

# TWO APPROACHES TO SELF-LOVE: HUTCHESON AND BUTLER

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## ABSTRACT

This paper contrasts Frankfurt's characterisation of self-love as disinterested with the predominant 18th-century view on self-love as interested. Two senses of the term 'interest' are distinguished to discuss two fundamentally different readings of the claim that self-love promotes the agent's interest. This allows characterising two approaches to self-love, which are found in Hutcheson's and in Butler's writings. Hutcheson sees self-love as a source of hedonistic motives, which can be calm or passionate. Butler sees it as a general affection of rational beings in the sense of a kind of love of one's real nature.

**Keywords:** self-love, interest, egoism, passions, affections, Francis Hutcheson, Joseph Butler, Harry Frankfurt

## Introduction

In his latest book, *The Reasons of Love*, Harry Frankfurt defends the idea that *self-love* is *disinterested*. Any variety of love “consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved.”<sup>1</sup> As the object of self-love is one's self, the conclusion lies at hand:

Perhaps it would flirt too egregiously with the absurd to suggest that self-love may be *selfless*. It is entirely apposite, however, to characterize it as *disinterested*. Indeed, self-love is nearly always entirely disinterested, in the clear and literal sense of being motivated by no interests other than those of the beloved” (Frankfurt 2004, p. 82).

<sup>1</sup> Frankfurt 2004, p. 79. Frankfurt presupposes that self-love is a kind of love, an assumption that is not shared by Hutcheson and not explicitly discussed by Butler.

This may sound surprising. In general, if we are to give an outline of what self-love is, then we do so rather by appealing to the fact that it consists in some kind of looking after ourselves, or at least by appealing to the fact that it makes us do so. Maybe self-love consists even in looking after ourselves at the cost of looking after others, or at least in looking after ourselves by seeking advantage for ourselves. This may come close to what we call ‘egoistic’, which means to be interested or self-interested, and thus not to be *disinterested*.

However, this account of interestedness, which relies on an account of selfishness, is not precisely what Frankfurt has in mind when he speaks of ‘interested’ or ‘disinterested’ with respect to a concern for the well-being of a person, or in the context of love and self-love. For him, the distinction is linked with whether or not the concern is motivated by *any* ulterior purpose from just the promotion of the well-being of the beloved. This leaves the question about whether the concern is interested or disinterested in a *selfish* or *unselfish* way unanswered. Thus, according to Frankfurt’s definition of ‘interested’, it is possible to have a selfishly interested concern for someone (if the ulterior purpose is to promote one’s own well-being) and an unselfishly interested concern (if the ulterior purpose is to promote a third person’s well-being). Similarly, the mere characterisation of love as disinterested does not say anything about whether it is selfish or unselfish. The last section of this article will treat this question more intensively.

The fact that there is a surprising corollary in Frankfurt’s claim has its terminological roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During that period, most philosophers were very clear about self-love being *interested*. However, this claim is ambiguous, since several accounts of self-love and interest can be found that differ fundamentally. The present paper aims at giving an idea of the claim’s ambiguity by sketching out two approaches to self-love: Hutcheson’s and Butler’s.

Roughly until Hobbes, self-love had been an object of constant but rather moderate philosophical interest, and with a rather unsettled moral status. Aristotle, for example, distinguishes two kinds of *philautia*, or ways of loving oneself. The first is the way vicious persons love themselves, and it consists in desiring for “...themselves the greatest share when it comes to money and honours and bodily pleasures.”<sup>2</sup> The second kind of *philautia* is the way the virtuous person loves himself. He gratifies “...the supreme element in himself and complies with it in everything.”<sup>3</sup> Since this second way of loving oneself has as its object the rational part of the soul, there is no conflict with virtue and hence “...a good person should be a self-lover.”<sup>4</sup> To love oneself is only vicious if it leads to a selfish focus on our own interests, as they are specified for the first kind of *philautia*. It is virtuous in case it leads to due focussing our attention on the rational part of

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle 1998, p. 35. (1168b)

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle 1998, p. 35. (1168b)

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle 1998, p. 36. (1169a)

the soul, which does not exclude taking into consideration the interests of others. Loving himself in this way, the agent does “make himself better off and benefit others.”<sup>5</sup>

The double view on self-love as possibly vicious and virtuous, depending on its degree and its object, survived the centuries. The closeness between self-love and self-preservation also supported a positive view on the former, since the latter was considered a duty to oneself in natural law theory. Hobbes’ account of human nature and morality, however, fundamentally changed the settings. According to his “picture of human nature as essentially individual, non-social, competitive and aggressive”<sup>6</sup>, human beings only follow self-directed passions. They preserve themselves, whatever the means. This is a rational attitude in a world of self-centred individuals. Good and evil are entirely relative to the individual’s passions, until a sovereign power institutes norms for behaviour.

