

Hutcheson's Theological Objection to Egoism

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Journal of Scottish Philosophy 14(1) (2016): 101–123.

Please cite the published version.

Abstract: Francis Hutcheson's objections to psychological egoism usually appeal to experience or introspection. However, at least one of them is theological: it includes premises of a religious kind, such as that God rewards the virtuous. This objection invites interpretive and philosophical questions, some of which may seem to highlight errors or shortcomings on Hutcheson's part. Also, to answer the questions is to point out important features of Hutcheson's objection and its intellectual context. And nowhere in the scholarship on Hutcheson do we find these questions addressed. This paper addresses them. A fact that emerges is that the apparent errors or shortcomings the questions may highlight are just that – *apparent* errors or shortcomings; in reality they are nothing of the kind.

Key Terms: Francis Hutcheson, psychological egoism, evaluative egoism, self-interest, English Calvinism, deformity.

1.

In his *Inquiry Concerning Virtue* and his *Essay on the Passions* Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) advances many objections to psychological egoism, the view that our most basic desires are self-interested.¹ Most of those objections appeal to experience or introspection; however, at least one of them is theological. It includes premises of a religious kind, such as that God rewards the virtuous. The objection is interesting for that reason, and even more so for three further reasons. First, it raises interpretive and philosophical questions, some of which I suspect many have asked. In fact, to say that it raises questions may be an understatement; some may suspect that the questions highlight errors or shortcomings on Hutcheson's part. Second, to answer the questions is to point out important features of Hutcheson's objection and its intellectual context. Third, nowhere in the scholarship on Hutcheson do we find these questions addressed. Indeed, in the studies of Hutcheson's objections to egoism

¹ The two titles mentioned here are abbreviated references, respectively, to *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good* (hereafter *Inquiry*), in Hutcheson 1726; and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions* (hereafter *Essay*), in Hutcheson 1728. Most of my references to the *Inquiry* are to the edition just cited, which, being the copy text for the Liberty Fund editions (which include the original pagination in brackets), is likely the most available edition.

we find nearly a complete neglect of his theological objection.² That objection deserves more attention. I give it some in what follows.

In Section 2 I clarify psychological egoism and makes some points about Hutcheson's opposition to it. In Section 3 I present Hutcheson's theological objection and, in that section and the remaining ones, discuss the questions his objection raises. A fact that emerges from this project is that the apparent errors or shortcomings the questions may highlight are just that – *apparent* errors or shortcomings; in reality they are nothing of the kind.

2.

According to psychological egoism, human nature is such that we are incapable of fundamental desires for anything but self-benefits. By a self-benefit I mean a personal benefit to the agent (the person who has the desire), such as the agent's own health or happiness. By a fundamental desire I mean a desire we possess insofar as we want something for its own sake, not simply as a means to something else. Suppose I want to take aspirin because I want to relieve my pain. But suppose I want to relieve my pain for no further reason – I simply want relief from pain. Then the latter desire, my desire for relief from pain, is a fundamental desire. My desire to take aspirin, by contrast, is a nonfundamental, or subordinate desire. Its object is something I want not for its own sake, but because it will serve one of my other ends. In other words, its *direct* aim or object (the consumption of aspirin) is not its *ultimate* aim or object (relief from pain).

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

Note that psychological egoism specifically concerns desires, and its defenders will likely maintain, plausibly, that although the meaning of 'desire' is hard to pin down, we have a pretheoretical grip on the notion, sufficient to see that not just any psychological state that might move us is a desire. Consider the sudden impulse to strike a person when in anger, or to shriek when suddenly frightened. We do not recognise such things as full-fledged desires, which is why 'urge' or 'impulse' is the natural term for them. So even if they arise without any aim to secure self-benefits, they make no trouble for psychological egoism.³

² I say 'nearly' because Cuneo (2013: 229) provides a brief account of the objection. For useful commentary on Hutcheson's other objections to psychological egoism, see Cuneo 2013; Jensen 1971: 13–19; Stewart 1982; Strasser 1990, ch. 4; Mautner 1993: 31–47, 71–4, 119–22; and Gill 2006: 141–50. Maurer (2013) provides a valuable general discussion of psychological egoism as it figures in eighteenth-century British philosophy.

³ Nor does the point just made – that not all motivational states are desires – make psychological egoism insignificant. It would be significant indeed if every genuine desire aimed ultimately at nothing but self-benefits.

Hutcheson would agree with this point. In fact, the examples – about the urges to strike and to shriek – are his. He uses them to argue that we have ‘propensities of instinct’ which, although they move us, are not really desires (Hutcheson 1728: 62–4). In his view, what distinguishes desires from propensities of instinct is that the former, unlike the latter, arise from our belief that something (an object, an action, etc.) is good (ibid.: 7, 62–4). We need not follow him in this; the point for our purposes is that for Hutcheson, as for the egoist, ‘desire’ is not sufficiently broad to make just any non-selfish motivational state a counterexample to psychological egoism.

Even so, Hutcheson opposes psychological egoism. He does so for at least two reasons. First, he believes that actions are virtuous only if they spring ultimately from desires for the good (happiness, well-being) of others.⁴ Hence, were he to accept psychological egoism he would imply, absurdly in his view, that virtuous deeds never occur. Second, he believes that a major role of the moral philosopher is to encourage virtuous conduct.⁵ This involves, in part, presenting such conduct as possible, which it would not be (Hutcheson believes) if psychological egoism were true. We thus find in Hutcheson’s work many objections to psychological egoism. Some of the most interesting of them are in the second section of his *Inquiry*, which considers the ‘*Springs*’ of virtuous action (Hutcheson 1726: 136). It is there that we find his theological objection to egoism.

3.

Hutcheson’s theological objection is in all four editions of the *Inquiry* published in his lifetime. However, he made small revisions to it in going from the second to the third edition. No doubt he saw the revisions as improvements, so let us quote his theological objection from the third edition:

Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*, we must imagine that every *rational Being* acts only for its own *Advantage*; and however we may call a *beneficent Being* a *good Being*, because it acts for our *Advantage*, yet upon *this Scheme* we should not be apt to think there is any *beneficent Being* in *Nature*, or a *Being* who acts for the *Good* of others. Particularly, If there is no *Sense* of Excellence in *publick Love*, and promoting the Happiness of others, whence should this Persuasion arise, ‘That the Deity will make the *Virtuous* happy?’ Can we prove that it is for the *Advantage* of the Deity to do so? This I fancy will be look’d upon as very absurd, by many who yet expect Mercy and Beneficence in the Deity. And if there be such Dispositions in the Deity, where is the impossibility of some small degree of this *publick Love* in his Creatures? And why must they be suppos’d incapable of acting but from *Self-Love*?

