their influence. He explains that

> the very idea of an interested pursuit necessarily presupposes particular passions or appetites; since the very idea of interest or happiness consists in this, that an appetite or affection enjoys its object. It is not because we love ourselves that we find delight in such and such objects, but because we have particular affections towards them. Take away these affections, and you leave self-love absolutely nothing at all to employ itself about; no end or object for it to pursue, excepting only that of avoiding pain. 100

And if particular affections for all sorts of external objects are consistent with self-love, so is benevolence.

Just as it is self-love's function to coordinate particular impulses and co-ordinate them in a principled way to prudently maximize our happiness in the long run, benevolence plays a similar role. Just as an agent's particular passions and affections are not proof positive of self-love, so the passions and affections for those we see in distress are not manifestations of genuine benevolence. As self-love's intent is to act prudently to increase our long-term happiness, so it is the place of benevolence to increase general happiness. Self-love and benevolence are in essence mirror principles, with each urging us to ignore short-term goods for long-term goods.

But it is the relation between them that is most interesting. Butler argues that benevolence promotes self-love and vice versa.

> Though the former tends most directly to public good, and the latter to private: yet they are so perfectly coincident, that the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due degree; and that self-love is one chief security of our right behavior towards society. 101

Before stating in exactly what manner Butler argues for duties to oneself, we must review his principle of conscience. Butler argues that it is not enough that men abstain from "gross wickedness." Nor is it enough merely to be "humane and kind to such as happen to come in their way." To do so would be minimally moral.

> Whereas in reality the very constitution of our nature requires, that we bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty; wait its determination; enforce upon ourselves its authority; and make it the business of our lives, as it is absolutely the whole business of a moral agent to conform ourselves to it. That is the meaning of that ancient precept, *Reverence Thyself* 102

Just as he is clear in showing agents' obligations to self-love, Butler is unequivocal in saying that agents have an obligation to heed the dictates of conscience. "The natural authority of the principle of reflection is an obligation most near and intimate," he argues. By nature he means "not only the several parts of our internal frame, but also the constitution of it." 103 These several parts include our passions and affections, self-love, and benevolence—parts that need an authoritative principle like conscience, just as a civil constitution needs one direction. 104

Furthering this civic analogy, Butler, in Sermon III, "Upon Human Nature," writes that the principle of reflection or conscience is superior to the various appetites, passions, and affections in men, so that if "the latter happens to prevail it is mere usurpation." It is evident then that "every instance of such prevalence of the latter is a breaking in and violation of the constitution of man."105 In addition, this principle of reflection was for Butler a principle of action in the sense of being a "motivational source of conduct," as were his principles of cool self-love and benevolence. 106

Aside from Butler's idea that our internal constitution is weakened and "usurped" by vice, he finds proof for his notion of the obligation to obey conscience and practice virtue in our "reflex approbation" of goodness and "disapprobation" of vice. In fact, Butler's primary criticism of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry* was "not taking into consideration this authority, which is implied in the idea of reflex approbation or disapprobation." 107

> Though a man should doubt of everything else, yet, that he would still remain under the nearest and most certain obligation to the practice of virtue; an obligation implied in the very idea of virtue, in the very idea of reflex approbation. 108

For my purposes it must be noted that this "certain obligation" to virtue rooted in the "reflex approbation of what is good" and disapprobation of vice extends indifferently toward others and self. As Butler writes, if a person should sacrifice his self-love—his virtue—for the "little" that can be gained by vice, he cannot commit such a transgression "without being self-condemned." 109

Seeing that Butler grounds our obligation to be virtuous in our nature, we can employ the following argument to understand his view on self-regarding obligations (references are to *Sermon* book and paragraph numbers).

> (1) It is our nature that particular appetites, passions and affections—and self-love and benevolence—should be brought under the "direction" of the one superior principle of reflection or conscience. (III, para. 2)
> (2) It is by this faculty of conscience that man is a moral agent (that he is a law to himself) (III, para. 3)
> (3) For an agent to bring his behavior under this faculty (that is, under the authority of the reflective principle of conscience), means to not allow particular affections and passions to overrule his real interests (or genuine self-love), interests which are evidenced in prudent behavior and productive of his happiness. (III, para. 2)
> (4) His happiness consists in following the "middle way;" that is, in enjoying riches, honors, sensual gratification (and other objects of our passions and affections) to only a certain degree (II, para. 11)
> (5) An agent who routinely allows passions—anger, envy, revenge, and various appetites—to overrule his nature lives a ruinous life. (Sermon II, para. 12)
> (6) To live a dissolute life is allowing vice to overrule virtue.
> (7) To allow vice to overrule virtue is to violate our nature (as defined in (1))
> (8) To violate our nature is to violate a moral obligation (Preface, para. 27)
> (9) This obligation is grounded in our "reflex approbation of goodness" and disapprobation of vice. (Preface, para. 27)
> (10) This inward disapproval of vice includes a disapproval of actions "ruinous" to agents' "real happiness and interests." (I, para. 14) or, what amounts to the same thing, a disapproval of imprudence in ourselves and others (*Dissertation II: Of the Nature of Virtue.* Sec. 8) 110
> (11) Given (9), these imprudent actions—by which agents are the authors and instruments of their own misery and ruin and are as "unjust to themselves as to others"—are disapproved in ourselves and in others. (*Dissertation II,* sec. 8*)*
> (12) Such actions are disapproved not merely on subjective grounds, but because (as stated in 1) it is the obligation of to agents to obey the law of their nature.

(13) It is thus immoral to act against prudence—which is a part of virtue (*Dissertation II*, Sec. 8) –or, what is the same thing, unjustly toward oneself.

It is evident from Sermons I-III and from *A Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue* that persons can not only act immorally and against plain obligations to themselves, but that they *do.* Just as persons are capable of malevolence toward others, they are just as capable of self-hatred. This reflexive immorality goes against cool self-love just as immorality toward others goes against benevolence. 111

Both are immoral because the actions they include are "disproportionate" to our nature. For just as persons "neglect the duties they owe to their fellow creatures, to which their nature is abhorrent," so there is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification." 112 Agents are frequently the authors of their own miseries; it is evident that they have "dispositions and principles" which lead to "sickness, pain and death."

For my purposes, it is also evident that these obligations cannot be compromised but are absolute. For Butler agents have an obligation to act virtuously but this obligation is not secondary to their obligations to act on behalf of others. For Butler there is no scenario under which we might permissibly violate our nature as virtuous agents in order to achieve some "greater good." There is no mention in Butler of our greater obligation to others than to ourselves. Further, it is evident that he is not arguing for egoism but against it. It is selfishness and acting against our interests that is contrary to our nature and the self-love that Butler recommends.

Thus for Butler injustice to others is mirrored by the injustice persons do to themselves. That Butler's account of the source of this injustice is in its own manner

ironic is clear from his section on self-deception. Persons do the greatest damage to themselves because of what he calls "self-partiality." While proper self-love, under the guidance of conscience, can be a well-spring of moral good, self-partiality is a near certain well-spring of moral evil. Butler argues the point that unnatural self-love stems from self-partiality and willful blindness about one's own vice and folly.

So while there is no necessary opposition between self-love and regard for others, there is surely an opposition between self-partiality and goodness. He writes,

> I am persuaded that a very great part of the wickedness of the world is, one way or another, owing to the self-partiality, self-flattery, and self-deceit, endeavored there to be laid open and explained. It is to be observed amongst persons of the lowest rank, in proportion to their compass of thought, as much as among men of education and improvement. It seems that people are capable of being thus artful with themselves, in proportion as they are capable of being so with others. Those who have taken notice that there really is such a thing, namely, plain falseness and insincerity in men with regard to themselves will readily see the drift and design of these Discourses: and nothing that I can add will explain the design of them to him, who has not before remarked, at least, somewhat of the character. 113

The moral psychologist *par excellence*, Butler is here building the case that self-deception is a kind of root moral phenomenon, wherein much of what is wrong with oneself is dismissed due to this "artful" and morally inadequate inspection of oneself due to self-partiality. This self-partiality is commonplace both among those "of the lowest rank" and perhaps more so among "men of education and improvement."

What is not commonplace is Butler's perspicacity about how immorality stems from self-deceit.

> But if there be any such thing in mankind as putting half-deceits upon themselves; which there plainly is, either by avoiding reflection, or (if they do reflect) by religious equivocation, subterfuges, and palliating matters to themselves; by these means conscience may be laid asleep, and they may go on in a course of wickedness with less disturbance. All the various doubles, intricacies in a dishonest heart, cannot be unfolded

> or laid open; but there is somewhat that kind is manifest, be it to be called self-deceit, or by any other name. 114

By self-deceit one can practice any manner of wrongness without acknowledging that one is doing wrong. Simply put, "when conscience is laid to sleep" we can explain away our duties to ourselves and to others.

Butler repeatedly makes this point about immorality being the inevitable effect of self-partiality in Sermon X, "Upon Self-Deceit."

> This likewise was the reason why that precept, *Know thyself,* was so frequently inculcated by the philosophers of old. For if it were not for that partial and fond regard to ourselves, it would certainly be no great difficulty to know our own character, what passes within the bent and bias of our mind; much less would there be any difficulty in judging rightly of our own actions. 115

And again,

> There is plainly, in the generality of mankind, an absence of doubt or distrust, in a very great measure, as to their moral character and behavior; and likewise a disposition to take for granted, that all is right and well with them in these respects. The former is owing to their not reflecting, not exercising their judgment upon themselves; the latter, to self-love. 116

And again,

> …There are instances of persons having so fixed and steady an eye upon their own interest, whatever they place it in, and the interest of those whom they consider as themselves, as in a manner to regard nothing else; their views are almost confined to this alone. Now we cannot be acquainted with, or in any propriety of speech be said to know any thing, but what we attend to. If therefore they attend only to one side, they really will not, cannot see or know what is to be alleged on the other. Though a man has the best eyes in the world he cannot see any way but that which he turns them. 117

This very avoidance of knowing oneself, this refusal to reflect on oneself and one's actions, this blindness and unwillingness to inspect one's own life results in a purposeful ignorance

of one's character and constant source of immorality. Rather than shine a light on one's own peccadilloes, an agent in the grip of self-partiality lives in willful obscurity about his true condition.

Another way in which self-deception "darkens the understanding" is by exaggerating injuries to ourselves. In Sermon VIII, "Upon Resentment and Forgiveness of Injuries," Butler writes

> With respect to deliberate resentment, the chief instances of abuse are: when partiality to ourselves, we imagine an injury done us, when there is none: when this partiality represents it to us greater than it really is: when we fall into that extravagant and monstrous kind of resentment, towards one who has innocently been the occasion of evil to us; that is, resentment upon account of pain or inconveniences, without injury…118

And again,

> Self-love is a medium of a peculiar kind; in these cases it magnifies every thing which is amiss in others, at the same time that it lessens everything amiss in ourselves. 119

Our attitude toward others' treatment of us includes overlooking our own injuries to others and not forgiving theirs to us. Again, self-partiality is a root moral phenomenon, extending to all our attitudes and actions and creating a distortion that results in vice.

There are three ways in which self-partiality results in immorality. The first way—and the one most relevant to the discussion of self-love—has to do with the kind of self-partiality that results in succumbing to passions. This kind of immorality occurs specifically for agents when "reasonable concern for themselves, or cool self-love, is prevailed over by passion and appetite." So again Butler's main theme rears its head: it is not over fondness for self that steers persons to act wrongly; rather, it is fondness for the

wrong objects. Agents don't have too much regard for themselves but too little; hence, they mistreat themselves as often as they do others, for they do not know what their happiness consists in. The actions that violate other's interests, say Butler, are the same actions that violate one's own. So self-love, in general, ought not to be the target of our condemnation.

On the contrary, in Sermon I, "Upon Human Nature," Butler proves that it is a deficit of "cool self-love" and an excess of passion that undercuts agents' happiness.

> Or is it not manifestly owing either to this, that they have not cool and reasonable concern for themselves to consider wherein their chief happiness in the present life consists; or else, if they do consider it, that they will not act conformably to what is the result of that consideration: reasonable concern for themselves, or cool self-love is prevailed over by passion and appetite. 120

In sum,

> There is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification; for the sake of which they negligently, nay, even knowingly, are the authors and instruments of their own misery and ruin. Thus they are often unjust to themselves as to others, and for the most part are equally so to both by the same actions. 121

Butler thinks that the locus of immorality is the battle between the passions and the authority of conscience. When "several appetites, passions and affections, prevailing in different degrees of strength" override reason and the individual's true concerns, the result is the better principle in us is losing to the lesser. Butler employs a civic analogy:

> …As in civil government the constitution is broken in upon, and violated by power and strength prevailing over authority so the constitution of man is broken in upon and violated by the lower faculties

> or principles prevailing over that which is in its nature supreme over them all. 122

But if conscience prevails, then there can be no opposition between love of self and love of others. Indeed, the concerns of self-love and other-regarding affections coincide. Butler repeats the Epicurean philosophy that if "the strength of self-love were sufficient it would eliminate temporal distractions and follies and vices."

> It is manifest that, in the common course of life, there is seldom any inconsistency between our duty and what is called interest: it is much seldomer that there is any inconsistency between duty and what is really our present interests, happiness and satisfaction. Self-love then, though, confined to the interest of the present world, does in general perfectly coincide with virtue; and leads us to one and the same course of life. But whatever exceptions there are to this, which are much fewer than they are commonly thought, all shall be set right at the final distribution of things. It is a manifest absurdity to suppose evil prevailing over good, under the conduct and administration of a perfect mind. 123

The self-virtues and the private, far from being at odds, are mutually enhancing. Genuine self-love—as opposed to the superficial pursuit of one's "interest" or payoff of the moment—would improve not only an agent's own moral situation but those of others to whom he was connected. Thus Butler writes,

> I must however remind you that though benevolence and self-love are different; though the former tends most directly to the public good, and the latter to private; yet they are so perfectly coincident, that the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due degree; and that self-love is one chief security of our right behavior towards society, It may be added, that their mutual coinciding so that we can scarce promote the one without the other, is equally a proof that we were made for both. 124

I have argued that Butler's conclusion is that we have a negative obligation to avoid self-deception. Here his moral psychology comes to the fore; he is inveighing against self-partiality for he sees that it is this "falseness and insincerity" that is the source of willful blindness about oneself. Self-love is laudable because moral; self-partiality, not.

Butler has been variously classified. With his stress on conscience and how it furnishes the information for moral decisions, he could surely be regarded as a deontologist. He might also be viewed as a fusion of Aristotelian thinking that grounds virtue in human nature and the duty-centered ethic found in Kant.

Butler did not use general moral rules as premises from which moral judgments about particular situations could be deduced. In fact, it is not clear that he thought that moral rules—of the kind found in utilitarianism or deontology, for instance—to be important. Despite not invoking moral rules, he still holds to an objective theory of obligation, a theory based on our living a life in accordance with our ideal nature. Thus he is able to make claims such as "Interest, one's own happiness, is a manifest obligation" and "Your obligation to obey this law, the moral law, is its being the law of your nature."

His not acknowledging moral rules is but one salient characteristic of Butler's ethics. Another is his unfailing view that what I am under an obligation to do always coincides with what it is in my best interests to do. In sum, whether Butler is writing of our obligation to self-love, or cultivating virtue, or the obligation not to self-deceive, he is an uncompromising defender of the idea that there are self-regarding obligations.

Immanuel Kant

More extensively than anyone in the history of ethics, Immanuel Kant argued for the existence of duties to oneself. His extensive analysis of duties to oneself can be found in two places, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785) and in the *Lectures on Ethics* (1775).

In the former work he begins with his familiar analysis of a good will, arguing that such a will is not good because of what it accomplishes but because of its willing. This signals that for Kant the consequences or effects of actions are not morally determinative. Rather, the morally determinative factor is whether agents act from duty or, what amounts to the same thing, out of reverence for the moral law. Since it is Kant's concept of duty that determines how agents are to act, it is not imperative that agents act from inclination to produce good consequences for themselves or others. Agents ought never to act except in such a way that they can will that their maxims become universal laws. Since universal law applies indiscriminately to self and others, the conclusion is inescapable that I have self-regarding *and* other-regarding duties.

Duties to oneself follow from any of his Kant's three formulations of the categorical imperative.

Kant claims that there is only a "single categorical imperative" and it is:

> Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. 125

But he asserts that this universal imperative of duty can also be recast as follows:

> Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end. 126

The third formula is:

> All maxims proceeding from our own making of law ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature. 127

It is the second formulation, with its stress on humanity "in your own person or in the person of any other," that seems to address the issue of duties to self most directly. It implies that we may be able to separate out those instances of treating persons as ends, on the one hand, and treating them as means, on the other.

But either of Kant's first two formulations, with their stress on universality, requires that agents discharge duties to themselves. This is so, because the categorical imperative approves of or disapproves of maxims without regard to whether those maxims are self-regarding or other-regarding. In fact, he states in his *Lectures on Ethics*: "The first among all duties is the duty I owe to myself." 128

Later, in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, Kant twice offered four illustrations of duties (categorized as duties to oneself and others and perfect and imperfect), once after giving the first formula of the categorical imperative and then again after giving the second formula.

To show that Kant argued for such duties in the strongest manner possible, we need only recall that far from regarding duties to oneself as secondary in importance to our duties to others, or as somehow incidental to morality, Immanuel Kant argues that our self-regarding duties are primary.

Duties to oneself are primary among all duties, he argues, because they are a precondition of our duty toward others.

> Only if our worth as human begins is intact can we perform our other duties; for it is the foundation stone of all other duties. A man who has

> destroyed and cast away his personality, has no intrinsic worth, and can no longer perform any manner of duty. 129

And again,

> Our duties to oneself are of primary importance and should have pride of place, for nothing can be expected of a man who dishonors his own person. He who transgresses against himself loses his manliness and becomes incapable of doing his duty toward his fellows. 130

And again,

> A man who performed his duty to others badly, who lacked generosity but nevertheless did his duty to himself by leading a proper life, might yet possess a certain inner-worth, but he who has transgressed his duty towards himself can have no worth whatever. Thus a man who fails in a duty to himself loses worth absolutely while a man who fails towards others loses worth relatively. 131

Despite this primacy of duties to oneself, the subject of duties to oneself, in the words of Kant, constitute a kind of "afterthought" among many moralists. "Just as an innkeeper gives a thought to his own hunger when his customers have finished eating," Kant says, "so a man gives a thought to himself at the long last for fear that he might forget himself altogether." 132

While it is possible to counter Kant's argument about the primacy of duties to oneself, for my purposes such a counter is unnecessary. The bone of contention at present is not whether fulfilling duties to oneself is a precondition for carrying out our duties to others. Rather, the issue is whether he thinks duties to oneself can be compromised or not. That is, the issue at hand is how convincingly Kant argues for duties to oneself and if he defends such duties in the strong sense.

Again, it is second formulation of the categorical imperative, with its stress on humanity "in your own person or in the person of any other," is the best of Kant's three formulas for a strong defense of duties to oneself. It implies that we may be able to separate out those instances of treating persons as ends, on the one hand, and treating them as means, on the other.

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he first considers the case of the agent who contemplates suicide. His question ought to be "Can my action be compatible with the idea of humanity *as an end in itself*?" 133 The answer is "no," since his maxim is born of self-interest and if he "does away with himself" in order to escape a painful future, he is treating himself as a *means.* But an agent must not treat himself as a thing but always as an end in himself. Suicide is unexceptionally wrong, since "disposing of oneself as a mere means to an end of one's liking is debasing humanity in one's own person." Hence, this is, in Kant's words, a perfect duty (he also labels it "necessary") not to take one's own life. It is unexceptional, or a duty of narrow latitude, always binding agents regardless of consequences.

Then Kant considers contingent or "meritorious" duties to oneself. While imperfect or wider duties allow the agent some choice of how to apply the duty, agents must still act to promote the end in question. Thus with the duty of developing one's talents it is not prescribed exactly how I will behave or when in order to fulfill such a duty. And it is not enough that I adopt the minimal posture of doing nothing to "conflict" with such self-development. Rather, I must regard the duty as a positive obligation to be furthered. In a sense, such positive duties—like an agent's duty to develop his talents and the duty to act

benevolently—are continual. Put another way, positive or "meritorious" duties—when compared with contractual or "juridical" duties—are never discharged once and for all.

Thus Kant writes:

> Fulfillment of [imperfect duties] is *merit*; but failure to fulfill them is not in itself *culpability* but rather mere *deficiency in moral worth*, unless the subject should make it his principle not to comply with such duties….It is when an intentional transgression has become a principle that it is properly called a *vice*. 134

In the *Groundwork*, Kant makes clear that maxims of not helping others and not improving ourselves violate the categorical imperative. 135

Kant's class of imperfect duties allows agents greater latitude. Does this mean that he is arguing for such imperfect duties in a weaker sense? No. Our duty to develop our talents, for example, is still a strong duty, but allows for a significant degree of freedom in complying with it. This is because wide duties do not prescribe exactly how a person should behave. So, there is no one way in which an agent can fulfill the obligation to develop his talents. The general maxim to develop one's talents does not tell an agent which talent to develop and when, or to what extent and what manner and so forth.

But the latitude allowed agents in complying with imperfect duties does not render such duties "weak." They are still absolute duties in that they cannot be trumped by other duties. I still have the obligation to develop my talents and act benevolently; I must discharge these obligations at one time or another. Thus Kant argues,

> …in regard to contingent (meritorious) duty to oneself, it is not enough that an action should refrain from conflicting with humanity in our own person as an end in itself: it must also harmonize with this end. Now there are in humanity capacities for greater perfection which form part of nature's purpose for humanity in our person. To neglect these can admittedly be compatible with the maintenance of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the promotion of this end. 136

Thus a person failing with regard to his self-development is also failing to promote humanity as an end.

With duties to oneself in general, Kant acknowledges a duty of self-mastery covering more than just duties concerning appetites for food, drink and sex. It is of fundamental importance, since it underlies the performance of duties to self. The drunkard, the servile person, the person who makes himself a means for another's pleasure, the liar—all fail morally, regardless of whether their failure affects the lives of others. Thus Kant does not ground duties to oneself in utility. Nor do agents fail morally because they undercut their own chances at happiness. The duties owed to ourselves do not depend on how our actions further or mitigate our happiness. For,

> If they did, they, they would depend upon our inclinations and so be governed by the rules of prudence. Such rules are not moral, since they indicate only the necessity of the means for the satisfaction of inclinations, and cannot therefore bind us. 137

Having rejected utilitarian, egoistic and prudential premises for supporting the conclusion that there are duties to oneself, Kant proceeds to argue that they are grounded in the "worth of the person." Again, the second formulation of the categorical imperative demands that agents treat themselves as ends.

In addition to Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, in his "Doctrine of Right" in the *Metaphysics of Morals* he generates similar conclusions about what it means to be moral toward oneself. There he explains what it means to be honorable.

> *Be an honorable human being* (honeste vive). *Rightful honor (honestas juridical)* consists in asserting one's worth as a human being in relation to

> others, a duty expressed by the saying, "Do not make yourself a mere means for others but be at the same time an end for them." 138

There is more than a passing similarity between this principle and the perfect ethical duty to avoid servility.

Carnal self-defilement and "self-stupefaction" resulting from an immoderate use of food or drink are similarly prohibited. As with self-murder, the wrong lies in treating oneself as a means; all such cases represent a misuse of our freedom, freedom which should be used for purposes of restraint.

A person who fails in his obligations to himself violates his moral worth as a person. Indeed, "The basis of such obligations is not to be found in the advantages we reap from our duty toward ourselves but in the worth of manhood." 139

And again,

> Our duties toward ourselves constitute the supreme condition and the principle of all morality; for moral worth is the worth of the person as such; our capacities have a value only in regard to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Socrates lived in a state of wretchedness; his circumstances were worthless; but though his circumstances were so ill-conditioned, yet he himself was of the highest value. 140

The worth of our humanity remains intact even if we are without "life's amenities."

Kant goes on to list other violations of duties to self merely as a moral being. He argues that miserliness, servility and cowardice also violate duties to self.

> Miserliness is not itself mistaken thrift: it is slavish subjection of oneself to riches, which is a violation of duty to oneself since one ought to be master of these. It is opposed to liberality of mind as such. 141

He spends considerably more time explicating our negative duty to avoid servility.

Regarded as a person, man is not to be valued as a mere means to the ends of others, or even to his own ends, but always as an end in itself.

> Man should seek his end, which is in itself a duty, not abjectly, not in a servile spirit, as if he were seeking a favor, not disavowing his dignity, but always with consciousness of his sublime moral disposition. And his self-esteem is a duty of man to himself...
>
> But deliberately to set aside one's own moral worth merely as a means to acquiring the favor of another no matter who he may be is false humility, which is contrary to duty to oneself since it is an abasement of one's personality. 142

The negative duty to avoid servility is at once a positive duty to respect oneself, for a person who is servile "casts away his manhood." Here the notion of dignity is inextricably bound up with duty: to submit to indignities is to violate one's duty. (Kant thinks that the same is true of servility when it is directed at religious objects. Thus, "kneeling down or prostrating oneself on the ground, even as an outward sign of veneration for holy things, is contrary to the dignity of humanity, as in invoking these in the presence of images.") 143

Under this heading, Kant also addresses several elements of "proper self-respect." Humility and "true, noble pride" are included, but a deficiency of these attributes is not self-respecting.

> A low opinion of oneself in relation to others is not humility. It's a sign of a little spirit and a servile character. To flatter oneself that this is a virtue is to mistake an imitation for the genuine article; it's a monk's virtue and not at all natural. 144

Drawing on this premise about a person not disavowing one's own dignity, Kant deduces several other duties falling under the category of negative duties related to servility. Thus he instructs, (1) "be no man's lackey; do not led others tread with impunity on your right" and (2) "contract no debut for which you cannot give full security." 145 The latter case of contracting the debt, an agent might end up being beholden to another. Even after the debt is paid, I still owe my benefactor a debt of gratitude. Similarly, Kant argues

that by accepting favors also violates a duty to oneself, for by accepting factors I contract a debt. “Who can accept such a debt?” Kant asks. Of this negative duty, Kant writes, “Do not accept favors you could do without and do not become a parasite or a flatterer or a beggar. Be thrifty, then, so that you will not become destitute.” 146

In addition, those who lack boldness and are so weak that they are given to complaining violate a duty to oneself. “They—the faint-hearted who complain, sigh, and weep—are despicable in our eyes,” says Kant. “We do our best to avoid them.” Thus Kant concludes, “One who is bold in the face of misfortune deserves our respect.” Even “A criminal’s death may be ennobled by the resoluteness with which he dies.” 147

Kant’s entire catalogue of duties is a description of duties in the strong sense. Whether such duties are modified by the qualifiers “perfect” or “imperfect” they are absolute: they cannot be compromised or be overridden in importance by considerations of the common good. Nor does the fulfillment of duties to oneself depend upon our happiness.

