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**ETHICAL EGOISM
AS A MORAL THEORY**

Michael Chau-Fong Mok

NANKANG, TAIPEI, TAIWAN
REPUBLIC OF CHINA
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ETHICAL EGOISM AS A MORAL THEORY

INTRODUCTION

Ethical egoism, the view that each person ought to maximize his own interests (whatever they may be) — hereafter referred to as (E) — has been attacked from two fronts. First, it is charged that the doctrine is inconsistent. Arguments of this kind has the following form: given an occasion in which A's interest is contrary to B's interest, the ethical egoist would make inconsistent moral judgments. When the ethical egoist says to himself: "I ought to pursue my own interests exclusively", he *wants* himself to follow the advice accordingly; in saying to others: "You ought to pursue your own interests exclusively", he *does not want* them to follow his advice accordingly (since others pursuing what is in their interests would have the result of defeating his). Thus, the ethical egoist is involved in an inconsistency.

Although the issue of whether E is inconsistent or not is an important problem, I shall not discuss it in detail here. Critics of E, to make their point, often add another premise P such that (E + P) implies an inconsistency. Now it does not seem to me that this argument is very convincing, for, as defenders of E have pointed out, the ethical egoist can consistently reject P and thus avoid the charge of inconsistency.

Rather, the purpose of this article is to consider the second sort of arguments against E. It is alleged that E is contrary to "the moral point of view". To illustrate this allegation, let me cite a story told by James Rachels.

A friend of mine who lives in a very small town in south Georgia told me about the following incident which occurred within the past year. The town is so small that there is only one doctor, and he is, as one might expect, one of the town's affluent citizens.

One day the doctor was visited by a poor, uneducated black woman with a variety of minor complaints. A brief examination showed that she was suffering malnutrition. The problem was that the woman did not have enough money to buy food for herself and her several small children. She worked, whenever she could, as a cleaning woman in the homes of the better off people in the town, but she was able to earn only a few dollars a month in this way. All this was known to the doctor. After spending no more than five minutes with the woman, and having done absolutely nothing for her, the doctor told her that the charge would be twenty five dollars. The woman only had twelve dollars — this was, literally, all the money she had in the world — so the doctor took that.¹

Why does Rachels think that E would endorse such an “immoral” act? The doctor, as being an egoist, did not concern himself with the needs or interests of other people. Since the twelve dollars was the only thing that he could get out of the poor woman, then, according to the ethical egoist, he was right to take the money. But did he? Rachels’ answer is that he did not. He believes that anyone can tell that what the doctor did is wrong. This is a case “in which it is plain which is right and which is wrong”.²

The problem “Is ethical egoism a moral theory?” has caught the attention of moral philosophers in the recent years. Many proposals have been put forward as the minimal criteria for a moral theory. Frankena has claimed that the necessary requirements of a moral theory are: universalizability, prescriptivity, and overridingness.³ Other philosophers have added more. For instance, Baier states that a moral theory is designed to *coordinate* people’s activities.⁴ If the last requirement were true, E. of course could not be a moral theory, for it emphasizes the differences and conflicts of interests among persons and thus directs them to choose opposed actions.

So far, in the literature of ethical egoism no agreement has been reached on this issue. While critics continue to argue that E fails to satisfy this or that criterion for a moral theory, defenders respond with arguments that it is not so. In this article I do not wish to take sides with either camp. But I do believe that the problem of ethical egoism is much deeper than that it does not satisfy certain moral requirements. More specifically, the reasons for the unsettlement of this problem are, I think, the

following: (1) the lack of constraints upon excessive egoistic behaviors; and (2) the lack of a correct formulation of E.

Let me begin with the problem of giving an acceptable definition of E. The ethical egoist tells us that we ought to maximize our own interests, but he does not tell us *how* this is to be done. To do this, presumably, we must be able to take the following steps. (1) We consider our desires and choose a particular desire that we want to satisfy the most; (2) we investigate the relevant circumstances; (3) we look at the different courses of action open to us and choose the course of action which will satisfy that particular desire the most. If so, it is natural to formulate E as the following:

(AE) (x) (y) (X ought to do y if and only if y is in x's overall self-interest)⁵

In this definition, x ranges over persons; y ranges over individual acts. The distinguishing characters of this formulation are (1) that the advantage the ethical egoist is considering refers to an individual act, and (2) that if the act is the most advantageous to him among the possible alternatives that he has, then he is morally bound to do it.

However, act-egoism — hereafter referred to as (AE) — has suffered a serious criticism: that the doctrine is unable to deal with conflicts of interests, since it sanctions any action that maximizes a person's own interests, including behaviors that are harmful to other persons. Act-egoists often respond that AE does not have to arbitrate conflicts of interests among persons. Now it seems to me that, once act-egoists concede the critics this point, anyone who acts in accordance with AE would not be able to achieve the barest fraction of his own interests.

But this does not mean that E should fall with AE. Recently, Hospers has suggested that we can interpret E as applying to rules. The formulation thus arrived at is called rule-egoism. I wish to argue that rule-egoism, when properly understood, is able to provide a correct formulation of E.

It is easy to see why there is virtually no moral constraint upon egoistic behaviors. Let us return to Rachels' story. Our moral intuition tells us that the doctor should help the poor woman. We might have different opinions regarding the extent to which he should help her (should he simply not charge her any fee? or should he give her money so that she can buy food for her and her children? or should he help

her to earn some extra money, say, to hire her as a cleaning lady in his clinic?). Whatever it may be, it is clear that the doctor *should not* take away the last twelve dollars from the poor woman. In short, we think that the fact that the woman needs help is itself a moral reason, among others, to dictate what the doctor should do in this situation. But the ethical egoist would recommend the opposite of our moral intuition: if the doctor does not have a good heart and all he wants is to get the most for himself from this incident, then why shouldn't he take the money?

But it does not seem to me that Rachels' story gives us the whole picture of the ethical egoist. Now the only reason for the ethical egoist to act is self-interest. If we want to say, as Rachels does, that taking the woman's money is the self-interested act that the doctor should perform in this incident, we have to assume that what is to the advantage (material or otherwise) of the doctor is what is to his own interests. Even defenders of E do not challenge this assumption. For example, what Machen finds objectionable in this story is rather its supposition that taking the money is to the best advantage of the doctor. The doctor could gain more by doing something else. He could help the woman without any charge; the word might get around, gaining the doctor a good reputation and more patients. However, this assumption seems to overlook the full meaning of self-interest and leave many questions unanswered. For instance, how does one judge what is to his advantage? Should he do whatever brings him the greatest immediate satisfaction? Or should he do what brings him satisfaction in the long run, as defenders of E often insist on? Moreover, it is important to note that this assumption defines self-interest solely in terms of the consequences of the act. If so, it leaves the subject who exercises the act out of the picture. What happened if taking the woman's money means a small gain to the doctor and yet he is not interested in taking it? Should we still say that taking the woman's money is the self-interested act that, if E is true, the doctor should perform?

I shall attempt to show that E has suffered unnecessarily because of inadequate understanding of the concept of self-interest on the part of critics, and that an analysis of the meaning of self-interest enables us to solve these problems.

Notes to Introduction

1. James Rachels, "Two Arguments Against Ethical Egoism", *Philosophia* 4, 1974, pp. 308-309.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
3. William Frankena, "The Concept of Morality", *Journal of Philosophy* 63, No. 2, Nov. 1966, pp. 688-696.
4. Kurt Baier, "Ethical Egoism and Interpersonal Compatibility", *Philosophical Studies* 24, 1973, pp. 357-368.
5. Jesse Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism", from *Morality and Rational Self-interest*, ed., by David p. Gauthier, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1970, p. 65.

CHAPTER 1

THE MEANING OF SELF-INTEREST

In attempting to isolate and exhibit the concept of self-interest, I shall employ several distinctions. The recognition of these distinctions will throw light upon our understanding of this concept.

In the first place, we have to distinguish *self-interest from interest*, or self-interested act from interested act. Perry has defined interested act as the following:

An act is interested in so far as its occurrence is due to the agreement between its accompanying expectation and the unfulfilled phases of a governing propensity.¹

An explanation is needed here. What is involved in this definition of interested act is first a governing desire which is at any given time in control of the agent. Secondly, there is the response by which the governing desire is fulfilled or disappointed. Finally, there is the expectation of what the response will bring about. A simple example can illustrate this. Suppose I want to pick up a book in the next room. I walk across the room, and find the book there. My desire is thus fulfilled. The walking and finding constitute a series of responsive acts the occurrence of which is due to my desire to pick up the book. Moreover, the walking and finding are not randomly performed, they are selected because of what are expected from these responses. I walk across the room because I expect or believe that the book is in the next room. If I expect or believe that the book is in the library, then instead of walking across the room I will go to the library and find the book there.

Next, we have to answer the question of what it means to claim that actions are done out of self-interest. Butler, in his sermon "upon The Love of Our Neighbor", had distinguished self-love, or self-interest, from particular interests. He said:

Every man hath a general desire of his own happiness; and likewise a variety of particular external objects. The former proceeds from or is self-love (. . .) The object the former pursues is somewhat internal, our happiness, enjoyment, satisfaction; (. . .) the object of the latter are this or that particular thing (. . .)²

On this view, then, self-interest is a desire whose object is our own happiness; while the object of a single interest is a particular thing (e.g. I like ice cream; dislike fish

and so on). If so, self-interested acts are those that lead to our own happiness.

But Butler's conception of self-interest seems to be too narrow. For there are many self-interested acts that do not refer to our happiness. Suppose I set aside a portion of my income for retirement. It is said that I act out of my own interest, but it is doubtful if I also act out of a concern for my own happiness. My act is to have my retirement secured; whether it leads to my happiness is entirely another matter. Again, there are some acts that we do want to classify them as self-interested, but they are against our happiness. Suppose I have an affair with a married woman. This is clearly egoistic. But does it make me happy to do so? It very often does not, especially if her husband finds out the affair.

Besides, if self-interest is understood in this manner, it does not explain the general feeling of many philosophers that the ethical egoist is immoral.

The egoist, as almost everyone knows, is a most unsavory fellow. Flouting every code of common decency, he confronts the entire moral community. If you unhappily meet with him, your only appropriate stance — so goes the conventional wisdom — is one of fear and distrust, for he will invariably regard you as means at his disposal. If society gives the egoist power, it does so at its peril. He is essentially beyond the moral pale, and as such is to be watched, not won over; dealt with, not persuaded. In short, the egoist is a moral outlaw.³

Indeed, if self-interest is a desire for our own happiness, then what is so wrong of a person who merely wants to pursue his own happiness?

Hence, Butler's proposal will not do as a definition of self-interest.⁴ Another approach, seldom mentioned, is provided by Perry. According to him, self-interest and maternal love are similar in the following sense: the object of the governing interest is another interest. The mother tends her child's need because she cares for the child. In this case the object of mother-love is the fulfillment of another interest, viz, the need of her child. Similarly, self-interest is "an interest on the part of a self in the fulfillment of any one of its own constituent interests."⁵ The term 'self', as Perry points out, properly suggests a reflexive relationship. Thus, to act in the name of self-interest requires the subject to deliberate different desires of his and then to act on the desire that he wants to satisfy the most. This conception of self-interest will be more sharpened as we proceed.

Perry's view is closer to what are commonly said about E, because it is broad

enough to include all kinds of acts ascribed to E. Kalin says that according to E "a person could be morally justified in cheating on tests, padding expense accounts, swindling a business partner, being a slum landlord, draft-dodging, lying, and breaking promises, as well as in contributing to charity, helping friends, being generous or civic minded, and even undergoing hardship to put his children through college,"⁵ Now self-interested acts, in Perry's analysis, could be anything, because self-interest is a second-order interest. It aims at the fulfillment of another interest of the agent himself which could be anything he wants.