⁴ Hutcheson 1726: 155, 162, 224; Hutcheson 1728: 17, 21, 115. A key word here is ‘desire’. It is a benevolent desire, not a mere impulse, that underlies virtuous deeds. Although I find this position in every edition of the *Inquiry*, it is more pronounced in the later editions than in the earlier ones. See, for example, Hutcheson 1729: 151.

⁵ Hutcheson 1726: 269–70; Hutcheson 1728: v–ix. For valuable discussion see Mautner 1993: 31–3; and Gill 2006: 143–4, 201–3.

In short, without acknowledging some other Principle of Action in rational Agents than *Self-Love*, I see no Foundation to expect *Beneficence*, or *Rewards* from *God*, or *Man*, farther than it is the *Interest* of the *Benefactor*; and all Expectation of Benefits from a *Being* whose Interests are independent on us, must be *perfectly ridiculous*. What should engage the Deity to reward *Virtue*? (Hutcheson 1729: 156–7)

I take the core of the objection to be in the first paragraph – in the portion beginning with ‘Particularly’. The earlier portion, I believe, is introductory material that Hutcheson fleshes out – makes more particular – in the later portion.⁶ And the two sentences directly following that portion, those beginning with ‘In short’, summarise key points of the objection.

Hutcheson’s objection raises at least four questions. Some of them are best introduced in the process of answering others; so let me go directly to the first one without listing all four. I will tie things up, summarizing the questions and their answers, in my concluding section.

The first question is this: What, actually, is Hutcheson’s target? Is it really psychological egoism? Although we find evidence that the answer is yes, we find a possible sign that it is not.

Evidence for the first answer is abundant. To give one example, the quoted passage begins with the phrase ‘Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*’, which seems just another way of saying ‘Were psychological egoism true’.

But as I said, we find a possible sign that Hutcheson’s target is not psychological egoism. As a preliminary to showing this, note that the first two sections of Hutcheson’s *Inquiry* challenge two related theses.⁷ One of them is psychological egoism, the view that our desires are fundamentally self-interested. The other is the view that we value things, consider them good or excellent, just to the extent that they further our own interests. More precisely, we intrinsically value – value for their own sake – nothing but benefits to ourselves, and thus value other things (e.g., another’s actions) only to the extent that we deem them sources of such benefits. Regarding the latter view, Hutcheson particularly wants to refute the version of it in which ‘value’ means ‘morally value’. But of course to refute that version is also to refute the more general version. Let us call the general version *evaluative egoism*, to distinguish it from psychological egoism.

To repeat, the first two sections of Hutcheson’s *Inquiry* challenge these two theses. The first section challenges evaluative egoism. It argues that we have a moral sense through which we approve actions not with regard to our own advantage, but insofar as we take them to spring from fundamentally

⁶ More on this later – in the final few paragraphs of Section 5.

⁷ Hutcheson finds these theses in the works of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville, among others. See his references to Mandeville in Hutcheson 1726: 130, 157, 227, 230. See also Mautner 1993: 8–30; and Gill 2006: 141–5.

benevolent desires.⁸ On this view, moral approval presupposes that psychological egoism is false; thus, predictably, the next section of the *Inquiry* disputes psychological egoism.

Now back to Hutcheson's theological objection. In it, we find a possible sign that it targets evaluative egoism rather than psychological egoism. Directly after the word 'Particularly', which introduces the core of the objection, we find a rhetorical question, a rhetorical way of saying this:

If there is no sense of excellence in public love, and promoting the happiness of others, then God rewards the virtuous only if he benefits himself by doing so. Of course, God rewards the virtuous. However, he does not benefit himself by doing so.

Note the conditional statement at the beginning of this assertion. Its antecedent, which, I take it, is a way of saying that we never intrinsically value the happiness of others, is a corollary of evaluative egoism. In fact, it may be just a loose way of stating evaluative egoism.⁹ Its presence thus suggests that evaluative egoism is Hutcheson's target, that he aims to refute that thesis by refuting the consequent of the conditional statement.

Also relevant is the opening phrase of Hutcheson's objection as it appears in the first two editions of the *Inquiry*. In those editions the phrase is not 'Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*', which speaks of psychological egoism, but rather 'But if we have no other Idea of *Good*, than *Advantage* to our selves', which speaks of evaluative egoism (Hutcheson 1726: 150). The substitution of the former phrase for the latter was a revision Hutcheson made in the third edition of the *Inquiry*. Given the difference in meaning between the two phrases, the substitution would seem to necessitate changes to the substance of Hutcheson's theological objection. However, Hutcheson made no such changes.¹⁰ This indicates, possibly, that in going from

⁸ Hutcheson 1726: 117–19, 122, 133–5. See also *ibid.*, 116, 162, 224; Hutcheson 1729: 151.

⁹ Hutcheson does not sharply distinguish between the following: (a) we never intrinsically value a non-self-benefit; and (b) we never intrinsically value the happiness of others. This is understandable given that (a) implies (b) and that although (b) does not itself imply (a), it implies (a) if combined with the plausible view that if we intrinsically value some non-self-benefits, among them is the happiness of others.

¹⁰ Although he made no changes to the substance of the objection, he made an important change to the wording. In the third edition we find the sentence, 'This [that it is to God's advantage to make the virtuous happy] I fancy will be look'd upon as very absurd, by many who yet expect Mercy and Beneficence in the Deity' (Hutcheson 1729: 157) in place of the following, which is in the second edition: 'This I fancy will be look'd upon as very absurd, unless we suppose some beneficent Dispositions essential to the Deity, which determine him to consult the *publick Good* of his *Creatures*, and reward such as cooperate with his *kind Intention*' (Hutcheson 1726: 150). This revision is important because the statement in the second edition seems to suggest that as long as the deity has some beneficent dispositions, he reaps an advantage from making the virtuous happy. This suggestion is unwanted because one of the points of Hutcheson's objection is that regardless of what desires the deity has, it is not to the deity's advantage (or disadvantage) to make us happy (his 'Interests are independent on us'). The replacement sentence is an improvement because it clearly does not suggest that God benefits himself by rewarding the virtuous.

the second to the third edition he changed his mind about what his objection actually challenges, though without changing his mind about the essence of the objection. Was Hutcheson ambivalent as to which of the two forms of egoism his objection opposes?