William Kingdom Clifford

Writing in *The Ethics of Belief (1877),* W. K. Clifford discusses a different kind of duty—a duty that is at once epistemological and moral. Persons have a duty of believing only true statements supported by evidence. “The existence of a belief not founded on fair enquiry unfits a man for the performance of his necessary duty,” Clifford says. 148 Later he puts the matter more strongly: “It is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, or to nourish beliefs by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigations.” 149

At first glance it might appear that Clifford is writing of two duties—one intellectual and one moral. In actuality the two are intertwined. Holding a belief on insufficient evidence is wrong on first principle or deontological grounds, according to

Clifford. A utilitarian might also point out that holding false beliefs could also produce harmful consequences, but this is not what concerns Clifford. Because he is far more concerned with deontological reasons, he argues for the duty of holding well-considered beliefs in the strong sense. His most famous statement of duty is cast in the form of a negative imperative: "It is always wrong for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence." Stated positively, agents have a duty to examine all beliefs and strive to accept only true ones. It is true, a priori, that we must "extend our judgment to all beliefs" no matter "how unimportant the belief is." 150

Clifford mentions non-consequentialist reasons for unfounded beliefs being immoral.

> Belief is desecrated when (1) given to unproved or unquestioned statements, for the solace and private pleasure of the believer; (2) to add a tinsel splendor to the plain straight road of our life and to display a bright mirage behind it; or (3) even to drown the common sorrows of our kind by a self-deception, which allows them not only to cast down but also to degrade us. 151

The "desecration" owes to the unquestioned belief, especially if the unquestioned nature of it is motivated by the benefit to be derived from not questioning it.

What follows for Clifford is a universal duty of "questioning all that we believe." Again, the duty doesn't follow from what results from holding the belief. Whether the false belief produced harm or good consequences makes no difference.

> If a belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence it is stolen, and the pleasure that accrues to believing is stolen. Not only does it deceive ourselves by giving us a power which we don't possess, but it's sinful, because it's stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind. … If I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there can be no great harm done by the mere belief; it may be true after all, or I may never have occasion to

> exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong towards man, that I make myself credulous. 152

Clifford's most famous case of immoral credulity is elaborated in *The Ethics of Belief*. Clifford instances a shipowner who sends his well-worn ship to sea. Though he knows the ship could benefit from an inspection, he stifles all doubts and suspicions about the vessel's seaworthiness. Thus, when the ship goes down in mid-ocean, "He got his insurance money" and "told no tales" for he had "acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy." What can we deduce about the owner's culpability?

> Surely this, that he was verily guilty of the death of those men. It is admitted that he did sincerely believe in the soundness of his ship; but the sincerity of his conviction can in no wise help him, because he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him.

This is because,

> He had acquired his belief not by honestly earning it in patient investigation, but by stifling his doubts. And although in the end he may have felt so sure about it that he could not think otherwise, yet inasmuch as he had knowingly and willingly worked himself into that frame of mind, he must be held responsible for it. 153

It is the unquestioned nature of his belief, his very unearned credulity, that makes the belief immoral.

That Clifford argues in a strong, first principled way and that this unquestioned belief is the locus of immorality is made especially clear by his second example.

> Let us alter the case a little, and suppose that the ship was not unsound after all; that she made her voyage safely, and many others after it. Will that diminish the guilt of her owner? Not one jolt. When an action is once done, it is right or wrong forever; no accidental failure of its good or evil fruits can possibly alter that. The man would not have been innocent, he would only have not been found out. The question of right or wrong has to

> do with the origin of his belief, not the matter of it; not what it was, but how he got it; not whether it turned out to be true or false, but whether he had a right to believe on such evidence as was before him. 154

Clifford argues for this duty to self in a strong manner. The duty to believe only on considered evidence cannot be overridden, ever, even by any comforts that might be gained from holding the false belief. The duty is absolute: to found beliefs on fair enquiry, instead of suppressed doubts; on sufficient evidence, instead of avoided investigations.

Hardy Jones

In his article "Treating Oneself Wrongly," Hardy Jones argues that it is a legitimate theoretical and ethical question whether agents can harm themselves or violate their own rights. He asserts that if it is wrong as a matter of general principle to cause unnecessary suffering, then it must also be wrong to cause oneself unnecessary suffering. 155 He reasons that if it is wrong to cause persons A, B and C unnecessary suffering, then one cannot contend that the act is somehow less bad if another person, D, had caused their suffering rather than A, B or C causing the suffering to themselves.

Jones sets out to show that there are genuine cases of reflexive wrongdoing.

> The issue concerns the reasons or grounds on which certain self-regarding actions are condemnable. The fact that others are wronged by A's conduct need not prevent us from fruitfully inquiring whether A wrongs himself. Even if all self-regarding acts are also other-regarding, we can still focus attention on the self-regarding aspects. 156

For Jones, the primary way of wronging oneself is to "violate one's own rights." If one accepts the condition that there are basic human rights, then they would include but not be limited to (1) a right not to be killed, (2) the right not to endure unnecessary suffering,

(3) the right to a minimal level of freedom, (4) the right to be treated justly, and (5) the right to be treated respectfully in accord with human dignity.

In emphasizing the universal aspect of moral principles, Kant, Jones notes, did not allow that the universality principle applied differently to oneself than it did to others. Thus there are Kantian restraints—what Jones calls moral "self-restraints"—on self-regarding actions no less strict then the moral constraints on other-regarding actions.

He begins with the example of an agent who has been charged with the responsibility of distributing food during a period of serious shortage. If this agent reasonably undertakes his distribution based on what each person needs and deserves, and that he wishes to treat everyone fairly, then *he* has a right to be treated fairly. If he fails to treat himself and, say, three others fairly, then they have legitimate grounds for complaints and so does he—even if the complaint is against himself.

Jones provides several other examples of self-regarding restrictions. If a man were to sell his son into slavery to make money, he would be thought immoral. Likewise, one oughtn't sell oneself into slavery. Jones echoes Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative in acknowledging that the general principle that one ought not to degrade human beings applies to others and oneself with the same force. And, as for Kant, Jones insists the generalization covers instances of self-degradation and exploitation: "One is not morally free to allow others to do simply as they choose with her." 157

Marcus Singer had denied that there could be obligations to one's future self. 158 Jones, relying on a notion of self-other symmetry in morality, contends that such obligations do exist. Suppose that a man, at 30, begins smoking for many years and is

discovered to have cancer at the age of 60. He may judge his prior actions to be imprudent, but his self-criticism may take on even stronger moral tones: he may be full of resentment toward the younger man and he may even experience guilt over causing a person to have cancer.

But Jones saves the best ammunition for last. Singer had argued that the notion of releasing was essential to obligations and that, in particular,

> …no one can release himself from an obligation by not wishing to perform it or by deciding not to perform it, or, indeed, in any other way whatsoever. In other words, no one can release himself from an obligation, just as no one can release himself from a promise. 159

But Singer's conclusion that there are no obligations to oneself rests on this and another assumption that all obligations *are* releasable and that all rights are waivable. This assumption leads him to conclude that "a duty to oneself, then, would be a duty from which one could release oneself at will, and this is self-contradictory." 160

But not for Jones, who points out "If there are duties to oneself, they are duties from which persons cannot be released and whose correlative rights cannot be waived." 161 We can allow that a person, A, cannot release person B from the obligation to respect one's right to life. Could A really say to B, "You need not refrain from killing me?" If we allow that this and other kinds of rights possess a stringent feature such that they are duties from which one cannot be released and correlative rights from which one cannot be waived, then why wouldn't it follow that there are comparable duties to oneself from which one cannot be released and rights which cannot be waived? It would require a peculiarly asymmetrical kind of thinking to affirm the antecedent and deny the consequent.

In addition, those who deny duties to oneself often wish to fold moral behavior toward oneself into prudential behavior. But if prudence has to do with the careful, deliberate calculation and pursuit of a person's interests, then it is clear that "prudence does not cover the entire domain of rational constraints on self-regarding actions." This use of the word prudence is too broad, since it "subsumes all rational self-treatment under prudence." [162] Jones concludes,

> Prudence involves the careful calculation of interests—one's own and others. Morality involves the respectful consideration of rights—others' and one's own. The move from prudence to morality is not a move from self to others; it is a move from interests to rights. [163]

The distinction between prudent behavior and moral behavior is a move that allows for the possibility of moral obligations to oneself that aren't merely self-interested. Once the distinction is allowed, it is possible to acknowledge the existence of moral obligations to oneself.

Jones surely argues for duties to oneself in a strong sense. His Kantian acceptance of a first-principle approach to morality makes eminent sense of his conclusion: If one grants that there are basic human rights, and such rights include a right not to be killed and the right not to endure unnecessary suffering (and others already mentioned), then these rights could not be overridden. Such rights are absolute in the sense that they cannot give way to considerations of the general good and are also basic and hence not derivable from other rights.

Notes to Chapter Two

1 It might be argued, for instance, that if agents observe duties to themselves by not smoking or drinking excessively, then on a cost-benefit analysis they contribute to the society long-term, by not putting others at risk and not drawing unnecessarily on society's resources.

2 Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*. (New York: Hafner Press, 1948), p.310.

3 David Fordyce, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 2003), p. 55.

4 *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), p. 89

5 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Ed., by Oakeshott, Michael (New York: Macmillan, 1962), ch. 14, para. 9.

6 Ibid., ch. 14, para. 7

7 Ibid., ch 14, para. 5

8 Ibid., ch. 15, para. 4

9 Ibid., ch. 15, para. 5

10 Ibid., ch. 15, para. 7

11 Ibid., ch. 15, para. 5

12 Gregory S. Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 303

13 *Leviathan*, ch. 14, para. 1

14 By contrast, we will see that for Joseph Butler obligations to uphold contracts are grounded in the pronouncements of conscience. I will consider Butler in the second section of this chapter, "Philosophers Arguing for Duties to Oneself in the Strong Sense."

15 *Leviathan,* ch. 14, paras. 4 and 5

16 Ibid, ch. 15, para. 2

17 Ibid., ch. 14, para. 3

18 *Kavka*, p. 358

19 *Kavka,* p. 359

20 David Boonin-Vail has argued that Hobbes is not a rule egoist. Rather, he argues that Hobbes holds to a theory of virtue concerned with the development of good character traits. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

21 Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Book 1, ch. 3, sec. 9 (all references henceforth will be in book, chapter, and section sequence).

22 Bk 1, ch. 3, sec. 10

23 Bk 1, ch. 3, sec. 9

24 When Pufendorf says that each man must "receive some education in accordance with his capacity and fortune," he is not far from what Kant will later call a duty to develop one's talents. But for Kant the duty to develop these talents fits the category of an imperfect duty *to oneself*. By contrast, for Pufendorf men must "choose an honest way of life in accordance with his natural bent" for social reasons: he who fails to develop them will be a "useless burden on the earth, a problem to himself and a nuisance to others."

25 Bk. 1, ch. 5, sec. 2

26 Bk, 1, ch. 5, sec. 3

27Bk. 1, ch. 3, sec. 10

28 Bk. 1, ch. 5, sec. 1

29 Bk. 1, ch. 5, sec. 4

30 Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964)

31 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 250 (all references to the characteristics will be to volume and page number).

32 Vol. 1, p. 250

33 Vol. II, p. 86

34 Vol. I, p. 280

35 Vol. I, p. 248

36 Vol. I, p. 248

37 Vol. I, p. 248

38 Vol. I, p. 86

39 Vol. I, pp. 243-44

40 Vol. I, p. 282

41 Vol. I, p. 287

42 Vol. 1, p. 292

43 Vol. I, p. 287

44 Vol. I, pp. 292-93

45 Vol. I, p.249

46 Vol. I, p. 252

47 Vol. I, p.251

48 Samuel Clarke, "A Discourse on Natural Religion" in *British Moralists*. Op. cit., pp. 191-92

49 Ibid., p. 202

50 Ibid., p. 211

51 Ibid., p. 212

52 Ibid., p.207

53 Jeremy Bentham *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*. (New York: Hafner Press, 1948) p. 1

54 Ibid., p. 310

55 Ibid., p. 310

56 Ibid., p. 312

57 Ibid., p. 313

58 Ibid., p. 314

59 *Deontology or the Science of Morality* (part II). (Elibron Classics: facsimile replice of the 1834 edition; www.elibron.com, 2003), pp. 159-160.

60 Ibid., p. 160

61 Ibid., p. 160

62 Henry Sidgwick *Methods of Ethics*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981) p. xx

63 Ibid., p. 84

64 Ibid., p. 163

65 Ibid., p. 331

66 Ibid., p. 327

67 Ibid., p. 328

68 Ibid., p. 381

69 Ibid., p. 380

70 Ibid., p. 381

71 Ibid., p. 382

72 "Henry Sidgwick," by Marcus Singer in *The Encyclopedia of Ethics*. edited by Lawrence and Charlotte Becker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), p. 1151.

73 Sidgwick, pp. 431-432

74 *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 109
75 *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 20-21

76 Ibid., p.134.

77 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

78 Ibid., p. 26

79 Ibid., p.41

80 Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 15-16

81 Ibid., p. 118

82 Ibid., p. 119

83 Ibid., p. 74

84 Ibid., p. 74

85 Judith Andre, "The Equal Moral Weight of Self- and Other-Regarding Acts." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 17, 1, March 1987, pp. 155

86 Ibid., p. 159

87 Ibid., p. 159

88 Ibid., p. 161

89 Ibid., p. 157

90 Ibid., p. 157

91 Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*. (Charlottesville: Ibis Publishing, 1987), p. vi

92 Preface, para. 12

93 Preface, para. 11

94 It is possible to look at books XI and XII, "Upon the Love of Our Neighbor," and see its urgings to "Love thy neighbor as thyself" as utilitarian.

95 Preface, para. 38

96 In the *Republic* (435b-441e), Plato discusses the division of the soul into three parts, rational, appetitive, and spirited.

97 Preface, para. 34

98 Preface, para. 29

99 Marcus Singer, *Generalization in Ethics*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p.315

100 Preface, para. 30

101 Sermon I, para. 6

102 Preface, para. 25

103 Preface, para. 27

104 Sermon III, "Upon Human Nature," para. 2

105 Sermon II, "Upon Human Nature," para. 13

106 Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought: 1640-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 247

107 Ibid., p. 246

108 *Sermons*, Preface, para. 32

109 The point about wronging oneself is one that I will discuss later in this chapter in connection with Hard Jones' article, "Wronging Oneself."

110 *The Works of Joseph Butler.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 404

111 Preface, para. 33

112 Sermon I, para. 15

113 Preface, para. 31

114 Sermon VII, para. 10

115 Sermon X, para. 2

116 Sermon X, para. 3

117 Sermon X para. 4

118 Sermon VIII, para. 11

119 Sermon IX, para. 22

120 Sermon I, para. 14

121 Sermon I, para. 15

122 Sermon III, para. 1

123 Sermon III, para. 8

124 Sermon I, para. 6

125 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by Paton, H.J. (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 13/ 399 (In this and my Kant endnotes to come the last two reference numbers indicate the page number and section Paton uses, which match the edition issued by the Royal Prussian Academy).

126 52/421

127 67/429

128 *Lectures on Ethics*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 117

129 Some contest Kant on this point, arguing that this is an empirical claim. Indeed, it might be argued that there are agents that perform their duties to others well, even while diminishing their own self-worth and failing to treat themselves with comparable worth. For instance, an agent might meet all the onerous deadlines of his employer even while neglecting his own health.

130 Ibid., p. 121

131 Ibid., p. 118

132 Ibid., p. 117

133 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* (*GW*), 54/422

134 *The Doctrine of Virtue, Part II of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) MS, 390

135 *GW*, 56/423

136 *GW*, 69/430

137 *Lectures,* p. 121

138 Lara Denis, quoted from *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), p. 22

139 *MS*, 421

140 *Lectures*, p. 121

141 *MS*, 433

142 *MS,* 434

143 *MS,* 435

144 *Lectures*, pp. 126-17

145 *MS,* 436

146 *MS*, 436

147 *MS*, 435

148 W. K. Clifford, *Ethics of Belief*. (Roseville: Dry Bones Press, 2001) p. 13

149 Ibid., p. 14

150 Ibid., p. 14

151 Ibid., p. 14

152 Ibid., p. 16

153 Ibid., p. 10

154 Ibid., p. 10

155 Hardy Jones, "Treating Oneself Wrongly." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 17, 1983, p. 170

156 Ibid., p. 171

157 Ibid., p. 173

158 Ibid., p. 171

159 *Generalization in Ethics*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1961), p. 313

160 Ibid., p. 313

161 Ibid., p. 313

162 Ibid., p. 313

163 Ibid., p. 175

Chapter Three
Philosophers Arguing Against Duties to Oneself

The objective of this chapter is not to show that the seven philosophers who have argued directly against duties to oneself have offered irredeemably poor arguments. Rather, the goal is a more limited one. In most instances it will be enough to show that the philosophers who have employed those arguments have not accomplished what they set out to do; namely, prove that there are no duties to oneself. In the pages that follow here, I explain and reply to their views. I start with the utilitarians.

The Utilitarians

Utilitarianism stresses actions that are other-regarding. According to the theory, a good action is one which has utility and this utility has been understood, in various formulations, as producing benefit for others. Given this tendency to define good actions as other-regarding, several utilitarians have been disinclined to consider agents' self-regarding obligations. Oddly, however, many utilitarians who reject the possibility of duties to oneself do not employ utilitarian arguments to support their rejections. That is, their rejection of such obligations does not cite the primacy of our obligations to others as a way of ruling out our obligations to ourselves. A case in point is John Stuart Mill, the first philosopher of the utilitarian tradition to argue against the possibilities of duties to oneself.

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill directly addresses the notion of duties to oneself in chapter four of *On Liberty*:

> What are called duties to ourselves are not socially obligatory, unless circumstances render them at the same time duties to others. The term duty to oneself, when it means anything more than prudence, means self-respect or self-development, and for none of these is any one accountable to his fellow creatures, because for none of them is it for the good of mankind that he be held accountable to them. 1

For Mill, an agent's actions which do not affect others are self-regarding; as such, they can neither be praised as moral nor blamed as immoral. An agent who possesses any number of self-regarding faults may be demonstrating gross foolishness and imprudence, but his actions are not "a subject of moral reprobation" unless they involve a breach of his duty to others. 2

This view might be called the "social harm view" of morality. Mill's statement of that view occurs in the introduction. The object of his essay is to assert one principle, namely that:

> The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection... His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. 3

For Mill, then, genuine duties are necessarily connected with obligations a person has toward others. Without two (or more) agents, A and B, the idea of duty is inconceivable. Put another way, a duty relationship cannot hold between parts of a single self, but only for separate selves. He instances a person who "through temperance or extravagance" becomes unable to cover his debts or another unable to support his family. Such persons deserve punishment for violating their duties toward others, but not for the habits of intemperance that produced the violation.

This social harm view of morality leads Mill to draw a distinction between actions which are other-regarding and those that are self-regarding. His denial of the notion of duties to oneself follows from his idea that agents' actions cover two arenas of activity—public and private. Public actions can be evaluated as moral or immoral; private actions, merely as prudent or imprudent. Over the latter sphere of activity, society cannot compel an individual to do this action or that one. Mill writes,

> There is a sphere of action in which society, as distinguished from the individual, has, if any, only an indirect interest, comprehending all that portion of a person's life and conduct which affects only himself, or if it also affects others, only with their free, voluntary, and undeceived consent and participation. 4

This sphere of activity includes, among other things, an agent's entire set of virtues and vices.

Thus there are no `negative duties' to avoid vice either. Cruelty, envy, insincerity, greed, delight in the pain of others, pride—these comprise a rich catalogue of vices that the agent would doubtless be better off without, but society cannot compel him to avoid vicious characteristics or behavior that impacts only himself. Matters pertaining to my self-development, Mill continues, are matters of prudence but not of morality. And if such matters are not rightly matters of morality, then the agent is not obligated to develop the virtues, nor is society entitled to censure the person for failing to develop them.

While Mill makes plain that there are no duties to oneself, he should not be understood as arguing that there are no self-regarding virtues. In fact, he clearly thinks that agents ought to cultivate them. His point, however, is that if an imprudent agent cares little about cultivating self-regarding virtues, others cannot compel him to change his behavior. Rather, they are best advised to take a beneficent attitude in counseling him.

> Human beings owe it to each other to distinguish the better from the worse, and encouragement to choose the former and avoid the latter. They should be forever stimulating each other to increased exercise of their own higher faculties, and increased direction of their feelings and aims towards wise instead of foolish, elevating instead of degrading, objects and contemplations. But neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it. 5

Mill argues that "self-regarding faults" may well be "proofs of any amount of folly, or want of personal dignity and self-respect," but strictly speaking such faults are not immoral and "do not involve a breach of duty to others." 6

Just as there are no negative duties to shun vice, so there are no positive duties to cultivate virtues either. Again, since matters pertaining to my self-development are matters of prudence but not of morality, such virtues are not rightly considered matters of morality. The agent is not obligated to develop the virtues, any more than society is obligated to reprove the person for his failure to cultivate them.

Morality is social in nature. It follows, then, that there are no duties to oneself, since duties only obtain between separate persons. That is the first of Mill's arguments.

His other argument against moral duties to oneself involves the notion of punishment. Self-regarding actions are not subject to punishment. But for Mill, actions are only fit subjects for moral evaluation if they are punishable.

> We do not call anything wrong unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it; if not by law, by the opinion of his fellow creatures; if not by opinion, by the reproaches of his own conscience. This seems the real turning point between morality and simple expediency. 7

By arguing that punishment is a *sine qua non* of morality, Mill then shows that the

opinion of his fellow creatures and the self-reproach of his own conscience are not sufficient warrants for punishment.

> It is part of the notion of duty is every one of its forms, that a person may rightly be compelled to fulfill it. Duty is a thing that may be exacted from a person, as one exacts a debt. Unless we think that it may be exacted from him, we do not call it his duty. 8

But neither punishment nor morality comes into play unless the interests of others are involved. Mill's connection between punishment and morality can be captured syllogistically:

> (1) If an agent's self-regarding behavior were subject to moral evaluation, then it would of necessity be punishable.
> (2) But self-regarding behavior isn't punishable.
> (3) So a person's self-regarding behavior isn't subject to moral evaluation.

It is obvious that Mill embraces this *modus tollens*. For Mill, if there is no warrant to censure behavior that is self-regarding, then there is no duty to perform or omit that behavior.

The situation changes for Mill if the agent's behavior affects more than himself. The agent cannot "infringe the rules necessary for the protection of his fellow-creatures, individually or collectively." 9 But he can do as he pleases where society's self protection is not at issue. Even if an agent's vice affects others—like excessive drinking—the issue of obligation doesn't arise as long as his actions are self-regarding.

The case ceases to be a matter of individual liberty, and enters the realm of morality or law, only when the agent "violates a distinct and assignable obligation to any person or persons." This removes the action from the self-regarding class of actions into the other-regarding. Sanctions can be applied to this class of actions, for

> Acts injurious to others require a totally different treatment. Encroachment on their rights; infliction on them of any loss or damage not justified by his own rights; falsehood or duplicity in dealing with them; unfair or ungenerous use of advantages over them; even selfish abstinence from defending them against injury—these are fit objects of moral retribution, and, in grave cases, or moral retribution and punishment. 10

By contrast, self-regarding faults are not fit subjects of moral retribution.

Mill's vigilant protection of the self-regarding sphere of action is due to his concern for individual liberty. He argues that individual liberty must be protected from "the tyranny of the majority." In his introduction to *On Liberty* Mill announces that the subject of his essay is not the liberty of the will, but civil or social liberty, concerning "the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual." 11

At times Mill appears to think that there is some warrant for society to interfere with the freedom of the individual. In the essay, "Auguste Comte and Positivism," Mill writes that "By squandering our health we disable ourselves from rendering service to our fellow creatures." 12 The statement suggests that Mill might hold the view that the pursuit of vice, even if self-regarding, could affect the interests of others, if an agent were consequently unable to carry out his duty to them.

But Mill, showing consistency, counters that possibility in saying,

> Life is not so rich in enjoyments that it can afford to forego the cultivation of all those that address themselves to the so-called egoistic propensities and that the function of moral censure—as distinct from moral praise—should be restricted to the prevention of conduct that positively harms others, or impedes their pursuit of their own happiness, or violates engagements expressly or tacitly undertaken by the agent. 13

Mill acknowledges that what an agent does or fails to do regarding himself may negatively affect the interests of others. But the "moral coercion of public opinion" isn't justified in compelling him to change his habits.

An agent's vice can no doubt create a great inconvenience for other agents, but this "inconvenience is one which society can afford to bear for the greater good of human freedom," except where there is "a definite damage or definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public."[14] In sum,

> The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign. [15]

It isn't right for others to compel him, since he has no duties to others for that part of his behavior which affects only himself. Since duties are necessarily connected to punishment, and since punishment applies only to that sphere of behavior which is public, there are no duties to oneself.

Reply to Mill

Mill argued that only actions which are socially obligatory can be labeled duties. But self-regarding actions are not socially obligatory and so cannot be duties. While it might be prudent for a person to watch after his self-development, he is not accountable to his fellow creatures for developing self-regarding traits. Further, while there are self-regarding virtues, agents cannot be compelled to perform them. So Mill concluded, "a "breach of such virtues are not immoral and don't involve a breach of duties of to others."

Mill's first argument assumes that duties can only obtain between separate persons, based on the assumption that morality is necessarily social in nature.

His second argument concludes that for an action to qualify as an obligation, it must be punishable if the obligation is not carried out. But self-regarding behavior is not punishable and is therefore does not qualify as a moral obligation.

Mill's vigilant protection of the self-regarding sphere of action owes to his concern for individual liberty. Society cannot compel a person to perform duties to others since the "moral coercion of public opinion" isn't justified to get him to change his habits. Of course, one could argue for duties to oneself *and* accept Mill's argument: Mill is only saying that I cannot be compelled by society to look after my own well-being. But I can still succeed or fail to achieve some good for myself, even if I can't be compelled to perform it for society's benefit. Duties to self needn't be parallel to duties to others on the matter of coercion in order to be sensibly construed. After all, the duty here is to *oneself*, not to others. Mill's argument works if and only if duties to self must mimic duties to others. But they needn't.

Is it possible to argue that:

(1) X is a duty to someone.

and

(2) X is not a duty to others.

For Mill, the answer is clearly "no." But certainly there is no logical inconsistency between (1) and (2). Mill is in the grip of a theory, a theory common to many moral philosophers, namely, the view that all morality is social and that all duties are, perforce,

duties to others. But, again, there is no inconsistency, linguistic or logical, that prevents there from being duties to oneself.

In arguing for two duties to oneself in chapter four, I will be stressing that there are certain actions which have a bearing on the welfare of others and also on the agent whose actions they are. The social effect of these actions is what makes them duties to others. But there is also a non-social effect of these actions which makes them duties to the agent himself. I think the case can be made that they are not only duties to oneself but moral duties to oneself.

In addition, it is difficult to reconcile Mill's utility—or any utilitarian thinking that makes reference to the "greatest good," "the best state of affairs, or "optimizing good" or similar formulations—with a denial of duties to oneself. In *Utilitarianism* Mill stated, "Utility or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." 16 This principle makes no reference to whose happiness is promoted and therefore includes the happiness of agents and others. My argument here also pulls the views of Moore, Singer, Baier and other utilitarians under the same social morality tent. Any moral argument that says we must define the good as "producing the best consequences" cannot then add, "But these best consequences don't include oneself." The inconsistency in making such a move is obvious.

II

Once this reply is made to Mill's first argument, his second argument is weakened as a consequence. For his argument that to be a duty there must be punishment attending its violation, he again assumes that morality is social. But if the good means "producing

the best consequences," one can be seen as doing wrong whether or not that wrong involves others. It is not contradictory to assert both that

(1) Smith has done wrong.

and

(2) Smith has not wronged another.