Having explained what an interested act is, as well as what a self-interested act is, let us look at some of the criticisms against E. Medlin has raised the following charge:

The egoist cannot promulgate that he is going to look after himself. He cannot even preach that he should look after himself and preach this alone. When he tries to convince me that he should look after himself, he is attempting so to dispose me that I should approve when he drinks my beer and steal Tom's wife.⁶

Whether the egoist can or cannot convince me that I should approve his egoistic action is not the concern here. It is the kind of egoistic actions that Medlin has given. He seems to suggest that drinking my beer when the egoist is so interested is done out of his own interest. But is it? Suppose the egoist wants to drink my beer without my consent, I may prevent him from doing so. It would be wise if he first asks my permission. The egoist may figure that he is physically stronger than I am and he can do whatever he wants to with my beer. But then the next time I surely will not invite him to my house. The point here is that Medlin has pictured the egoist as one who does whatever he wants to without considerations of anyone else. Such a picture, to say the least, is oversimplified. The egoist, having the desire of drinking a beer at this moment, has other interests or desires too. He wants to keep my friendship; he does not want me to throw him out of my house and so on. It is in light of these different desires or interests of his that he tries to decide what he should do. At the end he may still decide to drink my beer without my consent, believing that it is to his own interest to do so. But then his act is not done simply out of his interest of having my beer. What should be said of him is that, in weighing different desires of his own and the possible alternatives that he has to fulfill or frustrate these desires,

he chooses to do the act that will satisfy his desire of drinking my beer. However, he may choose to do otherwise. A more sensible decision for him is that he first asks my permission to share the beer with me.

A more serious example of this type of act is provided by Rachels:

Suppose I have an urge to set fire to some public building (say, a department store) just for the fascination of watching the spectacular blaze: according to egoism the fact that several people might be burned to death provides no reason whatever why I should not do it. After all, this only concerns their welfare, not my own, and according to the ethical egoist the only person I need think of is my self.⁷

In this example Rachels' rationale is somewhat like the following. Suppose I, as being an egoist, have a sudden urge to set fire to a building just for the kick of it. The only reason I need to justify my action morally is my own interest (whatever it may be); the welfare of others does not come into play in my decision. Believing that what is to my interest is to fulfill my urge of setting a fire, such an action is exactly what I should do.

Spelled out in this way, there are two things that can be said of this example. (1) It is clear that Rachels tends to identify self-interested act with interested act and assumes that what is to my interest is the same as what I am interested in. (2) It is very unlikely that when I have the urge to set fire to a building, I do not have other desires and aversions. To name a few: I surely do not want to be caught; and I do not want people to be hurt (is it not possible that though I want to set fire to a building, I do not want people to be killed because of it?). If so, the scenario of this example has already changed. Instead of saying, as Rachels does, that what is to my interest to do is to fulfill a particular desire of mine at any given time, it would be more precise to say that what I am doing here is this: in reviewing different desires of mine and possible alternatives that I have to fulfill or frustrate these desires I try to decide what I should do.

If what I have said about these two examples are correct, it is clear, self-interest cannot in a single stroke be identified with any particular interest. A man has numerous particular interests whose objects are this or that particular thing. On the other hand, self-interest is a second-order interest whose object is the fulfillment of another interest of the agent himself. More specifically, it is a general interest which

reviews the interests of the agent himself and chooses to act on the interest which he wants to satisfy the most. Return to Medlin's example. Suppose the egoist claims that his action (drinking my beer) is done out of his self-interest and is therefore right. What he is saying is that, having deliberated upon the desires that he has and the consequences of the acts that are open to him, he wants to satisfy the desire of drinking my beer (without my consent). If so, there is an element of deliberation in acts done out of self-interest which acts done merely out of interest lacks. This element of deliberation involves choosing which desire (among the desires that the agent has at the moment of deliberation) should be fulfilled. Therefore, it brings out the problem of *how to assess the various interests of the agent*. I shall return to this problem in Chapter 2.

The second distinction we have to make is between *self-interest and selfishness*. When we say that a person is selfish, we usually mean that he has no concern of other people; that he is interested in himself and himself alone. If so, the correct usage of selfishness should be "the *absence* of interest in the interest of other agents".⁸ On the other hand, an egoist might perform some *unselfish* act out of his self-interest. For instance, the ethical egoist can help his friend because he figures that he may need his friend someday. In this case the ethical egoist takes interest in another person (his friend), yet his reason is an egoistic one: he expects that his friend will render him service when he himself needs it. Thus, the difference between selfishness and self-interest is that the former precludes other-interested act while the later does not.

A similar distinction has been made by C. D. Broad. In examining the kinds of desire that might be called 'egoistic', he distinguishes *self-regarding from self-referential*.⁹ Self-regarding desires concern primarily with the agent himself. These desires are further divided into self-confined and self-centered. Under the head of self-confined are those desires that a person could have even if he were the only person in the world: desires for self-preservation; desires to get pleasant experiences and to avoid unpleasant experiences; desires to be a self of a certain kind; and desires of self-respect. Under the head of self-centered come those desires that, though standing relations to other persons, their emphasis is still on the agent himself. For example, a commander wants to exercise his power over his subordinates. Self-referential desires are other-regarding and yet egoistic. That is, these desires would not exist if it were

not for the fact that those people or things already stand in certain relations to the agent himself. For example, a father undergoes hardship to put his child through college. The object of his desire is the well-being of another person (his child), yet his reason might be an egoistic one: he would not do this if the person he helps were not his child, and he is happy when he sees that his child receives a good education.

Many critics have confused self-interest with selfishness, and therefore take it for granted that the ethical egoist is a selfish person. It is particularly this confusion that has given E a bad name. We have witnessed this confusion in Rachels' examples (the doctor and the arsonist). He says:

According to ethical egoism, each of us should take the attitude that other people simply don't matter, except in so far as they are useful to us, and that is a wicked attitude.¹⁰

If Rachels is right about this, then E should be refuted. For we then have an act that is morally wrong, and yet it is done in the name of self-interest. But if we keep the distinction between self-interest and selfishness in mind, we can see that E need not endorse these wicked actions as charged, unless, of course, it makes one feel happy to perform them.

Then, we may ask the following question: "Is it true that if we behaved selfishly, we would be happy?" A selfish person would gain certain advantages in some circumstances. He might swindle his business partners and get by with it. But overall he stands to loss more than he stands to gain. When other people know that he is a selfish person, they simply cease to trust him. Again, his selfish attitude would deprive him of companionship and family life (how could he get the attention from his family if he is only interested in himself?). As Kalin keenly points out, "we have the suspicion that selfish people are characteristically, if not always, unhappy".¹¹ If this speculation about selfishness is true, then, we, as being egoists, ought not to be selfish.

The third distinction is between *self-interest in the short run* and *self-interest in the long run*. In daily life we constantly employ this distinction to determine what we should do. I refrain myself from having another drink so that I can drive home safely. Why? because I realize that the total net consequences of getting home safely outweighs the enjoyment of having an extra drink. In an orderly society, most of us are willing to give up an immediate gain in order to reap a greater compensation

or to avoid a greater loss in the future.

This distinction is so basic and so widely used that it does not seem worthwhile to mention it. But many critics assume that the ethical egoist considers only his immediate or short-run self-interest. According to them, if E is true, the doctor (Rachels) should take the immediate gain of twelve dollars; the ethical egoist (Medlin) should drink my beer even without my permission. Here is another one:

(. . .) imagine two or more agents simultaneously confronted by a revolving door. Now what advice would a universal categorical egoist have for our micro-society? It is self-evident that he would have none. The imperatives entailed by his moral first principle would cancel each other out. He would be forced to stand mute.¹²

Let us take a moment to consider this new case. What Emmons wants to say is that, when two or more egoists simultaneously arrive at a revolving door, each one should, according to E, fight every step of the way to go through the door first. But no one is able to get through if they all try to do so. Therefore, so the objection goes, E is totally unacceptable.

I have serious doubt that this case is true of E. Let us see what ordinary people would do in such situation. Suppose two persons simultaneously try to go through a revolving door. Immediately, both of them realize that there is a traffic jam at the door. Without a moment of thinking, one of them would take a step back and the whole situation is resolved. I imagine that the ethical egoist would do exactly the same thing here. He tries to go through a revolving door. If he bumps into another one trying to go through the door at the same time, he might be the first one to take a step back so that both of them can get through without a hitch. Fighting every step of the way to go through the door first would be the *least* desirable for him.

The point I want to make here is that, when critics use these cases to argue against E, they often describe the egoist as a person who, having no concern of other people, does whatever pleases him at the moment and is willing to fight every step of the way to get what he wants. This picture of the egoist is simply not true. What E tells us to do is that we should maximize our interests in the long run. It is to our long-run self-interest to have health, career, family, and so on. To pursue these interests, we should get along with people, help our friends, and take genuine interest in others. But the claim that we should cultivate our long-run self-interest does not

mean that we have to ignore our immediate wants and desires. The purpose of making the distinction between long-run self-interest and short-run self-interest is to urge us to consider the total net consequences of a given act. If a present enjoyment is indeed greater than the future cost, then we should choose the former.

Still, there are many cases in which maximizing our long-run self-interest does not seem to be morally justified.

There is a young bank clerk who decides, quite correctly, that he can embezzle \$50,000 without his identity ever being known. He fears that he will be underpaid all his life if he doesn't embezzle, that life is slipping by without his ever enjoying the good things of this world; his fiancée will not marry him unless he can support her in the style to which she is accustomed; he wants to settle down with her in a suburban house, surround himself with books, stereo, hi-fi set, and various objects d'art, and spend a pleasant life, combining culture with sociability; he never wants to commit a similar act again.¹³

If so, what is there to stop the young clerk to embezzle? It is case like this that we find E difficult to accept. The problem that this case poses for defenders of E is that they have to show that the egoist is *always* right to pursue his long-run self-interest. This problem, I believe, cannot be answered until we have found a correct formulation of E. I will return to this problem in Chapter 4. For now I content myself with pointing out that if one pursues his self-interest, it does not mean that he has to be a shortsighted, selfish person.

The last distinction is a linguistic one. Ethical egoists often use the phrase "it is to x's *self-interest* to do y" interchangeable with the phrase "it is to x's *advantage* to do y", or "x should act so as to achieve that which is to *his own interest*" with "x should act so as to achieve that which is to *his advantage*". Thus, we are told "Egoism cannot be spelled out adequately without some understanding of what is to the advantage of those who would act in terms of it. Without some idea of what it is to be to the advantage of each individual person, the theory cannot be universalized."¹⁴ Here the implication is that if we want to know what sort of things that it is to our self-interest to do, all we have to know is what sort of things that will bring us advantage (whether it is material or otherwise).

But there is a distinction to be made between "it is to x's self-interest to do y" and "it is to x's advantage to do y". Strictly speaking, the word "advantage"

refers to the consequences of an action. For example, a stock broker advises a potential client: "The advantage of investing your money in the stock market is to beat the inflation." On the other hand, the word "self-interest", in our analysis, refers to a desire whose object is another interest of the agent himself. If so, why ethical egoists use them interchangeably? When ethical egoists say that one should maximize his own interest, they mean that he should seek many things: knowledge, freedom, money, health, social status, family, friendship, and so on. On this ground, ethical egoists further assume that, when one considers what he ought to do in a particular situation, the question he should ask himself is "What can I get out from this situation?" In such context it is natural for ethical egoists to recommend that one should act so as to achieve that which is to his advantage. But it is not enough to know what benefits one the most in terms of the nature of the consequences; he must also know himself and what sources of happiness are especially effective in his own particular case. Suppose a writer is offered a tour to promote his new book. Taking the tour will probably bring him fame, money and esteem. But it will occupy a lot of his time so that he won't be able to finish the book that he is now working on. Suppose we add that he does not like traveling and he is not very sociable. If so, it might not be to the writer's interest to accept the offer. Thus, when one considers what sort of things that it is to his own interest to do, he not only has to consider the nature of the consequences, but also the nature of himself and human nature in general. As Hospers has put it:

Now the peculiarity of ethical egoism is that the reasons given to justify one's action are always of self-interest: long-term self-interest, to be sure, not the self-interest of the moment, and self-interest only in the full context – considering not only the nature of the consequences but the nature of the agent and the nature of man himself.¹⁵

Through the above distinctions I have explored the meaning of self-interest, and dispelled some of the misinterpretations of E. Let me summarize some of the results at which I have arrived.