We began with one question and now we have two:

- What, actually, is the target of Hutcheson's theological objection? Is it psychological egoism or evaluative egoism?
- Why, having replaced 'But if we have no other Idea of *Good*, than *Advantage* to our selves' with 'Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*', did Hutcheson make no significant changes to the substance of his theological objection?

4.

Regarding the first of the two questions, we find a clue to its answer in the first section of the *Inquiry*:

It may perhaps be alledg'd, 'That in those Actions of our own which we call *Good*, there is *this* constant *Advantage*, superior to all others, which is the Ground of our Approbation, and the Motive to them from *Self-love*, viz. That we suppose the Deity will *reward* them'. This will be more fully consider'd afterwards. (Hutcheson 1726: 128)

Here Hutcheson is anticipating a reply from his opponents, a reply concerning two things: first, the 'Ground of our Approbation' of those of our deeds we deem good; and second, our 'Motive to' those deeds. The reply is that because we think God rewards such deeds, we see a 'constant *Advantage*' to doing them, and that fact, not any fact about benevolence or a moral sense, explains why we approve them and why we do them. Thus, the reply defends two positions, one about valuations; the other about motives. Hutcheson says that he will consider the reply 'more fully . . . afterwards', and adds a footnote, 'See *Sect. ii. Art. 7*', citing the passage in which his theological objection appears.¹¹ We thus should anticipate that his theological objection concerns not one thing but two: a thesis about valuations, and a thesis about motives. The quoted passage is therefore a clue that in his theological objection Hutcheson aims to challenge not one, but both of the forms of egoism that concern him: evaluative egoism and psychological egoism.

That this is indeed Hutcheson's aim becomes apparent if we reconstruct his objection not only charitably, but thoroughly, 'thoroughly' meaning that we reveal his implicit conclusions no less than his explicit ones. The result is this:

¹¹ In which it appears, that is, in the first two editions of the *Inquiry*. In the third edition the objection appears in section 2, article 9, though the content of the footnote (p. 121) remains the same. Apparently, Hutcheson forgot to revise it.

1. If evaluative egoism is true, in which case ‘there is no *Sense* of Excellence in *publick Love . . .*’, then God rewards the virtuous only if he benefits himself by doing so.
2. God rewards the virtuous.
3. God does not benefit himself by rewarding the virtuous.
4. Therefore (from 1 through 3), evaluative egoism is false.
5. If God rewards the virtuous though he does not benefit himself by doing so, then he has fundamental desires for the happiness of (some) others.¹²
6. Therefore (from 2, 3, and 5), God has fundamental desires for the happiness of others.
7. If God has fundamental desires for the happiness of others, it is reasonable to think that humans are capable of such desires.
8. Therefore (from 6 and 7), it is reasonable to think, contrary to psychological egoism, that humans are capable of fundamental desires for the happiness of others.

This is a fair reconstruction of Hutcheson’s objection. By including step 4, which Hutcheson leaves implicit, this reconstruction makes clear that Hutcheson is not ambivalent about his target. He is deliberately opposing both psychological egoism and evaluative egoism.

We find further evidence of this two-part aim if we address the following question, which has interest in its own right:

- Why does Hutcheson accept premise 1? Why does he think its antecedent, according to which evaluative egoism is true, ensures its consequent, according to which God rewards the virtuous only if he benefits himself by rewarding them?

This question has interest because, at first sight, the antecedent of premise 1 does not ensure the consequent. The consequent explicitly concerns motives – and more particularly, God’s motives. The antecedent explicitly concerns no such things.

Not only does this question have interest, but, depending on the answer, it may flag an error on Hutcheson’s part – the acceptance of an implausible premise. After answering it and showing how my answer relates to the aims of

¹² Objection: perhaps God has a fundamental desire to do good, and rewarding the virtuous furthers that end. Although this objection may necessitate slight revisions to Hutcheson’s argument, the revised argument will be no less challenging to egoism than the present one.

Hutcheson's objection, I will return to the other question I posed: the one about the replacement Hutcheson made in the third edition of the *Inquiry*.

The answer to the present question lies in two assumptions that Hutcheson holds. First, psychological egoism, which concerns human desires, commits us to a similar view about the desires of any rational agent. In other words, we cannot plausibly think that we humans ultimately desire nothing but self-benefits without thinking the same thing of rational agents generally, including God. This assumption is clear in the opening words of the passage containing Hutcheson's theological objection: 'Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*, we must imagine that every *rational Being* acts only for its own *Advantage*'.¹³

The second assumption is that evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism: that if we grant that we intrinsically value nothing but self-benefits, we cannot plausibly (or at least not truthfully) deny that we fundamentally desire nothing but self-benefits.¹⁴ This assumption is found especially in Hutcheson's *Essay*, where he often implies that our desires are confined to what we value, that if we desire a thing we also see it as good:

The *Affections* . . . [are] *Modifications, or Actions of the Mind consequent upon the Apprehension of certain Objects or Events, in which the Mind generally conceives Good or Evil*. (Hutcheson 1728: 1)¹⁵

Desires arise in our Mind, from the Frame of our Nature, upon Apprehension of Good or Evil in Objects, Actions, or Events, to obtain for our *selves* or *others* the *agreeable Sensation*, when the Object or Event is good; or to prevent the *uneasy Sensation*, when it is evil. (Ibid., 7)

Desire, Aversion, Joy and Sorrow, . . . seem to arise necessarily from a rational Apprehension of Good or Evil . . . (Ibid., 62)

I take Hutcheson to be asserting at least three things. First, if we desire a thing we also value it – we consider it good.¹⁶ Second, our desire for it 'arises' from our valuation of it. Valuing, in other words, is explanatorily more basic than desiring.¹⁷ Third, if we value a thing, consider it good, we see it as a cause of

¹³ The reference here is not just to a 'rational Being', but to a rational agent, a rational being who acts.

¹⁴ I prefer 'guarantees' to the stronger term 'implies', since my idea is not that from evaluative egoism alone psychological egoism follows, but that from evaluative egoism combined with other contingent truths, psychological egoism follows.

¹⁵ Affections, as Hutcheson understands them, include desires. See Hutcheson 1728: 62.

¹⁶ This view is presupposed, even if not asserted, in further passages – for instance, in Hutcheson 1728: 92.