Since the idea of wronging oneself, quite apart from whether one has violated a duty to oneself, is not a wrong that would involve punishment, the concepts of wrongness and punishment needn't be connected. There is no necessity in connecting the concepts of "duty" and "punishment" unless the duties under consideration are duties owed to others.

G. E Moore

G.E. Moore's denial of duties to oneself follows directly from his distinction between those actions which have the characteristic of duties and those which are expedient. Ultimately Moore, whose *Principia Ethica* was published in 1903, 44 years after Mill wrote *On Liberty*, maintains that the goodness of an action will not depend upon this duty-expediency distinction. For Moore, the question of whether one action is better than another is determined not by whether we label it as dutiful or expedient but by which action produces the best effect. 17 Putting that consideration of utility aside for the moment, Moore makes it clear that that self-regarding virtues and expedient actions do not meet the requirement of duties to oneself.

Moore draws three distinctions between the uses of the words "duty" and

"expediency." First, he urges that the term "duty" is best used to describe a class of actions eliciting moral approval or whose omission elicits moral disapproval; expedient actions don't elicit the same reaction of approval or disapproval. Second, duties are actions that many agents are tempted to omit. By contrast, expedient actions are those actions which agents are almost universally inclined to perform. Third, the omission of a duty generally results in consequences inconvenient to someone else, in contrast to `self-regarding duties' like prudence and temperance, where the temptation to be imprudent and intemperate are strong, but the consequences pertain more to the agent himself and his future, but not others. 18

Moore is quick to point out that these differences between what is dutiful and expedient don't have any bearing on the larger ethical question of whether we ought to perform the action. On the contrary: whether the action in question is my duty or is really expedient comes to naught in practical terms: in either case I am asking, `Is this event the best on the whole that I can effect?' 19

That Moore, an ideal utilitarian, holds this view is patently obvious from several succeeding passages, supplemented by those in his little book *Ethics*. He goes on to say that the terms duty and expediency modify actions appropriately when those actions are productive of the best consequences.

> If `expedient' be understood in the strictest and fullest sense, as meaning that, when *absolutely all* the consequences are taken into account, they will be found to be the best possible. And if this be clearly understood, then most people, I think, will be reluctant to admit that it can ever be really expedient to do our duty, or that what is really and truly expedient, in the strict sense, can ever be wrong. 20

Moore realizes that he will appear to have done away with the distinction between what it is for an action to be a duty and what it is for an action to be expedient. He realizes that "people certainly do commonly make a distinction between duty and expediency" and he wants there to be, in fact, something to distinguish the two. He claims that duty and expediency *coincide*; but argues that the meaning of the two words is not the same. 21

Even pointing out that duty and expediency coincide is liable to rouse disagreement, Moore thinks. Indeed, a common misunderstanding of the terms has led many to suppose the view that duty and expediency are opposed. Again, there are differences. Chief among the differences between dutiful and expedient actions are that the former are "more useful to praise," because they form a class of actions which we are tempted to omit. 22 The comparison of duties and expedient actions is analogous to that between duties and `interested' actions: the former are no more obligatory than the latter; rather, they are more useful to praise, Moore agues, since agents are disinclined to do them.

One could reply to Moore that temperance and prudence are two self-regarding virtues producing actions that have at least one of the characteristics of duties. As Moore says, we have a strong temptation to omit them. Still, they don't fill the bill for Moore, since actions that are temperate or intemperate, prudent or imprudent, affect only the agent. Thus while a prudent action may be every bit as good as a dutiful one—a goodness which is determined by its "total consequences"— it doesn't meet Moore's standards for being a duty. 23

Whatever one thinks of the cogency of Moore's argument comparing dutiful to expedient actions, it is clear to Moore that whether an action is a duty or expedient action, the duty in question is never owed to oneself.

Reply to Moore

As an ideal utilitarian, Moore is impacted differently by the criticism directed at Mill and other utilitarians to follow. Moore's conclusion that there are no obligations to oneself relies on the premise that duties possess intrinsic features, features that "duties to oneself" would lack. On his view, there are three distinctions between duties and expedient actions. Duties describe a class of actions whose performance elicits approval or whose omission elicits moral disapproval; by contrast, expedient actions don't evoke the same response. Second, duties describe actions which agents are tempted to omit. Expedient actions are those which agents are inclined to perform. Finally, the omission of a duty usually inconveniences others. This is unlike the omission of "self-regarding duties" having to do with virtues like temperance and prudence where the failure to exercise the virtue affects the agent himself but not others.

For Moore, all of these three characteristics are essential to duties. Thus, even though prudence and temperance possess two of the necessary attributes of duties—namely, such virtues elicit our approval and we are often tempted to omit them by performing imprudent and intemperate actions—they lack the third requirement in that their consequences affect the agent, not others.

After agreeing to Moore's first two requirements for what duties include, one can surely ask, `By virtue of what language rule is it true that duties are solely other-

regarding, such that actions which possess several—in this case two of three—of the requirements of duties are still disqualified from being duties?' It is more than a little odd to claim that behavior which in recognizable ways is moral, behavior that it would be tempting to omit and that tends to draw approval, is rejected as not being dutiful because of a single difference: it doesn't involve others.

Now I will reply to Moore's second argument. After delineating the contours of dutiful and expedient actions, Moore confesses that this exercise doesn't have any bearing on the overarching ethical question: "Is this the best result on the whole that I can effect?" 24 Thus whether an action is dutiful or expedient comes to naught in practical terms and gives way to considerations of utility. That being said, the distinction between duty and expediency will be blurred, since both expedient and dutiful actions will share characteristics in common; namely, they are productive of the best consequences.

Once Moore includes this consequentialist criterion, introduced as a characteristic that expedient and dutiful actions have in common, he opens the door, no doubt unwittingly, to allow duties to oneself in. If an expedient action is one which when "absolutely all the consequences are taken into account is found to be the best possible," then not only will the expedient action ever be "wrong," as Moore puts it, but the expedient action itself is essentially obligatory. If doing prudent and temperate actions, and developing those two virtues, if refraining from self-deception and acting courageously are found to be the best choices possible, then it is because such actions produce the best consequences. The term "best consequences" doesn't come ready-made with a qualifier like "the best consequences for someone other than the agent." Rather, the best possible consequences would entail the best consequences for all involved,

including the agent. It is internally contradictory for his theory to state otherwise. That is, Moore would have to say that the best possible consequences would be tallied by dismissing, or at least regarding as indifferent, the best consequences of the agent.

There seem to be three logical possibilities. One, the agent performs an action that is solely other-regarding, like giving directions to someone lost or giving aid to a deserving charity, or any variety of benevolent actions. Here the best possible consequences needn't involve the agent at all; the good to be achieved is tallied solely for others, not himself. A second option is do an action that is good for others but also benefits oneself. So a mid-level manager at a company instructs several slackers in his department that their daily output should be greater. His instructions are for their good—"You will have greater job security and, as a stakeholder in the company, partake of the greater profits"—but are also for *his* good, since he can claim greater job performance for his sector when he reports to his superiors. Here there is a duty to others and oneself, one could say, since when "all the consequences" are taken into account, the "best possible" result will include the interests of *all* concerned. A third possibility would involve an action that is self-controlled or courageous or prudent where the consequences affect the agent more than others. This is not to say that an agent's possession of temperance or prudence or some other self-regarding virtue need only affect himself. It may well affect his colleagues, wife, and countless others. But it needn't affect them. And, considered in isolation from the interests of others, I still attain the best possible result by benefiting only myself, quite apart from my affect on others. In fact, the principle of utility instructs me to do just that.

In utilitarian thinking, the ethical prescription is to produce good consequences. The cash value of the action depends upon results, not on Moore's *a priori* difference between duty and expediency. There are clearly cases, then, where it is prescribed that I act to benefit myself.

Marcus Singer

Marcus Singer wrote at greater length on the topic of duties to oneself than any philosopher since Immanuel Kant. Singer first attacked the notion of duties to oneself in his article in *Ethics* in 1959. 25 In *Generalization in Ethics* (1961), he also devoted a section of the last chapter to a consideration of the same topic. 26 The *Ethics* essay provoked a series of spirited replies by a number of philosophers. 27 He thus took up the topic again in *Ethics* in 1963, this time replying to his critics. 28

Before the section on duties to oneself in *Generalization in Ethics*, a short section appeared entitled, "Prudence and Morality." At the outset Singer makes it clear that no confusion should be made between prudence and morality. Citing Richard Whately's view in *Paley's Moral Philosophy*, Singer writes:

> Whatever is done wholly and solely from motives of personal expediency—from calculations of individual loss or gain—is always accounted a matter of prudence, and not of virtue. 29

He thus instances several examples of prudent behavior. A person submitting himself to the will of another, because it is in his interest, is acting from prudence not from duty. If a robber threatens your life, and you submit, you didn't do so because you were bound in duty to obey. Again, a person accepting a good wage for laborious work is

acting from expediency, not from a duty to himself. Singer concludes, “We judge the same in every case where a man is acting solely with a view to his own advantage.” 30

Such prudential action is not morally wrong, since benefiting oneself needn’t come at the expense of anyone else. But can prudence be considered as a morally necessary trait or virtue? Not for Singer. He argues, “Even though prudence is not immoral, neither is it, at least in general, morally mandatory. For neither is imprudence immoral.” 31

Singer’s conclusion about the moral neutrality of prudence rests on his assumption that morality is social in nature. The morality of actions, he argues, depend upon their effects on others. In evaluating prudence, however, we are always considering an action’s effect on the agent. Therefore, if an act tends to harm only oneself, that is a reason for regarding it as imprudent, but not a reason for regarding it as immoral.

Despite Singer’s schism between prudential and moral actions, there are cases where the same act can be both prudent and moral (or imprudent and immoral). So a statement of the form “A ought to do X” can at once express a prudential counsel and a moral judgment. `One ought to drive a car carefully’ certainly expresses a prudential judgment. But here the prudence is moral, too, since if one fails to obey the judgment, there may be harm to the driver or others.

As a rule utilitarian, Singer applies his “generalization argument” to instances of prudence and asks, “What would happen if everybody in such circumstances as these were to fail to exercise due care, were negligent, thoughtless, or imprudent? Where the consequences would be undesirable prudence is morally obligatory.” 32 But again, the obligation to be prudent arrived at from his generalization argument results only because

the interests of others are involved. So there is at times an obligation to be prudent, but this is not an obligation owed to myself but an obligation owed to others. Singer's view of prudence is a harbinger of how he argues about duties to oneself.

Singer is unequivocal in his opposition to duties to oneself, and he offers two arguments against the possibility of such duties. I shall refer to his first argument against duties to oneself as the "correlativity thesis." He asserts that if I have a duty to you, then you have a right against or with respect to me. So if I've made a promise to finish a project by such a date, you have a right to receive that service from me. "In general, if A has a duty to B, then B has a right against or with respect to A," he says. [33] From this interpersonal view of rights, Singer argues that it follows, as day follows night, that having a duty to oneself would be tantamount to having a right against oneself, and "this is surely nonsense." [34] What sense can be made of a right or claim against oneself? He ridicules the notion further: "Could one sue oneself in a court of law for return of the money one owes oneself?" [35] Thus, the correlativity thesis does not countenance what might be called "reflexive" moral relations. In other words, duties can apply only interpersonally.

But Singer contends that he does not wish to rest his entire argument on the "nonsensical" notion that there cannot be rights against oneself. Thus, he goes further than the correlativity of rights and duties and employs a second argument against the existence of duties to oneself.

> It is essential to the nature of an obligation that no one can release himself from an obligation by not wishing to perform it or by deciding not to perform it, or, indeed, in any way whatsoever. In other words, no one can release himself from an obligation, just as no one can release himself from a promise. [36]

Of course, an agent can violate the obligation or break any promise. But Singer maintains that person A can only properly be released from the obligation by person B to whom the obligation is owed. The duty here may be based on an explicit or implied contract between them, and the person who is owed, in this instance B, can simply give up his claim or rights against someone, in this instance A, and thereby release the other from the obligation. But it would follow, then, that a duty to oneself is one from which I could release myself at will. But this is "self-contradictory," for "a duty from which one could release oneself at will is not, in any literal sense, a duty at all." 37

An analogy can be made with promising oneself to do something. While people employ the language of "promising oneself" to do this or that, the language is not literal. For a promise to myself is a promise I could break, and thereby release myself from, at will. In general, when I say I promise myself to do X, I am really saying that I strongly resolve to do X. It is not a genuine promise, for with genuine promises I really resolve to do that which I've promised to another. By contrast, with myself I can change my mind without breaking any promise. 38

For Singer, there is a family of expressions like "I promise myself" and "I have a duty to myself." But one cannot deduce from any of these expressions that I have genuine duties to myself. "You owe it yourself," "I owe it to myself," indicate no literal sense of owing. Rather, such statements counsel prudential behavior. Thus "You owe it to yourself to take a break" is a statement that urges the person to whom it is directed to be prudent. But again, this is a prudential and not a moral ought. 39 Singer suggests that all such statements are matters of "self-interest disguised in the language of duty." Again, since

morality requires a social component, the interests of at least one other person must be involved before we can even speak of duties.

Singer next takes on what is one of the most compelling and extended defenses of duties to oneself in the history of Western philosophy, namely those arguments put forth by Kant.

He rejects Kant's assertion in *Lectures on Ethics* that "Our duties toward ourselves are of primary importance and should have pride of place. The prior condition of our duties to others is our duty to ourselves." 40 For Singer, both statements are wrong. He maintains that there are no duties to oneself and cannot agree with Kant that I must first perform duties to myself before I can uphold duties to others. Singer reduces Kant's extensive treatment of duties to oneself to a one-paragraph dismissal.

> I have my doubts whether, to take the examples that are most usually given, it is a duty in general, and apart from special circumstances, to preserve one's life or develop one's talents. But suppose that it is, and it is morally wrong to commit suicide or waste one's talents. It would not follow that all these duties are duties to oneself, merely because they would be duties with respect to oneself. Someone under military discipline may have the duty of keeping his shoes shined and his hair cut, and, in general, of maintaining a trim and neat appearance. But these are not duties to oneself, nor are they alleged to be. Kant's argument to show the immorality of suicide and sloth (his first and third illustrations of the categorical imperative) have not the slightest tendency, even if sound, to show that these are breaches of duties to oneself. That there are duties to oneself is a supposition from which Kant starts, not a consequence of his argument. 41

Thus Singer's attack on Kant's argument for duties to oneself is two-pronged. He first expresses doubts that Kant's famous examples of the duties of self-preservation and of developing one's talents are really duties at all. And even if we assume they are duties, he says, it doesn't follow that they are duties to oneself simply because they are duties with

regard to oneself. He thinks that Kant assumes there are such duties but that he is short on proof.

Singer argues that what Kant calls duties to oneself may in fact be "general duties." The duty to pay taxes or the duty to fight for one's country—right along with the duty to preserve one's life—can be regarded as duties to mankind generally. 42 But this, he continues, presupposes another category of duties which are outside the purview of his present concern.

While Singer is unequivocal in his conclusions against duties to oneself, he does acknowledge that there are self-regarding virtues and vices. What he does not allow is that these are moral or immoral. If a vice is a defect or undesirable trait of character and something which it would be desirable for an agent not to have, it does not follow that it is a moral vice. If one smokes, he says, and will likely prove harmful to the agent, it is, for all of that, a self-regarding prudential vice. If, on the other hand, it is harmful to society, then it is undesirable not merely from the view of the agent, but to society, and this would make it a moral vice.

To reiterate Singer's view on prudence, one can harm oneself, undercut one's own purposes, even continually do what is detrimental to one's own best interests. One's character is as likely to include vices as virtues, and, by definition, these vices are defects that it would be undesirable for agents to possess. Where Singer parts company with those who argue for duties to oneself is that he doesn't characterize vices as "moral vices."

Not all vices are immoral and not all virtues are moral. For Singer, a vice is morally undesirable only when it is undesirable with respect to the interests of others. On

this point Singer has a kinship with Mill. Indeed, he says of Mill's statement on duties to oneself—"What are called duties to ourselves are not socially obligatory, unless circumstances render them at the same time duties to others" —that "Mill has very nearly the last word." 43

Reply to Singer

Marcus Singer employs three arguments against duties to oneself. The first of these, maintaining that prudence is a nonmoral matter, argues indirectly against duties to oneself. The latter two arguments attack the possibility of duties to oneself directly.

Before taking up the topic of duties to oneself in *Generalization in Ethics*, Marcus Singer discusses the morality of prudence and concludes (as I have already shown), "…Prudence is not immoral, neither is it, as least in general, morally mandatory. For neither is imprudence immoral." Singer's reason for accepting this conclusion rests on his assumption that morality is social in nature. Since the data of morality involves the effect one's actions have on others, when there is no such effect, there is, *ipso facto*, no moral consideration at stake. Only in those instances where my being prudent involves the interests of others can prudential behavior be morally obligatory, according to Singer. So judgments of the form "A ought to do X" can at once express a moral and a prudential judgment, most notably in instances like `One ought not to smoke in a room with non-smokers' or `You should be careful how you chose your words.' Here a failure to obey the prescription could lead to harm to others. Minus such social harm, however, prudence is a morally neutral matter.

Several responses come to mind. Since Singer's contention that prudence is not a matter of morality rests on a definition of ethics as a social enterprise, the argument is undercut if this social definition of morality is countered. While it may seem to be merely a matter of definitional fiat to say either (1) morality is exclusively social or (2) morality is not exclusively social, it requires extreme mental gymnastics to hold to the first definition at all costs.

If we make such an assumption, the most outrageous claims will follow. For one, embracing such a definition would require me to say that it is all the same whether I live my life in contemplative solitude or spend it consuming every drug I can get my hands on. Let us assume for a moment that the arc of either life doesn't undercut or even intersect the interests of others. In that "social aspect" the two lives could be deemed equal. But aside from the social impact of the lives, who would hold fast to the idea that the two lives were lived in morally equivalent ways? Could it possibly be that a life spent in pursuing the improvement of one's mind has no more value than a life spent trying to destroy one's mental faculties with mind-altering substances? One problem with such a conclusion is that no one does or could seriously embrace it.

In point of fact we do praise agents for making good use of their faculties. Part of this praise is due because it is "easier" (in the sense of being more tempting) for them not to make good use of their time. In some sense it is easier to backslide and slack off than it is to live a life of achievement. To label such behavior imprudent isn't the question at issue. The questionable claim is to say that prudence, because it involves acting on my own behalf, can never be moral. To assert that acting to benefit oneself can never be

moral requires that we ignore the verdict of an entire class of common moral judgments. A brief group of such judgments might include:

(1) It is good to face one's difficulties with bravery.
(2) It is worthwhile to make good use of your time instead of wasting it.
(3) It is virtuous to make a sacrifice now to attain a greater good later.

To deny that such counsels are moral would involve the following circuitous logic: affirming the good sense of all three propositions yet denying that they were counsels of morality. To do that requires that we wield an exceedingly arbitrary definition of morality. Such a definition is an option, of course, but wants explaining to rescue it from the charge of arbitrariness.

As a general utilitarian considering prudence, Singer raises the question, "What would happen if everybody in such circumstances as these were to fail to exercise due care, were negligent, thoughtless, or imprudent? Where the consequences would be undesirable prudence is morally obligatory." Of course, the meaning of "undesirable" is never private for Singer, but always social. But this makes his concept of desirability a severely limited one. It also suggests that what is morally obligatory follows the model of that which is legally obligatory: the only way to fail morally is to fail in a situation where someone else was involved and has some "right" against me.

Singer's denial that prudence can count as morality is intertwined with his two arguments against duties to oneself. To reiterate, his first argument against duties to

oneself might be termed his "correlativity argument." "In general, if A has a duty to B, then B has a right against or with respect to A," he says. Thus, having a duty to oneself would be tantamount to having a right against oneself and "this is surely nonsense." He ridicules the notion further by saying, "Could one sue oneself in a court of law for return of the money one owes oneself?" The upshot is that duties can only apply interpersonally, never reflexively.

Besides the correlativity of rights and duties, there is a second feature of duties that Singer thinks makes no sense when applied reflexively. Attendant upon all duties to others is the idea of "release." If I have a duty to you, you can give up your claim against me and release me from my obligation. But I cannot release myself from that duty, any more than I can release myself from a promise made. But surely, if I had a duty to myself, or have made a promise to myself, I could release myself from these. But, this is "self-contradictory," for "any duty from which one could release oneself at will is not, in any literal sense, a duty at all."

Locutions like "I have a duty to myself" or "I made a promise to myself" are prudential counsels, or, as Singer states, "self-interest disguised in the language of duty."

Several replies can be made to Singer's arguments. Beginning with his last, one can grant him the claim that duties to self are not duties in any "literal sense," if by "literal sense" he means "in exactly the sense that duties to others are duties." They could not be duties in exactly the way interpersonal duties are duties since the conditions for duties to oneself can never duplicate the conditions of duties to others. Why would one expect that a duty to oneself, which involves just one person, resembles an interpersonal

duty involving two or more? This inherent difference between such "literal" duties and duties to oneself can be granted without having conceded any ground in the argument.

In addition, if such locutions are prudential counsels, this doesn't rule out their being more than that. As I previously argued, prudential counsels can be and are construed as having moral weight. Additionally, if it is preferable to treat oneself morally rather than immorally, these counsels can be couched in the language of duty.

But much remains to be said about Singer's twin assault on the idea of duties to oneself—namely, the notion that there cannot be duties to oneself because they don't have the required correlativity of rights and duties and because the notion of releasing another from their obligation cannot apply sensibly in situations when it comes to oneself.

With regard to Singer's stated requirement that if A has a duty to B then B has a right against A, it can be said that this is certainly true of legal obligations. In most if not all situations where A fails to carry through on a contract, or even a promise, it might be claimed that B has a right against A. In this sense, surely, I cannot have a legal right against myself, for I cannot haul myself into court, as Singer says. But it can be argued that the issue is not whether there are legal obligations to oneself but whether there are moral obligations to oneself. Here several replies can be made. One, even in the case of A's obligation to B, it cannot be concluded that B has a moral right against A, even if he does have the legal right just mentioned. Therefore, the correlativity of rights and duties that is so manifest in the legal sense needn't follow in the moral sense, nor should it be expected to follow in the same way.

Second, to counter Singer, it isn't readily apparent how having a right against oneself in this moral sense rises to the level of a contradiction. Surely the statement, "Smith has a moral right against himself" is not internally contradictory in the way that "The wet dry Ganges flows smoothly" is. To conclude, therefore, that the former statement is nonsense is to draw a conclusion that wants explaining.

Far from being a contradiction, it is possible to argue that having a "right against oneself" is similar in some ways to having a "right against another." If A has a right to the performance of a certain action from B—for example, the right to expect that B will finish construction for an addition on A's home by an agreed up date—then we might explain the content of that right in part by saying that A has a right to "complain" to B or "be angry with" B if B fails to execute the agreed upon promise. We could capture these sentiments by saying that they are expressions of A's "strong disappointment with B" or his "moral outrage" with B. In like manner, these expressions can be applied reflexively.

So if B has promised himself to finish his doctoral dissertation by April 15 and he does indeed finish, then we can make sense of B's contentment with himself by saying he was full of "self-congratulation" or "self-respect" for having met the deadline, however burdensome. On the other hand, if B fails to complete the project by the deadline, we can make sense of his sentiments of self-regard by saying that he is now "unhappy with himself" or "ashamed of himself" or "full of self-recrimination" or "self-loathing." Thus, moral rights against oneself not only steer clear of the charge of being internally contradictory, but they make eminent sense and are frequently couched in language that is strictly analogous to other-regarding statements of praise and blame. Meanwhile, if B meets the deadline with A in the first case, or "with himself" in the latter case, we can

fully understand the praise coming from A in the former case or B's "self-praise" in the latter case. So the analogue of A's moral right against B and B's moral right against oneself does seem to work. Again, legal rights may follow Singer's correlativity model and thus requires two or more agents, but sensible talk of moral rights needn't possess that other-regarding element.

Now I will deal with Singer's argument about "releases" being a necessary component of duties. To reiterate, he writes, "A duty from which one could release oneself at will is not, in any literal sense, a duty at all." In one sense, this surely sounds unobjectionable. We think of duties as being binding, not frivolous. Thus, if Jones released Smith from a duty, we have a right to ask him, `Did you release Smith from the duty for a good reason or a capricious one?' If Jones replies that he released Smith for a capricious reason, we would then be entitled to wonder how serious the duty was in the first place. And since releases from a duty, if granted at all, are always granted by some other, we tend to think of duties as having a built in moral weight or gravity that keeps them from being trifled with. Thus, to claim that I had a duty to myself would be to admit that I had an expectation of myself that would fail to measure up to the kind of duty that Smith owes to Jones, since unlike the Smith-Jones case, it seems that I can release myself from my own duty, willy-nilly.

But Singer's point of disanalogy must face a point of analogy. We can grant Singer that the notion of release attending duties to others is not analogous to any notion of release attending duties to oneself in the legal sense, for legally speaking I have no duties to myself. But just as Jones will be disinclined to release Smith from his moral duty lightly (because his notion of release is connected to his notion of right against) it

can be argued that I will not release myself from a moral duty lightly. Just as I have shown that we can give content to the claim that we have moral rights against ourselves in a manner analogous to the moral rights we have against others, there is a way in which releasing ourselves from duties resembles the release of others. Just as the release of others is typically not done without good reasons, so too releasing oneself from a duty is not undertaken lightly. If I have a negative moral duty not to succumb to a life of wanton pleasure, say in the form of reckless drinking or sexual activity, then this is not a duty that I would release myself from without reason. I might fail to carry out my duty and have a few drinks too many one evening. People are human after all and are capable of moral weakness. But this doesn't change the fact that a moral duty isn't one that I would release myself at will. If I made a "promise to myself" —or even if I understand the moral gravity of observing a duty without making an actual promise to myself—then I don't release myself lightly, any more than some other person would release me from a duty lightly.

In this way, the bindingness of duties to oneself rivals the bindingness of duties to others. Once it is shown that Singer's notions of having "a right against oneself" and "releasing oneself" can be understood as making sense in reflexive moral relations, his conclusion that duties to oneself are "contradictory" is undercut.

Kurt Baier

Kurt Baier's contribution to ethics resists easy characterization. He has been recognized as a proponent of the "good-reasons" approach to ethics 44. Baier himself has

noted that his essay "Moral Obligation" in 1966 espoused a view similar to J.S. Mill in *Utilitarianism.* 45 Without trying to resolve the question of whether Baier is best characterized as a utilitarian or not, I place him among the utilitarians, not because I read him as a utilitarian in all his work. Rather, he is among the utilitarians here because of his analysis of duties to oneself, which was published just prior to Marcus Singer's *Generalization in Ethics* and bears strong similarities to that view.