1. Self-interest can be regarded as a second-order interest whose object is another interest of the agent himself. When one claims that his act is done in terms of self-interest, what he is doing is more complicated than simply following a particular interest which he happens to have. In order to determine what he should do in the

name of self-interest he first has to compare the interest that he has and the objects that will satisfy or frustrate them, then to act on the interest that he wants to satisfy the most.

2. There are many confusions which stand in the way of our understanding of E. These confusions concern chiefly the way we portray the ethical egoist. In particular, I have tried to show that the ethical egoist need not be a selfish, short-sighted person who simply does whatever pleases him without any consideration of others.

3. When ethical egoists say that one ought to maximize his self-interests, they usually mean that he ought to maximize his long-run self-interests. The objects of these interests are knowledge, freedom, income, health, social status, family and friendship. To pursue these interests he should get along with people, help his friends and take genuine interest in others.

4. Still, there are two difficulties that the ethical egoist has to deal with. (1) Given two self-interested acts, how can we tell which one is better than the other? (2) How are we to handle those cases in which maximizing our long-run self-interests does not seem to be morally justified.

These reflections do not point to a definite definition of self-interest, but I am content with these results for now.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. R. B. Perry, *General Theory of Value*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 183.
2. Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, London, 1953, p. 167.
3. Robert Berg, "Rule-Egoism?" *The Personalist*, Vol. 60, No. 2, April 1979, p. 211.
4. Nevertheless, the desire for one's own happiness is one of the desires which might be called 'egoistic'. See C. D. Broad, *Ethics and The History of Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Regan Paul Ltd., 1952) pp. 218-231.
5. Perry, op. cit., p. 666.
6. Brian Medlin, "Ultimate Principles and Ethical Egoism", in *Morality and Rational Self-interest*, ed., by d. Gauthier, Prentice-Hall Inc., N. J. 1970, p. 58.
7. James Rachels, "Egoism and Moral Scepticism", in *A New Introduction to Philosophy*. ed., by Steven M. Cahn, p. 429.
8. Perry, op. cit., p. 666.
9. Broad, op. cit., pp. 218-231.
10. James Rachels, "Two Arguments against Ethical Egoism", *Philosophia* 4, April-July 1974,

p. 297.

11. Jesse Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism", from *Morality and Rational Self-interest*, ed., by David p. Gauthier, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1970, p. 64.
12. Donald Emmons, "Refuting The Egoist," *The Personalist*, *Vo. L, No. 3, Summer 1969*, p. 312.
13. John Hospers, *Human Conduct*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972, p. 181.
14. Tibor R. Machan, "Was Rachels' Doctor Practicing Egoism?" *Philosophia* 8, 1978 p. 423.
15. John Hospers, "Ethical Egoism: Introduction to Nathaniel Branden's Essay", *The Personalist*, *Vol. Li, No. 2, Spring 1970*, p. 193.

CHAPTER 2

THE RANKING OF SELF-INTEREST

In Chapter 1, I have pointed out that to act in terms of self-interest is rather a complicated process. It calls ways of measuring, comparing, and rating interest. Thus, ethical egoists must deal with the following questions. First of all, how is the agent to measure his own interests? Secondly, given two interests of the same person, one of which is rated high in the scale A but low in the scale B while the other one low in the scale A but high in the scale B, how is he to determine which interest he ought to satisfy? Finally, when two interests of the same person, say L and M, conflict with each other (assuming at the moment that the interests of other people are not affected), what should he do? Is it better that he should fulfill L at the expense of M? or that he should fulfill M at the expense of L?

Comparison yields judgment of the form "this is better (or worse) than that". If so, what we are looking for here is some sort of standard or principle which renders such comparative judgments true or false. Stated in this way, we can see that the problem the ethical egoist is confronted with is the following: what are the principles or standards in virtue of which I can say that to act on this interest of mine and its corresponding object is better than to act on another interest of mine and its corresponding object?

Before turning to the principles that govern the comparison of interests and their corresponding objects, we have to say something about the object of comparison. What are we comparing here? what is the proper object of our comparison? In saying that a certain object, say O, is to his self-interest to pursue, the ethical egoist means that, after he has deliberated his interests, he chooses to act on the interest in O. If so, E implies that the value of an object consists in its relation to a subject who takes interest in it. If there were no subject for whom the object is valuable, the object by itself would not possess any value. That the ethical egoist must hold the relational theory of value¹ is clearly recognized by Eric Mack. He says:

The relational conception of value is an essential ingredient in impersonal ethical egoism (. . .) according to impersonal ethical egoism, "S is good" must always be elliptical for "S is good for

X or for Y". If there exists no X (or Y) for whom S is good,
S is not a good.²

Since it is the interest which confers value on the object, it must also be the interest which confers the amount of value on the object. Consequently, when the agent judges that one object is better or worse than another one, it must be because the interest which confers value on one object is in some sense more or less – of greater or less weight – than another interest which confers value on another object. Therefore, the proper object of comparison, according to E, is the interest itself.

How is the agent to measure his own interests? Bentham had devised a set of criteria – the hedonistic calculus – for measuring the amount of pleasure or pain. According to E, the object of measurement is not pleasure but interest. Thus, what follows is a modified account, similar to Bentham's hedonistic calculus, for measuring interests.³

The first principle recognized by common sense is the *intensity* of interest. Between two objects, A and B, if the interest in A is more intense than the interest in B, then A is better than B, everything else being equal. For example, if I am hungry at this moment, food taking is surely more valuable to me than, say, seeing a movie. However, this principle is often used implicitly to argue against E. Rachels' arsonist serves as a good example here. The implication of his example is that if the arsonist has a strong desire – presumably stronger than other desires he might have – to set a fire to a public building, then he is right to follow this desire. What is wrong of this example is not that it employs a wrong principle to compare interests. The refutation of this example is rather that there are more than one principle to be used in the comparing of interests, and that each one is independent in the sense that they measure different aspects of interest. An adequate comparison of interest must use these different principles as complementary methods of determining the value of objects on the whole.

The second principle is the *preference* of interest. It says that an object, A, is better than another object, B, if A is preferred to B. Suppose Smith likes classical music, and he prefers Bach to Mozart, Mozart to Beethoven. If so, we can say that, with reference to Smith's interest of classical music, Bach is better than Mozart, and Mozart better than Beethoven. In other words, the objects of a single interest can be ranked in accordance with the preference of the interest. That interest exhibits

this feature of preference is hard to deny. There are abundant examples of application of the preferential principle in our daily life. For instance, when a wine company advertises that its wine is better than the products of some other companies, it refers to the authoritative taste of an expert. The implication here is that if the consumers are also governed by the same interest of wine, they would adopt an order of preference the same as the expert. This advertisement tries to assimilate the taste of the consumers into one common order of preference in which the product of the advertiser is placed higher than its competitors.

The third principle of comparative value is *inclusiveness*. It says that, of two objects, A and B, if A can satisfy at least one more interest than B does, then A is the more valuable one. The illustration of this principle runs as follows. Suppose a painting derives value from my aesthetic appreciation of it. Now if I also discover that the painting can be sold at a very good price, then the painting gains additional value from my economic interest in it. Extending this sense we may cover the case in which, of two objects, one is better than another if there is at least one more interest invested in it.

The application of this principle can be seen in Bentham's famous phrase "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". On the face of it, the phrase suggests that the aggregates of everyone's welfare is the best when compared with anyone's welfare. However, this principle is often extended by utilitarians to cover the case where the aggregates of everyone's welfare is in conflict with the welfare of its members. It is said that in the case of such a conflict the individual's welfare should be sacrificed. But this extension is an illegitimate application of the principle of inclusiveness. Note that this principle has an important characteristic: an object would have added value if there are more interests invested in it *provided* that the original interest is still there. To sacrifice an individual in the name of the community has already violated this characteristic of inclusiveness, because in that case the interest of the individual and the interest of the community are co-exclusive.

Each of these three principles sets up an order in which interests are measured and hence the value of their objects are determined. Each one measures interest independent of the other two; jointly they yield a complimentary evaluation of an object on the whole.

How is the joint operation of these three principles to be achieved? Take the

combination of intensity and preference first. How do we compare two objects, A and B, of which the interest in A is more intense but puts A low in its preferential order; and the interest in B is less intense but puts B high in the same preferential order? Can we simply multiply the intensity (how intense it is) and the preference (how much it is preferred) of these two interests and see which sum is greater? Here the answer is evidently negative. Of these two magnitudes, all we can say about them is that one interest is more intense than another; and that one object is preferred to another. We cannot say that one interest is twice intense than another, or that one object is twice preferred to another. The lack of exact measurement leaves us unable to match up these two magnitudes. However, it is still possible to establish a relationship of *priority* between these two principles. A fully excited interest is said to have the effect of the total possession of the agent. In the heat of a rage there is little or no room to allow other interests to exercise their force. Thus, when we employ these two principles together, we should first take the principle of preference and then the principle of intensity, because the precedence of preference does not prevent the subsequent application of intensity while the precedence of intensity would definitely cut off the possibility of the employment of preference.

Similarly, the same order of precedence should exist between inclusiveness and intensity. That is, we should first employ the principle of inclusiveness and then the principle of intensity. For the employment of inclusiveness does not prevent the constituent interests being fully aroused, while the precedence of intensity may interrupt any use of the principle of inclusiveness.

What is to be said in the case of preference and inclusiveness combined? An example is helpful to illustrate the situation here. A man has fondness of classical music as well as rock concerts. Suppose he also puts classical music higher than rock concert in his preferential order. If so, the employment of preference always has the result of precluding the possibility of going to a rock concert. On the other hand, the application of inclusiveness suggests that the state in which both interests (the interest of classical music and the interest of going to rock concerts) are satisfied is better than the state in which either one is satisfied. Therefore, there is the same order of precedence between inclusiveness and preference.

So far our discussion of commensurability of value has established an order of precedence among these three principles. Namely, the standard of inclusiveness should

first be applied, then preference, lastly intensity. But neither the separate nor the joint application of these three principles provides much help for dealing with conflict of interests. The application of these three principles, whether separately or jointly, requires that the interests compared are *compatible* with each other. That is, the satisfaction of one interest does not create the frustration of the others. However, the state in which interests happily coincide is a rarity in the world. Our lives are full of situations in which interests clash. And it is conflict of interests which needs our judgment the most.

If so, what can be said, from the egoistic point of view, about conflict of interests within the person himself?⁴ A common strategy to solve this problem is to draw a distinction between long-run interest and short-run interest. But, first of all, short-run and long-run interests do not have to go against each other. Suppose my interest in the present is to study and my long-run interest is to become a scholar. This case of course does not create any difficulty. The problem arises when two interests are opposite to each other. Should I spend all the money now, or should I save it for the future? According to this distinction, I should forego the present interest, because there is more good to come out if I follow the long-run interest.

Let us focus on the above case for a moment. Spending all the money now derives positive value from my present interest (say, I want to buy a luxurious car). But doing so will interfere with my future interest (I also want financial security when I retire). On the other hand, saving the money for retirement is good with regard to my future interest, but evil to my present interest of buying a luxurious car. If so, which one is better: buying the car now, forgetting the future, or saving the money for retirement? There are both good and evil in each alternative. Can I simply compare the good and the evil of these two mixed wholes (say, regarding the first alternative, to compare the good of my present interest with the evil of my future interest), and see which comes out a greater sum of value? Such a comparison means that I compare *directly* the claims of these two opposing interests. This is impossible, because there is no common order in which these two interests can be compared. First, both interests may reach to their maximum strength, therefore the principle of intensity cannot determine which one is better. Second, in order for the principle of preference to be applicable, these two interests must have the same order of preference, which they do not. Finally, the principle of inclusiveness does

not apply, because they are co-exclusive. What can be said at this point is that, relative to my present interest, the first alternative is better; relative to my future interest, the second one is better. But none of them is better on the whole.