¹⁷ Hutcheson may seem to make 'appetites', such as hunger and thirst, exceptions to this second assertion (Hutcheson 1728: 89–91). However, on a close reading I do not think he does. I will let this pass, however, for as I observe in the next paragraph in the text, my purposes require only the first of Hutcheson's three assertions.

pleasure, of ‘agreeable Sensation[s]’, to ourselves or to others. This is not to say that ‘good’ in the above passages is simply a stand-in for ‘pleasure-producing’ or that for Hutcheson, valuing a thing is nothing more than seeing it as a cause of pleasure. Hutcheson’s point, I take it, is that if we consider a thing good in some way, even where ‘good’ does not reduce to ‘pleasure-producing’, we also see it as contributing, in one way or another, to agreeable sensations for one or more beings.¹⁸

Although all three assertions are defensible, the first is probably more so than the others. At any rate, it is all I need for my purposes. So what I take from the above passages is that in Hutcheson’s view, if we desire a thing we also value it.

But where does the distinction between fundamental and subordinate desires enter into this view? And where does the distinction between intrinsic and nonintrinsic valuations enter into it?

As I interpret Hutcheson, he sees a connection between fundamental desires and intrinsic valuations: if we desire a thing for its own sake, we also value it for its own sake: we see it as good in itself. I interpret him this way largely out of fairness. It would be odd for him to hold, on the one hand, that if we desire a thing we also value it, but to deny, on the other, that if we fundamentally desire a thing we intrinsically value it. To do so would be to suggest that sometimes, a person desires a thing for its own sake, and hence (because she desires it) also values it; yet values it not for its own sake but only as a means to something else. This is a very curious position which, barring strong textual evidence for doing so, we should not attribute to Hutcheson.

So as I said, Hutcheson believes that if we desire a thing for its own sake, we also value it for its own sake. He thus believes, implicitly, that if we value nothing but self-benefits for their own sake, we also desire nothing but self-benefits for their own sake. This is to assume that evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism.

¹⁸ My interpretation comports not only with the above passages but with related ones, e.g., Hutcheson 1728: 2. As the footnoted sentence implies, I see no reason to read the noun ‘good’ in the above quotations as short for ‘nonmoral good’ rather than ‘good of some kind’ or ‘moral or nonmoral good’. (A similar point goes for the adjective ‘good’.) The first reading might be tempting for a three-part reason: first, much of what Hutcheson’s *Essay* says about goodness seems to have nonmoral goodness especially in view; second, Hutcheson understands nonmoral (or at least ‘natural’) goodness in terms of pleasure (Hutcheson 1728: 34); and third, one of the above quotations suggests that if we consider a thing good, we see it as a cause of pleasure. But these facts fall far short of entailing that ‘good’ in the quoted passages is short for ‘nonmoral good’. For one thing, Hutcheson’s belief about considering a thing good – namely, that if we do so we also consider it a cause of pleasure – applies to moral, not just to nonmoral, good. In Hutcheson’s view, to consider a thing morally good is to see it as exhibiting (or being) benevolence and, as a result, to approve it via the moral sense (Hutcheson 1726: 117–35). So on his view, to consider a thing morally good is also to consider it pleasure-producing, because benevolence, as we know, typically produces pleasure. Let me add that if ‘good’ in the quotations were short for the narrower term ‘nonmoral good’ (or ‘natural good’) we would expect Hutcheson to use the latter term. Interestingly, not once in the *Essay* does he use that term when stating the relation(s) between desiring a thing and finding it good.

Now if, as Hutcheson assumes, evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism, and if, as Hutcheson also assumes, psychological egoism commits us to the view that the desires of all rational agents are fundamentally self-interested, then we must grant that if evaluative egoism is true, God (a rational agent) rewards the virtuous only if he benefits himself by doing so. In short, given Hutcheson's two assumptions, neither of which is implausible, the antecedent of premise 1 ensures the consequent, making premise 1 true.

I said that neither of Hutcheson's assumptions is implausible. Consider, for instance, the assumption that psychological egoism commits us to the view that the desires of all rational agents are ultimately self-interested. It is not implausible to think that the only promising defence of psychological egoism begins with a premise about rational agency. That premise is that rational agency and fundamental self-interest go hand in hand – that essential to rational agency is a system of desires the most basic of which are self-interested.¹⁹ This premise would explain the egoist's claim that we not only lack, but are incapable of having, fundamental desires for things other than self-benefits. The meaning of that claim, arguably, is that necessarily, insofar as we are fully rational agents we ultimately desire nothing but self-benefits. Suppose that psychological egoism indeed derives its plausibility from this premise about rational agency. Then to hold psychological egoism – to hold it plausibly, anyway – is tacitly to accept the premise about rational agency. This is to hold that every rational agent ultimately desires nothing but self-benefits.

To return to the main point: Given Hutcheson's two assumptions, the antecedent of premise 1 ensures the consequent. We thus see why Hutcheson accepts premise 1. Equally important, one of the facts that helps us see it – that in Hutcheson's view, evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism – supports my earlier assertion that Hutcheson's theological objection challenges not one, but both of those forms of egoism. For as Hutcheson knows, if evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism, then step 8 of his objection, which explicitly challenges psychological egoism, also challenges evaluative egoism.

5.

I have answered two of the three questions posed earlier. First, what is the actual target of Hutcheson's theological objection? Second, why does Hutcheson accept premise 1? Along the way I have shown that Hutcheson assumes that evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism. That he does so helps us answer the third question. It helps us explain why, having replaced 'But if we have no other Idea of *Good*, than *Advantage* to our selves' with 'Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*', Hutcheson made no

¹⁹ Hutcheson apparently thinks that some psychological egoists, including 'the old *Epicureans*' and Hobbes, hold this premise. See Hutcheson 1728: 207–8.

significant changes to the substance of his objection. I say that it ‘helps us explain’, not that it ‘explains’, because the full explanation requires a further point: that Hutcheson assumes that psychological egoism guarantees evaluative egoism. Let me pause to establish this point.

Consider the following passages:

The Apprehension of Good, either to our selves or others, as attainable, raises *Desire*: The like Apprehension of Evil . . . raises . . . *Aversion*, or Desire of removing or preventing it. (Hutcheson 1728: 61)

Desire, Aversion, Joy and Sorrow, . . . seem to arise necessarily from a rational Apprehension of Good or Evil . . . (Ibid., 62)

Neither passage explicitly claims that psychological egoism guarantees evaluative egoism. However, that claim receives support from a point implicit in both passages.

Let me explain, first by noting that the two passages seem to maintain, each with a qualification, that invariably, if we value a thing, consider it good, we then desire it. The second passage does so through its use of ‘necessarily’; the first does so partly through its wording. By the latter I mean that if the first passage meant that we only sometimes, rather than invariably, desire a thing upon valuing it, we would expect a different wording of the passage.