This extremely short summary does no justice to the complexity of Hobbes’ theory, but it may come close to how its main points were presented by many philosophers during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. And especially, it allows giving an account of how self-love became a more serious problem in moral philosophy after Hobbes. Both key terms of the present paper, ‘self-love’ and ‘interest’, occur hardly ever in Hobbes’ writings, but many of his critics presented and attacked his accounts of human nature and morality in this terminology.<sup>7</sup> He was said to have claimed that self-love or self-interest are the only motives for human actions, and that virtue is reducible to self-love or interest. If this account of human nature was correct, then Aristotelian self-love in the vicious sense would be the only way human beings can love themselves, which would create friction between self-love and virtue in the eyes of many philosophers.

In reaction to Hobbes, numerous authors claimed to defend human nature and virtue against him. As his accounts were often presented and discussed in terms of self-love, this concept came to occupy a central place in subsequent moral philosophy. Many philosophers responded to Hobbes either by limiting the importance apparently attributed to self-love in his theory of human nature and in his moral theory, or by modifying the concept of self-love in order to show that there is no necessary conflict between self-love and virtue, or between virtue and interest.

This paper focuses on two authors of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Hutcheson and Butler. It analyses their concepts of self-love, which are important elements in their theories of the passions. It will be shown that their accounts differ fundamentally. It will be argued that Hutcheson, on the one hand, conceives self-love as a source of hedonistic motives and desires, and that Butler, on the other hand, conceives self-love as a kind of love

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle 1998, p. 36. (1169a)

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre 1967, p. 463.

<sup>7</sup> This trend is significant at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, obviously under the influence of discussions on *amour-propre* and *intérêt* in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by French moralists such as La Rochefoucauld, Nicole and Abbadie. Debates on natural law, especially on Pufendorf’s account, had also a big impact.

for one's self in terms of one's real nature. Furthermore, it will be shown that this is mirrored in a fundamental difference in their concepts of interest, which both claim to be what is promoted by self-love. At the end of this article, Frankfurt's characterisation of self-love as disinterested will be compared with the two accounts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1. *Self-love as a source of hedonistic motives and desires in Hutcheson*

Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), an important moral philosopher at the beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment, held a moral sense theory. Among his most important early works are the *Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good* from 1725 (third edition 1729), and the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, With Illustrations on the Moral Sense* from 1728. The present analysis of his concept of self-love is based to a large extent on these two texts.<sup>8</sup> Hutcheson claims that in his *Inquiry* “the Principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are Explain'd and Defended, against the Author of the *Fable of the Bees*.”<sup>9</sup> One of Shaftesbury's most important theses was that “virtue and interest may be found at last to agree”<sup>10</sup>, which is put forward by Hutcheson in a different form, notably as the claim that “[Virtue] is the *surest Happiness* of the Agent.”<sup>11</sup> Bernard de Mandeville, the mentioned *Fable's* notorious author, attacked Shaftesbury and claimed that moral virtue requires self-denial, thus is *not* compatible with private interest.<sup>12</sup> The social aspects in the nature of man, sketched out by Shaftesbury in form of the claim that the “*natural affections*, which lead to the good of the public,”<sup>13</sup> have reality and motivate actions, were eliminated in Mandeville's account of human nature. For him, human beings are determined to seek pleasure and to avoid pain for themselves. He outlined an account of human nature that is close to Hobbes'. Furthermore, he notoriously stated that “Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride.”<sup>14</sup>

In Hutcheson's moral philosophy, which is in part directed against Mandeville's theses, self-love is an important element in two domains. On the one hand, within his theory of the passions, it is discussed as a feature of motivation. It is Hutcheson's declared aim to show that human beings are not only motivated by self-love or interest, but also by benevolence. On the other hand, in his moral epistemology, he argues that moral judg-

<sup>8</sup> The following editions will be used: For the *Inquiry* Hutcheson 1729, pp. 104-304. For the *Essay* Hutcheson 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Darwall 1995, p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> Shaftesbury 1999, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. xi.

<sup>12</sup> Mandeville 1966, pp. 42f.

<sup>13</sup> Shaftesbury 1999, p. 196.

<sup>14</sup> Mandeville 1966, p. 51.

ments are not reducible to interested judgments of self-love, but that there is a moral sense, which approves and disapproves of motives and characters and is independent from self-love and interest. In this paper, I will focus on the first aspect and discuss self-love as a feature of motivation.