Ordinarily, very few people would opt for either of these two extremes. Common sense tells us that the sensible thing to do is to spend some of the money now (to buy, say, a less expensive car) and yet to save some for the future. What this judgment amounts to is that, of two opposing interests, the solution is reconciliation between them. Such reconciliation in fact means that the state in which both interests are satisfied *would* be better than the state in which either one is defeated.

If so, this example has pointed a way to solve the problem of conflict of interests within a person. On reflection I realize that there are two opposing interests jointly operating within myself. The satisfaction of one interest involves the frustration of the other. In order to satisfy both interests without loss I could work out a plan with a view to accommodate both interests. I could, as mentioned before, save a portion of the money for retirement; and yet have enough left to buy a less expensive car. Or I could work harder so that there will be more money available to achieve the objectives of both interests. Whatever plan I choose to follow, the point is that the plan is made solely because of these two opposing interests. This means that each interest in the plan must take account of the other, and both jointly contribute the final outcome. It is in this sense that both interests are said to be wholly satisfied in the plan.⁵

It may be objected that in the plan both interests suffer loss in the sense that each does not have its satisfaction as it would have were each operative separately. Strictly speaking, both interests are not the same as before. The original objective of my present interest is to buy a luxurious car. Now in order to accommodate my future interest I have to settle with a less expensive car, or have to wait a bit longer to buy the car I want. This means that the plan will not succeed if each still insists on its demand. The modification of both interests is the necessary requirement of working out the plan. Therefore, the plan cannot be said to defeat or limit both interests.

We have seen that the incompatibility of opposing interests is due to the fact that there is no common order in which these opposing interests can be compared. It follows that in order to insure the success of all his interests, the agent has to est-

establish a common order in which his constituent interests are properly placed. In such a harmonious state there will be no conflict of interests. Suppose I have worked out a comprehensive arrangement in which the interest of comfortable retirement is higher than the interest of buying a luxurious car. When these two interests clash within myself, the solution is obviously that the satisfaction of the latter should not interrupt the satisfaction of the former; or vice versa if the arrangement is reversed. Therefore, the solution to conflict of interests within a person depends largely upon how well he integrates his interests into a common order, and his readiness to drop those interests which cannot be so integrated.

Let me recapitulate what I have so far established. In order to say that an act is done in the name of self-interest, the agent has to compare the interests that he has and chooses to follow one he judges to be better than others within the context of his total field of interests. If the interests that he has are compatible with each other, then the three principles above mentioned are sufficient to yield a decision. In such circumstance self-interest may be understood as a second-order interest which takes the fulfillment of any of his particular interests as its object. But since a man is capable of various desires, self-interest can assume many different forms.

When conflict of interests arises, comparison of interests in accordance with these three principles is simply not enough to deal with the problem. In the case where conflict of interests is within the agent himself, he has to work out some plan with a view to reconcile the opposing interests. In order to secure their joint success, he has to arrange these interests in a hierarchy such that the interest lower in the scale would not violate the interest higher in the scale. Thus, self-interest may be understood, in a broader sense, as an interest of the self as a whole which strives to achieve the fulfillment of all his interests.

In the beginning of this thesis I have stated that E has two shortcomings.⁶ One of them is that there is virtually no constraint upon egoistic conducts. To illustrate this point, I have used Rachels' story of a small town doctor. In Chapter 1, we can see that Rachels, in making his point, may have failed to draw (1) the distinction between selfishness and self-interest; (2) the distinction between short-run self-interest and long-run self-interest and (3) the linguistic distinction between "It is to x's advantage to do y" and "It is to x's self-interest to do y". But these responses do not seem to touch the central point of Rachels' story. According to Rachels' description,

the doctor is a heartless man who does not have "good feelings" about treating the poor woman kindly; and he has no guilty feeling if he takes the last twelve dollars from her. Moreover, he judges that there will be no harmful reactions from the community. Under such circumstances, what is there to stop the doctor from taking the money?

In this chapter, I have argued that, strictly speaking, self-interest acts are not without their limits. To act in the name of self-interest requires the agent to subject himself to certain principles which govern the comparison of his interests. More specifically, the agent has to integrate all his interests into a common order so that the interest lower in the order would not violate the interests above it. This in turn requires the agent to exert certain controls over his conducts. Even so, these "internal" constraints do not seem to be sufficient to stop the doctor from taking the money. For, according to Rachels, the doctor has a narrow field of interests. Money and fame are the only two things that he wants for himself. This means that his actions are all geared to fulfill these two interests. If so, the doctor *could* still claim that doing what he does is justified by the reason of self-interest, even in the sense that I have developed in these two chapters.

From these considerations, it is clear that the constraint upon egoistic conducts has to come from *without*. But at the same time the constraint has to be compatible with the reason of self-interest. Therefore, the question of how to establish the constraint that meets these two conditions becomes crucial for defense of E. To this question we now turn.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Kalin seems to hold the relational theory of value when he distinguishes the formal conception of value from the material conception of value. Kalin, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-78.
2. Eric Mack, "Egoism and Right", *The Personalist*, LIV (winter 1973), p. 10.
3. In treating comparison of interests, I am following Perry. In my judgment, his book *General Theory of Value* is one of the most important philosophical work on the subject of interest.
4. Here I focus on conflict of interests within a person. Conflict of interests among persons will be dealt in the next two chapters.
5. This process of working out a plan to accommodate opposing interests is what Perry called intergration of interests. It means that interest are in some sense conjoined or linked together. See Perry, *op. cit.*, Chapter 13.
6. cf. The Introduction p. 3.

CHAPTER 3

ACT-EGOISM

There are many formulations of ethical egoism. The most widely discussed is act-egoism, the view that "A person ought to do a specific action, all things considered, if, and only if, that action is in that person's overall (enlightened) self-interest."¹ This formulation has been offered by Kalin, Mack and others. So defined, AE, however, is criticized as not being able to provide moral constraints upon excessive egoistic conducts. The charge runs as follows. To assess what he ought to do in relation to other persons, the act-egoist considers only his overall self-interest. He takes account of the interests of other persons in so far as they conform to his; otherwise he does not. Thus, he is justified in using other persons if they stand in the way of pursuing his egoistic goal. The following example captures the core of this type of criticism:

Let B and K be candidates for the presidency of a certain country and let it be granted that it is in the interest of either to be elected, but that only one can succeed. It would then be in the interest of B but against the interest of K if B were elected, and vice versa, and therefore in the interest of B but against the interest of K if K were liquidated, and vice versa. But from this it would follow that B ought to liquidate K, that it is wrong for B not to do so, that B has not "done his duty" until he has liquidated K; and vice versa. Similarly, K, knowing that his own liquidation is in the interest of B and therefore anticipating B's endeavors. It would be wrong for him not to do so. He would "not have done his duty" until he had made sure of stopping B (. . .)²

In the literature of AE, there is a persistent attempt to find some sort of constraints upon egoistic conducts. Eric Mack believes that the act-egoistic principle alone is enough to impose certain constraints upon egoistic conducts. The kind of constraints that he tries to establish is that the act-egoist should not prevent other persons from pursuing their own interests. If constraints of this kind can be established, then the act-egoist should abstain from actions that are harmful to other persons.

Central to Mack's argument is the idea that the act-egoist is committed to the

view that other persons have the same reason just as he has to pursue their own interests. This commitment implies that he ought not to interfere with their efforts to do so. Thus, except in a situation where his own life is threatened, the act-egoist is not justified to perform those self-interested actions which are detrimental to other persons.

With this idea in mind, Mack first draws a distinction between actions that are necessary to one's self-interest and actions that are not necessary to one's self-interest. He says that "an action *s* is necessary if it is a constituent of a series of actions which is the most in one's interest, or if there are more than one series of actions equally in one's interest, then *s* is a constituent in every such equally advantageous series of actions".³ In the case where the action is necessary to his self-interest, the act-egoist cannot abstain from doing it even though its result is harmful to others.

Then, he draws the following parallelism:

A. Ques. Why does this action by Smith lack justification?

Ans. Because Smith is acting as if it is not the case that Smith ought to act in his own interests, since he is acting, say, as if Smith ought to act in Jones' interest.

Ques. Why is it wrong for Smith to act as if it is not the case that Smith ought to act in his own interest?

Ans. Because all persons ought to act (exclusively) in their own interest.

B. Ques. Why does this action by Smith lack justification?

Ans. Because Smith is acting as if it is not the case that Jones ought to act in his own (Jones') interest, since he is acting, say, as if Jones ought to act in Smith's interest.

Ques. Why is it wrong for Smith to act as if it is not the case that Jones ought to act in his own (Jones') interest?

Ans. Because all persons ought to act (exclusively) in their interest.⁴

Schema A indicates that certain actions of Smith are not justified by AE: namely, those actions that are not to Smith's self-interest. Just as Schema A shows that Smith is not justified to act contrary to his own interest, Schema B shows that Smith is not justified to interfere with other person's efforts of pursuing their own interests. Since the reason why the actions in both schemata are not justified is the act-egoistic principle itself. Mack concludes that the principle alone can impose the

needed constraints upon egoistic conducts.

There is a number of things worthy of discussion in Mack's argument. Let us begin with the distinction between actions that are necessary to one's self-interest and actions that are not. There seems to be an ambiguity in the concept of a necessary action. It is Mack's contention that this distinction singles out those cases in which the act-egoist's actions should not be limited by any means. When the life of the act-egoist is in danger, he is entitled to do whatever he can to protect himself even if doing so is at the expense of other persons. Clearly, the constraints upon egoistic conducts must not prohibit such "necessary" actions. If so, then the actions that are necessary to a person's self-interest are those that involve his self-preservation. Let us designate the meaning of "necessary" illustrated here as necessary¹. However, Mack defines a "necessary" action as the following: an action *s* is necessary to a person's self-interest if *s* is a constituent of the series which is the most advantageous to that person in a given situation. Let us call it necessary². It is clear that the meaning of necessary¹ is not quite the same as the meaning of necessary². In a given situation, a person may have a series of actions that is the most advantageous to him; and yet this series of actions does not involve his self-preservation. For instance, A and B are business partners. When A is out of town, a customer comes in the store and buys something in cash. What is the most advantageous thing for B to do? Let us stipulate that A would not find out this incident. If so, it is plausible to say that the most advantageous thing for B to do is to keep the money to himself without telling A about it. Note that in this case the most advantageous thing for B to do has nothing to do with his own survival. To support his claim that, unless the action is "necessary", the act-egoist should abstain from actions that are harmful to other persons, necessary¹ is what Mack really wants; but not necessary².

I believe that the ambiguity in Mack's notion of a "necessary" action is because of his inadequate understanding of AE. He seems to regard AE as a doctrine that tells one to do what is in his own interest. In a given situation, there are numerous actions that can bring satisfaction to the act-egoist's interest. Among these actions, some of them contain condemnable actions (actions that are harmful to other persons); others do not. According to Mack, the act-egoist is required to perform any one of them. Now if we can establish that the act-egoist should not perform those condemnable actions, then the alleged charge against him can be avoided. With this under-

standing of AE, Mack then purports to show that, unless an action is necessary (in the sense that the performance of the action is vital to one's self-preservation), the act-egoist should abstain from actions that are condemnable.