In *The Moral Point of View*, published in 1958, a year before Singer's first article on the subject, Baier treats the idea of duties to oneself at length. 46 Like Singer, he leaves no doubt about his denial of the possibility of duties. Since for Baier morality—the moral point of view—arises out of social relations, there is no meaningful sense that a person without contact with others could be said to be acting either morally or immorally. He writes,

> …The solitary individual could employ his reason in practical matters only from the point of view of self-interest, never from the moral point of view. If individuals live by themselves and cannot affect one another, then, morally speaking, there is nothing they may not do or refrain from doing. A world of Robinson Crusoes has no need for a morality and no use for one. Moral distinctions do not apply to it. 47

Crusoe might follow a detailed practical program to further the chances of his survival. But for Baier his behavior would be self-interested, not moral. In his essay "Moral Obligation," he sounds a similar note. In speaking of moral directives, Baier claims that, "We can eliminate the solitary desert islander, for in this case whether he follows these directives must be solely his business." 48

In *The Moral Point of View* Baier describes ethical egoism as the view that "each man has a predominant obligation to himself." 49 From this description, one might expect

that he would go head to head with ethical egoism—asserting how duties to oneself can only arise on an egoistic account of what our obligations are—defeat this doctrine, and so be through with duties to oneself once and for all. But he doesn't. Rather, Baier cleaves the ninth chapter of the *Moral Point of View* into two parts: the first is subtitled "Obligations to Oneself" and the second "Duties to Oneself." In both sections he undertakes an ordinary language analysis of the terms "obligation" and "duty" and argues that in no sense of either term can there be duties or obligations to oneself.

In the first part of his argument, Baier writes,

> The word `obligation' occurs naturally in remarks such as `I am under an obligation to the Bairds.' In this use, `obligation' has three logical dimensions, `the partner,' `the ground,' and `the content of the obligation.' We mention the partner of an obligation when we answer the question `To *whom* is A under an obligation?'; the ground we answer the question `*On account of what* is A under an obligation to B?'; and the content when we answer the question `*What* does A's obligation to B *consist in?'*50

It is easy to discern what Baier has in mind. If Jones has agreed to deliver a 50,000-word manuscript on the history of ethics to publisher X, then Baier's triad of partner, ground, and content can be filled in. Jones' *partner* is the publisher, since the publisher is the one to whom he is under an obligation. The *ground* of the obligation in this case is typically a contract signed by both partners, stating the terms of the deal between Jones and publisher X (Baier does not say that the ground of an obligation would in all cases be a contract; presumably, there are promises which don't require a contract). Finally, the *content* of the obligation, would spell out the specifics that Jones and the publisher are obliged to deliver—this would give an account of due date, word count, advances (if any), royalties, etc.

Baier argues that this triad of partner, ground, and content cannot occur with one person, but only arises when at least two or more people's interests are involved. Thus obligations obtain only between separate persons. Given that obligations arise for Baier when commitments are made between individuals, it is hard to envision an instance where obligations to oneself would be possible.

> They (moral obligations) arise only when the normal moral relationship between two or more people, that of moral noninvolvement, is disturbed, and they end only when the state of moral noninvolvement is restored. Restoring this state is called `discharging the obligation.' Not restoring it is failing to discharge it. When one does not discharge it, one's partner of the obligation is morally entitled to complain. He is entitled to do so until the obligation is discharged and, furthermore, any harm or damage done by the delay is compensated for. 51

For Baier, no analogy exists between these other-regarding obligations and obligations to self.

> Clearly, one cannot be literally under an obligation to oneself. There could be no such thing as upsetting the moral relationship between one-self and oneself, no such thing as restoring it. It would be absurd for one to complain because one had failed to discharge one's obligation to oneself or to have a clear conscience because one had discharged it. 52

Singer had ruled out reflexive moral relations by arguing that the notion of 'duties to oneself' could countenance no sensible notions of 'rights against oneself' or 'releasing oneself.' Employing slightly different language, Baier rules out reflexive relations in maintaining that the notions of 'discharging' obligations or 'failing to discharge' obligations to oneself are absurd.

Baier further contends that the triple requirement of 'partner,' 'ground,' and 'content' applies not only to obligations but to promises in general. A promise, according to Baier, is "a socially recognized way of bringing into being specific moral ties between at least two people." 53 Thus, while I might "promise myself" a holiday, I have no recourse to complain if I keep working and don't take one.

At times people mistakenly construe promises to others as promises to oneself. The mistake occurs when people confuse the three logical dimensions of the obligation. He instances a case in which there is confusion about the ground of an obligation.

> When I promise my wife to look after my health or to give myself a holiday at Christmas or to buy myself a new overcoat, I have an obligation to my wife (my underlining) to do these things. But since *what* I have an obligation (to her) to do is something "for myself," that is, to my advantage, it is not unnatural to say in such a case that this is an obligation to myself. 54

Here the obligation can be said to concern myself; but Baier notes it is a confusion to say that the obligation is "to" myself.

Baier also realizes that philosophers arguing for obligations to oneself may try to attempt to run an end around his requirements of 'partner,' 'ground,' and 'content.' Some philosophers might object, for example, that they are not concerned with the word "obligation" in this sense. Rather, they mean to use it as a noun of "ought." But Baier points out that this move results in logical problems.

Baier argues that whenever 'A has an obligation to do X,' it is also true that 'he ought to do X.' But the reverse is surely not true. For example, one might say `I have never killed anyone or stolen anything.' Surely these are things I ought not to do. "But they are not things which I had, or was under, an obligation not to do," Baier argues. By

refraining from the killing, or other wrong act, I refrained from what I ought not to do, but I did not discharge an obligation to anyone or everyone.

But aside from obligations to ourselves, maybe we have duties to ourselves? Thus begins the second part of Baier's denial of duties to oneself. Baier considers the possibility of duties to oneself by analyzing how we use the term duty in ordinary language. Baier separates two uses of the word "duty."

First, each of us has what may have what are termed duties of job or station. What follows are that we must perform those duties relevant to that task. At any time we might raise the question of whether we are attending to or neglecting those duties. But these are clearly duties to another and not duties to myself, for Baier.

A second way in which the term is used occurs when a person receives praise for performing some action and deflects the praise by saying, 'It was nothing at all; I was just doing my duty.' Thus Baier says the phrase, "'I am (merely) doing my duty' has come to be used to rebut the suggestion that one deserves moral praise or condemnation." 55 The reply that 'I was just doing my duty' would be inaccurate if I performed an action not required by my station. Such acts might be termed supererogatory (Baier does not use this term here). Baier's example of a person on vacation who saves another from drowning is one instance of an action that is clearly not mandated by the vacationer's station in life and so might be regarded as supererogatory.

But according to Baier, neither praise nor blame owes to a person merely fulfilling an alleged 'duty to oneself.' In addition, since the person fulfilling his duty of station has this duty to his firm, his country, or some other, there is no comparable sense in which someone owes a duty to himself.

> Obviously, no one can have a duty to himself, in this sense. No one can feel aggrieved by and complain about his own neglect of duty. 56

Further, duties usually follow from some contract made, not because of the agent's self-interest or the interests of others. A pro baseball player may have a duty to train, to eat properly, to abstain from the use of drugs, and so forth. These things are in his interest, but it is not because of his interests, or because it would be a benefit to his owners, that these are duties. The duty results from a contract, actual or implied.

Having argued against duties to self for their disanalogy to duties to others, Baier entertains several of the Kantian proposals for duties to oneself—especially the duties commanding us to develop our talents, not to commit suicide, and to treat ourselves with respect. For Baier these considerations do not tip the scale in favor of duties to oneself. To take Kant's examples of negative duties—the prohibitions against lying to oneself and taking one's life—I ought not engage in these kinds of behaviors, Baier allows, and that may be because they are "foolish" behaviors or there may be "moral reasons against it." 57 But from the consideration that there are moral reasons against these behaviors it does not follow that by engaging in these behaviors that we are violating moral duties to ourselves. It is one thing to claim that we should refrain from behavior that is to our "detriment;" it is quite another to say that we have a duty to ourselves to refrain.

Also, regarding the duties to develop our talents and to refrain from committing suicide, Baier claims that Kant's universalization argument doesn't work in these cases. On the issue of talents, Baier claims that the command 'Develop Your talents' is not a true moral precept in the way that 'Drive on the left,' becomes a true moral precept if it is incorporated in the law of the society. Violating the latter command is illegal and

immoral, since breaking the law is morally wrong. Is it morally wrong to neglect one's talents, or commit suicide, in the same way? For Baier the answer is no. The law must establish uniformities about rules concerning driving, because of the danger involved in the violation of the law. But the need for uniformity doesn't arise in the case of suicide: no harm is done if some unhappy people commit suicide and others do not.

Baier, like Singer, closes his consideration of duties to oneself by employing a Millean argument. "Society is entitled to exert moral pressure where the interests of some members are threatened by the behavior of others," Baier maintains. For Baier, then morality is social in nature. 58 It presupposes interaction between people. Given such a starting point, the possibility of having obligations to oneself is ruled out.

Baier holds to the view that morality is social by nature in his later work. In *The Rational and the Moral Order* Baier writes,

> Promising generates a duty (of the sort I call an obligation) to keep the promise made. It is generated by a certain linguistic performance, such as "I promise to be home by seven," or some such linguistic equivalent, such as, "Sure, I'll be home by seven," or by some nonlinguistic equivalent, such as, nodding in response to a question of the form, "Do you solemnly promise to do X"; and its content, what one is obligated to do, is what one says one promises to do. 59

Writing thirty-seven years after his *Moral Point of View*, Baier still rejects the possibility of obligations to oneself.

Reply to Baier

Like Singer, Baier is obviously arguing from a definition that presumes morality only obtains between separate persons. Such a definition can surely be argued for. But it just as surely strains credulity. Persons accepting any number of definitions of the term

"morality" are allowed to decide for themselves whether such an account of morality results in a *reductio ad absurdum*. I would argue that it does.

Before one accepts this social definition of morality embraced by Mill, Singer, Baier and others yet to be mentioned in this chapter, one should have a full understanding of what it commits them to, especially in the case of castaways like Robinson Crusoe instanced by Baier. According to the social definition of morality, it is all the same whether the castaway does any of the following things:

(1) Builds the best home he can for his optimal protection, eats the foods that will sustain him and builds fires in an attempt to get attention

(2) Enjoys the sun, swims as much as he cans and tries to discover new kinds of shells and rock formations

(3) Doesn't eat or protect himself from the elements and attempts to end his life

The life bent on self-preservation in (1), idle enjoyment in (2), and self-destruction in (3) are, according to the social definition of morality, morally equivalent. This is clearly so, says Baier, since in the loner's solitary universe, moral distinctions do not apply. Put another way, it is all the same whether one makes every attempt to persevere in living—and living well—or chooses to kill oneself.

Aside from the factual question of whether anyone really believes the last statement, it must be asked why this social definition of morality should enjoy pride of place. It is as if by the mere choice of a starting point, those embracing a social view of morality have defined self-regarding morality away. The question might be raised, 'What makes this an illicit move in the argument?' An appropriate reply is that it is not illicit. It is as allowed as other move. But it is just one move and not a proof. To

confront the vast landscape of moral relations and draw a line in the earth that delineates social and personal relationships and calls the former moral but not the latter seems, at bottom, as arbitrary as any other move to be made. It is hard to fathom what gives this starting point a logical nod over any other.

Of course, it might also be the case that Crusoe has future obligations to others, based on the possibility that if he gets off the island he may to able to aid family, friends, be a public benefactor, and so forth. Aside from such other-regarding considerations, however, one might further analyze Baier's following two sentences about Crusoe: "A world of Robinson Crusoes has no need for a morality and no use for one. Moral distinctions do not apply to it." Here he makes three separate assertions. It could therefore be shown that solitary individuals (following my threefold description of how he might behave above) have a need and use for such a morality, the need and use being necessary means for the end of self-preservation and, depending upon how well the solitary person achieves this end, moral distinctions do apply.

Like Singer, Baier employs something of an ordinary language approach in his consideration of the two ways in which we use the word "duty." Neither of these ordinary usages subsumes duties to oneself. Baier first consents that there are duties of job or "station" and both the doer and the person to whom these duties are owed can ask whether those duties are being fulfilled or not. Clearly these are duties to others, not oneself. It might well be asked, however, whether these duties of station are ends in themselves or means to a further, larger duty that is owed to oneself. If I ask why ought I perform my duties of job or station, someone could reply, in Baier's way, that I ought to perform them because it is my duty to do so. But one might also reply in Aristotelian

fashion that fulfilling the requirements of one's station will also lead to my own happiness or flourishing as a human being. In this sense, duties of station can be viewed as important means to self-regarding ends. Put another way, the fulfillment of the duties of one's station can be understood as a subset of overarching teleological duties, in this case duties of self-development. There is no mutual exclusivity: a duty can at once be a duty of station and a duty of personal flourishing.

A second notable way in which the term "duty" arises, Baier says, is when an agent deflects praise by for performing an action by saying, "I was merely doing my duty." As a corollary, one might also say, "I am to blame; I shirked my duty." From these usages Baier infers that neither praise nor blame attaches to an agent performing some alleged duty to himself. Duties are solely other-regarding, and can be understood when owed to one other, a family, a firm, or a country. But the analogy doesn't carry over to oneself, Baier argues, since there is no comparable way that one can owe duties to oneself as one does to others. Thus Baier's terse rejection of such reflexive duties: "No one can feel aggrieved by and complain about his own neglect of duties." 60

But the reply to Baier here is similar to the reply made to Singer's argument that having a right against oneself is "self-contradictory." It was previously shown that one right against oneself similar to that against others was the right to complain of an expectation not fulfilled. I can and often do feel aggrieved at my own shortcomings in failing to discharge what I believe to be my duties. It could plausibly be argued that appropriate responses at my own neglect of duties are regret, self-recrimination, and the like. Thus, contrary to Baier's conclusion, one can indeed feel aggrieved about and complain about his own neglect of duties, both to himself and to others.

Other Replies to Singer and Baier

Warner Wick

It can be argued that the flurry of interest in duties to oneself over the last fifty years traces to Marcus Singer's article in *Ethics* in April, 1959. Warner Wick then took issue with Singer's conclusion that "taken literally, the idea of a duty to oneself involves a contradiction." From that article on, it was off to the races. The issue of whether there were duties to oneself attracted seven philosophers to publish eight articles in the following five years. 61

Wick spends much of his article responding to Singer's citation of John Stuart Mill that "self-regarding faults" are not properly immoralities, and to whatever pitch they may be carried, do not constitute wickedness." Further, Singer wrote,

> What are called duties to oneself are not socially obligatory, unless circumstances render them at the same time duties to others. The term duty to oneself, when it means anything more than prudence, means self-respect or self-development; and for none of these is anyone accountable to his fellow creatures, because for none of them is it for the good of mankind that he be held accountable to them. 62

Wick attacks Singer's endorsement of Mill's argument, and specifically Singer's follow-on application that smoking is a self-regarding fault that can never constitute "wickedness." Whether Wick agreed with the conclusion about smoking is unknown. What is known is that according to Wick, Singer must establish the more general case that all self-regarding faults are not "moral" faults.

Though he doesn't state it as such, Wick might be read as making an attempt to puncture a universal negative statement with a single instance. Those denying duties to oneself must embrace a universal negative proposition: namely, 'There are *no* duties to oneself.' For if they allow but a single example, then their argument is undercut. Put another way, those denying such duties must make the case that all would-be examples of duties to oneself are either not really duties at all or, if they are duties, are merely duties *concerning* oneself, but in actuality are either duties to another, to society, or perhaps even to God.

Wick argues that Singer cannot make such a case. What the deniers of duties to oneself must show is that all self-regarding faults are never "moral" faults and thus cannot involve a breach of a duty to oneself. Wick thinks there are even better examples than Singer's smoking example.

> Had Singer chosen some more spectacular form of self-indulgence or self-abuse, what then? To call a self-made derelict, having progressed from folly through various stages of degradation to utter depravity, not immoral but only imprudent or misguided is to put an intolerable strain upon our language: it is to maintain a thesis at all costs. To be sure, such a person would, in all but Crusoe-like circumstances, have been sure to have injured someone else; but if such depravity is not in itself immoral, the moral thinking that says so is hardly to be found outside the bewitching groves of Academe. 63

Wick asserts that a powerful point can be drawn from his example. To deny all duties to oneself is tantamount to denying that we have a moral obligation to care for our characters *and* to deny that we have an obligation to make certain character traits the basis of our actions, quite apart from whether those traits affect others. To deny all this, Wick maintains, is "to eliminate a whole chapter from the doctrine of morals."64

The effect of excising this sizable chapter in ethics would result in viewing all duties in their external aspect alone. When we act from the moral point of view we aren't merely concerned whether person A carried out his duty to person B according to the "letter of the law;" rather, we are concerned with "the spirit with which something is do be done." Wick points out that even with contracts, "my moral duty is not simply to perform them but to "honor" them—that is, carry them out as a man of integrity would." Thus Wick concludes, "All duties, morally considered, are self-regarding, since to deny self-regarding duties is to deny what is characteristic of morality." 65

In a follow-up article in 1961, Wick pursued a different path of reasoning. 66 In this article he emphasized the distinction between the external and the internal nature of obligation, citing Kant's distinction in the *Groundwork* between ethical and juridical duties. Juridical duties obligate the agent's performance to fulfill some obligation, seeking to enforce that performance under threat of law. By contrast, an agent fulfills his ethical obligations only when he acts out of respect for the law. Juridical obligation is *outward*, concerning overt acts; ethical obligations *inward*, prescribing maxims for action. In this sense, every juridical duty carries with it a moral duty: viz., carrying out the duty in the spirit of the law.

He uses the example of an ethical duty as applied to his own profession.

> To meet our classes regularly (but, mercifully, not to take attendance) is an obligation that goes with membership in our particular faculty. To do so out of regard for the principles of our profession and not for fear of the dean, is a moral duty. But it requires no separate performance of me. The very same commitment is a duty to ourselves, in that it provides an occasion to develop our characters and wisdom, our understanding of our subjects and of human affairs. 67

Following his use of this "duty of station" to draw the distinction between legal and ethical duties, he makes another point about the relation between being obligated and being released from obligations.

Arguing against duties to oneself, Kurt Baier had made the point that if person X had a duty to himself, then it would, unlike duties to others, be one that he could *release himself* from. For Baier this is absurd, so that the duty in question is not a genuine duty. Wick disagrees, arguing that moral duties are not the kind of duties from which one can ever be released. To do what is right by acting on principle is an "ethical dimension" attending every duty of station. In addition, "The duties of virtue, which fall under the ideals of human perfection and human happiness, are also not of a sort from which one can be released." 68

For Wick the duty to discharge any obligation carries with it an obligation to self. As such, duties to oneself hold in the strong sense. If X is obligated to Y, then X is not only required to discharge that obligation externally. There is in addition an unceasing internal aspect to all such other-regarding obligations, too.

N. Fotion

In his article, "We Can Have Moral Obligations to Ourselves" N. Fotion sets out to counter the argument made by Kurt Baier and Marcus Singer that morality is social in nature. 69 Baier had agued that "A world of Robinson Crusoes has no need for a morality and one use for one." Stranded on an island, Crusoe can do what he pleases without praise or blame, for none of his actions can be morally construed. "Morality arises out of the relations between individuals," Baier insists. 70

Fotion is unconvinced. Launching his argument from deontological grounds, he shows that a Kantian universalizability principle includes the moral well-being not only of other persons but of the agent himself. He chides both Baier and Singer—though his more frequent target is Baier—for owning a too narrow view of morality.

> In short, in saying that morality is basically social, Baier apparently feels that he is pointing to one of the important characteristics of moral discourse. …He and others who are defending this same general position are not doing anything of the kind but, instead, are moralizing. They are moralizing because utterances like "We have moral obligations only to others—and not to ourselves" are a breed of moral rules which have special functions in moral discourse. 71

In the same place he adds: Baier employs an argument that is not moral but "meta-moral." The issue for Fotion is not whether morality is social but whether it is exclusively so. And there are enough considerations that make it appear that morality is not exclusively social.

Fotion points out that terms like 'ought' and 'right' could certainly have application in a Crusoe-like circumstance. Moreover, the use of such moral terms needn't be self-interested. A self-interested expression might be, 'I ought not to have done that since it does not tend to preserve my life.' A moral usage might be 'I ought not to have done that since it does not tend to preserve life.' The second usage sounds less self-interested than the first because it is "universalizable" in its application. Furthering his point about univeralizability, Fotion quotes Stephen Toulmin:

> The point at which the justification of moral decisions must cease is where the action under discussion has been unambiguously related to a current `moral principle', independent (in its wording) of person, place and time: e.g., where 'I ought to take this book and give it back to Jones at once' has given way to 'Anyone ought always to do anything that he promises anyone else that he will do' or 'It was a promise.' 72

If we accept the universalizability principle, then the principle necessarily covers everyone, including Robinson Crusoe. It must be so: if the principle says we must not discriminate, then "Crusoe would seem to have obligations to himself in addition to other living creatures." 73

Fotion's point about an agent including himself in the moral accounting is illustrated in another telling example. He asks us to imagine a predicament in which only three of five hermits can survive. The situation is such that either the first three can survive together or the last two can survive together with no other allowable combination. The final proviso is that the one who decides whether two or three will survive is one of the three. Now, on moral grounds a disinterested observer might well say that 'This agent is obligated to save three people instead of two.' Others might claim that such a decision is self-interested, not moral. Fotion replies,

> But I think that some moralists would argue here that this charge is not necessarily a valid one. To be sure, the hermit who must make the choice might choose to save three merely because he is included among them. He would then, most likely, be acting selfishly. However, he could defend himself by saying that saving three lives is a better thing to do than saving two lives—other things being equal. Making explicit this point, he might add that he has a right to include himself in the moral weights and balances. Otherwise, the situation would be a "toss-up" morally. 74

It can be argued that the deciding person has an obligation to oneself, every bit as much as he has an obligation to another. The situation is not a moral "toss-up." And to argue that one has an obligation to self is not merely to say that one has the obligation on egoistic or prudential grounds. Rather, one has such an obligation on moral grounds and maintain that anyone in a like circumstance ought to do as he does.

This leads Fotion once more to a discussion of the unveralizability principle.

> The universalizability principle reminds us that moral language does necessarily involve an appeal to rules or principles but it does not tell us in any way, shape or form what specific rules and principles are right or wrong. In fact, by not so deciding anything morally, the universalizability principle helps keep moral discourse "open-ended," that is it helps keep moral discourse structured in a way that any person or "thing" can be included in the range of some moral rule or other. 75

Not only is saving a greater number of lives instead of a lesser number unimpeachably rational, but the univeralsality principle does not discriminate between "selves" and "others," but scoops up all in its net, making the same moral demands on the former as it does on the latter.

That being said, it cannot be argued that Fotion embraces duties to oneself in the strongest sense possible. His examples of Robinson Crusoe and the hermit don't show that their interests count more than the interests of others but that they count *as much* as others, even when they are acting to further their own good. Crusoe has an obligation to himself to survive but surely this obligation to himself would not be so overriding that it could be defended at the expense of other human. The hermit counts in his own calculus of good but his right to survival doesn't outweigh the right of any other person. In the pleasure calculus he counts for one and no more than one. He has an obligation to himself as one among many. If others find themselves in like circumstances then the universality principles makes it imperative that they too respect their own interests.

William Neblett

Like N. Fotion, William Neblett also argues against assumptions made by Baier and Singer to fashion an argument for duties to oneself. 76 Nebett's twin targets are

claims made by Singer about alleged moral duties to oneself being nothing more than prudence and by Baier about morality only "arising out of the relations between individuals." 77

Neblett takes up Baier's point first. Baier's view that morality is necessarily social in effect defines away the very possibility of duties to oneself. Still, Neblett thinks that this view runs counter to the moral intuitions of most individuals. Reclusive individuals—and even isolated individuals like Robinson Crusoe, for that matter—are subject to significant moral constraints on Neblett's view.

> Most people believe that they are morally constrained from inflicting needless injury to their bodies, and even that they are morally constrained from taking their own lives. And these constraints are not, as Singer would have us believe, solely other-regarding. For we do believe that each of our individual lives has some value, and we do not believe that this value would vanish at the moment we found ourselves isolated on a desert isle. 78

Neblett's principled argument might be recast as follows:

(1) Humanity, whether belonging to an isolated agent or to others, possesses intrinsic moral value.
(2) It is wrong to compromise this moral value.
(3) Taking one's own life or inflicting needless injury on oneself are examples of compromising this moral value.
(4) Inflicting needless injury on oneself and taking one's own life would be morally wrong.

The wrong applies indiscriminately; that is, it is wrong to harm oneself or another in the manner described. On the deontological grounds that Neblett is arguing from, the universality principle doesn't discriminate in picking out the agent or others. Neblett's other point is that this duty to preserve one's life is self-regarding and not one owed to society or to mankind generally.

Neblett also undercuts Singer's contention about the mutual exclusivity of prudential and moral behavior. Surely some decisions could be regarded as practical and

prudential without being considered moral. But this is a long way from saying that the concepts moral and prudential never overlap. "As a matter of fact, we consider it both immoral and imprudent to indulge a habit that will result in an extreme debilitation of our capacities," Neblett writes. And, in a more subtle example:

> We view the young man who forgoes his education to care for an `invalid' mother —who is not an invalid but a hypochondriac—as both (1) `failing to prudently advance himself in the world' and (2) `neglecting his obligation to himself.' 79

Few would argue that the first agent, in the grip of a ruinous habit, was merely acting imprudently. In fact, it would seem that only someone in the grip of a theory—like the theory maintaining that morality is, of necessity, social—would argue an agent's life is of so little value that it's all the same, morally speaking, whether he furthers his well-being by pursuing worthwhile goals or ruins himself.

Neblett's second example illustrates the degree to which self-regarding behavior can override other-regarding behavior. A pressing matter of self-regard, like one's education, isn't merely prudential but a matter of obligation. Therefore, it takes precedence over the smaller concern—which likely doesn't even count as an obligation—of caring for one's hypochondriac mother. Both the debilitated person and the person neglecting his education have undercut their development as persons and are in violation of obligations to themselves.

There are two other arguments against duties to oneself that Neblett counters. The first is Baier's view that arguments for duties to oneself are in essence arguments for ethical egoism, since ethical egoism is "the view that each man has a predominant obligation to himself as such." 80 For one, egoism seems to imply that there are only

obligations to oneself and never to others, whereas one defending obligations to oneself allows that there are also obligations to others. In addition, an obligation to oneself needn't be egoistic in prescribing that one pursue only one's private advantage. In fact, Neblett cites Kant as making this point. Not only are duties to oneself and duties to others not mutually exclusive, but

> Our duties towards ourselves constitute the supreme condition of and the principle of all morality. …Our proper duties towards everything in the world. First among these is the duty we owe our own selves. 81

While one might reject Kant's deontology and take a different view of duties to oneself, Neblett argues that traditional utilitarianism, since it recommends the maximization of pleasure, also favors self-regarding morality.

If maximization of pleasure is a good, then the promoting of one's own pleasure is "a component in the maximization of pleasure." He cites Sidgwick arguing for "the virtue of prudence" and the latter's view that "Most men would assent to Butler's statement that `interest, one's own happiness, is a manifest obligation.' In other words, they would think that a man *ought* to care for his own happiness." 82 By contrast to this "traditional" utilitarianism, Neblett thinks that Baier and Singer embrace an "exaggerated utilitarianism." According to this view,

> Morality, as other-regarding, is concerned solely with promoting the private advantage of other persons; and self-regarding morality, in so far as it were possible, would of necessity be concerned with promoting one's own advantage. Since promoting one's own advantage is a matter of prudence and not of morals, it cannot possibly be obligatory. Therefore, obligations to oneself are impossible. 83

That this exaggerated utilitarianism is also a non-inclusive utilitarianism for leaving out

the self-regarding concerns of the agent is not the only criticism one could make. What is also wrong with it is the very asymmetry that it assumes.