Now for the qualifications. The first passage includes the phrase ‘as attainable’. Exactly what Hutcheson means by ‘attainable’ (‘possible’? ‘obtainable though our own efforts’?) need not detain us. The important point is that owing largely to that word, the meaning of the first passage is not that if we value a thing we then desire it, but that if we value a thing we then desire it if we deem it attainable.

Similarly, because the second passage mentions joy as well as desire, it implies not that if we value a thing we then desire it, but that if we value a thing we then desire it or at least feel joy over it. In Hutcheson’s view, if upon valuing a thing we feel joy over it rather than desire it, this is only because we see it as already achieved, by which I mean already present, occurrent, or immanent (Hutcheson 1728: 60–1). It is thus something which, whether we actually desire it or not, we would desire if we considered it unachieved. So I take the second passage to imply that if we value a thing, we then desire it or at least would desire it if we considered it unachieved.

Clearly, the two passages differ a bit in meaning. Even so, they share an implication: that if we value a thing, consider it good, we then desire it either actually or hypothetically – ‘hypothetically’ meaning that we would desire it if we deemed it attainable but unachieved. If we formulate this implication as it concerns valuations of the intrinsic kind, and if we make it reflect, plausibly, the distinction between fundamental and subordinate desires, it says this: if we intrinsically value a thing we then form a fundamental desire for it, actually or

hypothetically.²⁰ I believe that Hutcheson holds this thesis, and that the passages I quoted support this.²¹

Now suppose this thesis, the one Hutcheson holds, is true. Then if psychological egoism is true, so also is evaluative egoism, meaning that we intrinsically value only self-benefits. For if, contrary to evaluative egoism, we intrinsically valued some things other than self-benefits, then given the thesis I have attributed to Hutcheson, we would fundamentally desire those things, at least if we deemed them attainable though unachieved. This, however, is contrary to psychological egoism, according to which we are incapable of fundamentally desiring things other than self-benefits. So given the thesis I take Hutcheson to hold, to accept psychological egoism is to commit oneself to evaluative egoism.

Thus, I take Hutcheson to assume that psychological egoism guarantees evaluative egoism. And as argued earlier, Hutcheson also assumes that evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism. Hutcheson assumes, then, that in many contexts, those two forms of egoism are interchangeable, that we can replace an assertion of one of them with an assertion of the other without altering truth value.

We now can answer the third of our questions. We can give a plausible and charitable explanation as to why, having replaced ‘But if we have no other Idea of *Good*, than *Advantage* to our selves’ with ‘Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*’, Hutcheson made no substantive revisions to his theological objection. I believe that Hutcheson saw the replacement as valuable on the one hand, but of no consequence for his objection on the other. He saw it as valuable because the replacement phrase, unlike the original, makes it clear from the start that his theological objection is similar to other objections in the second section of his *Inquiry*: it has *psychological* egoism as a target (even if not as an exclusive target). He saw the replacement as of no consequence for

²⁰ Read ‘value a thing’ to mean ‘see it as good overall, that is, as having sufficient good to outweigh any evil it might necessarily involve’. I say this on the basis of Hutcheson 1728: 31–2 and especially 39. The passage in 31–2, by the way, is similar to the two quoted above: the gist of it, roughly, is that if we value a thing, then ‘by the Constitution of our Nature’ we then desire it.

²¹ Allow me a comment similar to the one in note 18: that despite possible temptations to do so, there is no reason to read ‘good’ in the quoted passages as short for ‘nonmoral good’. For one thing, the point of the quoted passages – that if we value a thing we then desire it, actually or hypothetically – applies, Hutcheson thinks, to moral valuations no less than to nonmoral ones. For example, Hutcheson believes that insofar as we morally approve a thing (in which case that thing is virtue, or benevolence), we find it ‘amiable’, ‘lovely’, and ‘beautiful’, a ‘perfection’ in the deeds that possess it, a stimulus to ‘love’ and ‘esteem’ the agent, and a cause of a desire ‘of doing the like’. (For these and similar beliefs see Hutcheson 1726: xv, 111–12, 117–19, 121–2, 133–5, 190–92, 228–9, 243, 246, 249–50, 268, 271–2; Hutcheson 1728: xvi–xvii, 8, 69, 71, 81–2, 88, 105, 209, 300; Hutcheson 1729: 128–30.) Such statements would be decidedly odd if Hutcheson saw no tight connection between morally approving a thing, that is, valuing it morally, and wanting its existence, actually or hypothetically. (Imagine me saying, ‘Insofar as I morally value *x* in an act, I find *x* beautiful, admire the agent, and want to emulate her action; nevertheless, I lack even the slightest preference whether *x* exists, in her deed or in any other’.) Hence there is evidence that he sees such a connection.

his objection, however, because in his view the replacement phrase and the original phrase are interchangeable in the relevant assertion.

By the relevant assertion I mean, of course, the first assertion in the passage containing Hutcheson's theological objection: 'Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*, we must imagine that every *rational Being* acts only for its own *Advantage*'. If evaluative egoism and psychological egoism guarantee each other, then in that assertion the phrase 'Had we no other *ultimate Desire* but that of *private Advantage*', which asserts (subjunctively) psychological egoism, is interchangeable with the phrase, 'But if we have no other Idea of *Good*, than *Advantage* to our selves', which I take to assert evaluative egoism. Therefore, insofar as the particulars of Hutcheson's objection were designed to jibe, in whatever ways he intended, with the second of those two phrases – or more exactly, with the sentence containing it – they were also designed to jibe with the first phrase. In Hutcheson's mind, then, the replacement of the second phrase with the first necessitated no substantive changes to his objection.

Let me make this talk of 'jibing' less abstract. In the second edition of the *Inquiry*, the passage containing Hutcheson's theological objection begins as follows:

But if we have no other Idea of *Good*, than *Advantage* to our selves, we must imagine that every *rational Being* acts only for its own *Advantage*; and however we may call a *beneficent Being*, a *good Being*, because it acts for our Advantage, yet upon *this Scheme* we should not be apt to think there is any *beneficent Being* in *Nature*, or a *Being* who acts for the *Good* of others. (Hutcheson 1726: 150)

Interpreted fairly, this sentence concerns not what we are 'apt' to think, but rather what we are apt to think if we are reasonable. Its key point – call it *P* – can be put thus:

If evaluative egoism is true, reason compels us to conclude that no being exists that acts for the good of others – which is implausible.