But this understanding of AE is misleading. For AE does not merely tell a person to do what is in his self-interest; it tells him to do that particular act which is the most in his own interest. Consider the following example. Suppose A and B are business partners. A customer comes in and buys something in cash from B. There is a number of actions that B can do, all of which are in B's own interest. For instance, he can keep the money to himself without telling A about it; or he can report the business transaction to A so that both of them can benefit from it. It is clear that the first action is more advantageous to B than the second one. AE, understood in the former sense, requires B to perform either one of these two actions. As long as B performs either one of them he acts in accordance with the act-egoistic principle. And if we can say with justification that B should abstain from the first action, then AE is home free. However, AE, understood in the later sense, requires B to perform the first action. And it is the *maximization* of benefit that makes the act-egoist unable to avoid the charge against it.

Furthermore, I believe that Schema B does not show that the act-egoist is unjustified if his action has the result of stopping others from pursuing their own interests. Schema A is supposed to govern the actions of the act-egoist. It says that when Smith acts contrary to his own interest, he is then acting as if AE were false. On the other hand, Schema B is supposed to govern the relationship between Smith and other persons. It says: suppose that someone else, say, Jones, pursues Jones' interest; if Smith tries to stop Jones from doing so, then Smith is also acting as if AE were false. But is it really the case that Smith acts as if AE were false when he tries to stop Jones? Let us suppose that Jones is also an act-egoist. If so, Jones' action could be related to Smith in three different ways. First, the result of Jones' action is indifferent to Smith. In this case it seems that Smith would care less what Jones does, because his action is simply irrelevant to Smith's interest. Consequently, Smith has no reason to act for or against Jones. Secondly, Jones' action will increase Smith's interest. If so, it is likely that Smith will step in and help Jones pursuing Jones' interest. For the fulfillment of Jones' interest also means the increase of Smith's interest. Thirdly, Jones' action is detrimental to Smith's interest. Smith, in

seeing that Jones' action will frustrate his own, has to stop Jones; in doing so he still follows AE. For his reason is not that others should not follow AE. Just as he himself can adopt AE, others can follow it as well. Rather, the reason for Smith to act against Jones is that, when his own interest is threatened, he ought to do whatever he can to protect his own. Thus, we can see that in none of these three cases Smith acts as if AE were false. Therefore, it is false to claim that, when the act-egoist tries to stop others from pursuing their own interest, he acts as if AE were false.

Ironically, many philosophers regard the principle that one ought not to prevent others from doing what they ought to do as incompatible with AE.⁵ Kurt Baier has construed an argument using the above principle against AE.

1. B ought, all things considered, to assassinate K.
2. K ought, all things considered, to prevent B from assassinating K.
3. K's preventing B from assassinating K = K's preventing B from doing what B ought to do, all things considered.
4. One ought never to prevent someone from doing what they ought, all things considered.

Therefore, K ought not, all things considered, to prevent B from assassinating K.⁶

However, Kalin constantly points out that the act-egoist must not consent to premise 4. The act-egoist does not expect that others give him a free hand to pursue his own interest, especially when his action is detrimental to their own. Why should he give them a free hand in a similar situation? He wants to pursue his own interest; others can pursue theirs just as well. When his interest clashes with others', he would say to them, as well as to himself: "May the best man win." The act-egoist believes, as Kalin puts it very well, that "life is a game and we are its players."⁷ In a game, it will be right that one tries to win and also right that his opponent tries to prevent him from winning. Thus, the act-egoist can consistently reject the principle that one ought not to prevent someone else from doing what he ought to do.

Mack later abandons Schema B. Instead, he argues that the act-egoist, in recognizing that other persons ought to pursue their own interest, is also recognizing that they must be free to make use of their activities, capacities, etc, to pursue their own interest. Therefore, any use of other persons' capacities, activities and so on

is inconsistent with such recognition. Consequently, he ought not to prevent others from doing what they ought to do.⁸

Why shouldn't he? As we have explained, the act-egoist, in admitting that others ought to pursue their own interest, need not give them a free hand to do so. The difficulty of Mack's defense of AE is his insistence that a person has a natural right, the right to use his own capacities and so on. On the assumption that he has such a right, actions that violate it are wrong. But Mack has not shown why the act-egoist should acknowledge such a right. Hence his defense of AE is unsuccessful.

In his early papers on ethical egoism, Kalin claims that AE by itself is able to guide human behavior. He argues convincingly that the principle can do this without contradiction or inconsistency. However, he concedes that the principle cannot provide a solution to conflict of interests among persons. More significantly, he admits that a person who adopts this principle must refrain from engaging in most of moral activities – punishing and rewarding, asking and giving moral advice, and so on.

Such conception of ethical egoism is unsatisfactory in many ways. One of them is that, although the principle can guide a person in any particular situation (he ought to do that action which maximizes his self-interest in a given situation), it does not help him much in dealing with other persons. When he confronts with other persons whose interests conflict with his, the principle tells him to try to come out as a victor. If so, it is obvious that he is not able to get everything he wants; the mere existence of other persons stops him. Thus he has to deal with the problem of interpersonal relationship by some other means.

In his more recent paper, Kalin abandons his original position on ethical egoism. He says:

Ethical Egoism is best understood not as a lone principle which is to be applied as it stands to each action, but rather as the foundation for establishing a system of interpersonal, or moral reasons which are nontraditional in character.⁹

On account of this, AE is now conceived as the basis upon which a group of persons get together and select certain rules and principles for their dealings with one another.

The leading idea of Kalin's view is that morality as a set of moral rules and moral principles is contractarian in nature. To illustrate: suppose that a group of act-egoists join together to decide what they ought to do in their dealings with one another.

It is obvious that AE is inadequate to guide them in this joint venture. For it "will emphasize differences and conflicts in interests among the reasoners, and will frequently dictate not a course of action they ought to pursue, but opposed actions for each individual."¹⁰ What they need is a set of rules and principles the establishment of which can provide peaceful solution to their differences. Thus, the act-egoists choose together a set of moral rules and moral principles for their mutual advantage. Kalin calls this contractarian view of morality "nontraditional".

The rules and principles are designed to regulate certain egoistic behaviors. They limit those excessive demands that the act-egoists claim against one another. For example, "Do not steal" is a good rule for all act-egoists to follow. In some situation a person may find that it is to his own interest to steal. Although he may get by with it, he surely does not want himself to be the victim in a similar situation. Therefore, rules that prohibit killing, stealing, and so on are to the interest of each act-egoist to accept and to follow. Furthermore, there are other rules the adoption of which can create social goods (friendship, love and so on) which are otherwise nonexistent. The rule "Help those in need" is a good example. These social goods are essential to every act-egoist if he wants to have a happy life.

Then, there are rules that each act-egoist can use to advance his own interest. This means that the establishment of moral rules and moral principles is based upon AE. Everyone wants to maximize his own interest, but no one can do this without certain rules to arbitrate the competing claims. Therefore, Kalin concludes that "morality is nontraditional in character and is to be understood as instituted in a complex way in accord with egoistic considerations."¹¹

However, according to Kalin, an act-egoist regards morality with some reservation. This is to say that he follows moral rules and moral principles only if he stands to gain by it more than he stands to lose. In general, the act-egoist recognizes that it is to his own interest to observe those rules and principles which he and other persons have agreed upon. But there are cases in which he may find that it is no longer advantageous for him to do so. When such a situation arises, the act-egoist can, as Kalin puts it, "opt out of the moral institution."¹²

Under what conditions can one opt out of the moral institution? In answering this question, Kalin first offers the following conditions as necessary for an act-egoist to form a moral institution with other persons: (1) "members have roughly similar

needs and interests," and (2) "members are sufficiently equal in power and ability to assure that in normal circumstances none is able to dominate the others."¹³ Now if people's interests are so different from each other, there are few or no egoistic reasons for him to form a moral community with other persons. The purpose of establishing a set of moral rules and moral principles is that he and other persons confront with a *common problem* that they have to deal with: the problem of interpersonal conflicts. It is this common interest that makes them choose and accept a moral system. Again, they will not abide rules if one of them is very powerful and can get away with whatever he does. Thus a person will not enter into a moral system unless these two conditions are met.

Even if one joins with other persons to form a moral system, according to Kalin, it does not mean that he never departs from it. Consider the following example. The adoption of the rule "Do not steal" is advantageous to everyone. It protects people's properties. Thus if this rule is operative in a moral community, then stealing is wrong, not because the act is not advantageous to the thief (it does bring immediate advantage to him), but because the act brings him more disadvantages. The bad consequences of stealing almost always occurs. When a thief commits a crime, he is likely worried being caught. If he is caught, he will be punished. Even if he is not caught, his violation of the rule would undermine the effectiveness of the rule. This is something he hardly wants to bring about. Although he himself violates the rule, he does not want himself to be a victim in a similar situation. Therefore, when a person compares the act of stealing and not stealing in a particular situation, he probably reasons that it is to his own interest to follow the above rule. Nevertheless, there are cases in which he may find stealing is more advantageous than not. Suppose his act of stealing could not be detected; or the penalty for it is very light. If so, then he is justified in stealing in this particular circumstance. The question of whether or not an act-egoist will opt out of the moral institution which he and other persons have formed depends solely upon the risk he has to take, such as "the severity of the penalty, the likelihood of getting away with, etc."¹⁴ In short, the act-egoist has to consider all the relevant consequences of his act before he chooses to depart from the moral community.

This attitude toward morality is in accord with AE. The principle says: do that particular act which will produce the most good to you. In normal circumstances,

following rules will produce the most good to you. But in some particular situation, after considering all the relevant consequences, if you know that breaking a rule will bring advantage to you far more than following it, then, and only then, you are justified in departing from it.

Intuitively, the idea that the establishment of a moral system is based on egoistic consideration is very promising. This idea is also present in the writings of many contemporary moral philosophers. For instance, John Rawls, in a different context, uses a similar contractarian strategy to demonstrate that the principles for the basic structure of society are chosen by a group of rational persons whose main concern is to advance their own interest. As Hospers puts it, "the characters of Rawl's drama . . . could easily be construed as being ethical egoists."¹⁵ Yet I believe that there are at least two reasons why Kalin's theory is unsatisfactory. The first reason is that, because of their *reserved* attitude toward morality, the act-egoists cannot not come up with a set of moral rules acceptable to them. The second reason is that, even if they could adopt a set of moral rules, these rules would have little impact on them. If I am right about these two reasons, AE is basically an untenable position.

We have seen that the act-egoists' attitude toward moral rules is that they are on the whole advantageous, but they may have exceptions. This act-egoistic attitude toward morality is difficult to accept. In the first place, what kind of moral rules can the act-egoists having such a reserved attitude toward morality choose and agree to? How do they formulate a set of moral rules acceptable to them? In choosing and agreeing to a set of moral rules the act-egoists must at the same time determine the specific contents of these rules.

These central rules, (rules such as "Do not harm others," "Do not murder," "Do not lie," and "Help those in need.") therefore, provide a schema which can be filled in more than one way without violating reason. Their content gets specified in terms of exceptions made, excusses accepted, and cases regarded as paradigmatic. But what actually count as legitimate excuses, exceptions, and paradigmatic cases, and how in fact these considerations are to be ranked when they conflict is settled only by the mutual adoption (usually tacit) of a particular practice and are thus nontraditional in character.¹⁶

Let us imagine that the act-egoists are choosing and determining a rule that prohibits killing. Is it enough that the rule is specified in the following way: killing

is wrong unless it is killing in self-defense, killing by the hangman, killing of an enemy in wartime, accidental killing, and possibly mercy killing?¹⁷ The answer seems to be negative. We have said that the act-egoist has a reserved attitude toward moral rules. That is, he will follow the rule that prohibits killing only if *in every case* the rule under which his acts falls will bring him the most good; otherwise he can refuse to abide by it. For he ought to do that particular act which brings him the most good in any given situation. This means that he does not really accept the rule formulated as above. His act-egoistic attitude toward killing is somewhat like the following: I ought not to kill, except in self-defense, . . . , and except in the case that killing will maximize my self-interest (for instance, killing my favorite enemy without being detected). But the last qualification defeats the rule that prohibits killing. If everyone had this attitude, then their adoption of the last qualification would frustrate the whole purpose of having such a moral rule: namely, do not kill an innocent person.