Those arguing for duties to oneself can point out that morality toward others cannot be reduced to promoting their private advantage and that, similarly, morality toward ourselves cannot be reduced to furthering our private advantage. Says Neblett,

> I have obligations `to human beings' and vis-à-vis these obligations that I have, I also count as a human being. I am as morally constrained from treating myself with disrespect and unconcern as I am morally constrained from treating any other human being with disrespect and unconcern. 84

This introduction of a kind of moral symmetry into the issue is yet one more example that the Baier-Singer manner of talking about duties to oneself falls short.

Dennis Anthony Rohatyn

Like Fotion and Neblett, Dennis Anthony Rohatyn generates his view by countering arguments Kurt Baier raised against the possibility if duties to oneself. Rohaytn argues that Baier and Marcus Singer want to rule out "reflexive cases of obligation altogether, as if they were not genuine relations." 85 For Rohatyn, this represents an exceedingly narrow view of what obligations are.

> If we view obligations as a relation between two parties, a and b, what considerations if any compel us to add that *a* and *b* are distinct, that is, that *a* doesn't equal *b*? Why not let `a = b' be a special case of a more general relationship, *Rxy*? The problem boils down to one of taxonomy, and as such, as Plato once remarked, is but a matter of preference. 86

Indeed, if one's language rule requires that obligations exist only between separate

persons, then one has "solved" the problem of self-regarding duties in advance of even considering it. But if all that underlies such a rule is a preference for defining obligations in one manner than another, then it is just as easy to adopt an alternate preference in one's definition.

Rohatyn's second criticism is a corollary of his first. If one acknowledges only obligations modeled on the idea of clear-cut cases of contractual legal obligations, then it will turn out that obligations to oneself will be disqualified. And Baier, following H.L.A. Hart, adopts just such a model. 87 From there it is but a half-step to the conclusion that there can be no self-regarding obligations, since no person signs a contract with himself. But Rohatyn thinks there is an obvious rejoinder to this legal model.

> Now, it is true that no one ever signs a contract with himself, but is this an essential characteristic of moral obligation, too, or its it not merely a form of life, that is, a legal custom. And, while a legal agreement between one and the same person would be baffling, because superfluous (who would contest it?), the same thing is not true of ethical obligations to oneself: for instance, standards one simply fails to live up to (which is why there is a tendency to self-impose the obligation in the first place), because of physical inability, conflicting impulses or desires which get the best of us (so-called "moral weakness"), or what not. To call self-regarding duties "misleading" betrays a stubbornness: or if the parallel between legal and moral obligations breaks down (as would the attempt to extend either facet to religious obligations), why cling to it at all costs? This is nothing but a foolish consistency. 88

If there is no logical requirement that there be parallels between legal and moral obligations, then the picture of what kinds of obligations widens. With the "legal-parallel requirement" dropped, it is possible to consent to the notion of moral duties to oneself. In addition, all sorts of reflexive moral values—which are ruled out according to the legal parallel requirement—can be seen as having moral status. Thus Rohatyn surmises, "The

wholesale exclusion of self-regarding duties, by that or any other name, would be grossly unfair to certain significant moral considerations which demand a place in the sun." 89

In showing that the logic of obligations doesn't rule out the notion of self-regarding obligations, Rohatyn argues unambiguously for duties to oneself. Still, he has not argued that the duties an agent has to himself trump duties to others and so has not argued for them in the strong sense.

R. B. Brandt

In his discussion of duties, R.B. Brandt bears similarities to both Singer and Baier. He addresses the notion of duties to oneself in his paper, "The Concepts of Obligation and Duty." 90 It is his avowed purpose in that paper to provide an accurate description of the ordinary use of terms obligation and duty.

In speaking of the concepts of obligation and duty Brandt takes the position that only other persons can obligate us. 91 In addressing the grammar of obligation and duty concepts he writes, "…Of course, I can obligate myself, e.g., by a promise. I cannot 'duty' myself. Indeed, it even sounds queer to say that I have `made' something my duty." 92 By contrast, another person or group can make something my duty. For example an academic committee might be appointed which enlists my services to review course requirements in a university.

Aside from pointing out how self-regarding locutions involving the word 'duty' are exceedingly odd, Brandt launches an attack upon the very possibility of obligations to oneself. Before doing so, however, he tries to make quick work of the notion that duties must be owed to someone. We say things like "citizens have an obligation to observe the

laws of their country;" or "citizens in a democratic country have an obligation to vote;" or "mentally gifted people are under an obligation to develop capacities." Brandt concludes that in many of these cases it isn't sensible to identity an individual to whom the obligation under question is owed. Thus, he concludes, there are uses of the terms "obligated" and "obligation" where it would be "absurd" to identify an individual to whom the obligation is owed. 93

Here Brandt echoes Singer, who argued:

> I can see no good reason from supposing that every duty must be a duty *to* someone. Many duties…are thus relative to persons, are duties to some assignable individual or group, and this feature…is characteristic of duties arising out of contracts or promises. But not all duties arise out of contracts or promises. Why then must all duties be supposed to have this characteristic? 94

Armed with the notion that obligation statements often don't refer to a specific person obligated, Brandt discusses the specific case of obligations to oneself.

> There is widespread talk of 'obligations to oneself' an expression used sometimes, I think, to refer to a person's obligation to protect his own interests when it would be easier to allow aggressive persons to impose on him, but used most often, probably in affirming one's right to live up to one's moral standards, when one has convictions one feels should be respected by others, particularly by persons with less rigid standards who encourage participation in activities one considers wrong. 95

Thus Brandt reduces talk of obligations to oneself to two senses: (1) to a person's 'obligation' to protect his own interests and (2) to his right to live up to his own moral standards. But Brandt remains unconvinced that we are speaking of moral obligations here.

Brandt thinks that the tendency to argue that there are duties to oneself is understandable given a background assumption that all obligations are owed to someone. This is so because if no other person to whom the duty is owed can be identified, it is unsurprising that we would say that a duty owed to X might well be a duty owed to oneself. The notion that duties must be owed to someone is an inheritance of a certain "paradigm" usage, according to Brandt. Our earliest uses of the term "duty" concern duties owed to someone. 96

Brandt argues that even if we were to concede that the terms obligation and duty could be used with respect to oneself, there is no guarantee that we would be speaking of "moral" obligations. It might well be the case that our talk of obligations to oneself concerns non-moral obligations rather than `moral' ones. We ought not assume that obligation talk is, perforce, talk about morals. Before we can say that a duty or obligation if a moral one, Brandt, argues, it must have five characteristics.

The first of these requirements is that the duty must be a matter of conscience. The failure to perform the duty will, unless the agent has some justification or excuse, cause guilt feelings and lead to feelings of moral disapproval in the agent. A second requirement is that the obligation must have what Brandt calls "community-wide support," and not merely enjoy the favor of a specific class, as do certain codes of honor. A further requirement of a moral duty is that a failure to perform it will reflect on one's character, for example, showing a deficit of honesty or respect for the rights of others, and so on. Fourth, the moral duty cannot emanate from a counsel of prudence or convenience, but must be a matter of principle. Finally, the duty must have a "stringency superior" to that of the claims of customs, manners, tastes and the like. 97

For Brandt, then, requirements like these suggest that the term moral arises more in social contexts than individual ones. Nothing in his view suggests that reflexive relations qualify as "moral" relations. With Brandt then, we are back to the social notion of morality, the notion that moral obligations are those that involve at least one person besides myself.

Later, in *Morality, Utilitarianism, and Rights* (1992), Brandt once again addressed the matter of duties to oneself. He argues that the idea of an obligation to self has been largely "abandoned." For Brandt, the reason is simple and it harkens back to Baier's notion of releasing another from a duty. "It is of the essence of an obligation-to that the one to whom the obligation is owed can at will release the obligated from his obligation," Brandt writes, "so that in the case of obligation to oneself, there is no real obligation at all." This claim, Brandt continues, leaves open the question of whether there are obligations "respecting" oneself which are not duties "to" oneself. Examples of these duties might be duties of self-improvement and duties to develop one's talents. 98

Reply to Brandt

Richard Brandt suggests that there are certain features common to all uses of obligation and others common to all uses of duty. Two elements are common to all uses of obligation.

> First, one's obligations always concern a state of affairs to be reached, something to be planned along with one's personal goals. It is a prescribed end, to be taken into account in designing one's behavior. There is a second distinctive feature, present in paradigm uses of "obligation" which is common also to all normal uses. It is on account of it that one cannot quite say that for one to have an obligation is for there to be some positive goal one ought to bring about. This is the fact that "obligated" in its extended uses retains what we may call the "coercive" flavor of the

> paradigm uses. There is not necessarily an agreement-like bond to a specific individual, etc., but the suggestion is that there is a *bond as if there were. "*Obligation" is never used just to talk about what ideally ought to be, or even about what ideally someone ought to do.
>
> What then is common to *all* the non-odd uses of "duty?" Like "Obligation," one's "duty" is always to do something conceived positively as a goal to be aimed at. … Again, like "obligation" "it is your duty to" typically has more force than "you ought." Indeed, in some contexts people feel that "it is your duty" is an even more compelling, solemn, or decisive claim than "it is your obligation." 99

Brandt's point about the concepts "obligation" and "ought" is well argued. If one is obliged to do X, one ought to do it. But the reverse is not true. There is a greater stringency and coercive quality to obligation language than there is to ought language. So just one because one ought to look after one's interests doesn't mean that is obligated to.

Brandt's point follows just as naturally from the views of Singer and Baier. While each shuns the "duty" of self-regard, each says nothing objectionable about ought language. But since that is the case, isn't this a way of saying that people ought to be prudent and that to act imprudently is something one oughtn't do and runs against one's best interests? Would it be immoral to act against one's interests, one's self-development? To say no would seem like defending a thesis at all costs—the thesis, again, being that all morality is social, never personal.

Brandt also maintains that people ordinarily assume that duties must be owed to someone. Thus, in some instances they wish to assign the duty to someone and, not finding a person to whom it is owed, assume that it is owed to oneself.

> It has been doubted that there are obligations to do something, except as obligations to some person or persons; this contrasts with "duty," about which a parallel claim would be much less plausible. It is important to see that this is not true, at least for current usage….we say (1) "citizens have

> an obligation to observe the laws of their country," (2) "citizens in a democratic country have an obligation to vote;" (3) "Mentally gifted people are under an obligation to develop their capacities." To go back to earlier times, *O.E.D*. cites Burke as saying, (4) What obligation lay on me to be popular?" And it gives an 1859 example, (5) "You are obligated to vindicate yourself." In most of these cases it seems hardly sensible to attempt to identify any individual to whom the obligation is owed. On the other hand if we had the authors of these statements before us, and more context were filled in, possibly in some instances it would be natural to pick out such an individual. We must conclude, however, that there are uses of "obligated" and "obligation" in connection with which it would be absurd to identify an individual to whom the obligation is owed.
>
> Nevertheless some people feel that there must be someone to whom one is obligated if one is obligated is all…Moreover, an implicit assumption to this effect may lie behind the way a good many persons talk. For there is widespread talk of "obligations to oneself." … Such talk is understandable if there is an implicit assumption to the effect that obligations are always to someone. For, given such a tendency, in case no other person is identifiable as the one to whom an obligation is owed, it is not surprising that the "to X" blank is filled in as "to myself." But why should anyone think, or talk as if, obligations are always owed to someone? This is a puzzle. 100

Whatever the validity of Brandt's general contention that duties needn't be owed to someone, it isn't difficult to figure out to whom his abbreviated list of obligations are owed.

Despite his claim that it is "hardly sensible to identify any individual" to whom an obligation is owed, the fifth one—"You are obligated to vindicate yourself"—is better understood as being owed to oneself than it is to someone else or to no one in particular. It might be compared with, "You are obligated to make an effort in life" or "It is your duty to live with honor." If one proceeds by process of elimination, it is hard to see that statements with this kind of form and content can be owed to one's friends, spouse, parents, government or God. Not being suitably owed to some other, and being owed to someone, they are strong candidates for good being owed to oneself.

Deontologists

Bernard Gert

Given the fundamental place of duty in deontological theories, one might expect that deontologists are inclined, perhaps necessarily so, toward accepting the possibility of duties to oneself. But deontologists, at least since Kant, seem split on the issue. While on deontological theories duty is primary and the morality or immorality of actions is derivative from duty, whether or not a deontologist favors duties to oneself depends on whether he regards morality as interpersonal in nature or not.

For Bernard Gert, writing in *Morality: Its Nature and Justification*, the very heart of morality consists of agents adhering to a list of prohibitory rules. 101 With his stress on obeying these rules and rejecting a personal, egoistic approach to morality in favor of rational impartiality, Gert is in ways reminiscent of Immanuel Kant. While Gert credits a variety of influences on his philosophy—including Thomas Hobbes, Kant, Mill, Singer, Baier, and John Rawls—the ground of deontology is most evident in his thinking. Despite this categorization, Gert makes statements that suggest he embraces a social view of morality. Early on in *Morality: Its Nature and Justification*, Gert writes:

> I shall attempt to justify a system that meets the following definition. Morality is an informal public system that applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, and includes what are commonly known as the moral rules, ideals, and virtues and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal. Those preferring a smaller and more formal definition can simply take the first eleven words, Morality is an informal public system applying to all rational persons, as the definition. 102

While "applying to all rational persons" tilts toward the possibility of duties to oneself, the phrase "governing behavior that affects others" delineates the field and shows that

morality is social and not personal for Gert. This becomes more apparent in Gert's discussion of virtues and vices.

Gert draws a distinction between personal virtues like prudence, temperance, and courage and moral virtues like kindness, truthfulness, and justice. While the former virtues are clearly good to possess, and rational persons would clearly want them for themselves, it needn't be the case that all impartial, rational observers would want others to have them. These impartial observers wouldn't want a cruel person to have the personal virtues, for this would only increase that person's chance of inflicting evil on others. Also, a rational egoist may desire a world where only he possessed such virtues. Thus the value of personal virtues is merely conditional. This point, not to mention Gert's argument about morality being social, proves that he countenances no obligations to cultivate personal virtues.

In fact, while Gert is quite clear in recommending that agents cultivate the virtues, he nowhere uses the words "duty" or "obligation" in connection with them. One example of this is his discussion of prudence. A prudent person, Gert points out, is generally contrasted with a rash or impulsive person, who undertakes a course of action that is likely to have consequences that a prudent agent would avoid. He instances a person who ought to exercise prudence on behalf of another. Thus, if, through imprudence, an investor fails to exercise due diligence and overlooks risks in investing money on behalf of a client, such action can be punished, for "It is plausible that it is as much a lack of concern for these others as a lack of prudence that was responsible for the imprudent action." By contrast, a person who habitually acts imprudently with regard to himself may be "suffering from some mental disorder," but he is not violating a duty. 103

Cultivating personal virtues needn't be exclusively a matter of self-interest exclusively, but may help an agent to act morally toward others. In this way, the personal virtues may contribute to an agent's other-regarding behavior. But it doesn't make the cultivation of those virtues a matter of duty. On a separate matter, Gert points out that it's common for a person to have the personal virtues without possessing the moral ones. But the personal virtues are not moral since "It is possible for a man to be prudent, temperate, and courageous and yet to be thoroughly immoral." 104

Duties for Gert are institutional in nature. That is, they are duties involving jobs, offices, roles, and positions. *Ipso facto*, there are no duties to oneself.

Again, for Gert the essence of morality concerns his list of ten prohibitory rules. These "justified moral rules," which he argues apply to all rational persons, have nothing to say about self-regarding moral behavior. In order, the rules are:

> Do not kill.
> Do not cause pain.
> Do not disable.
> Do not deprive of freedom.
> Do not deprive of pleasure.
> Do not deceive.
> Keep your promises.
> Do not cheat.
> Obey the law.
> Do your duty.

What justifies these rules, Gert thinks, are the five basic irrational desires. A desire is irrational, he argues, "if it is always irrational to act on it without an adequate reason." 105 The five irrational desires are: the desire to die, the desire for pain and other unpleasant feelings, the desire to be disabled, the desire for loss of freedom to act or from being acted upon, the desire for loss of pleasure. While Gert cannot prove that his list of irrational desires is complete, he thinks that it is.

One might ask why it is important for moral rules to be grounded in rationality. But to Gert, the question "makes no sense."

> In the sense of "rational" with which I am concerned, no person who understands what "rational" means would ever ask why be rational. This is the sense of rationality that plays the most basic role in justifying claims, not only in moral philosophy, but in all of philosophy as well as in everyday life. 106

Whatever commentary the list of rules and irrational desires evokes, it plainly fails to include even a suggestion of duties to oneself. It is open to a proponent of duties to oneself to turn the tables on Gert and seek to show that some of his rules—like those concerning prohibitions on killing and deceiving, for example—might apply as duties to oneself. But Gert clearly doesn't acknowledge such duties. Moral rules for Gert are other-regarding.

In addition to rules, Gert sees morality as including ideals. Gert argues that, in one sense, moral ideals seem more suggestive of the nature of morality than moral rules. A person can act in such a way that he never transgresses a moral rule, but he can do this by living alone, without having contact with others; following moral ideals, on the other hand, would involve helping other people. Despite this insight about the nature of morality, moral ideals still occupy a secondary place. For a human society to exist, its members must generally act in accordance with moral rules about what is required and prohibited. Failing to act in accordance with the rules warrants punishment. By contrast, while moral ideals contribute to human flourishing, an agent's failing to live up to ideals does not warrant punishment. For Gert, acting in accordance with ideals is to be encouraged but is not morally required.

Reply to Gert

Once Gert defines morality as "an informal public system applying to all rational persons," then the defender of duties to oneself has an obvious rejoinder. For each agent is obviously included in the accounting of all rational persons. Gert's qualifier that morality "governs behavior that affects others" places an other-regarding restriction on his view of morality.

This other-regarding restriction is further evident in his ten moral rules. But at least four of his rules—and possibly as many as eight—have a self-regarding application. Don't kill (rule one), do not cause pain (two), do not deceive, (six) and keep your promises (seven) are moral rules that point inward as well as outward. If, according to Gert, the grounding for such rules is a set of irrational desires that it is "unreasonable to act on," then how could it be that such irrational desires don't apply to oneself? Unless Gert holds to some arbitrary line between the agent and others, the answer would be that such rules do apply to oneself. The alternative would be a "moral" world in which it was necessarily wrong to kill, cause pain to, deceive, and break promises, but with one proviso: the wrongness consists in doing all of these things to others. In this world it would be morally neutral and hence optional for agents to do such things to themselves. But in such a world agents would be violating their own best interests, hence violating their very rationality. In addition, this would thwart one of Gert's ends of moral action: the lessening of evil or harm.

Alan Gewirth

Alan Gewirth derives his view on the question of duties to oneself from his Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC). This generic principle of obligations and rights may be expressed as a precept addressed to every agent: "Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself."

Gewirth argues that the PGC is a necessary principle in two ways.

> It is formally or logically necessary in that for any agent to deny or violate it is to contradict himself, since he would then be in the position of holding that rights he claims for himself by virtue of having certain qualities are not possessed by other persons who have those qualities. The principle is also materially necessary, or categorical, in that, unlike other principles, the obligations of the PGC cannot be escaped by any agent shifting his inclinations, interests, or ideals, or by appealing to institutional rules whose contents are determined by convention. 107

Given the formal requirements of the PGC, Gewirth argues that it seems "anomalous" for someone's duties to be grounded only on the freedom and well-being of other persons but exclusive of his own freedom and well-being. If someone has a duty to refrain from harming others, wouldn't that duty, perforce, commit him to refrain from harming himself?

It might seem so. In fact, the very principle of consistency that Gewirth espouses would seem to demand it. Still, Gewirth points out that there are important objections to the idea of duties to oneself. He enumerates five arguments that he claims are telling against the possibility of duties to oneself. All five conspire to suggest that the notion of duties to oneself is linguistically muddled or illogical.

First, if duties to oneself are strict duties like other duties, then the agent believes that pressure, even coercion, is justified to enforce them. Applied to duties to oneself, however, this would imply that the person who has the correlative right, namely oneself, is justified in his own self-coercion (Gewirth doesn't provide an argument for why self-

coercion is illogical or in some sense absurd). Second, any argument maintaining that a person has duties to himself would, perforce, because of the correlativity of rights and duties, maintain that he has rights against himself. But if this were the case, then the right-holder could give up his right and release the other of his duty. This makes the notion of duties to oneself self-contradictory, since the notion implies that the agent both can and cannot release himself from his duties to himself. Third, if a duty to oneself is like other duties, then one who violates a duty to himself is in the odd position of both gaining and losing. For if he is the agent to whom the duty is owed, he loses when the duty is violated. But since he is also the one who has violated the duty, he gains. Fourth, Gewirth argues that duties to oneself—especially those to further one's own happiness or avoid harming oneself—are "nugatory." This is because the point of a duty is to curb one's natural inclinations. But agents are already inclined to promote their self-interests and avoid self-harm; so, their actions to those ends could hardly be described as duties. Fifth, duties to oneself, and self-regarding virtues in general, cannot be "moral" duties, since the term "moral" always has a social definition, not one that is personal to individual agents. 108

On this last point about social morality, Gewirth is unambiguous on the first page of his book. He writes,

> Morality is a set of categorically obligatory requirements for action that are addressed at least in part to every actual or prospective agent, and that are concerned with furthering the interests, especially the most important interests, of persons or recipients other than or in addition to the agent or speaker. 109

It is this last clause view that determines Gewirth's view of the matter.

Gewirth's other-regarding conception of morality is restated later on. "Morality," he argues, "is primarily concerned with interpersonal actions, that is, with actions that affect persons other than their agents." 110Merely teleological considerations are not enough. It is not enough, that is, for an agent to justify the morality of his action by saying that it was the action he most wanted to do, that it was, in other words, the action that furthered his personal goals, that it benefited him, and so on. Moral action can only be justified on the ground that it benefits others.

Gewirth uses the term "transactions" to describe the actions that take place between agents. One agent acts and the other is a "recipient" of that action.

> Every agent logically must follow certain generic obligations. Negatively, he ought to refrain from coercing and harming his recipients; positively, he ought to assist them to have freedom and well-being whenever they cannot otherwise have these necessary goods and he can help them at no comparable cost to himself. The general principle of these obligations and rights may be expressed with the following precept addressed to every agent: *Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipient as well as of yourself*. 111

It is this very point, however, which led Gewirth to be attacked by Marcus Singer.

Singer is perplexed as to how Gewirth can derive his Principle of Generic Consistency—"Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as yourself"—which is moral, from a mere prudential consideration. 112 To answer the charge, Gewirth clarifies what he means by "prudential" and "moral."

For Gewirth, the distinction between the terms depends upon whose interests or purposes are being served.

> A right or ought is prudential when it serves or upholds only the agent's or the speaker's own interests or purposes. It is moral when it serves or upholds the interests or purposes of at least some person or persons other than or in addition to the agent or the speaker. 113

Each agent has prudential rights, which are based on their self-interests and purposes. These rights he labels "claim rights" which "entail correlative duties from other agents to act or forbear in the ways required for the right holder's having the object of his right." These duties, set in motion by the agent claiming the original prudential right, are themselves moral, however, since the agent now has to uphold or take favorable account of the interests or purposes of other persons—namely, of all prospective purposive agents, whose generic rights, and hence whose possession of freedom and well-being, he is now logically committed to endorsing. 114

For the purposes of the issue of duties to oneself, the point is again made that a distinction must be drawn between an agent's prudential rights and the correlative moral duties to others. It is a matter of prudence, not morality, when I pursue my own interests or purposes merely. But it is a matter of morality when I am upholding the interests of others.

In *Self-Fulfillment* (1998), Gewirth repeats the first four arguments about duties to oneself, adding but a single line to the first argument about self-coercion, writing, "But this seems odd." 115 Notably, in *Self-Fulfillment* he omitted the fifth argument from *Reason in Morality*, the one that argued that any duties to oneself cannot be "moral" duties, due to a social definition of moral that precludes them. In place of that earlier fifth argument against duties to oneself, he added two more.

The new fifth argument in *Self-Fulfillment* is curious, not to mention singular.

> Gewirth argues that if there were a duty to develop prudential virtues bearing on one's freedom and well-being, and if, as he has already argued, agents have rights to freedom and well-being, "it would follow that the duty and the rights have the same objects." But this cannot be allowed, since the objects of rights are benefits or goods to the right-holder

while the objects of duty are burdens to the duty-bearer. It would follow, untenably according to Gewirth, that the same objects are both benefits and burdens to the same person. In addition, the new sixth argument rejects duties to oneself on the grounds that such duties would entail that one ought to develop whatever is conducive to one's self-interest. But if this were so, two things would seem to follow. One, there would be no limit to such duties, and, two, there would be duties for whatever was instrumental to our purely selfish ends. 116

Reply to Gewirth

In general, Gewirth's denial of duties to oneself is inconsistent with his own Principle of Generic Consistency. This "generic principle of obligations and rights" applies to "every agent." In arguing that agents should "Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself" he couldn't have been clearer about how agents are obliged. This imperative, so obviously recalling Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, strikes a balance between self- and other-regard.

Gewirth's first two arguments against the possibility of duties to oneself are similar to those made by Singer and so my response to them will be brief. First, he argues that a person who has a right against himself would be justified in his own "self-coercion," just as agents to whom duties are owed believe that coercion is justified to enforce them. Gewirth doesn't show that this notion is illogical but seems to assume that it is odd or absurd. So because

(1) Duties to oneself are strict.

it doesn't follow that

(2) Duties to oneself are strict like duties to others are.

Surely self-criticism and self-reprimand might be considered forms of self-coercion, so there is nothing internally contradictory in the notion of reflexive criticism. His second argument –the view that the notion of duties to oneself is self-contradictory, since the agent "both can and cannot release himself from duties to himself" –has already been made by Singer and I have responded to it earlier in this chapter in my reply to Singer.

Gewirth's third argument states that the one who violates a duty to himself is in the "odd position of both gaining and losing. For if he is the agent to whom the duty is owed, he loses when the duty is violated. But since he is also the one who has violated the duty, he gains." Other than the oddity of this, it is hard to know why Gewirth would point it out. Even if it is true, what follows from it? That there cannot be such duties? It might be pointed out that his last conclusion doesn't follow. If someone violates a duty to oneself, it would be hard to see the "gain." Jones abused himself (was servile, disrespected himself, failed to persist in his effort, squandered his talents, etc.) and so he gained? Aside from the curiosity Gewirth notes in noting how one and the same agent loses and gains, it is hard to see how this disproves the possibility of a duty to oneself.

His fourth argument—that a person is already inclined to promote his self-interest and so cannot be said to have a duty to do so—was made previously by G.E. Moore. Gewirth's argument assumes that persons are always inclined to promote their interests and avoid self-harm. But this is not the case. Thus Butler bemoans a world in which there isn't too much self-love but too little. Men often don't know where their true interests lie. They often set out on courses of behavior that are self-gratifying but which lead to self-harm. Thus agents often fail to promote their genuine interests.

The fifth argument—that there cannot be moral duties to oneself since the term moral always has a social definition—is not the conclusion of an argument but a language rule, as I have previously noted.

In the next chapter I will demonstrate that there are duties to oneself.