I have included the final phrase because it is implicit in Hutcheson's sentence. Given Hutcheson's intended (mainly Christian) audience, the conclusion to which *P* refers – that no being (not even a divine one) acts for the good of others – is understood to be implausible.

Let us now look back at my reconstruction of Hutcheson's objection, meaning my reconstruction of what follows 'Particularly' in the relevant passage. It extends and makes more particular the thought *P* expresses, and hence does likewise for the above quotation. For example, premise 3 and the consequent of premise 1 together imply that God does not reward the virtuous. By doing so they make more particular the idea in *P* that no being exists that acts for the good of others. Also, premise 2 makes more particular the thought expressed by *P*'s final word, 'implausible'. It does so by identifying the particular thing that lacks plausibility: the implication that God does not reward the

virtuous. Finally, statements 4 through 8 continue the line of thought begun by *P*, including a rejection of the evaluative egoism mentioned in *P*'s antecedent.

If statements 1 through 8 extend and make more particular Hutcheson's opening sentence, they continue to do so following the alteration of that sentence in the third edition of the *Inquiry*. They do so, that is, if the replacement phrase involved in the alteration is interchangeable with the original phrase. For then the new sentence is equivalent with the old. Nothing essential has changed through the alteration.

6.

I have answered three questions about Hutcheson's theological objection. However, a further question remains. Some preliminaries are desirable before stating it; so let me begin by recalling Hutcheson's premises. Leaving aside premise 1, which has already received attention, and ignoring intermediate conclusions, we have the following:

2. God rewards the virtuous.
3. God does not benefit himself by rewarding the virtuous.
5. If God rewards the virtuous though he does not benefit himself by doing so, then he has fundamental desires for the happiness of (some) others.
7. If God has fundamental desires for the happiness of others, it is reasonable to think that humans are capable of such desires.

For most of these premises, we can easily see why Hutcheson expects a receptive audience. He no doubt intends his objection for religious believers of his place and time, the vast majority of whom are Christians. And most of the above premises are plausible from a Christian standpoint.

Premise 3, for example, follows from a two-part assumption acceptable to most Christians. First, God benefits himself by rewarding the virtuous only if he increases his happiness by doing so. But second, given God's perfection, immutability, or other attributes, his happiness cannot increase.²² Some scriptural passages may suggest that God's happiness can increase; however, there is a long tradition, stretching at least from Augustine, of interpreting such passages figuratively.²³ So we can see why Hutcheson accepts premise 3 and expects an audience that does the same.

²² That Hutcheson holds this position is evident from Hutcheson [1744] 2006: 173 and the material preceding it: *ibid.*, 162–7.

²³ An excellent source on this tradition is Renihan 2015.

Premise 7, however, cannot be passed over so quickly. Although Hutcheson does not state it exactly the way I have, he certainly advances it – indeed, advances it without argument. This may seem curious given his intended audience. For we can imagine many Christians of Hutcheson’s day opposing premise 7 as follows: Owing to the fall of Adam, human nature is corrupt to the last degree, and is thus not merely different, but radically so, from God’s nature. Therefore, contrary to premise 7, the fact that God has fundamental desires for the happiness of others creates not the slightest presumption that humans can have such desires.²⁴

This objection would have been natural in Hutcheson’s day, for it reflects an outlook that was prevalent then. Michael Gill calls it ‘English Calvinism’, though he indicates that its main elements were not exclusively English – for instance, they were common among Scottish Presbyterians.²⁵ Gill describes the outlook thus:

A defining feature of . . . English Calvinism . . . was an ardent belief in the sinfulness of all humans. . . . Humans had originally been created pure and good but through original sin had fallen to the depths of degradation. As a result, each and every human is now corrupt through and through. The corruption . . . was so complete, afflicting as it did all of our faculties, that we now lack even the ability to do anything to improve our degenerate state. (Gill 2006: 7)

This outlook is part of what Isabel Rivers calls ‘the orthodox Reformation account’ of our relation to God (Rivers 1991: 10). Rivers lists many elements of this account, including the view that owing to Adam’s sin, ‘human nature is now corrupt: the faculties are so depraved that man is incapable of obedience to the law and can only choose to sin’ (Ibid.).

What Gill and Rivers highlight in the Calvinist outlook is the so-called doctrine of human corruption: the view that owing to Adam’s fall, our nature is thoroughly corrupt. Implicit here is that our nature differs radically from God’s nature. Those holding this view are likely to reject premise 7 – or at least to eye it suspiciously, to demand proof that it comports with Christianity.

The doctrine of human corruption provides not just an objection to premise 7, but also a traditional defence of psychological egoism. As Thomas Mautner observes, among the Protestant reformers we find the view that given our corrupt nature, those who lack Christ’s grace – which, significantly, we cannot win through our own efforts – are inescapably selfish (Mautner 1993: 8–14). The gist of this view, Mautner says, is ‘that action not motivated by self-interest is contrary to human nature. For such action to occur, something like a miracle is necessary’ (Ibid., 16).

²⁴ A similar objection – similar in being premised on the vast difference between God and humans – could be aimed at premise 1. My chief conclusions about premise 7 thus apply to premise 1, *mutatis mutandis*.

²⁵ Gill 2006: 135–7; see also Mautner 1993: 10. Gill notes that the views of English Calvinism ‘should not all be equated to Calvin’s own’ (Gill 2006: 271 n.).

Hutcheson, apparently, was aware of this view. In the *Inquiry* he mentions ‘Men impress’d with Notions of *Self-Love*, as the *sole* Motive of Action, from the Pulpit, [and] the Schools’ (Hutcheson 1726: 155); elsewhere he speaks of ‘*Christian Moralists*’ who make ‘the *Prospect of private Happiness* . . . the *sole Motive of Election*’ (Hutcheson 1728: 208). Very likely, this mention of the pulpit and of Christian moralists denotes those who see the doctrine of human corruption as evidence that humans are fundamentally self-interested. This makes it even more puzzling that Hutcheson would employ premise 7, particularly without defending it.

To return to the main point, premise 7 raises this question:

- Given that Hutcheson intends his theological objection mainly for Christians, why does he advance premise 7 – indeed, advance it without argument? Why does he do so, that is, knowing that it invites the objection, natural among Christians of his day, that it conflicts with the doctrine of human corruption?