The act-egoist can, of course, pretend to follow moral rules. He can publicly accept a set of moral rules to govern his behaviors; while secretly he will violate them whenever doing so will bring him the most good. But others have the same kind of attitude as his. This means that every act-egoist would publicly accept moral rules; while secretly they would violate them when it is in their own interests to do so. If so, there would not be mutual adoption of moral rules among the act-egoists at all.

The difficulty of formulating a set of moral rules acceptable to the act-egoists arises from the fact that they do not have principles or rules; they have only one aim: to maximize their own interests in every particular situation. To adopt the moral point of view, on the other hand, as Baier puts it very well, is to conform to the rules whether or not doing so favors one's own or anyone else's aim.¹⁸

In the second place, rules are not meant to be broken. We believe that moral rules are meant for every one to follow; no one should make exceptions in his own favor. We follow moral rules and expect that others will do the same. Without this understanding, no one would be induced to conform his actions to moral rules. Now suppose that an act-egoist has the attitude that he would follow moral rules only if he could benefit from doing so; otherwise he would not. When others knew this they would follow the suit. If so, no one would adhere to moral rules any longer. The purpose of having moral rules would thus be totally lost.

Even Kalin himself acknowledges the importance of mutual adoption of moral

rules.¹⁹ Yet he allows the possibility of breaking moral rules and moral principles. He says,

That moral considerations have only a contingent force which can under the proper circumstances be escaped is crucial to an egoistic account of morality, for if moral considerations could not be avoided when, for instance, one's life were at stake, the account would cease to be egoistic.²⁰

The apparent incompatibility between mutual adoption of moral rules and the possibility of making exception to moral rules does not seem to bother Kalin. He is convinced that there are very few circumstances in which the act-egoist should opt out of the morality. In fact he mentions only one extreme case: when one's life were at stake, he is justified to opt out of the morality.

We do not have to go very far to find circumstances in which one can escape from the force of morality. There are abundant cases in which a person is justified, giving the act-egoistic account of morality, to break moral rules. Hospers gives several examples of this kind. To name a few of them,

Suppose that I have figured out a way to rob a bank in which there is virtually no chance of detection; suppose also that conscience doesn't bother me (the persons who need conscience most appear to be the least endowed with it). Why on egoistic premises, should I nevertheless not rob the bank?²¹

Again,

Why should you not violate your favorite enemy's right to life if some lonely night on a deserted pass you can despatch him without witnesses and plant the evidence on somebody else?²²

The point is that rules may be easily be broken if we consider the consequences of a single act. Even if we add to our consideration the consequences of this act on the general practice of lawbreaking itself, there are numerous cases in which breaking a rule is advantageous than not. Suppose I make a promise to a dying man that I will look after his family. Later, I realize that it is so inconvenient for me to fulfill my promise. Suppose also that no one knows that I made the promise, not even the family of the dying man. If so, breaking my promise does not undermine the effectiveness of promise keeping. Why, then, should I not break the promise?

It might be argued that the truth will eventually come out. When it does, the bad consequences of my breaking the promise will haunt me. But suppose that the

truth did not come out. What then? It is an empirical fact that there are so many cases of lawbreaking that are not detected. If so, am I justified to break a promise if it is made in secret? and not justified if the promise is known by other persons?

The error of this reply is that the rightness or wrongness of an act now depends upon whether the public knows about it or not. Breaking a promise is wrong if others know about it; it is not wrong if no one finds out about it. However, we tend to believe that breaking a promise is wrong even if no one ever finds out about it. Once the rule "Do not break a promise" is chosen and adopted, it is of utmost importance that everyone conforms to it. Whether the public might find out or not is simply an irrelevant consideration here.

The disparity between mutual adoption of moral rules and the possibility of making exceptions to them arise from the fact that Kalin talks as if moral rules have subordinate validity as secondary rules. There is a great utility in following them for the most part. But they can be violated when the circumstance is in one's favor. If this is so, moral rules really don't matter; they are merely rules of thumb.

If I am right about the necessity of conforming to rules once they are adopted, it seems that there is an intrinsic inconsistency in Kalin's theory of ethical egoism. In accepting a set of moral rules to deal with the interpersonal matters, the act-egoist must give up to some degree the ultimateness of AE. For moral rules very often produce different answers to what he ought to do in particular cases. If he stresses the ultimate importance of AE, moral rules would have very little influence on him. Therefore, it is paradoxical to maintain on the one hand that one ought to maximize his self-interest in every particular case and yet on the other hand accepts a set of moral rules to guide him in interpersonal matters.

Thus, granted that moral rules are useful for the act-egoist in most cases, a question can still be raised: do moral rules have any binding force on him at all? They would have only if following moral rules is to his self-interest in every case. But this is too much to expect; there are so many cases in which following rules are not even to one's long-run self-interest. If so, the answer seems to be that moral rules have very little force on him, if at all.

The act-egoist is thus faced with the following dilemma: (1) the more he emphasizes maximization of his self-interest in every particular situation, the more he tends to break moral rules and moral principles which he and other persons have agreed

upon; (2) the more he follows moral rules, the more he tends to override the act-egoistic principle. This dilemma makes the act-egoist unable to enter into a moral system. Either he adheres to AE and admits his inability to handle the interpersonal conflicts; or he has to give up to some degree the ultimateness of his egoistic goal. But he cannot have both.

The fundamental error of Kalin's theory is that AE is too rigid a formulation of E. Once the act-egoist is required to do *all and always* those actions that maximize his self-interest in particular situations, the problem of interpersonal conflicts is fatal to him.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Jesse Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism", in David P. Gauthier's *Morality and Rational Self-interest* (e.d.), Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1970, p. 66.
2. Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, Ithaca, N. Y. Cornell Univ. Press, 1958, pp. 189-190.
3. Eric Mack, "Egoism and Rights", *The Personalist*, LIV (winter 1973) p. 19.
4. *Ibid.*, P. 25.
5. Jesse Kalin, "On Ethical Egoism", American Philosophical Quarterly, Monograph #1: *Studies in Moral Philosophy*, Section 3.
6. Jesse Kalin, "Baier's Refutation of Ethical Egoism", *Philosophical Studies* 22, p. 74.
7. Jesse Kalin, "On Ethical Egoism", American Philosophical Quarterly, Monograph #1: *Studies in Moral Philosophy*, p. 34.
8. Eric Mack, "Egoism & Rights Revisited", *The Personalist*, Vol. 58, No.3, July 1977, pp. 282-288.
9. Jesse Kalin, "Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning: Ethical Egoism as A Moral Theory", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Vol. V, No. 3, Nov. 1973, p. 339.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
11. *Ibid.*, 334.
12. *Ibid.*, 336.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
15. John Hospers, "Rule-Egoism", *The Personalist*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Autumn 1973, p. 392.
16. Jesse Kalin, "Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning: Ethical Egoism as A Moral Theory", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. V, No. 3, Nov. 1973, p. 333.
17. I borrow this formulation from Kurt Baier. *op. cit.*, p. 193.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
19. Jesse Kalin, "Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning: Ethical Egoism as A Moral Theory", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. V. No. 3, Nov. 1973, Section 2.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
21. John Hospers, "Ethical Egoism: Introduction to Nathaniel Branden's Essay", *The Personalist*, Vol. LI, No, 2, Spring 1970, p. 193.
22. John Hospers, "Rule-Egoism", *The Personalist*, Vol, 54, No. 4. Autumn 1973, p. 393.

CHAPTER 4

RULE-EGOISM

Ethical egoism, formulated as AE, is widely regarded as an implausible moral theory. For AE requires one to do those, and only those, particular acts that maximize his self-interest, including acts that are harmful to other persons. The act-egoist may observe moral rules for the most part, because he regards them as useful means to maximize his self-interest. But this is all he is committed to — moral rules are merely rules of thumb. He will act against a moral rule whenever doing so will bring him the most good.

It may be the case that AE is too strict in its formulation of E. There is no reason why E should be formulated in this narrow fashion. It is true that self-interest, according to E, is the only reason for or against performing an act. But this statement does not entail that the ethical egoist ought to perform those, and only those, acts that bring him the most good. If so, why not loosen the formulation a bit? Why not formulate E in such a way as allowing certain constraints upon excessive self-interested actions?

An attempt to formulate E along the line suggested as the above has been made by Edward Regis. He proposes to define E as the view.

(. . .) (1) that the achievement of one's own personal happiness and well-being ought to be the ultimate (but not the only) end of one's actions, and (2) that no one has any unchosen moral obligation or responsibility to serve the interests or satisfy the needs of others.¹

According to Regis, condition (1) states the essential feature of E: the emphasis on self-interested actions. More importantly, it loosens the requirement that one should perform all and only those acts that maximize his self-interest. Thus, condition (1) allows the possibility of establishing certain constraints upon excessive self-interested actions. On the other hand, condition (2) distinguishes E from other moral theories. The non-egoistic theories not only accept self-interest as a moral reason to determine what we ought to do, but also demand that the interests of others should be considered as well. For example, according to Utilitarianism, one ought to

maximize the good of all people — oneself included. If so, Utilitarianism, as well as other non-egoistic moral theories, imply that we have certain obligations or responsibilities toward others.

Is Regis' definition of E — hereafter referred to as AE' — a plausible one? Regis takes condition (1) for granted. Thus, all he attempts to do is to argue for the truth of condition (2). His argument can be schematized as the following.²

(i) Human needs are the products of the choices made by an individual for which he is morally accountable (and no one is responsible for anyone else's need).

(ii) If one is not responsible for the need, he is not morally responsible for the satisfaction of that need.

(iii) Therefore, no one is responsible to satisfy the need which he is not responsible for its existence.

This argument is clearly invalid. For if (i) were true, then we should say that, for instance, the boat people in Southeast Asia are responsible for their own needs. But it is absurd to hold the boat people morally accountable for their misfortunes. Between the choice of living under the terror of a totalitarian regime and of drifting in the sea at the mercy of pirates, they choose the later, hoping somehow to be rescued. Yes, they have made this choice, but they are not responsible for their own needs. Rather, it is a handful of people in Vietnam who make the boat people constantly living in hunger, terror and sickness. Again, are the political prisoners and Jews in the Soviet concentration camps responsible for their miseries? The answer is obvious. It is the present regime in the Soviet responsible for this evil.

Suppose I have a modest income and yet desire a luxurious style of life. In this case it is plausible to say that my need is the product of the choice made by myself for which I am morally accountable. No one else should be responsible for my need. But it is absurd to generalize case of this kind and to claim, as Regis does, that human needs, even the basic necessities of life like food, shelter, and etc., are the products of the choices made by each individual for which he is morally responsible.

Premise (ii) is even more difficult to accept. For if (ii) were true, it would have the implication that we need not do anything with regard to the boat people or the prisoners in the Soviet concentration camps, unless it makes us feel happy, moral satisfaction and etc. to do so. If we met the boat people in the sea, we should say to them: you people deserve what you get, because you are the ones who are responsible

for your needs in the first place; since you are the ones who create your miseries, you figure out a way to save yourselves; don't expect us to do anything for you, for we are not morally responsible for the satisfaction of your needs and hence need not rescue you at all.

Granted that AE' is true, how do we get to the needed constraints upon excessive self-interested actions?

(. . .) if egoism is conceived as a universal self-interest doctrine, then it would seem that a necessary part of such a doctrine would be a stipulation defining and protecting each individual's freedom to act in his own interests without coercive interference. Egoism, therefore, is not only consistent with constraints upon self-interested actions, but actually requires them as necessary conditions, of the doctrine's successful application to practice.³

Regis seems to assume that human beings have certain inalienable rights. Among these "human rights" there is the right to use and dispose of one's life as he sees fit. On the assumption that each individual has this right, acts that violate it are wrong. Therefore, one should not interfere with others' pursuit of their own interests. But Regis has provided no egoistic argument for these rights. All he has done is to assume that there are human rights and then to claim that self-interested acts that violate them are thus not justified.