Notes for Chapter Three

1 *On Liberty*. edited by David Spitz, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, York, 1975, p. 73

2 Ibid., p. 73

3 Ibid., p. 10

4 Ibid., p. 74

5 Ibid., p. 71

6 Ibid., p. 73

7 Ibid., p. 78

8 Ibid., p. 80

9 Ibid., p. 74

10 Ibid., p. 73

11 Ibid., p. 3

12 Ibid., p. 15

13 Ibid., p. 73

14 Ibid., p. 76

15 Ibid., p. 11

16 John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Essay on Bentham*. (New York: Meridian, 1962), p. 257

17 G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 218. Moore at times refers to this quality of an action to produce a greater effect as one action having a "greater total result" than another.

18 Ibid., p. 217

19 *Ethics.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 72. In *Ethics*, first published in 1912, Moore used the phrase "total consequences." "The question whether an action is right or wrong always depends upon its total consequences."

20 Ibid., p. 74

21 Ibid., p. 73

22 *Principia,* p. 170

23 Ibid., p. 218

24 *Ethics,* p. 73

25 In "Duties to Oneself" in Ethics, 69, 1959 pp. 202-205

26 *Generalization in Ethics*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961)

27 No less than seven philosophers joined the debate, including Warner Wick, "More About Duties to Oneself," *Ethics*, 70, 1960, pp. 158-83 and "Still More about Duties to Oneself," *Ethics*, 71, 1960-61, pp. 213-16; Daniel Kading, "Are There Really No Duties to Oneself?", Ethics, 70, 1960. pp. 155-57; Nicholas Fotion, "We Can Have Moral Obligations to Oneself," *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 43, 1965, pp. 27-34; Frank Knight, "I, Me, My Self, and My Duties," *Ethics*, 71, 1960-61, pp. 209-12; George I. Mavrodes, "Duties to Oneself," *Analysis*, 24, 1964, pp. 165-67; Jack W. Meiland "Duty and Interest," *Analysis*, 23, 1963, pp. 106-110; Mary Mothersill, "Professor Wick on Duties to Oneself," *Ethics*, 1960-61, pp. 205-08. Kurt Baier had written a portion of a chapter on "Obligations to Oneself" in his book *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) 1958.

28 "Duties and Duties to Oneself" in *Ethics*, 73, 1962-63, pp. 133-42

29 *Generalization*, p. 302

30 Ibid., p. 302

31 Ibid., p. 303 In chapter four I will argue that prudential actions are morally obligatory.

32 Ibid., p. 311

33 Ibid., p. 312

34 Ibid., p. 313

35 Ibid., p. 313

36 Ibid., p. 313

37 Ibid., p. 313 On the issue of releasing oneself, Singer is not just arguing that one can release oneself from a "duty to oneself" when there is a duty to another which conflicts with and / or outweighs the duty to self. Rather, he is arguing that one can always release oneself from a duty, whether there is an actual duty to others or not.

38 Ibid., p. 314

39 Ibid., p. 315

40 Ibid., p. 311

41 Ibid., p. 317

42 Ibid., p. 317

43 Ibid., p. 318

44 *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. by Becker, Lawrence C. and Becker, Charlotte B. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992) see especially Laurence Thomas' essay on Baier, where he says that *The Moral Point of View* established Baier as "one of the three or four leading voices in the school of thought known as the good reasons approach to ethics."

45 American Philosophical Quarterly 3 (July 1966) pp. 210-226

46 *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1958)

47 Ibid., p. 215

48 "Moral Obligation," p. 225

49 The Moral Point of View, p. 215

50 Ibid., p. 216

51 Ibid., p. 216

52 Ibid., p. 217

53 Ibid., p. 217

54 Ibid., p. 218

55 Ibid., p. 221

56 Ibid., p. 227

57 Ibid., p. 227

58 Ibid., p. 228

59 *The Rational and the Moral Order*, p. 315. In this work Baier defines obligations as a "subclass of institutional duties."

60 *The Moral Point of View*, p. 227

61 Warner Wick, "More About Duties to Oneself" in *Ethics*, January, 1960, lxx, 2, p. 159

62 Ibid., p. 159

63 Ibid., p. 160

64 Ibid., p. 161

65 Ibid., ps. 161-162

66 Warner Wick, "Still More about Duties to Oneself" in *Ethics*, April, 1961, lxxi, 3

67 Ibid., p. 217

68 Ibid., p. 217

69 N. Fotion, "We Can Have Moral Obligations to Ourselves," *Australian Journal of Philosophy,* 43, 1965, pp. 27-34.

70 Ibid., p. 27

71 Ibid., p. 27

72 Ibid., p. 29

73 Ibid., p. 29

74 Ibid., p. 31

75 Ibid., p. 33

76 William Neblett, "Morality, Prudence, and Obligations to Oneself," *Ethics*, 80, 1, October, 1969, pp. 70-73

77 Ibid., p. 70

78 Ibid., p. 71

79 Ibid., p. 71

80 Ibid., p. 72

81 Ibid., p. 73

82 Ibid., p. 72

83 Ibid., p. 73

84 Ibid., p. 73

85 Dennis Anthony Rohatyn, "Self-Regarding Duties Again," v. 14, May, 1971, p. 118

86 Ibid., p. 118

87 Hart's view can be found in "Legal and Moral Obligation" in *Essays in Moral Philosophy, ed by A.I. Melden.* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958)

88 Ibid., p. 118

89 Ibid., p. 119

90 *Mind*, 73, 1964. pp. 374-393

91 William Frankena, in his book *Ethics*, classified Brandt as a rule utilitarian. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall) 1973 p. 37. See also Gregory Kavka's view of Brandt in the *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, p. 96. For further evidence of Brandt's view, see especially *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1979, where Brandt argues that people would choose, if fully rational, not according to individual, irrational desires but would choose according to a common, happiness maximizing code.

92 "The Concepts of Obligation and Duty," p. 378

93 Ibid., p. 379

94 *Generalization in Ethics*, p. 316

95 "The Concepts of Obligation and Duty," p. 379

96 Ibid., p. 380

97 Ibid., pp. 381-82

98 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 74

99 “The Concepts of Obligation and Duty,” op. cit., p. 392

100 Ibid., pp. 379-80

101 (New York: Oxford University Press) 1998

102 Ibid., p. 13

103 Ibid., p. 294

104 *The Moral Rules.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 159

105 Ibid., p. 45

106 Ibid., p. 45

107 Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*.(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978),p. 135

108 Ibid., p. 334

109 Ibid., p. 1

110 Ibid., p. 129

111 Ibid., p. 135

112 “On Gewirth’s Derivation of the Principle of Generic Consistency,” *Ethics* (January 1985) pp. 297-301

113 “From the Prudential to the Moral: A Reply to Singer,” p. 302

114 Ibid., p. 302

115 *Self-Fulfillment.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 135

116 Ibid., p. 136

Chapter Four: Duties to Oneself

In this chapter I will set out the argument that there are duties to oneself in the strong sense that I have described. That is, I argue that such duties are not grounded selfishly or egoistically, that they are not obligatory just because cultivating them contributes to the common good, and that acting on some self-regarding duties is absolute, not *prima facie*, since they override considerations of duties to others and utility.

In section one of this chapter I will evaluate the social view of morality that argues against duties to oneself. In the second section I will show that the assertion that morality is exclusively social is logically inconsistent and that prudence, among other virtues, can be viewed as morally obligatory. In the third section I will offer three additional considerations that support the idea of duties to oneself. Finally, I argue for the duty to keep promises and the negative duty of self-deception in section four.

I. The Social View of Morality

There is a widespread notion, unstated by many moral philosophers but firmly rooted nonetheless, that morality is necessarily social. To elaborate, this social view of morality (SVM) holds that moral predicates like "good," "duty," "justice," and the like apply only when we are describing relations between agents. Thus Jones can fulfill his duty to Smith; Miller's charitable gesture toward his neighbor qualifies as a 'good deed;' and Brown's paying off his debt was 'just' because it 'discharged his obligation.' According to SVM, however, these moral terms and others can have no meaning when

describing reflexive or personal moral relations. This is because morality, being interpersonal in its essence, necessarily involves the interests of others. In short, matters personal to the agent may be prudential at best, but never rise to the level of what is moral.

According to SVM, it is as if there are two spheres, separate and unequal, which impact the way we use moral predicates. The social sphere is the moral sphere, since in acting publicly I am affecting the lives of others. This is the sphere which includes all those actions and relations affecting others. Such actions and relations include but are not limited to meeting deadlines, doing favors, making promises, giving to charities and so on. The same is not true of the private sphere. When I act privately, moral predicates do not apply to my actions, since my private actions bear, at best, only indirectly on others.

Prior to Mill, and his celebrated distinction between the public and private spheres of action, this view hadn't attained the status of a presupposition. But since Mill, and the subsequent flourishing of a greater number of utilitarian thinkers, the social view has enjoyed broader acceptance. Since utilitarianism recommends actions which produce the greater social effect on balance than other actions, its stress seems other-regarding.

SVM assumes that a person acting on his own behalf may be described as prudent or opportunistic, tenacious or persistent, wise or temperate, diligent or irrepressible. But while such aretaic descriptions reflect merit on agents, they imply no *moral* judgments. The same would be true of their corollary vices, such as self-indulgence, laziness, and so on. These attributes may reflect imprudence and foolishness on an agent, but don't imply that the agent is immoral. That SVM has been widely held cannot be contested. In addition to those thinkers I addressed in chapter three—Mill,

Moore, Singer, Baier, Brandt, Gert and Gewirth—others have embraced the view less directly who have not been mentioned above. John Dewey endorsed this view in *Human Nature and Conduct* and in later works. P.F. Strawson embraced the social view in his article "Social Morality and Individual Ideal." D. Daiches Raphael holds a version of the view in *Moral Judgement*. In *Ethics*, P.H. Nowell-Smith reveals his preference for a version of the social view, too. The same can be said of H.L.A. Hart. [1]

There is no apparent logical inconsistency in saying that one has both duties to others and to oneself. But the matter is different with SVM. What makes SVM different is that it reminds us of our obligations toward others, but rules out the possibility that I can have obligations to myself. It is possible, however, to deny the universal sweep of the social view and thereby make room for self-regarding duties. SVM says that "All moral duties (or obligations) are social in nature" and proponents of this view cannot admit a counter-example to defeat their universal generalization. It falls to the defender of duties to oneself (DTS) to show that at least a single counter-example exists. To defenders of DTS, the proponents of SVM have delimited the moral terrain, thus defining far too narrowly what it means for an action to be moral.

But defenders of SVM can allow that there are many examples of "good" actions in the private sphere. But this sort of good action—for instance, one that is in accord with a personal ideal or exemplifies some virtue such as self-control—cannot be regarded as obligatory. Of course, the good of following one's ideals or practicing self-control may have an indirect bearing on the social good. But, again, defenders of SVM cannot allow that such actions are ever obligatory.

Defeating the morality-is-exclusively-social position is one of two obstacles for the possibility of vindicating duties to oneself. The other main difficulty for duties to oneself is raised by the correlativity thesis. Once a rejoinder to this thesis is put forward—as I have done in my reply to Marcus Singer in chapter three—then the case has been made that the idea of duties to oneself isn't "contradictory," as Singer claims. In fact, I have shown in chapter three that the correlativity requirement that A's duty to B be connected with B's right against A can be applied to and make sense of self-regarding moral relations. So if the correlativity thesis fails to prove the impossibility of duties to oneself, and if the idea that morality is exclusively social can be defeated, then a path is cleared for grounding certain duties to oneself.

I contend that morality is not exclusively social, as Kurt Baier, Marcus Singer, and others have maintained. Baier and Singer have taken this to be the case by employing a certain language rule. To them, the statement that morality is social is true by definition. This contention ought not to be undersold: on their view we can no sooner find a moral reason that is not exclusively social than we can locate a triangle whose angles total more or less than 180 degrees. In effect, their position is tautological and hence no different from the familiar analytic assertions that bachelors are unmarried men or triangles are three-sided figures. Moreover, they have made it appear that this position is the conclusion of a chain of reasoning. In actuality, it is an assumption of their view that wants argument.

One of the reasons that there can be obligations to oneself is that the various arguments to prove otherwise have failed. I contend that the denial that morality

can be personal—or, what amounts to the same thing, the assertion that morality is of necessity always social—is frequently held as a dogma. The dogmatic position seems to be this: that the sole criterion of moral actions, and an unwaivable prerequisite for moral statements, is that they cannot be about self-regarding actions, or self-regarding virtues, but must be about some relation beyond the agent himself. Put another way, they must be interpersonal, not personal. This dogma has the effect of asserting that what is *part* of the sphere of ethics—that ethics is *often* social—constitutes the *whole* of ethics. The insistence that morality is only social shrinks the moral sphere arbitrarily. In addition, the assertion that morality is exclusively social isn't the same thing as saying that we shouldn't investigate the matter. This assertion should come at the end of the inquiry, not at the beginning.

But, while demonstrating that the assertion that morality is exclusively social is logically inconsistent is necessary for my position, it is not sufficient. For it needs to be shown that there are obligations to oneself in general and then demonstrate at least one in particular. First, I want to show that a central problem with the view that morality is social is that it saddles its defenders with logical inconsistencies.

II

The Assertion that Morality is Exclusively Social is Logically Inconsistent

If persons were asked to describe what their duties consisted in, it would not be unusual for many to enumerate a veritable swarm of obligations. A series of "must" items on their to-do lists might include tipping the mailman at holiday time, returning phone

calls and emails, taking out the trash, paying dues for various club memberships, paying assorted bills and taxes, and on and on. Such a list always reminds us of the "pull" of our outer-directed obligations, but rarely includes any obligations to oneself. The agent following his list might then run through the social and seasonal obligations of doing favors, inviting people for dinners, and attending parties, even when such attendance is expected more than appreciated. Then he must remember to send birthday cards or contribute to some charity when the hat is passed. In this swarm of obligations, the "self" is apt to be drowned. Not just drowned in the sense of being overwhelmed—a feeling which endures—but drowned in the sense of being overlooked. Amazingly, the matter of what obligations agents owe to themselves is miniscule in these various moral calculations or not considered at all. And if it were considered, it might not offer them relief from the ceaseless pull of social obligations. But an agent who recognizes that he has obligations to himself might be afforded the insight of where those obligations fit—and what place they deserve—in the grander scheme of things.

What do I mean by saying that there are "obligations to oneself?" Above all, that matters of self-regard often hold up as stringently in moral discourse as our obligations to others. When such self-regarding obligations are weak—for instance, with a "leisure obligation" to kick back, take a break and watch Tuesday night's game—they can be overridden by more serious ones. But when they are strong, they override other-regarding concerns. I regard obligations as "performative" in nature. An obligation A overrides another obligation B if, in actual experience, A is a more stringent duty than B. Following on this, if A is more stringent than B, then A ought to be *performed*.

I maintain that if the notion of self-regarding morality is to have any teeth, it must be the case that duties to oneself are not always prima facie merely, such that they fall away weakly whenever an obligation to others beckons. Suppose an agent forgoes performing some other-regarding action, like attending a family party or more casual outing like a barbecue with friends and acquaintances, in favor of a substantial self-regarding action, such as working toward a deadline of updating a resume and essay for a fellowship application. Why isn't what this agent has done morally praiseworthy? The other conclusion, though less palatable, is that his choosing the more stringent obligation is either morally neutral or morally blameworthy. After all, don't we bestow praise on agents who cancel other–regarding action X (say tutoring a student) for other-regarding action Y (assisting in a medical emergency), because Y was more pressing and stringent than X? Likewise, don't we also praise an agent who forgoes his only week to take a vacation to assist in the convalescence of a friend? If we answer both hypotheticals in the affirmative, then how can we remain logically consistent and say that attending to *my own* convalescence fails to outstrip the promise made to a friend to join him on his only week of vacation? Even if ordinary morality refuses to bestow praise on the recovering agent who must break his social promise, by what logic is this conclusion reached? None that I can see. The agent's duty in the case in question is to discharge the personal obligation, because it supersedes the social obligation. The only way to defeat the DTS argument is by fiat. That is exactly what SVM does: it adopts a definist position holding that only social obligations can be moral obligations.

So if an agent's choice to work toward a self-imposed fellowship deadline is a more serious moral matter than the social obligation to attend the party, then the choice to

forego the party functions as an obligation. One way of construing this obligation is to say that the failure to do it will involve more harm to the agent's interests than the failure to attend the party will harm anyone else's interests. Whether the self-regarding choice fits some stipulative philosophical definition of an obligation is in a sense irrelevant. For it functions in moral discourse and in actual experience as an obligation, since it is the action we would perform under the circumstances.

One manner of showing that the social view of morality is untenable is to assess how consistent it is in addressing everyday situations. Consider the following eight moral situations.

(1) An agent is praised for kindnesses, such as granting small favors (giving directions, etc.) to others. Does he deserve moral praise for these deeds?

(2) The same agent later performs actions which are benefit himself, meaning actions that contribute to his happiness and don't harm others. Does he deserve moral praise for these actions?

(3) Is developing other-regarding virtues, such as liberality and justice, part of what constitutes a moral character?

(4) Is developing self-regarding virtues, such as self-control and courage, part of what constitutes a moral character?

(5) Is harming others ever a moral issue?

(6) Is harming oneself ever a moral issue?

(7) Is lying to others morally wrong?

(8) Is lying to oneself morally wrong?

I will argue that the answer to all eight questions is "yes." My conclusion about each of these cases rests on a more general premise about the nature of morality, namely, that (in some cases at least**)** we are able to intuit that rightness or wrongness of actions in themselves without awaiting the verdict of consequences. In addition, I contend that this rightness or wrongness follows irrespective of whether the benefits the actions produce is self-regarding or other-regarding.

Before proceeding to support this view, I will point out that no one accepting what I have called a social definition of morality would agree. Their view requires that they give negative answers to the questions posed in (2), (4), (6) and (8). But I argue that to maintain that the other-regarding concerns mentioned in (1), (3), (5) and (7) are properly labeled moral matters while arguing that the self-regarding issues in (2), (4), (6) and (8) are not is logically inconsistent and reflects a misunderstanding of the nature of morality.

First I shall examine the logical and moral relationship between beneficence and benefiting oneself in statements one and two.

Beneficence and Benefiting Oneself

In examining the relationship between statements (1) and (2) above, we can assert that if some agent grants small favors, such as giving directions and doing other "small" generous deeds for others, then he deserves moral praise for such kindnesses. If one raises a question why an agent should do this, a response is needed. Why ought I give directions to a stranger? An appropriate answer might be 'Because it would help him' or 'He looked lost and stressed out,' or any number of other favor-granting rationales such

as, ‘He seemed to be in hurry.’ I venture to say that such answers would prove satisfactory, if not self-evident for many persons.

But further skeptical questions might still arise. If someone asks, ‘Why would you want to help him?’ I might invoke value terms to support my conclusion and say, ‘We *ought* to grant small favors that cost us nothing’ or ‘All things being equal, benevolence is a *good* policy’ or employ any number of other evaluative reasons. Now, unlike before, my reasons appeal to general evaluative principles. I have reasoned “backwards;” that is, starting with a specific case, I have retreated to a foundational principle from which the case follows. If the person grasps the principle more readily than he grasps the case, then we might start with a principle and reason “forward” to various cases. The principles invoked provide a kind of umbrella coverage to the cases.

But the skeptical questions might be pressed further. If someone—either in a desire to play devil’s advocate or else genuinely committed to moral skepticism—asked why we would adopt such principles, they are demanding further reasons. Here we are entitled to reply, ‘My principle cannot be supported further. You either recognize the principle as self-evident or you will probably not recognize it at all.’

If in a separate case another is entitled to expect that I keep my promise to pay him an agreed upon sum of money, then I must in fact keep it. (We are not talking about cases in which he has forfeited the right to receive the sum in whole or part because he has failed, say, to perform some service). If I don’t recognize that I ought to keep this promise, then I can be steered to a foundational principle which covers it. It is unlikely, however, that one will appreciate the force of the foundational principle, unless he sees the obligation in this unambiguous particular case. 2

It may be that the challenge to the particular case of promising may be coming from someone who has moral blinders and is thereby prevented from accepting any moral principles or the particular judgments that follow from them. Other reasons may fuel this demand for further principles. He may be an emotivist, prescriptivist or nihilist even. But the principle cannot be supported further.

We might at this point appeal to the good consequences of keeping promises or maintain to our earnest inquirer that duty requires that we be generous—as in the case of giving directions. But grounding our principles in these ways makes them more vulnerable to continued argument, not less. For what if we are fulfilling the stranger's request for directions by directing him to another's home and the stranger will use the information given to do harm, such as burgling the house at a later date, or worse. Here our consequentialist justification would blow up in our face. Or what if our enquirer reminds us that there is no duty to give directions, since Kant's fourth illustration of a duty to others is imperfect merely, and need only be applied at the time and place of the agent's choosing. So while we have a general "meritorious" obligation to do benevolent acts it does not apply to this case. Will the demand for a first principle ever end? No. Again, our enquirer will either grasp the principle immediately or not at all.

If one does grasp the principle and understands that it covers the case in question, it is but a half step away to accept further points about conflicts of obligations arising in beneficent situations. Imagine an agent who forgoes one beneficent action, such as helping a disabled neighbor to cultivate a garden at noon as promised, for another other-regarding action, like giving blood to a neighbor at a local clinic. His reason for choosing one action over the other will not be grounded in beneficence pure and simple, but more

likely in a second-order principle that urges agents when confronted with two or more acts of benevolence to perform the more pressing one.

If we can accept that actions grounded in principles and second-order principles can work in moral matters that are other-regarding, does this exclude the possibility that actions that are beneficial to self can also be moral? No. Only if we are trying to defend some theoretically motivated account of morality, like the social view of morality, would we eliminate self-regarding reasons. But without such a theoretical understanding of morality, which excludes personal reasons as moral, there are ample reasons to support the conclusion that self-regarding actions, and the habits that produce them, are moral.

In fact, the logic of intuiting matters of self-regard might be laid out as follows:

(1) We can understand our duties to others, not to self.
(2) We can understand duties to self, but not to others.
(3) We can understand neither duties to self nor duties to others.
(4) We can understand both kinds of duties.

Those denying the possibilities of duties to self must take position (3) or position (1). But I have just established the unreasonableness of (3), since in many cases we can understand our duties to others. This leaves those skeptical of DTS only (1), in which they would need to demonstrate that the process of intuiting duties to self and others is not only different, but that the one is possible while the other is impossible. I will demonstrate the inconsistency of intuiting our duties to others but not ourselves by examining the logic of self-regarding duties.

I label self-regarding reasons for action matters of moral 'self-attention.' There are some actions an agent can perform that contribute to his own happiness and don't harm others. I contend that he deserves moral praise for these actions. Let's say an agent forgoes performing some other-regarding action, like attending a party or other social

gathering as promised, for another self-regarding action, like working on a journal article he is writing on spec. Is what he has done morally praiseworthy? The answer may depend upon the description of the event. We might argue that a certain action token—such as performing a self-regarding action that could be postponed until after the party—might not qualify as a matter of moral self-attention. This might be excuse-making that gives the agent a cover or pass to "get out" of the social obligation involving family and friends.

But even as we reject such instances, this doesn't preclude the possibility that we still might accept others. For instance, if actions beneficial toward others qualify as moral—such as improving their well-being through education—then the analogue for such actions is one that is self-beneficial. That is, just as person A can act beneficently toward person B by assisting in his mental development, there seems to be no logical account that precludes the possibility that he can act beneficently toward himself. After all, if benefiting *persons* is good, why must it follow that benefit is construed as good only when it occurs between *separate* persons? If an agent develops some beneficial skill—such as cultivating a worthwhile talent for writing literature—and the cultivation of this talent contributes to his happiness, improves his condition long-term and doesn't harm others (e.g., he is not writing perverse literature whose anti-social content might one day contribute to the harm of other sentient beings) then he has acted rationally and morally. Does he deserve praise for these actions? The answer must be "yes."

Thus it is not the other-regarding features of actions in general that are morally determinative. If one is kind toward others, it is the kindness that makes it moral, not the fact that it is done for another. As with other-regarding kindnesses, the justification for

our obligations of self-attention can be stated in one of two ways. We can reason backward from particular instances to principles, or we can reason forward from principles to cases. I have proceeded in the first way: I maintain that particulars are recognizable as obligatory by themselves and imply principles. But if a dispute arises as to whether the obligation is actual, we will invariably find a principle lying behind it, suggesting that the case follows from this principle.

Again, if our moral skeptic raises the "why" question about attending to literature, we can answer that 'Each agent's self-development is a moral good.' This general premise, functioning as a moral principle, provides a covering reason for the instance about writing literature. If he balks at this explanation we might employ a broader foundational premise such as "The self-development of *all* persons is good."

If the skeptic is still unconvinced and presses the issue, we can turn the tables. Let him show his cards. Is he a consequentialist? If so, then he must acknowledge that generating good consequences for persons is a moral good, all things being equal, and so conclude that an agent benefiting himself is doing moral good. This must follow, unless he adopts a theory that says agents must promote general well-being, but must exclude their own.

After all, from the "point of view of the universe," as Sidgwick put it, the good of any one individual is of no more importance than the good of any other." [3] And from the point of view of the agent, no other person is more important than him. If this be true, then agents are directed to favor self and others equally, which is another way of saying that I am as obliged to benefit myself as I am to benefit another. The obligation to self must follow, then, unless our opponents ask us to embrace some exceptional brand of

consequentialism that says agents must at once promote general well-being while at the same time excluding their own well-being. But this is arbitrary. For a species of consequentialism that counted an agent's own good for naught would be theoretically self-inconsistent. It would be tantamount to embracing the following sort of imperative: "Agents should perform those actions that produce the greatest amount of good among alternative actions, with the caveat that their own good is to be excluded from the calculus of benefit."

But here the consequentialist might launch another broadside. He might insist that I have only shown duties to myself to be on *a par with* duties to others but not *greater than* those duties. He is correct to lay down the challenge in this way. But some duties to oneself can be shown to be greater. For nothing keeps an agent from arguing that an important self-regarding project overrides some other-regarding one. Only one such instance is needed. So if an agent wishes to persevere with some defining goal rather than joining in a worthy but time-consuming community fundraiser to benefit the homeless, then he can justify his choice by saying that the former obligation overrides the latter. He can reason that if all people pursued their nearest and dearest projects at crucial points, then the sum of utility in society would be increased, provided of course that those projects are likely to succeed and have an enduring payoff. Only occasionally, when they have the time and energy, should they let labor intensive benevolence trump personal projects. He can reason, 'Isn't this how most people apportion their time, anyway—giving to other people as time allows—and not allowing other-regarding projects to cancel out their own work?' He might think further, 'Even if time is unavailable, I can write a check for the homeless.'

There is also an unexpected benefit in defending obligations to oneself. Because I defend the idea that some of my own projects can bear a moral weight that is equal to or even greater than that of the projects of others, I may end up being tolerant of the projects of others. A meeting with another that is so important to me may, in the scheme of things, rank pretty low in his pecking order. I reason that just as my projects enjoy a pride of place because they are mine, then his enjoy pride of place because they are his.

If our opponent is a nonconsequentialist, he will examine an agent's self-attending act in itself. In this instance he must consider whether an agent's cultivating his literary talent is, in and of itself and irrespective of its consequences, morally praiseworthy. Before he answers, we can force him to consider the alternatives: is it better that an agent engages in such self-development or not? If he wants to employ a universality principle, let him. Would he wish to conclude that universalizing a maxim of neglecting the talent or ignoring it altogether is better than cultivating it? No one could rationally draw such a conclusion.