The answer to this question lies in a fact that is just as important, even if not as widely known, as the facts just related. That fact is that many Christians of Hutcheson’s time were likely to accept premise 7 – or at least to find it consistent with the doctrine of human corruption. There are two things to be said on this head. First, although English Calvinism was indeed prevalent in Hutcheson’s time, it had been under fire for many decades and from many quarters. Among the many reasons it received criticism, Rivers observes, is that ‘from the point of view of [its] modifiers and opponents . . . [it] exaggerates the gap between God and man’ (Rivers 1991: 10).

These ‘modifiers and opponents’ include the Cambridge Platonists, especially Benjamin Whichcote (1609–83), Henry More (1614–87), and Ralph Cudworth (1617–88); they also include the seventeenth-century ‘latitude men’, among them Isaac Barrow (1630–77), John Tillotson (1630–94), and Joseph Glanvill (1636–80).²⁶ Among the tenets of these men is that human nature is *deiform* – that is, that although human nature is indeed fallen, it remains similar to God’s nature.²⁷ In an illuminating discussion of some of these thinkers, Michael Gill writes this:

²⁶ Unlike some scholars, Rivers sees the Cambridge Platonists not as forerunners of the latitudinarians, but as the first generation of them (Rivers 1991: 2, 28). The latitudinarians were members of the Church of England, nearly all of them clergymen, who shared a cluster of tenets that proves difficult to define. The following definition is representative: ‘The term “latitudinarianism” generally signals a broad churchmanship, willing to accommodate some degree of doctrinal and liturgical heterogeneity in pursuit of a common ground of popular Protestantism, anti-Calvinist moral theology, and what was sometimes called “reasonable” Christianity’ (Sirota 2014: 20).

²⁷ The latitudinarians (understood to include the Cambridge Platonists) were not the only ones who took this line. Many moderate Presbyterians of that era did so, including Hutcheson’s teacher at Glasgow, John Simson (1667–1740). See Gill 2006: 137–8. On a different matter, let me stress the words ‘indeed fallen’ in the footnoted sentence. Although some scholars see the latitudinarians as advancing an

Under Whichcote's influence, Cudworth and his friends came to reject the Negative Answer [the view that human nature is basically evil] that had been at the center of their Calvinist upbringing. . . . Every human being is basically good, they believed, because every human soul is God-like. . . . This theistic conception of the Positive Answer [that human nature is basically good] is best summed up by the claim, explicit in the work of Whichcote, Cudworth, and their friends, that human nature is *deiform*, or God-like. . . . The deiformity claim . . . turns the traditional Protestant reading of the candle metaphor [in Psalms 20:27] on its head. Instead of emphasizing the dimness of a candle, Whichcote and the others focused attention on the fact that the light of a candle is the very same stuff as the light of the sun. There is, of course, a great *quantitative* difference between a candle and the sun . . . *Qualitatively*, however, the two are the same: they both emit the light that enables us to see (see [Whichcote's] Aphorisms 262). Thus, according to this reading, Psalms 20:27 is telling us that . . . the spirit of each of us is fundamentally God-like.²⁸

The general point is that although English Calvinism was alive in Hutcheson's day, opposition to it was not lacking, some of which viewed human nature as deiform. And this opposition was not without influence. To give just one example, it significantly influenced Shaftesbury's philosophy, which advanced a positive view of human nature and had many readers throughout the eighteenth century.²⁹ If we suppose, plausibly, that some of Hutcheson's Christian readers had been persuaded by the opposition to Calvinism, we can suppose that he had Christian readers likely to grant premise 7 – or at least to find it consistent with the doctrine of human corruption.

The second thing to be said is that because English Calvinism is such an extreme, misanthropic view, we really need no knowledge of its major critics to suspect, plausibly, that many of Hutcheson's readers held a more moderate view. That is, they saw humans as somewhat God-like, even if fallen. And sure enough, when we examine the religious literature of Hutcheson's day we find our suspicion justified. Some examples:

Of that *Image of God*, in which Mankind was Originally created, . . . there remains a plain Tract, and many Foot-steps may still be discerned. For tho' . . . 'twas much defaced by the Sin of our first Parents, yet Mankind is not so wholly degenerated from his Original Excellency . . . There are yet left some Seeds of Grace in our Souls, which if cultivated

'optimistic appraisal of human nature' (Crane 1934: 220), others do not, maintaining that the latitudinarians emphasise our fallen nature (e.g., Spellman 1993). But even the latter scholars acknowledge the latitudinarians' vision of our nature as deiform. Spellman, for example, says that the Cambridge Platonists' 'theology . . . undoubtedly stressed the potential goodness of human nature, . . . [and] strongly underscored man's potential to act in accordance with the inborn principles of reason provided by a loving God, who, as Henry More declared, "communicates his own Nature . . . so far forth as [human nature] is capable of receiving it"' (Spellman 1993: 26, 27). Spellman could also have quoted Isaac Barrow, who is representative of the latitudinarians in whom Spellman finds a dim view of human nature. Barrow writes many things like this: 'Every man is subject to defects, . . . but no man is really despicable. . . . Every man living hath stamped on him the venerable image of his glorious maker, which nothing incident to him can utterly deface. . . . Every man is of a divine extraction, and allied to heaven by nature and by grace; as the son of God, and the brother of God incarnate' (Barrow [1683] 1716: 255).

²⁸ Gill 2006: 18, 20. Also illuminating is Gill 2010: 15–16, 18, 23.

²⁹ Alderman 1923: 175–6, 183–9; Rivers 2000: 87–8, 129–32; Uyl 2001: vii; Gill 2006: chap. 6; Gill 2010: 14. For the works that won Shaftesbury his readership (published individually from 1699 to 1710), see Shaftesbury [1711] 2001.

and improved; the *Image of God* will be daily renewed in us; we shall increase in Vertue, and grow more and more like God . . . (Atterbury 1720: 181–2)

The Highest Excellency that We are capable of in this World, is, to be, in some measure Partakers of the Divine Nature: To be like God, in the delightful Practice of Righteousness and Truth; in Love, Mercy and Universal Goodness. (Curteis 1723: 12)

As Corrupt as our Nature is, we have nothing *Substantial* in us but what is Good, and a great deal that is Excellent, being made in the Image and Likeness of God, which still in great Measure shines forth in us. (Norris 1707: 25)

We are not capable of being very like God, in his Omniscience, or his Almighty Power, but we are very capable of being like him in his Goodness. (Adams 1709: 9–10)

It is doubtful that those who accepted these claims of deformity would oppose premise 7 by citing our fallen nature. Many of them, we can suppose, would find 7 plausible.