Given that human rights can be construed as a necessary part of E and that they can impose the much needed constraints upon excessive self-interested actions, I still believe that AE' is not an acceptable formulation of E. In the following I will give a counter example to show why it is not. Let us suppose that Smith on the way home sees an injured person lying on the road. What should he do in this situation? According to Utilitarianism (whether in the form of Rule-Utilitarianism or Act-Utilitarianism), Smith ought to help him because saving a life promotes the general good. Next, what would a person who holds a type of deontological view similar to that of Ross say about this case? Among Ross' list of prima facie duties, there is the duty of beneficence. That is, we have an obligation toward others because of the fact that there are other beings in the world whose condition we can make better. Therefore, Smith ought to help the injured person. Now, what would someone who adopts AE' say about this case? If saving the injured person brings Smith some good (for instance, fame or money), then, according to the first character of AE', Smith

ought to help him. But what happened if Smith knew that there would not be any reward? According to the second character of AE', Smith has no unchosen obligation toward others. Since there is nothing for him in this situation, then Smith has no reason to offer his help. Therefore, according to AE', Smith has no obligation to help the injured person. He can just leave him there and go straight home.

This example is made to order against Regis' theory. It clearly shows that a person who adopts AE' is immoral. For AE' fails to account for those moral actions (e.g. helping an injured person) which most moral philosophers claim that we have a duty to perform. Regis might want to argue that human beings not only have the right to life, but also the right to be helped and so on. On the view that human beings have these rights, then, we ought to perform these moral actions. But if that is so, it is just unclear what human rights are and how many there are.

The problem of AE, as Regis has well said, is its strict condition "that the egoist ought to do all those acts which are in his interests."⁴ While he is right in pointing out that AE is much too narrow in its formulation of E, he is wrong in the direction he takes of repairing AE. I have argued that his revised formulation of AE is not successful. What is wrong with AE is not that it takes self-interest as the only justification for or against performing a moral act, but that it employs as its criterion the consequences of the particular act done in the particular circumstance. Once we apply the reason of self-interest (that is, maximization of one's self-interest) directly to particular acts, there cannot be any constraint upon self-interested acts.

Recently, a different approach to E has been suggested by John Hospers. He formulates it as the principle that "one should observe those rules whose adoption would be to one's interest."⁵ This principle "employs as its criterion not the consequences to one's own interest of the particular act before him, but the consequences (to his interests) of the (adoption of the) rule in question."⁶

Rule-egoism — hereafter referred to as RE — is best illustrated by contrasting it with AE. According to AE, whether one should perform a particular act before him depends upon whether the consequences of that act maximize his self-interest on that particular occasion; moral rules are thus merely rules of thumb that he uses only to avoid the complexity of evaluating the probable consequences of his act. On the other hand, according to RE, one should consider the consequences of the

rule under which his act falls; moral rules are for him more than rules of thumb. Thus, RE and AE would yield totally different results if we apply them to the same situation. For instance, with regard to promise keeping, the act-egoist holds that we ought to keep our promise only if following the rule best promotes our own interest, and that we are justified to depart from the rule in those cases in which breaking our promise yields a greater benefit to us. But the rule-egoist holds that we ought to keep our promise even in those cases in which breaking the rule yields a greater benefit, because if a policy of everyone breaking his promise when doing so is to his own interest were adopted the result would be bad for him.

RE has been anticipated by some philosophers. Richard Brandt notes that "there might be some kind of rule-egoism, parallel to some kind of rule-utilitarianism":⁷

(x) (y) (x morally ought to do y if and only if y would be called for by that set of resolutions, policies, or action-habits of x, the adoption of which by x would maximize x's utility)⁸

But he does not pursue this possibility further. It gets a better recognition from Henry Hazlitt. In fact, Hazlitt captures the central idea of RE when he says:

For in the long run it is in the greatest interest of the individual that he should live in a society characterized by law, peace, and good-will; a society in which he can rely on the word of others; in which others keep their promises to him; in which his right peacefully to enjoy the fruits of his labor, his rights to security and property, are respected; in which he can depend on the cooperation of his fellows in undertakings that promote their mutual benefit; in which he can even depend on their active aid should he meet with accident or misfortune through no commensurate or glaring fault of his own.

And as it is in the interest of everyone to promote such a code of conduct on the part of others, so it is in his own interest to abide rigorously and inflexibly by such a code.⁹

Nevertheless, John Hospers is the first one to propose that E, if formulated as RE, can meet certain criticisms against it. The most serious difficulty of E, as we have seen, is that there is virtually no constraint upon egoistic conduct. Why the ethical egoist should not eliminate his enemy on a deserted road; swindle his business partner; rip off money from his company; and so on, if the consequences of these actions are to his self-interest? According to RE, the criterion that one employs to

determine whether he ought to do a particular act is not the consequences of the act, but the consequences of the rule under which the act falls. Let us take stealing as an example. The rule-egoist would reason roughly as follows. I can see that in this particular case it is to my own interest to break the rule that prohibits stealing. I would have a stereo without paying for it; the owner would not miss this one (he has too many of them); I would not be caught. But am I better off in having a rule that prohibits stealing or not having it? If there were not such a rule that prohibits stealing in the society, I would have to watch my personal belongings constantly; I would not be able to sleep at nights; and I would not be able to go to work, for if I did, my belongings would be all gone. All things considered, it is indeed more to my own interest if I obey the rule and not commit the stealing in this particular case. Therefore, according to RE, we are not justified to do those actions which are commonly considered to be immoral.

Moreover, RE is able to handle another kind of criticism. It is said that there are some moral actions that we ought to do, even though they themselves may not promote our own interest. Rachels' story of the small town doctor, again, is a good example here. What would the rule-egoist say about this case? He probably reasons the following way. Being generous to the poor woman may not be to the doctor's interest. It may not "feel better" to do so; it may not bring him a good reputation. But if he does not, there will be no one to lend help to him when he needs it. Generosity is a two-way street – if you are generous to others, others will be generous to you in return. In short, generosity is a good policy the adoption of which is to each and everyone's self-interest. Therefore, according to RE, the doctor should help the poor woman.

If so, the rules that RE recommends, as Hospers puts it, "approach much more nearly the set of rules prescribed by most non-egoistic systems of teleological and deontological ethics than do any of the rules of conduct usually ascribed to the act-egoist."¹⁰ Consequently, RE is able to accommodate many of our common sense moral convictions.

However, RE is not free from difficulty. Many well-known objections to rule-utilitarianism may easily be applied to it as well. For example, what are the rules acceptable to the rule-egoist? What happens if an act falls under different rules? I shall not deal with these issues here. Rather, I am concerned to examine those objec-

tions which directly aim at RE.

In the first place, it is argued that RE is just another account of AE.

But consider now Example I: B is A's aging, wealthy uncle. B makes a demand (not a claim) on A, a demand resting on no prior commitments. The demand would wreak serious hardship on A. He hesitates, then carries out B's wishes, again deciding on the basis of the (rule-egoistic) principle. Now the moral root-rule justifying compliance, as far as egoism is concerned, is the same in both R and I models, even though it seems to me that our intuitions tell us that there is a distinguishable moral difference between the two cases. According to the rule-egoists' plan, the moral basis for compliance turns not on some rights-rule scheme that serves everybody's long-term best interest, but on a *prima facie* interest equivalence for each individual party to the agreement. In other words, this is not really a proposal for something that is frequently called impersonal ethical egoism, but as another account of act-egoism (to use Hospers' term), viz., negotiating agreements and being nice to wealthy, aging uncles assumes the same moral principle – the long-term best interest of each individual concerned.¹¹

Example I, according to Burrill, shows that RE is just another account of AE. His argument seems to be the following. What are the rules the adoption of which maximizes the rule-egoist's self-interest? There is only one rule that has the greatest utility: to perform that act, among those that are open to you, which will bring you the greatest good. Therefore, A should be nice to B, on the expectation that if he carried out B's demand, he would likely inherit B's fortune. If so, there is really no difference between AE and RE. Both principles employ the same criterion: the long-term best interest of each individual concerned.

This argument, it seems to me, ignores the real difference between AE and RE. True, both principles concern with the long-term best interest of every individual. But there is a difference to be made. AE ascribes the long-term best interest to each and every particular act, while RE ascribes the long-term best interest to a set of rules. Let us see how this difference works in model I. The act-egoist would say to A: You should carry out B's demand. Yes, the demand would mean hardship on you. But if you carry out B's demand, you will likely inherit B's fortune. Therefore, on balance, carrying out B's demand is the best thing for you to do in this circumstance. However, the rule-egoist would give a different advice to A: Are you better

off in having a rule that permits others to make a demand on you with no prior commitment? If such a rule were adopted in the society, it would mean that one should sacrifice himself to others with no apparent purpose. So, seeing that this is a bad rule, you should not carry out B's demand in this circumstance.

To say, as Burrill does, that, according to RE, A should comply with B's demand is simply a misunderstanding of rule-egoists' attitude toward moral rules. The position of RE is that there are some rules – rules such as “Don't kill except in self-defense, and so on”, “Don't inflict harm on others”, “Don't steal”, and so on – that are to everyone's self-interest to follow. What the rule-egoist ought to do is to consider the consequences of the rule in question. If so, it is false to say that the rule-egoist would consent to a rule that demands self-sacrifice with no prior commitment.

In the second place, it is said that RE is not a version of E.

I submit that any ethical doctrine which requires the agent to perform deliberate acts of self-sacrifice is not a version of egoism, even egoism “broadly construed”. I am not saying only, what is trivially true, that rule-egoism is not egoistic by the standards of act-egoism. I am saying that rule-egoism is contrary to the spirit of and intent of egoism, contrary even to an egoism vaguely characterized as, say, the doctrine that each person ought to maximize his own well-being, it is difficult to see why one will not be led to an act-egoistic standard – viz: one should perform an action if and only if that action conduces maximally to one's interest – since consistent adherence to such a standard is (tautologically) the way to maximize one's well-being.¹²

Berg's argument can be schematized in the following way.

1. Ethical egoism is the view that everyone ought to maximize his own interests.
2. RE sometimes requires a person to perform actions which do not maximize his own interests.
3. Therefore, RE is not a version of ethical egoism.

Let us take the rule “Do not steal” as an example. According to RE, it is to the interest of each person to accept and to follow this rule. This does not mean that following this rule will maximize one's own interest in every particular case. RE recognizes that there are cases in which violation of this rule will bring more good to a person. If so, then a rule-egoist may sometimes perform actions that are not to his own interest. Berg characterizes the rule egoist acting in such a way as self-sacrifice.

Consequently, RE cannot be a version of E.

What we are concerned here is the question that, when a rule-egoist upholds the rule, does he perform a deliberate act of self-sacrifice? The answer is definitely not. His choice is between having a set of rules whose adoption is to everyone's interest and not having it. By considering the overall consequences of these two alternatives, the rule-egoist upholds the rules. This can hardly be described as self-sacrifice. True, by following the rules he may not maximize his own interest in every particular case, but what he is primarily concerned with is the overall advantages of having a set of rules to govern his actions as well as his fellows.

Underlying Berg's argument is his narrow conception of E. He believes that the only way to maximize one's interest is to employ the act-egoistic principle: one should perform an action if and only if that action conduces maximally to one's interest. But in Chapter 3 I have argued that AE is an untenable position. If so, then Berg's argument does not touch RE.