I want to contend that we avoid all these consequentialist and nonconsequentialist justifications of self-regarding morality. For we have all seen how theoretically based moral thinking takes circuitous turns, with philosophers spinning the example this way and that, to make the conclusion come out any way they desire. With consequentialist reasoning, for instance, there is a ceaseless undercurrent of nagging dissatisfaction. For it is hard to see how we can ever be certain of how the long and short- and long-term consequences of any action will play out. But even with the circuitous twists and turns of consequences, it needs to be pointed out that on consequentialist grounds actions that promise likely, significant and enduring payoffs to oneself can be easily justified when

people will hardly notice or care that an agent misses a party. One example is all that is needed to upset the universal negative judgment, hatched from a purely social understanding of morality, that personal matters are never moral matters. And one example has been furnished. Self-development is moral, a conclusion that follows from a general claim that it is good and desirable that agents further the good of agents, whether those agents are others or themselves. In general, if an agent ignores his self-development, then his action has less utility and the world would be a less moral place. But whether we ground our approval of him in utility or a sense of duty makes no difference: his action is right from the vantage point of either ethical framework.

If benevolence is "extra-regarding prudence" as Jeremy Bentham put it, can't we infer that prudence is self-regarding benevolence? If one assumes that all benevolence is other-directed or that one cannot take up a genuinely generous or moral attitude toward oneself, then the notion of self-regarding benevolence will gain no more of a footing than the notion of dry wetness. But there is an analogy between self-regard and other-regard here.

Consider: where person A assumes a generous attitude toward person B—such as performing actions on B's behalf or supporting B in ways which improve his well-being, and so on—he is said to be doing B some *prima facie* good. Likewise, A can assume such a giving attitude *toward A*. What would such an attitude entail? We can derive an answer from two vantage points.

From the impartial vantage point of person B (and all other persons similarly qualified to view A's well-being impartially and contribute to his well-being), the benevolent attitude would entail performing just those actions and supporting A in ways

that would contribute to A's interests and overall well-being. For instance, if B is a teacher and A is a student, B would want to be giving, but at the same time measured in the help he would give to A. For instance, he might criticize A's term paper constructively, offering him principles of writing that point him in a direction to be successful in writing this and future papers. But while B may instruct A on how to write, he will not want to tell A precisely *what* to write. In this manner he is not cheating on A's behalf, but rather hopes to contribute to his long-term understanding. That is, given the choice between a quick fix that would lead to A's receiving a better grade, and a long-term way to aid A, B chose the latter, hoping that his aid would contribute to B's long-term understanding. In sum, B takes an attitude of *proper* benevolence toward A.

If A wants to adopt the same attitude toward A, he can—in general and not just in the case under consideration—choose those benefits that don't result from some present passion but contribute to his overall well-being. He will not cheat on the term paper, hoping that another will write it for him or buy a paper from a service that furnishes them. A will view his own good impartially, in much the same way that others view his good. If A's reflexive attitude toward himself matched the attitude of others who were genuinely interested in his well-being as opposed to those who had no such abiding interests, then he would have adopted an attitude of proper self-regard. Thus, insofar as we could say that the behavior of B and others toward A would be moral, so too would the behavior of A toward A be moral if he patterned his attitude to himself after theirs.

I maintain, therefore, that this comparison of benefiting others and benefiting oneself is appropriate. Thus, if benefiting others is moral, then it is intuitively plausible that benefiting oneself is also moral. Therefore, the inconsistency of defending statement

(1) has been laid bare. It is not reasonable to assert that I can understand obligations to others but not to myself.

Self- and Other-Regarding Virtues

Combining points (3) and (4) about the virtues, it might be instructive to compose lists of both self-regarding virtues and other-regarding virtues and compare them. Consider the following lists:

Other-regarding	**Self-regarding**
Courage	Courage
Truthfulness	Truthfulness
Respect	Respect for oneself
Liberality	
Benevolence	
	Integrity 4
	Temperance
	Self-development
Loyalty	
	Prudence
Compassion	
	Industriousness (diligence)
Tolerance	
	Independence (or self-sufficiency)
Love	Self-love

Fairness

Gratitude

Authenticity

Forgiveness

Humility

Discernment

Curiosity

Enthusiasm

Excellence

Virtues such as liberality which have no other-regarding analogue and temperance which have no other-regarding analogue appear throughout both lists. Whether the virtues in these lists are described as personal qualities or dispositions or habits is not my concern here. I am interested in them insofar as they suggest something about self- and other-regarding morality. The argument might be made that:

(1) If moral virtues are dispositions to act rightly, and vices tendencies to act wrongly
and
(2) If tendencies to act wrongly can be overcome by well-honed virtuous dispositions
and
(3) It is appropriate to apply ought language to these well-honed virtuous dispositions, whether self- or other-regarding,
and
(4) This ought language is appropriate for cultivating virtues and shunning vices, regardless of whether they are self or other-regarding.

In addition to trying to elucidate this analogy between the language of virtues and vices for self- and others, I will argue that there are some self-regarding virtues that are duties

to cultivate in the strong sense. That is, I argue that the self-regarding virtues are not grounded egoistically, that cultivating these virtues is not obligatory just because cultivating them contributes to the common good, and that acting on some self-regarding virtues is absolute, not *prima facie*, since they override considerations of duties to others and utility. Put another way, there are some personal virtues so integral to an agent's moral and practical well-being that they cannot be overridden by other-regarding considerations. [4]

We can make some preliminary observations about these lists. Though the lists are by no means exhaustive, we can find more self-regarding virtues than other-regarding ones. Also, it is clear that some are, in the sense of *producing benefit* for others, other-regarding (benevolence), some are self-regarding (prudence), and some are both (such as courage and temperance, for instance). Given that virtues such as courage and self-control are neither exclusively social nor exclusively personal, an agent possessing courage might well benefit himself and others. Thus Miller can protect Jones from any number of harms. In ordinary circumstances, and in extreme situations such as war, one agent might save another's life. But a further point must be made: if the essence of courage is facing what is painful and standing up to fearful situations without giving in (the courageous man, for Aristotle, does not fear a noble death in noble circumstances, i.e. in battle) then this definition doesn't cut between but across the self- and other-regarding distinction. [5] But this ability to stand tall against pains is not restricted to benefiting others. Rather, it is indiscriminate regarding self or others; I can overcome pleasures and pains to benefit myself or others. Is the other-regarding benefit more morally imperative than the other-regarding benefit from the standpoint of virtue theory?

No, an excellence is an excellence, regardless of whether the virtue is personal or impersonal.

We might get a clearer picture of the self- and other-regarding qualities of courage and self-control by understanding their corresponding vices. In terms of vice, the cowardly man is comparable to the indulgent man. For the self-indulgent man, since "he craves for all pleasant things or those that are most pleasant," is led by his appetite to choose these at the cost of everything else and is pained more than he ought to be at not getting pleasant things. 6 Likewise, the cowardly man is pained more than he ought to be in fearful situations. A courageous man, like the self-controlled man, faces up to and does not run from difficult situations. In so doing the courageous and self-controlled agents benefit self and others, just as surely as their opposites, cowardly and indulgent agents, excessive as they are in the feelings of fear and desire, may harm others and themselves.

We can also consider self-regarding virtue in comparison with benevolence. If we define benevolence as a disposition to act morally and show kindness toward mankind (with the qualifiers that it is toward the right persons at the right time in the right amount, etc.), then it must be said that it is a virtue, for it is an ethically desirable character trait. Aside from being ethically desirable, benevolence might also be labeled a virtue because it is expected that agents are naturally motivated to benefit themselves but less motivated to benefit others. Would there be a need for a virtue of benevolence if people were naturally charitable and as attached to the good of others as they were to their own well-being?

But I argue that the assumption contained in the last question—that self-concern cannot be a virtue and thus we have no duty to pursue it—is flawed. The suggestion is

that all self-concern is equal to selfishness. But is it? Being selfish implies looking out for one's own concern to the detriment of others. An agent living out a personal ideal may be practicing a virtue every bit as virtuous as interpersonal virtue. To think otherwise is to let an unwarranted assumption creep into our moral thinking. The assumption is that all self-concern is selfish, which is cousin to the view that all self-interest is selfish. But to make the ascription of selfishness stick it is just not enough to say that some agent is concerned with his own interests.

For certain consequentialists and others skeptical of obligations to oneself this analysis will not do. For them, the self cannot be the legitimate object of any moral prescriptions. Even an agent who follows a worthwhile moral ideal like unrelenting persistence in some task, and measures his moral progress against the ideal, may evidence a form of narcissistic selfishness, since the agent is seen as turning away from his rightful moral ties to others. It can be said that any and all concern with oneself only undercuts moral impulses of various sorts, which must be other-oriented. Thus, agents pursuing their own projects will appear selfish. But could it be that this thinking represents a misunderstanding of selfishness by calling action tokens and action types selfish which really aren't? It would appear so. If selfishness is to value one's own well-being at the expense of others, then only selfishness of this latter sort is a vice antithetical to benevolence.

If an agent sees the needs of others as having less importance, then the agent's self-importance will be exaggerated. The agent's over-estimation of his own needs will cause him to undervalue the needs of others. But do all agents following self-regarding obligations act in this selfish manner?

While it is possible to overvalue the satisfaction of one's own needs, it is by no means necessary that an agent acting from motives of self-regard on a frequent basis will undervalue the needs of others. In addition, agents can be just as likely to undervalue their own needs while overvaluing the needs of others. Public opinion may label the person who minds his own business as selfish. Such an agent will be labeled selfish all the more if he puts his own projects first. He will need strength to overcome the uncharitable estimates of others. It will require no small amount of wisdom for him to determine how many and which kinds of sacrifices of his own interests he should make. There is no codifiable way to determine the extent of his charitable deeds. No moral algorithm will make this clear. But he can also be charitable toward himself.

In general, then, duties to act—both to benefit self and others—can follow from virtue theory. If generosity toward others can be conceptually framed, and be regarded as praiseworthy, so might a corresponding generosity toward oneself. This generosity would not consist in the indulgent pursuit of mindless pleasures or hankering for whatever is immediate or appeals to our passions. A person overly passionate about his pleasures and short-term goods is no doubt acting contrary to what Butler called "cool self-love." So any compelling concept of moral self-attention will need to concern itself with virtuous and not vicious behavior. And if it is argued that benevolence instructs us to benefit persons—not in just in any manner but properly—then the same rule will follow for self-benefit, for the acting agent is a person, too.

Courage and temperance, prudence and veracity, self-respect and self-development—these are but a few of the character traits that can be construed as excellences and excellences of a peculiar kind. They are personal excellences but not the

kind of excellences that agents are always inclined to pursue. After all, each of the virtues is but a half step from some vice. Virtues overlook a precipice of temptation. Because we are prone to give in to some present passion or pleasure, cowardice and indulgence are easy but courage and self-control are difficult. Self-destructive habits have us in their grasp and are a bane to self-development. Since it is easy to deceive ourselves about our overall circumstances, veracity is less tempting than self-delusion.

Moral self-benefit, in which we pursue our genuine good and not some momentary, apparent good, is difficult. Agents often opt for some nearer good, often a vice, and are more attached to that nearer good than they are to their real well-being. So I will consider a self-regarding virtue that covers a whole range of morally significant choices: prudence.

Prudence

Prudence as a virtue embodies a double-meaning. In the modern period prudence has at various times been associated with fiscal responsibility and being risk averse, not to mention bearing the slightly more pejorative connotation of undue carefulness. Yet prudence also possesses a classical meaning. Aristotle held that the good toward which humans tend is both active and contemplative. At the contemplative level, the good for humans is the apprehension of truth; at the active level, the good is a life in accord with reason and virtue. So if the moral virtues are means toward the achievement of the end of a happy life, prudence guarantees that the means are in accord with reason. So a soldier exercising courage requires prudence to avoid the vice of rashness or foolhardiness during a battle. An ordinary citizen who prizes punctuality may question whether

weaving in and out of traffic at high speeds is a prudent cost-benefit means of being on time for an appointment.

The seminal place of prudence can be traced to Plato's *Symposium*, where the character Agathon lists prudence as a "cardinal" virtue, with justice, courage, and temperance. These virtues were regarded as the "hinge" (cardo) around which the moral life revolved; the virtue of prudence was seen as central to their activity, as their "measure" or their prototype, their prerequisite and their foundation. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas viewed prudence as an application of "right reason to action." and as "wisdom about human affairs." 7

I want to raise two questions about prudence. (1) Can prudence be viewed as a self-regarding obligation, in view of its role as overseeing and completing the other virtues and (2) does a consideration of prudence lead naturally to other related virtues needed to improve one's life?

I believe the answer to both questions is "yes." Prudence is most often associated with private matters and construed as a personal virtue. But it is none the worse for that. I disagree with the view of Frances Hutcheson that prudence, if restricted to private advantage, can never be a virtue. For an agent promoting his own advantage is still promoting the interest of one person. 8

I will take up question one in two different ways. The first way is by analogy. Consider a solider and a risk-taking motorist. Each is exercising prudence on his own behalf. If a solitary soldier scampers from his fox hole to spray the enemy with machine gun fire, his bravado may cost him his own life only. We can also imagine a set of circumstances in which a speeding motorist is not jeopardizing the lives of others. In such

instances their poor measure of courage on the one hand, and of the value of punctuality on the other, would then be self-regarding.

They might have possessed the virtue of prudence as a disposition but still failed to take its measure appropriately when the crucial moment arrived. Harming persons would be seen as *prima facie* immoral and an agent without prudence seems to be aiming at a life of self-harm.

If the point about self-harm is not readily grasped, we can elucidate it by analogy. So we change the circumstances slightly. If our intrepid soldier is the captain of a platoon in need of his direction, then his foolhardy behavior also affects their well-being. Our speeding motorist may likewise affect his dependents in his own car and may threaten the lives of others on the road. In such cases where what Bentham called the "extent" of an agent's actions reached to others, we would conclude that the agent had judged poorly, hence immorally, by putting other's lives at risk. One way of supporting this conclusion would be to argue that both agents had failed to exhibit due respect for others. The foundation of our conclusion would be that disrespect for persons is *prima facie* immoral. Naturally, the word "persons" applies indiscriminately—both to those affected by an agent's action and to the agent himself.

If this is sound reasoning, then it also follows that disrespect for oneself is similarly immoral, since each agent is a person. So if imprudence can be counted as immoral and prudence as moral, and I have an obligation to be moral, then I have an obligation to be prudent.

Notice that this conclusion follows whether one embraces the classical or contemporary sense of prudence. So if prudence is construed in the now popular sense as

merely looking out one for one's best interests—for instance, gauging that long-term interests often supersede short-term ones and so exert a greater moral pull on us—then prudence commands me to not disrespect my person in the long-term in order to accomplish some short-term good, like drinking or smoking excessively in order to experience pleasure.

The rejoinder will be that my reply to question one needs more proof. My second way of responding to question one will be to meet this request for proof head on. Proof in ethics in general is a non-starter. Defenders of other normative ethical theories have insisted that the virtues tell us how *to be* but don't tell us what *to do.* But persuasive counters to this argument can be found. For one, we can say that deontic notions of right and wrong and duty needn't be tied to moral obligations. Rather, such deontic notions emerge from aretaic notions like excellence and prudence. For if an act is good, are we not implicitly committed to viewing it as right and obligatory? Second, it is not always clear that deontological and consequentialist theories provide clear information on what to do either. 9

For one, the request for proof is a double-edged sword. For if it is asked that I "prove" my obligations to self, I must also prove my obligations to others. If I cannot prove them, does this mean that I don't have them to others? Hardly. In some sense we know that we do have obligations, even if we fall short of a proof in demonstrating it.

If we relax our requirements for what is provable, and consider instead what is reasonable, we can imagine Smith with or without the virtue of prudence. We can look at his actions in the past, and imagine other actions five minutes from now and others well into the future. We can ask whether it is better for him to act courageously or rashly,

moderately or intemperately in his eating and drinking, and so on. I argue that the procedure for deciding on the virtues is much the same as deciding on beneficence and self-attention, as earlier in this chapter. We examine the particular action, such as driving recklessly in order to be on time or not. If we conclude that 'Smith is better off driving safely,' we may most likely be appealing to a general principle that lauds safety over risky behavior. If someone objects, we might answer more generally that safe behavior promotes Smith's well-being more than risky behavior does. At this point we would hope for consent on a point so obvious. And so an affirmative answer to question (2) follows from the affirmative answer to (1). That is, seeing prudence as a self-regarding obligation leads to seeing other virtues in a similar vein.

One avenue for objection might be with equating "safety" and "goodness." Jumping onto subway tracks in the path of an oncoming train in an effort to save a stranger (as a New York City man did last December) is anything but safe. But it is surely heroic and embodies goodness. Traditional virtue theory might have trouble recommending supererogatory actions of this sort. For one, such heroism lies in the extreme, not in the mean. So Aristotle's theory of the virtues has a particular problem recommending heroism and saintly behavior. But Aristotle is not alone.

Heroic action is problematic for normative theories, too. Non-consequentialist theories, like Kantian deontology, recommend acting from a motive of duty. But the heroic agent in question would then be acting immorally, since the rescuer had no duty to risk his own life to save the life of a stranger. Actions bearing "moral worth" are those performed from a motive of duty. But acting "beyond the call of duty" is not the same as "acting from a motive of duty" and is thus immoral.

Consequentialism fares no better. After all, the best principle for consequentialists is to choose that action which will produce the best consequences of all available actions. But on these grounds, the heroic man's action might not have been optimal. He risked his own life to save another and risked leaving two young daughters fatherless had his rescue failed. He could not have known in advance that his heroic behavior would produce the good consequences it did.

Another means of showing the importance of prudence is by bringing in the issue of harm addressed in (5) and (6) above. Imprudent agents are in some way harming themselves; that is, doing things that have adverse effects on their own interests. Before turning to the relationship between self-harm and morality, I will first talk about harming others as morally wrong.

Harm

To take one instance of other-regarding harm, we could conclude that the attempt to manipulate others by using peer pressure, as in done in college fraternities to get pledges to drink more alcohol than usual, is morally wrong. Similarly, we could argue that a man taking sexual advantage of a woman compromised by alcohol is harming her, not to mention exhibiting a kind of cowardice. We might contend that in both cases harms are being done because the actions had adverse effects on the victims' interests. The term "interests" might be too broad for definition. But we can argue minimally by saying that interests are components of a person's good or well-being.

The harms can be captured in a different way. In both cases agents are treating other agents as means. This much is obvious from even a cursory reading of Kant's

second formulation of the categorical imperative, "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." If these treating-others-as-means scenarios are morally uncontroversial, is doing harmful things to oneself any less uncontroversial? My answer is no. I maintain that when agents harm themselves, at least in significant, on-going ways, their actions have adverse effects on their own interests and they are thereby acting immorally.

For Kant, self-harm or self-abuse scenarios are morally uncontroversial. In *The Doctrine of Virtue* he propounds the view that man's duties to himself follow from his nature as an animal and moral being. Those impulses of nature having to do with man's animality aim at (1) self-preservation, (2) the preservation of the species and (3) the preservation of his capacity to enjoy life. Vices opposed to such animal duties are "murdering oneself, the unnatural use of his sexual inclination, and such excessive consumption of food and drink as weakens his capacity for making purposive use of his powers." 10 The vices contrary to man's duty to himself as a moral being include lying, avarice, and false humility (servility). But there is more.

In his *Lectures on Ethics* he claims that "The prior condition of our duty to others is our duty to ourselves; we can fulfill the former duty only in so far as we first fulfill the latter." Kant asserts this duty-to-self as a prerequisite to duty-to-other is conceptual. But it is possible to see the connection as empirical. For we are all familiar with persons who are Johnny on the spot when it comes to helping others, always ready to do a favor or lend support when others are undergoing some sort of crisis, while running down their own health and being seriously neglectful of their own interests in the process. This

would seem to argue against Kant's conceptual self-other connection, since this kind of person seems neglectful, perhaps purposefully so, of their self-regarding duty, while at the same time being exceedingly vigilant about the needs of others. But this point is not essential to my present purpose.

After his assertion, Kant then enumerates a "few examples"—there are eight examples in all—of failing in a duty to oneself. 11

Since Kant inveighs against drunkenness, we might add smoking to the Kantian catalogue, for by regular smoking an agent also makes ill use of his liberty. For Kant these judgments hold whether the vices have some social effect, or whether one does it alone in the privacy of one's home. But these other- and self-regarding scenarios may only exhibit episodic wrongs. I would not argue that going on one drunken binge or smoking a cigar to celebrate a birth or important achievement is harming oneself, though smoking and drinking excessively are acts of self-harm.

But I cannot advance that conclusion without first getting at the assumption held by those defending the social view of morality that harming oneself does not rise to the level of immorality. In the interests of logical consistency, defenders of SVM cannot acknowledge that an agent can treat himself immorally. But in many cases where an agent consistently and willfully damages his own interests, we can say that such self-regarding behavior can be construed as immoral. What does it really mean to say that an agent has an obligation not to violate his interests?

I hope to illuminate the issue of self-harm by comparing it to other-regarding obligations. Think of the following issue. Can an agent forego doing one other-regarding action, like helping a neighbor cultivate a garden, for another other-regarding action, like

giving blood to a different neighbor at a local clinic? If we say yes, it is likely because we believe that the promise to help with the garden is overridden by a more serious moral situation. If the latter situation involves a matter of life and death, we could argue that the moral situation is more grievous and that more harm will result from one inaction than the other. If one of two other-regarding obligations can override the other, because the one obligation has greater "weight" than the other, why can't the weightiness of a self-regarding obligation override an obligation to another of lesser weight? After all, if it is the weightiness—or stringency—of the obligation that matters, what should it matter whether the obligation is owed to person A or person B?

Still, there may be a residue of dissatisfaction surrounding the view of an obligation to oneself. But I think this dissatisfaction can be accounted for. It may be an ingrained assumption of both common-sense morality and SVM that a kindness done for others rates higher morally than doing something that serves one's own interests. I understand what underlies this view. SVM presumes that morality is necessarily impersonal but acting on one's own behalf is personal. Thus the two can never be the same and, what is most important, that the personal sphere is of less importance morally speaking than the impersonal. But if Smith keeps a promise—even a promise to himself —in order to persevere in a greater good for himself, then his action, though personal in the sense of benefiting himself, has a greater moral value than upholding a less weighty promise to others. The obligation to others is just that—an obligation. But this obligation can, under certain circumstances, be *prima facie* merely and be superseded by an obligation to self.

It is at this point that the personal versus impersonal distinction in morality is further weakened. For when an obligation to others runs up against another obligation and is trumped by that obligation, what does it matter whether the former was impersonal and the latter personal? How can we say otherwise? Is it mere self-interest that overrides the obligation to another? No. For not just any interest will replace the promise to help the neighbor cultivate the garden. For instance, it would seem frivolous to say, "I would help you now, but I only have an hour before my wife comes home and I want to try out this tasty Cuban cigar instead." Ordinarily, it would not be thought that interests of this type, mere pleasurable self-indulgences, could replace obligations to another. If any self-interest is to supersede the obligation to others it must be an obligatory self-interest that has the characteristic of being objective and universal.

So what is the source of our believing otherwise? Just how is it that the harm done to others seems wrong unambiguously, but that wronging oneself fits some other category besides the moral?

I will attempt to answer that question, noting that there are several reasons for thinking differently about the two cases, though I will argue that neither of them is persuasive. First, it might be thought that a wrong done to others is a "true" wrong because interpersonal, while wronging oneself is merely personal and less wrong because an agent injures himself "merely." It may seem, therefore, that the first is objective and goes to heart of what we mean by doing wrong, whereas harming oneself is private and subjective and of a lesser status than the wrong done to others. But could it be that the very logic of this categorization is dependent, and dependent utterly, upon a social view

of morality that defines away the personal as not being moral and the interpersonal as being moral? It would seem so.

For it is at this fork in the road between the personal and impersonal that there is a tendency to separate things done for oneself as prudential—in the sense of being other than moral—and things done for others as moral. But an obvious rejoinder to this view can be made.

As I have already stated, prudential matters do not concern ephemeral kinds of enjoyments, such as pleasures of food, drink and sex. These tastes are by their nature subjective and personal, since they vary from agent to agent. In speaking of prudence, however, we are concerned instead with such things as insuring our future, perhaps by taking care of ourselves or by getting an education or by looking both ways before crossing the street. So a distinction can be drawn between attending to our momentary pleasures and attending to our well-being. Prudential self-attention is attention to our well-being and so such self-attention becomes a subset of the moral sphere.

In cases of moral self-attention we often forego pleasure for deeper self-interest. The nature of foregoing the pleasure is analogous to postponing a pleasure for myself in order to help another and is moral for the same reason. I might not enjoy my annual doctor's visit. In fact, in my experience it promises more pain that pleasure. The pain may be immediate and physical or be about some prognosis regarding my future condition. But self-attention designed to better my health is a kind of moral self-attention. The conclusion is clear when we consider that if we prevented our child or friend from consulting with a doctor then we would be regarded as doing something immoral. The

excuse that we avoided the doctor for fear of learning bad news would hardly justify the avoidance.

Viewed in this way, there is no divide between personal territory and moral territory. The two realms as staked out by SVM are in reality not mutually exclusive but in fact overlapping. By accepting SVM we got ourselves into this tortured, either-or kind of thinking. But it is easy to see how to get ourselves out. How do personal and self-interested situations on the one hand relate to moral situations on the other? Do they exclude one another? Hardly.

Imagine the following not uncommon type of situation. Bill smokes cigars, enjoys watching and attending ballgames, hang gliding, and going to the beach whenever he can. When he plays basketball lately, however, his one-on-one partner Sam notices that Bill's play is sluggish and that he is frequently winded after just a few games, whereas in the past he experienced no such breathlessness. His friend advises him to stop smoking cigars, or at least cut back on them. "You'll feel a lot better," he urges him. At first Bill opposes the advice, declaring in a self-deceptive manner that cigar smokers are immune to the kinds of dangers that cigarette smokers are. But if Bill decides to return to his senses and follow his friend's advice, do we say his decision is personal or moral?

SVM would ask a question before answering. If it is his own personal well-being which is at stake, and he does not have a wife or children, SVM would draw a divide and say his decision is personal, but not moral. But this is wrong. Bill's giving up his smoking and drinking is not just a matter of giving up his likes. The major consideration is not the relatively insignificant pleasure he derives from smoking, but his own welfare and indeed his survival. We would reason that the pleasures of drinking and smoking, the

camaraderie with others and shared conversation, the alluring taste and scent of the tobacco, are considerations that pale beside his personal well-being. If he continues smoking, we would conclude that he is harming himself by violating his interests. His moral obligation is to pay attention to his true interests. By comparison, his likes and dislikes are less momentous and trivial.

Here his self-interest is not "other than" morality, but something he has an obligation to pursue. We can imagine Sam saying to him, "You're no longer a single man; people depend upon you. You now have a duty, at least for *their* sake, to give this up." *Only* then is he speaking the language of morals, according to SVM, since Bill's concerns for family and offspring are no longer just self-regarding. The language of duty, this view claims, comes into play only at this point.