To return to our question: Given that Hutcheson intends his theological objection for a Christian audience, why does he advance premise 7 – indeed, advance it undefended? The answer, almost surely, is that he intends his objection not for *all* Christians, but for those who view human nature as deiform. Most of his objections to egoism address a much wider audience, but this one, charitably interpreted, aims at those who consider our nature similar (though vastly inferior) to God’s nature. This would be a serious shortcoming if Hutcheson had no reason to think that such readers exist. But as we have seen, he has good reason to think that they do.

A possible objection is that Hutcheson is merely preaching to the choir, merely addressing those who already reject psychological egoism. The grain of truth here is that many published deiformists of Hutcheson’s time maintained (though not necessarily with supporting arguments) that people are naturally benevolent.³⁰ Even so, the objection fails. Firstly, Hutcheson is not necessarily preaching to the choir. A reader who sees human nature as deiform does not necessarily have a settled opinion about the content of God’s fundamental desires. Secondly, it is not always amiss to preach to the choir. Even if a person already finds psychological egoism unpersuasive, she may benefit from a fresh objection to it. We must remember that Hutcheson is opposing psychological egoism partly to encourage virtuous conduct – specifically, to refute false positions that can suppress virtuous inclinations. Such encouragement can take the form of strengthening existing doubts about egoism; it need not address itself only to egoists.

Before closing this section, allow me just a few more remarks about premise 7. Earlier I mentioned a tradition of reading figuratively certain biblical passages – those which suggest that God’s happiness can increase. What goes for those passages goes also for passages that suggest that God has desires. We

³⁰ For examples see Crane 1934: 222–6, including note 52; and Rivers 1991: 77–9.

find a tradition of reading them figuratively, on the grounds that God's 'desires' can be nothing like the mutable, human psychological states that we strictly mean by desires. Also, this tradition was orthodox among theologians of Hutcheson's era.³¹

Hence there arises a new objection to premise 7, namely, that because God has desires only figuratively, the consequent of 7 receives no support from the antecedent. The consequent, after all, concerns human desires; the antecedent concerns divine ones.

We thus come to the following variation of our earlier question: Given this new objection, Christian in origin, and given that Hutcheson is writing mainly for Christians, why does he advance premise 7 without argument? The answer is similar to the one before. His theological objection is for readers who grant a significant, even if distant, similarity between human and divine nature. He expects them to grant that if God can nonselfishly act for the good of others – which, in essence, is what the antecedent of 7 says – this creates a presumption that humans can do the same, even if their motives only slightly resemble whatever actuates God. This is no blunder on Hutcheson's part, for he has reason to think that he has such readers.

7.

In this paper I have answered four questions:

- What, actually, is the target of Hutcheson's theological objection? Answer: both psychological egoism and evaluative egoism.
- Having revised (in the third edition of the *Inquiry*) the opening phrase of the passage containing his theological objection, why did Hutcheson leave the substance of that objection unchanged? Answer: He saw no need to make substantive changes. Owing to his assumption that evaluative egoism and psychological egoism guarantee each other, he saw the new opening phrase, which speaks of psychological egoism, as interchangeable with the old, which speaks of evaluative egoism.
- Why does Hutcheson accept premise 1, the antecedent of which – that evaluative egoism is true – seems little connected with the consequent, which says that God rewards the virtuous only if God benefits himself by doing so? Answer: Given two of Hutcheson's assumptions, the antecedent of premise 1 supports the consequent. Those assumptions are, first, that evaluative egoism guarantees psychological egoism; and second, that psychological egoism, the

³¹ See Renihan 2015 – both the sources he includes and his introduction, especially pp. 21–34.

view that human desires are fundamentally self-interested, commits us to a similar view about the desires of any rational agent.

- Given that Hutcheson is writing mainly for Christians, why does he advance premise 7 – indeed, advance it undefended – knowing that it invites an objection of a Christian kind: that it conflicts with the doctrine of human corruption? Answer: He is writing for those who regard human nature as deiform, those who will see no inconsistency between premise 7 and the doctrine of human corruption. Despite the prevalence of English Calvinism in his time, he has good reason to think that he has such readers.

I suspect that others besides me have asked these questions, which is one reason I take them to have interest. Another reason is that prior to answering them, they may seem to highlight confusions, oversights and the like on Hutcheson's part. But in truth they do not. For instance, the first question flags no ambivalence in Hutcheson's mind about the target of his objection; the third points to no indefensible acceptance of premise 1; and the fourth reflects no naivety on Hutcheson's part about the religious beliefs of his audience.

I have not shown that Hutcheson's objection is incontestable. But if it has weaknesses, where are they? Given the beliefs of Hutcheson's intended readers, meaning religious believers of his place and time who see human nature as deiform, premises 2, 3, and 7 are very plausible. And although 5 invites a minor objection (see note 12), it calls for only slight changes to Hutcheson's argument.

This leaves premise 1 – the claim that if evaluative egoism is true, God rewards the virtuous only if he benefits himself by doing so – as a possible weak spot. However, premise 1 is no pushover: the most likely objections to it are unavailable, or of no use, to Hutcheson's intended audience. These include the atheist's objection (clearly useless to religious believers) that premise 1 falsely presupposes theism. They also include the following objection, unavailable given the state of science in Hutcheson's day. First, psychological egoism is true only because, in our evolutionary past, fundamental selfishness conferred a reproductive advantage on those who possessed it, and thus in time became a universal element of human nature. Second, given these naturalistic origins of this element, our possession of it is no evidence that God possesses it. Therefore, although the antecedent of premise 1 may guarantee psychological egoism, the latter cannot in turn guarantee the consequent of premise 1, which concerns the desires of God.

In addition to being unavailable in Hutcheson's time, this objection is not clearly forceful. Arguably, evolutionary theory fails to support psychological egoism (Sober 2013). At any rate, relative to his intended audience, premise 1 of Hutcheson's argument has considerable plausibility – and so does his argument as a whole.

It is a commonplace, though a useful one, that to understand or fairly evaluate a philosopher's argument we must attend to its context, including the philosopher's goals and assumptions and the views of his likely readers. Hutcheson's theological objection to egoism is a case in point. Looking over Hutcheson's premises, and keeping in mind his aims, his assumptions, and the beliefs of his intended audience, we find an argument of no mean force, an argument far from dismissible. Imperfections it no doubt contains. But I believe it has virtues enough to merit, and to repay, increased attention from philosophers and historians.³²

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³² For helpful discussions, reactions, or suggestions, I thank Chad Carmichael, David M. Craig, Samuel Kahn, and Thomas J. Davis.

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