The merit of defining E in the form of RE is considerable. E merely tells us to maximize our own interest, but it does not tell us how this is to be done. According to AE, if one wants to maximize his self-interest, he ought to perform an action if and only if that action brings him the most good in a particular situation. On the other hand, RE holds that the maximization of one's self-interest is inextricably tied with a set of rules whose adoption is to the interest of each and every person in the society. In the following I shall argue that, with regard to the question of how to maximize one's self-interest, RE fares much better than AE. If one wants to maximize his self-interest (whatever it may be), he cannot do it all by himself; he needs the *cooperation* of his fellows. It is undeniable that people have different interests. "One man's meat is another man's poison." The lack of harmony in interests of people often lead them to clash with each other. It is said that, according to E, in an occasion in which people's interests clash each person should try to come out as a victor. Critics of E quickly seize this point and conclude that the result is a state of nature — a war of every man against every man. However, there is another side of the coin that they often miss. Although each person has his particular plan of life, there are few things the promotion of them is to everyone's self-interest. For instance, everyone wants to live in a society in which his life is not threatened; he can enjoy the fruits of his labor; he is protected from the aggressions of others and

so on. To promote these shared interests, they need to cooperate with each other.

Moreover, there are certain things which everyone would prefer to have. Most of us desire for a happy life, wealth, power and social status. These things, as Rawls has called them "the primary social goods", cannot be achieved without social cooperation. For example, the success of a factory owner depends upon the industriousness, skill, and loyalty of his workers. On the other hand, the job and income of the workers depends upon the success of their employer. Therefore, social cooperation is the means for each one to obtain these social goods.

The point is that, whatever one may want for himself, he cannot achieve the barest fraction of it without the cooperation of others. As Henry Hazlitt has put it very well.

For each of us, social cooperation is the great means of attaining nearly all our ends (. . .) it is a means so central, so universal, so indispensable, to the realization of practically all our ends (. . .)¹³

Here cooperation should be understood in its broadest sense. In normal conditions there are cooperative efforts whenever two or more people work together toward a common goal. For instance, all the members of the Sierra Club seek to preserve the natural environment. But cooperation can also take place when people have different goals. The owner of a factory wants to increase his profit; the workers want money so that they can support their families, or pursue whatever other interests they might have. Each of them then realizes that by cooperating with others he can achieve his private goal or goals. It is particularly the second of these two cooperations that ethical egoists need to emphasize.

Both AE and RE recognize the importance of social cooperation. Hospers has pointed out that cooperative efforts can help each and everyone in the society to secure his life and properties.¹⁴ Kalin, the main advocate of AE, illustrates the same point by distinguishing two kinds of moral reasonings. The first is "personal (or private) assessment of actions with a view to deciding only what I ought to do",¹⁵ the second is "interpersonal (or public) assessment of actions with a view to deciding what we ought to do".¹⁶ Kalin's idea is that, when a person assesses a practical situation, he first has to consider the wants and desires most important to him. This does not mean that his consideration is confined to his own pleasure and advancement. He may have an interest directed toward the well-being of another person. For

example, his main interest may be the well-being of his child. Or, he may have an impersonal interest, say, scientific or artistic. Whatever the person's interest may be, the point is that at this personal level it is his wants and desires that provide him reasons to act. But he cannot stop his assessment at this level. There are other reasons that compel him to deliberate his action at the interpersonal level. First, among his self-interests there are some interests which he shares with others. He wants, for instance, to get along with others peacefully. Second, cooperation generally bring more good to himself than if he were to do it alone. Third, people are roughly equal in power. Therefore, it is unlikely that he can get away with whatever he chooses to do, especially when his action interferes with others' interests. Taking these reasons into account means that he also has to assess the situation with a view to deciding what he and others ought to do.

To sum up on this point: when one deliberates what he ought to do in a particular situation, not only he has to consider the wants and desires most important to him but also to recognize that the best means to achieve his own interest is social cooperation. Hazlitt has stated the relation between self-interest and social cooperation eloquently.

People cooperative with me (. . .) not primarily, or not solely, because they are interested in my purposes, but because they have certain purposes of their own; and just as I find that I can only secure the accomplishment of my purposes by securing their cooperation, so they find that they can only accomplish theirs by securing the cooperation of yet others, and find that I am in a position, directly or indirectly, to place this cooperation at their disposal. A vast range, therefore, of our relations with others enter into a system of mutual adjustment by which we further each other's purposes simply as an indirect way of furthering our own.

So far, I have argued that social cooperation is the best means to maximize one's self-interest. Next, I shall use the following cases to illustrate the conditions under which social cooperation is possible.

Case 1. Consider a society that consists of only two people, Jones, who fishes, and Smith, who picks coconuts.¹⁸ Jones wants some of Smith's coconuts and Smith some of Jones' fish. If so, the worst could happen to them is a state of nature — a war of every man against every man. Whenever Smith wants fish, he tries to get it

by force. Similarly, for Jones. In this state of nature, neither of them can advance his own well-being. Smith has to guard himself against Jones constantly, thereby reduces the time to pick coconuts. Similarly, for Jones. This case therefore illustrates that if a person weighing what he ought to do in a particular situation considers only his wants and desires without any regard to others, he could not get very far.

Case 2. Suppose Smith is content with what he has possessed. After acquiring sufficient coconuts to satisfy his current needs and future contingencies, he likes to spend his idle time in leisure. Similarly, for Jones. But this situation already implies that there is cooperation of some sort between Smith and Jones. That is, they both agree to observe the rule of non-interference. Each one keeps his hands off from the other's properties, otherwise neither of them could enjoy the fruits of his labor and his leisure time.

Case 3. Suppose Jones wants some of Smith's coconuts and Smith some of Jones' fish, and each one is willing to give up something that he has in exchange for something that he wants. If so, each of them can advance his well-being through cooperating with the other. But for such cooperation to take place there must be mutual agreement between them. That is, they must be able to "come to terms". The terms mutually agreed upon are the rules to guide the trade between them. Suppose they agree that the ratio for exchange is two coconuts for one fish. Then, this ratio becomes the rule to govern this economic cooperation. More importantly, the cooperation depends upon the necessary condition that *each of them must abide the rule*. Once the rule of exchange is established, they have to follow it inflexibly. This of course does not mean that the rule is permanent and unchangeable. Suppose Jones has a bad season of fishing. Smith, seeing that this situation could increase his profit, raises the price of coconut. Jones, still craving coconuts, has no other alternatives but agrees to change the term of the trade. Suppose now they agree that two fish equals three coconuts. If so, Smith get more fish; Jones, although he has to give up leisure for work in order to get the coconuts he wants, still benefits himself through trading with Smith, for he values coconuts more than the leisure given up. In short, the point here is that once the rule is established, the parties involved must abide the rule; if not, social cooperation becomes impossible.

Case 4. Suppose Jones does not like coconuts, and having caught enough fish for himself, spends his idle time in leisure. Smith craves fish, but does not have the

skill to catch them. Smith has several options here. He could get fish from Jones by force. This means that the relation between Jones and Smith is reversed to that of Case 1 -- a war of every man against every man. Neither of them can benefit himself in this situation.

Smith's other alternatives, though, might fare much better. He can approach Jones in friendly fashion, amuse him and praise his skills as a fishman. Jones, then, gives Smith some of his fish. If so, this amounts to cooperation of another kind: Jones is willing to give up some of his fish for psychological rewards; Smith his attention to Jones' psychological needs for fish. Or, Smith can make an ornament out of coconut shell. While Jones does not like coconuts, he simply must have the ornament, and is willing to give up fish in order to obtain it. Through any of these options, Smith has succeeded to induce Jones entering cooperative activities with himself and thus promotes his own well-being.

Most of act-egoists recognize that cooperative efforts generally promote a person's self-interest. Consequently, they need to incorporate moral rules and moral principles in their formulation of AE. Berg denies that "the act-egoist, who insists upon talking about individual case, must eschew the rules and principles by which he is to conduct his life."¹⁹ He then goes on to call attention to the fact: "the act-egoist is in no way bound to renounce abstract principles and the rational conduct of his life."²⁰ Kalin, from his most recent view of AE, says:

Ethical egoism is best understood not as a lone principle which is to be applied as it stands to each action, but rather as the foundation for establishing a system of interpersonal, or moral, reasons which are nontraditional in character. The resultant principles and rules will employ some conception of common good, usually involving the recognition of persons' interests as morally equal and will have force among parties only if mutually adopted.²¹

Still, act-egoists believe that the justification for social cooperation is the act-egoistic principle. According to them, a person engages in a cooperative activity with others because it will bring him the most good in the given situation. However, if the cooperative action brings him less good than other courses of action, then he should fall back to the act-egoistic principle: do that particular act which brings you the greatest good. If so, what happens when one adopts this attitude toward social cooperation?

Case 5. Suppose Smith, after getting fish from Jones, refuses to provide Jones coconuts as agreed, since he figures that he is physically stronger than Jones and thus can get away with what he does. If so, this case is not much different from Case 1. Smith has breached his agreement with Jones openly; Jones has no choice but resorts to force again; the result is, again, a constant war between them. To this we might add the observation that Smith's action does not really promote his interest in the long run. Jones, knowing that it is not to his own interest to produce more, will not catch more fish than he needs. This means that Smith has to catch fish himself. Or, he has to spy on Jones. It is clear that none of these two options benefits Smith more than if he stuck to the original agreement with Jones.

Case 6. Suppose one day Smith goes to Jones' place and wants to make a trade, but Jones is out to catch fish. Smith has several options here. He can leave the coconuts there and pick up the equivalent amount of fish in accordance with the agreed term. Smith, to take this option, gets what he wants. Moreover, his honesty will earn him Jones' trust. But this option may not be the optimal action for him. Smith can take some fish from Jones but does not leave the coconuts there in return. This alternative will bring him more good than the first action. Although Smith violates the agreement here, Jones may not know it at all, for he has too many fish in stock. If so, according to the act-egoist, Smith should take the second option. This case is different from the last one. Case 5 amounts to no cooperation between Smith and Jones; here Smith will cooperate with Jones as long as the cooperative effort is the optimal action in the given situation. But it is exactly this attitude toward social cooperation that leads the act-egoist to hold a reserved attitude toward moral principles and moral rules. In Chapter 3 I have argued that such attitude toward moral rules eventually defeats the whole purpose of having moral rules. If the line of the argument there is sound, then it has shown that the justification for social cooperation and hence the adoption of moral rules cannot be based on the act-egoistic principle.

In contrast, it is the merit of RE to recognize the importance of adhering inflexibly to rules. Hospers has repeatedly pointed out that the rule-egoist would uphold a rule even in those cases in which breaking it brings him greater advantage. Indeed, the whole point of applying the reason of self-interest to rules instead of individual acts is that the ethical egoist realizes that the general welfare of having a set of rules

operative in the society far outweighs the advantages derived from individual cases.

By now it should be clear that RE is more acceptable than any other type of E. For it correctly captures the interrelations among self-interest, social cooperation, and a code of moral rules. The sequence is the following: the best means to maximize one's self-interest is social cooperation; social cooperation is possible only if there is a set of rules to sustain it; once the rules are established, they have to be followed inflexibly by the parties involved, otherwise the whole purpose of having rules is totally lost.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Edward Regis, "Ethical Egoism and Moral Responsibility", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (January 1979), p. 46.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
5. John Hospers, "Rule-Egoism", *The Personalist*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Autumn 1973, p. 393.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
7. Richard Brandt, "Rationality, Egoism, and Morality," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXIX, 20 (Nov. 9, 1972) p. 691.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 691.
9. Henry Hazlitt, *The Foundations of Morality*, Princeton, New Jersey, D. Von Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964, p. 96.
10. John Hospers, *op. cit.*, p. 393.
11. Donald Burrill. "The Rule-egoism Principle", *The Personalist*, Vol. LVII, No. 4, Autumn 1976, p. 410.
12. Robert Berg, "Rule-Egoism?" *The Personalist*, Vol. 60, No. 2, April 1979, p. 214.
13. Henry Hazlitt, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
14. John Hospers, *op. cit.*, p. 392.
15. Jesse Kalin, "Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning: Ethical Egoism as A Moral Theory", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. V, No. 3, Nov. 1973, p. 329.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
17. Henry Hazlitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.
18. I have borrowed this case from Jude wanniski and altered it to suit my purpose here. See *The way The World Works*, Basic Books Inc., N. Y. 1978, p. 41.
19. Robert Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
21. Jesse Kalin, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

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