But this must be wrong and wrong on the face of it. For if it's maintained that the moral point of view—to borrow Baier's phrase—only begins when I take the stance of having regard for the well-being of others—the rejoinder is that I can also have regard toward myself. It is obviously better to have regard for my own well-being rather than to ignore it. Prudential self-concerns are objective and impersonal. "It seems that the relation involved in an obligation need not be a relation to another at all," as Prichard said. 12

III. Three More Arguments for Duties to Oneself

So far I have shown that duties to oneself obtain in that other-regarding virtues, which we readily acknowledge as moral, are analogous to self-regarding virtues. I have also shown that benevolence toward others and harming oneself have analogues in

benefiting and harming oneself. But here I add three more reasons that duties to self obtain.

The Argument from Duty and Interest

For those who would resist using the words "duty" and "obligation" in describing how some agent treats himself, it might be pointed out that the semantics are not determinative. Defenders of DTS and SVM can both legislate the meaning of value terms. But what is more determinative than semantics in moral situations is what agents ought to do. If an agent is presented with two or more courses of action, each of which exerts a significant moral pull on him, he acts best when he chooses that action which exerts the greatest pull. There is no codified way to make this choice. Egoism, Utilitarianism and deontology have their flaws. So the agent will act on what he thinks is best. If one adopts a *performative* sense of duty, instead of wracking his brains to find the "true meaning" of obligation terms, one's duty or obligation can be understood as performing that action which is best—best being construed as that action which has the greatest weight and thus outstrips the others—under the circumstances.

If this method of adhering to that obligation which outweighs the other obligations is allowed, then the case for duties to oneself will be made. For there will be many circumstances where the best action will be one that benefits oneself. In the previous section on virtues I argued that actions consistent with one's own projects, and actions that aid the constancy of those projects, can supersede genuine obligations toward others. Now if those obligations towards others are genuine—such as social obligations, obligations brought about through promising, etc.—then the only obligations which can rival or supersede them are those obligations where the actual weight is greater. At this

point whether the obligation is to self or another is incidental. I know of no normative ethical system which obligates an agent to effect the lesser of two obligations. In sum,

(1) It is obligatory for agents to perform that action which fulfills the greater of two or more obligations.

(2) In some instances the action which fulfills the greater of two or more obligations is an action that benefits oneself.

(3) Thus, in some instances it is obligatory for agents to perform actions which benefit themselves.

On the performative definition of obligation, it hardly matters whether we label an agent's self-regarding actions "prudent"—as Baier and Singer do—or "interests" or "duties." What ultimately matters is what is morally determinative—that reasons of self-regard can trump other-regarding concerns in a moral context.

Approval and Disapproval

There is a third way in which we can make sense of the notion of duties to oneself. Many other-regarding actions deserve the ascriptions blameworthy or praiseworthy. By analogy, then, we should praise or blame the traits exhibited by an agent in his self-regarding actions.

A few examples of self-regarding virtues will make the point. It can be argued that we are inclined to approve of temperance as a virtue. The reasons are clear: our approval is rooted in the notion that a self-controlled person thwarts frequent temptations, such as the temptations to eat, drink, smoke or be idle excessively. Our praise is bestowed justly

since his actions are approvable. The same is true of other virtues. When someone displays constancy in the pursuit of some worthwhile task, their behavior is laudable. When an agent resists the slanderous opinions of others and stands up courageously for his rights, he deserves our praise.

It should be noticed that we don't reserve our praise and blame for circumstances in which some other person besides the agent is benefited. Virtues are laudable irrespective of their social utility. So we do acknowledge agents for their self-regarding virtues, just as we praise them for their other-regarding ones. The corollary is that we disapprove of vice, be it self- or other-regarding. Disinterested observers approve of such a person because he lives virtuously and displays a consistent regard for himself, not unlike the way they would approve of him for having consistent regard for others.

The similarity is often overlooked by those arguing against duties to oneself. Consider: the agent who is consistent in his regard for others—we may call him "benevolent" or just thoughtful—surely elicits our approval. In addition, there is a temptation to omit benevolent actions, and this only strengthens our regard for the agent who performs them while overcoming temptations to omit them. If both of these claims are true of the agent given to other-regarding actions, then, aren't they also true of the temperate agent given to self-regarding actions?

That self-regarding virtues are moral characteristics is implied in our praise and blame behaviors, praising good traits as we do and scorning bad traits.

The Utilitarian Reductio Ad Absurdum

We can allow philosophers their own linguistic legislation. So it is permissible for Baier and Singer to define a family of ethical terms like duty, obligation and morality as if they applied only to others. It is no less permissible for someone to argue that duties also apply to oneself. It is the former definition, however, that leads to absurd results.

According to utilitarianism, a morally good action is an action that produces the best consequences among alternative actions. "Best" has always meant those consequences producing the most pleasure or happiness. Now if it is imperative that agents act to produce the best consequences, and the best consequences include taking into account my own well-being, then I have an obligation to take into account my own well-being.

The most telling kind of example is that of a solitary individual, such as a castaway. According to the felicific calculus, anything a solitary individual does to promote his own long-term pleasure is morally better than actions which fail to promote pleasure. As such, Robinson Crusoe has an obligation to further his own survival, not to mention cultivating those traits which promote his survival. But this is not a conclusion available to those accepting the social view of morality. For the strictures imposed by their definition of morality require them to say that a solitary agent has no duty to promote his own well-being.

IV. The Obligation to Keep Promises to Oneself: Truth Telling and Self-deception

Promises to Oneself

If it is rational to keep promise to others, then it is also rational to keep them to oneself. The social view of morality contends that promises to oneself do not qualify as

moral, since they are not genuine promises like promises made to others. True, they are unlike promises to others. Promises made between persons A and B are to that extent unlike a promise that A makes with A. But as I have already implied in my response to the correlativity thesis in chapter three, there is an analogy to be made between the promises person A makes to person B and the promises A makes to himself. Just as A can apprehend his obligations towards others, there is nothing that prevents him from having an apprehension of obligations to himself. In fact, truth telling is at the basis of all such obligations to self, just as it is at the root of obligations made to others. For in the absence of holding to promises to oneself, the discharge of all other obligations is threatened.

To begin, I will say that promises to oneself have four things in common with promises to others. (1) An agent can make a promise to himself in much the same kind of context that he can make the promise to others. One can sign a contract with others, where such a contract with myself has no binding force. But this speaks only to the issue of a *legal* disanalogy in the two kinds of obligations, while not addressing the similar moral obligations incurred by the promise. A promise to others, even without a contract, involves at least two people, while a promise to myself involves me directly and others only indirectly. Still, it is not the two-person nature of the former obligation that makes it weighty, but the weight of the promise itself. Likewise, I can make a weighty promise to myself.

A second feature of the promise is that the promise obligates me. If I promise Jones to do X, then I am typically under an obligation to do X. Why, then, doesn't a promise to oneself put the agent under a similarly serious commitment? If I promise my neighbor Jones that I will take a vacation in July and I promise myself to take a vacation

to give myself a break, the obligation created by both promises obtains, unless it is overridden by other obligations which are weightier.

So a third feature of the promise is that if it is great enough, it can override other sorts of obligations. So I might think that a promise made to Jones to help him till his garden pales beside the obligation to take another neighbor to the hospital if he has no other means of transport in an emergency. Here we rank the latter above the former since it overrides the other in weight. So, too, a promise to myself to relax and enjoy more things cannot establish this as an obligation to, say, follow on a New Year's resolution to sample more Cuban cigars, since that obligation pales besides the long-term care of my health. So the concept of overridingness, which is sensible when applied to obligations to others, makes eminent sense when applied to oneself, too. A promise made to others may pale alongside a significant promise to self. So Ross's point about prima facie duties—duties which are duties unless superseded by other duties—can apply to promises made to others that can be overridden by weightier promises to self.

A fourth feature of obligations to self is the self-reprimand that follows from not fulfilling them. If I am a professional billiards player and have promised my manager to put in 70 practice hours before the U.S. Open tournament that commences three weeks from now, then he may reprimand me if he senses I am not "tournament ready" as the time draws near. But the role that the manager plays toward me is a role that I can also play toward myself. Self-reprimand is an understandable concept. So are self-criticism and self-reproach. Self-recrimination and self-reproach are revealing concepts here, for they form closer analogues with the reprimand from the manager. Those like Mill, who argues that duties must be coupled with punishment and so there can't be duties to

oneself, can be shown at least an analogue to the punishment involved in other-regarding actions with self-reprimand. The recrimination is for time missed, specifically for not using my time better; letting other concerns get in the way of the practice time. 'I didn't prioritize my time,' the billiard player says lamentably after losing. 'I let smaller concerns get in the way and consume my days. Now I am not ready for the level of competition I will face."

These four reasons establish, at the very least, an analogy between promises made to others and to oneself. Still, one who rejects the notion that there can be promises to oneself may cite still another reason why such promises are not genuine. He might claim that promises to oneself are more easily broken than promises to others. A promise to others must be kept unless the person to whom it is made releases us from it. He might say, "Oh, don't worry about it" and thereby release us from discharging our obligation. So the obligation incurred by the promise can be waived, just as one can make a promise to oneself and decide not to follow through with it. I may promise myself to work up to 300 strides per minute on an elliptical motion training machine at the gym. I might give myself a deadline of next week to do this. But when I see that I will not be able to get to the gym as often as planned and so will be unable to work up to the necessary speed to do 300 strides per minute, I may "release myself" from that promise. Or if I hurt my foot and am unable to undertake the vigorous workout, I may postpone discharging that promise to myself until a future date.

If I promise myself—as Thomas Hill mentions—to sample every flavor of ice cream at Baskin Robbins, surely we are permitted to break such a promise. [13] I might break the promise and not feel morally self-aggrieved. Likewise, if I promise myself that

I will be able to walk the length of my driveway on my hands by next Wednesday, I can shirk my obligation to achieve this dubious goal. But we can at least imagine that there are promises that are more essential to the maintaining of one's consistency—what is sometimes referred as one's "self"—that ought to be kept.

Other promises to myself, like eating properly, are ones I may not postpone as readily.

But those defending the social view of morality will likely point out that the disanalogy between self- and other-regarding promises is with the more stringent duties. So if businessperson A owes $15,000 to businessperson B, B may not release A from this obligation so readily. It is then pointed out that a person can always release himself from so-called weighty obligations. Thus, promises to oneself are unlike genuine promises to others. But there is an analogy between stringent promises to oneself and to others. Just as A will not release B from a stringent obligation without good reason, so A will not release himself from an obligation without good reasons. Further, even if one does release himself from a stringent promise, this is no proof that he hasn't acted immorally. So if I backslide in my efforts to quit smoking after promising myself to do so, I have violated a morally significant promise to myself. In this regard, the violation of an obligation to another that harms him finds an analogy in a violation of an obligation to self that also harms me.

We can broaden this discussion about obligations and talk sensibly not only of keeping promises to oneself but of holding to a general duty of veracity. This would include honesty about my own life, including my relations with others and a keeping a clear eye about my future projects. If I am right about this, the duty of veracity leads

inexorably into a second duty and a negative duty at that: the duty to avoid self-deception. Before proceeding to make the point about the negative duty of avoiding self-deception, I want to explain what I mean by a duty of veracity. I maintain that promises to oneself have moral import. But a duty of veracity would be broader than a duty of just keeping promises. For promising involves all those matters in which I incur an obligation, either by using the words "I promise," as I would with another person, or by planning to follow through on something worthwhile as I would with myself. That the former kind of promise puts one under an obligation and establishes at least a prima facie duty hardly needs arguing. The latter kind of promise is a morally ambivalent matter for some, but not for me. For, as I've just argued, a promise to oneself, like a promise to another, creates an obligation unless a greater obligation supersedes the first obligation.

I am not concerned merely with making the analogical argument between promising another and promising oneself, though there is a very strong analogy to be made between the promise to oneself and to another. I am more concerned with a broader kind of candor about one's condition in the world. Possessing the virtue of veracity subsumes the duty of promise keeping. Put another way, it is necessary for a person possessing veracity to uphold his significant promises, but it is not sufficient. For an agent will want to uphold promises, which are particular, but he will also want to be candid with himself about his overall direction, which can be and often is larger than just the sum of his particular promises.

The importance of self-veracity and the obligation to practice it is a truth so self-evident that it hardly needs arguing. But I will argue for it anyway, showing that veracity about one's own condition puts it on a par morally with my obligations toward others.

Before arguing that the negative duty not to self-deceive is one such duty, I want to pause to show what is at stake.

To establish the conclusion that there are duties to oneself to uphold significant promises, I needn't show that an agent—any agent—must keep *every* promise to himself. Which ones must he keep? An agent must keep just the right ones, just often enough, to establish a continual self. There are promises that are obligatory to keep. Put another way, it is forbidden not to keep them. Again, the contention on the other side is a universal negative claim: No obligations to oneself exist. This assertion can be countered with a single obligation to the contrary.

A moment needs to be taken to appreciate the full force of this universal negative. If there are no duties to oneself, then the concepts of the forbidden and the obligatory don't apply. For if the class of duties to oneself includes no members, then there is nothing that I am obligated to do for myself. Neither the most trivial nor the most momentous self-benefits have any claim on me. It is all the same whether I spend my waking moments in study and elevated contemplation or waste them on a perpetual alcoholic binge. Indeed, there are no concepts of "elevated" and "wasteful" where one's own self is concerned. Such evaluative notions need not apply. They may have application to interpersonal relations, but never to personal ones. If the class of the obligatory is without content, then so too is the class of the forbidden.

For what is forbidden to someone who has no obligations to self? No self-expectations? What virtue needs to be cultivated? None. What vice is off-limits? Same answer. The refusal to acknowledge obligations to oneself results in a kind of self-

regarding egalitarianism. If no acts are forbidden, then it follows—as night follows day—that all acts are permissible.

Of course this universal negative affirmation can be expressed in other ways. Among all the deeds that one could list or could even imagine that would be injurious to oneself and one's interests, even deeds that would end one's life, it must be the case that no one of them is morally off limits. Further, there is not a single self-regarding character trait—no matter how promising it might be for personal self-improvement—that I ought to cultivate. Conversely, there is no self-regarding character trait so heinous that I ought to refrain from cultivating. Where self is concerned, there is no content to the notion of the forbidden, nor to the motion of the obligatory.

So to counter the universal negative affirmation that there are no obligations to oneself just one such obligation is needed. I have already argued for the obligations not to harm oneself, to be prudent, and to keep promises. One promise will do the trick. Like Kant's third and fourth illustrations of duties from the *Metaphysics of Morals* which refer to two violable obligations—to develop one's talents and to be beneficent—the obligation not to self-deceive is an imperfect duty. It is meritorious, but it is a duty of "wide obligation," meaning the agent has the latitude to decide which promises to self are to be kept and when.

Self-deception

A discussion of promise keeping and veracity leads to their opposite vice, self-deception. Self-deception is a disunitive vice, insofar as it breaks in upon a well-constituted self. On this picture we needn't subscribe to a Platonic idea of a soul with a

tripartite structure of reason, appetite and spirit. Rather, a compelling picture of the self is an entity with a loose but still connected structure over time, from past to present to future. If one's projects are united across time, then it is likely that one's identity as a person is somewhat tied to those projects. One ought not to engage in self-deception because by self-deception one misrepresents one's own identity to oneself. It is this lack of candor where one's self is concerned that undermines carrying out duties to oneself.

One might argue that self-deceptive acts can be beneficial, that they have a consequentialist value. But while other-deception may be episodic, self-deception, at least as a policy, is long-term and, because it threatens my consistency and integrity as a person, can undercut my long-term interests.

If we consider the inviolable duties of the kind Kant describes, naturally they don't allow even one transgression. So the negative duties of not breaking promises and not taking one's life admit of no exceptions. If a duty is violable, however, then it means, among other things, that the agent needn't be performing it at every moment. But I need to perform such duties at some point, as often is as needed to establish my unity as a person. To make the point, I would like to compare it to the duty of beneficence.

I can claim to be benevolent even if I don't write the check for the victims of Hurricane Katrina or to benefit the fund for Tsunami relief. I may refuse donations to Unicef, refuse to give my time to the local literacy program, or to lend a hand to my neighbor who needs help setting up for a backyard barbecue. But after a time, the more I pass up opportunities to act benevolently, the more my claim to be a benevolent person comes into question. Likewise, if I fail at every opportunity to discharge an important

duty to myself—something I have resolved to pursue on a prior occasion—then I am failing to aid and abet my own integrity.

Duties to self are grounded in a state of being. This state of being is a kind of self-cohesiveness. It is in the interests of agents to possess this attribute, since the alternative to a cohesive self is an inconsistent, fragmented self, which is surely a kind of deficiency. To lack such consistency is to lack a kind of identity. To recognize this consistency as not merely an episodic good but rather as a kind of abiding good, to recognize that consistency is not one choice among many but an essential choice, means that an individual will attempt to hold to it and make his choices cohere. Among other things, this means he will hold to commitments and projects that are consistent with and not in opposition to his well-being, those choices that define his life.

This is not to say that I cannot interrupt a duty to self. I should not avoid helping a motorist in distress because I was in such a haste to get home to finish the great American novel that I did not have time to make a cell phone call. Duties to self can be put on hold. This is not equivalent to saying, however, that the reasons for following such duties are *prima facie* reasons ready to be trumped by the next better reason to come along. Rather, the reasons I'm supporting might be better understood as *pro tanto* or genuine reasons. Unlike Ross' *prima facie* duties—which he also refers to as "conditional duties" –(he also claims that a prima facie duty is not an actual duty), the *pro tanto* duties I'm discussing are duties that have weight. A duty to self, because it is a duty to self, is not intrinsically less valuable than a duty to others. I may forego the duty to self for what I recognize as a duty to others. But the point is that I needn't.

So a person who is keen on self-development, like developing a talent to play the piano, say, has made either an implied or explicit promise to himself to do so. But he may forego tomorrow's practice to go on a walking tour to learn the history of New York's architecture. He may do something that it is even less important to his personal values. He may lie in bed all day or smoke cigars at Nat Sherman's and discuss the best affordable non-Cuban brands with other tobacco lovers. Does this mean that his avowed aim to play the piano is no longer woven into his life's plan? Not necessarily. He needn't develop his professed talent at every moment any more than he must eschew chocolate when it is offered though he is on a diet. He needn't be extreme in pursuit of his plan. He can be if he wants.

His duty is waivable. He needn't be on the mark one hundred percent of the time, since interrupted dedication isn't what's required here. An agent follows duties to oneself when he is self-ruled or autonomous in his actions. A self-governed agent isn't heteronomous, so he isn't prey to every external influence. If he were so prey to such influences, then he would not be a self, but would instead be the sum total of life's suggestible moments. To be without such self-government is to be adrift, heteronomous, without hope of a constituted self with all its projects and commitments.

To return to the issue of promising oneself, it is only on the assumption that morality is exclusively social that promises to oneself cannot be moral. There are various disanalogies between personal and interpersonal promises. But there are enough points of analogy between personal and interpersonal promise making. Just because promises to oneself are personal, doesn't mean they aren't moral.

If keeping significant promises to oneself is a moral obligation, it is an obligation in the strong sense that I've defined. That is, such promises are not obligatory because they promote the general good. If a conflict arose between the good of others and an agent's obligation to himself, then he ought to keep his significant promise to self, even at the risk of ignoring his obligation to others. One might, for instance, insist that Jones has a "family obligation" to attend some function, like a party. But his obligation, though important, is ephemeral and can be overridden by his obligation to pursue a project important to his own well-being. He needn't pursue the obligation at this time. On this Saturday he may choose to avoid the subsequent questions about "why he didn't attend" and snide comments about "being too good" for everyone else. He may put his self-development on hold and attend the party. But the point is that he needn't. He can choose not to attend and still be acting according to a duty that trumps his social duty.

If he continues to ignore his significant projects, then he runs the risk of missing something far more lasting and important than a party. Upholding significant promises contributes to one's integrity and consistency as a person. Keeping significant promises, and avoiding self-deception, is an essential element in achieving autonomy. To do the opposite is to fail to benefit oneself or, what amounts to the same thing, to harm oneself. Either way, one violates an obligation to oneself.

Notes on Chapter Four

1 John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 1922; P.F. Strawson "Social Morality and Individual Ideal," *Philosophy* 36, 136 (January 1961): pp. 1-17; D. Daiches Raphael *Moral Judgment* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD), 1955; P.H. Nowell-Smith *Ethics* (Baltimore: Penguin) 1959; H.L.A. Hart in "Legal and Moral Obligation" in *Essays in Moral Philosophy, ed. by A.I. Melden.* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958)

2 To some, this claim makes intuitionism sound dogmatic. For example, Christina Korsgaard claims that all that intuitionists can do in the face of disbelief is insist that what they are saying is true. But this needn't be so. Intuitionists needn't accept the blanket statement that any and all moral statements are self-evident, but only for some fundamental moral convictions. In addition, the intuitionist can take the doubter through the process that made him believe a certain proposition was self-evident. Of course, such reflection will not guarantee that these propositions are true, let alone that they are self-evident, but infallibility is too much to ask of any moral theory. *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge, 1996), p. 38.

3 *Methods of Ethics*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981), p. 380.

4 There is a debate about whether integrity is a separate virtue or whether it unifies other virtues. This way of putting the matter could pose the issue as a false dichotomy, since it can be both. On my view, integrity is a virtue and it is a necessary though not sufficient condition of this virtue that agents of integrity possess a kind of cohesiveness of character. In this sense, my view of virtue is similar to its lexical definition. When something is integral, like a music composition or work of dramatic art, its various parts hang together. With regard to duties of oneself, a person of virtue must possess a kind of unity over time. This period of time needn't include his whole life, since agents are apt to change their projects and so undergo shifts in intellectual and professional identity. But if a person possesses integrity for even a part of his life, he must have some cohesion of purpose over time. There must also be an evaluative component of integrity. Without such a normative requirement, what is to keep us from saying that moral monsters like Adolf Hitler and serial killers are persons of integrity? So more is required of agents possessing integrity than that they own the attribute of cohesiveness.

If there is a component of cohesiveness to the virtue of integrity, it may well be the case that this component completes other virtues like self-respect, self-control and other self-regarding traits. Though I tilt toward that conclusion, it is not a matter I wish to resolve here. I would rather point out that one way in which this cohesion is sustained is by keeping promises to oneself. To establish the conclusion that there are duties to oneself to uphold significant promises, I needn't show that an agent—any agent—must keep *every* promise to himself. Which ones must he keep? An agent must keep just the right ones, just often enough, to establish a continual self. There are promises that are obligatory to keep. Put another way, it is forbidden not to keep them. Again, the contention on the other side is a universal negative claim: No obligations to oneself exist.

This assertion can be countered with a single obligation, not to mention a family of such obligations, to the contrary.

So to counter the universal negative affirmation that there are no obligations to oneself just one such obligation is needed. One promise will do the trick. The character of this obligation to oneself will resemble the kind of obligation that Kant wrote of. Kant's third and fourth illustrations of duties from the *Metaphysics of Morals* refer to two violable obligations—to develop one's talents and to be beneficent. These imperfect, violable, meritorious duties allow the agent some choice in the manner the duty is discharged.

Inviolable duties don't allow even one transgression. So the negative duties of not breaking promises and not taking one's life admit of no exceptions. If a duty is violable, however, then it means, among other things, that the agent needn't be performing it at every moment. But I need to perform such duties at some point, as often is as needed to establish my unity as a person. For the moment I would like to compare it to the duty of beneficence.

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Duties to self are grounded in a state of being. As I've said, this state of being is a kind of self-cohesiveness. It is in the interests of agents to possess this attribute, since the alternative to a cohesive self is an inconsistent, fragmented self, which is surely a kind of deficiency. To lack such consistency is to lack a kind of identity. To recognize this consistency as not merely an episodic good but rather as a kind of abiding good, to recognize that consistency is not one choice among many but an essential choice, means that an individual will attempt to hold to it and make his choices cohere. Among other things, this means he will hold to commitments and projects that are consistent with and not in opposition to his well-being, those choices that define his life.

4 Plato might have argued that the list of other-regarding virtues was also to be catalogued among the self-regarding ones. For the effect of doing good for others is felt acutely as a good for myself. Likewise, a morally defective character harms its possessor, regardless of whether it affects other interests of the person. (Gorgias, 476) in *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Random House, 1937), p.535.

5 J.L. Ackrill *Aristotle's Ethics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 1115a 25, p. 87

6 Ibid., 1119a

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969) II-II, q. 47, a. 4, p. 49.

8 “Prudence, if it was only employed in promoting private interest, is never imagined to be a virtue…” Section II, 315 Concerning the Immediate Motive to Virtuous Action in *British Moralists, 1650-1800, Vol. 1* (Indianpolis: Hackett, 1991), p. 271.

9 Because virtue ethics is “agent-centered” rather “act-centered” and is thus concerned with being rather than doing, it has long been held that virtue ethics does not tell us what we should do. But Rosalind Hursthouse counters the argument that virtue ethics cannot be a normative rival to deontology and utilitarianism. She argues that the first premises of act utilitarianism (“An action is right if and only if it promote the best consequences”) and deontology (“An action is right if and only if it is in accordance with a correct moral rule or principle”) fail to give us guidance. In the case of utilitarianism the premise gives us no guidance about how to act until one knows what to count as the best consequences. It is the same with deontology: it offers no guidance about how to act unless one knows what counts as a correct moral rule or principle. “Normative Virtue Ethics” in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. by Stephen Darwall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p.185

10 Immanuel Kant in “Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue” in *The Metaphysic of Morals* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 216.

11 A drunkard who does no harm to another or, due to a “strong constitution,” to oneself, is nonetheless an object of contempt. This is not because I have some legal obligation, for duties to oneself cannot be treated juridically, Kant argues. Rather, duties to oneself have to do with “the use we make of liberty in respect of ourselves.”

After instancing the drunkard, Kant mentions briefly seven other violations of duties to oneself. (2) He criticizes an agent who “cringes and fawns” for degrading his person and losing his manhood. So, too, (3) when an agent makes himself the plaything of another he casts away the worth of his manhood. (4) Lying, even if it doesn’t harm another, is more a violation of duty to oneself than to others. (5) Agents who accept favors and benefits contract debts and owe a debt of gratitude even after the debt is paid. (6) Persons who sigh and weep and wail and complain about their luck are “despicable” in our eyes, for a man should show “steadfast courage in his misfortune” and “put a bold face upon things.” (7) If a person barters his freedom away for money, he also “violates his manhood.” Under this head Kant includes giving up one’s freedom directly, as in self-enslavement to earn money, or offering his body to another for profit, as in fighting in order to “gain a few pints of beer.” Then, too, this includes what Kant calls “vices of the flesh,” or *crimina carnis*. Though such crimes do no harm to anyone else, they still dishonor and degrade one’s own person. (8) Finally, Kant argues that suicide is abominable, since “it implies the abuse of man’s freedom of action.” Immanuel Kant *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 118-19.

12 The passage continues: “Thus we should admit that there is an obligation to overcome our natural timidity or greediness, and that this involves no relation to others. Still there is a relation involved, viz., a relation to our own disposition. It is simply because we can and because others cannot directly modify our disposition that it is our business to improve it, and that it is not theirs, or, at least, not theirs to the same extent.” “Does

Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" in *Moral Writings*, H.A. Prichard, ed. by Jim MacAdam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 13

13 Thomas Hill, Jr., *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 151

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