As to the place of self-love in his moral psychology, Hutcheson says in the introduction to his *Inquiry*:

The Pleasure in our sensible Perceptions of any kind, gives us our first Idea of *natural Good*, or *Happiness*; and then all Objects which are apt to excite this Pleasure are call'd *immediately Good*. Those Objects which may procure others immediately pleasant, are call'd *Advantageous*: and we pursue both Kinds from a View of *Interest*, or from *Self-Love*." (Hutcheson 1729, p. 106)

Hutcheson distinguishes between the *natural good*, which is pleasure, and the *moral good*, which is constituted by benevolent motives and which is irreducible to the former. Benevolent motives are morally approved by the moral sense. Self-love, which ultimately aims at procuring natural good to the agent, is thus in Hutcheson a source of hedonistic motives and desires. It is at work, to put it like this, if the agent has desires that ultimately aim at pleasure for herself. This is different in Butler, as I will argue. Of course, Hutcheson does not deny that human beings have these selfish desires and act on them. From this point of view, his concept of self-love is compatible with what Hobbes and Mandeville held to be the fundamental motivational force in human beings. But Hutcheson argues that self-love is not the *only* source of motives in human beings, and that we act on desires other than hedonistic or egoistic ones. He restricts the influence of self-love as a motivational power, which the psychological egoist claims to be the only effective one for human actions.

According to Hutcheson, benevolence, which ultimately aims at the good of the public and not at good for the agent herself, is a second source of desires in human beings, producing the "immediate motives to virtuous actions."<sup>15</sup> Benevolent motives cannot be analysed in terms of motives of self-love. This is obvious from the fact that

we never call that man *benevolent*, who is in fact useful to others, but at the same time only intends his *own Interest* [i.e. pleasure, Ch.M.], without any ultimate desire of the *Good* of *others*. If there be any *Benevolence at all*, it must be *disinterested* [...]" (Hutcheson 1729, p. 135)

And since we do in fact call agents or actions benevolent, such motives must occur. Benevolence and self-love are distinguished by their objects, the former ultimately aiming at the good of the public, or the moral good, the latter at private (natural) good or

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<sup>15</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 131.

pleasure for the agent. Hutcheson speaks of *disinterested* principles of action to refer to motives from benevolence, and of *interested*, i.e. *selfish* principles of action to refer to motives from self-love. He would reply to Frankfurt that self-love promotes the interests of the agent in the sense of seeking pleasure for herself, and that it therefore is an interested principle of actions, not a disinterested one. Hutcheson's notion of *interest* is a hedonistic one, as is his concept of self-love. It is often used as an equivalent for pleasure or advantage. Furthermore, to say that something is in the agent's interest entails that the agent has desires for the object or state of affairs in question (or at least would have, if she had an appropriate picture of the situation and of her own affections and passions). These desires are ultimately desires for pleasure for the agent.

Compared with benevolence, self-love as a source of interested or hedonistic motives has, unsurprisingly, a rather problematic status in Hutcheson's moral theory. This is particularly obvious in Hutcheson's mathematical approach to the computation of the morality of actions: If benevolence and self-love (or interest) both recommend the same action to us, then the latter's motivational part has to be deduced from the moral value of the action. If they recommend different actions and the benevolent one is performed, opposing self-love's part can be added to the moral value of the action.<sup>16</sup> But Hutcheson would not go as far as claiming that human beings *should not* be motivated by self-love, neither from a rational nor from a moral point of view. Firstly, because reflection from the point of view of *reasonable* or *calm* self-love (as opposed to *passionate* self-love, cf. below) shows that virtuous actions are rational, since benevolence is our "greatest happiness."<sup>17</sup> The "pleasures of the sympathetic kind" and especially the moral pleasures arising "from the consciousness of good affections and actions" are the highest pleasures to be gained by a rational agent.<sup>18</sup> Reasonable self-love, by means of seeking these pleasures, is thus in a position to psychologically *support* benevolence by recommending the same actions.<sup>19</sup> Here Shaftesbury's thesis that virtue is in our interest shines through. However, Hutcheson stresses that to desire to be motivated by benevolence for a selfish reason like feeling pleasure is not to be *truly virtuous*:

Not that we can be *truly Virtuous*, if we intend only to obtain the Pleasure which arises from *Benevolence*, without the *Love of others*. [...] But *Self-Interest* may be our *Motive* in studying to raise these kind [i.e. benevolent, Ch.M.] Affections and to continue in this *agreeable State*; tho it cannot be the *sole*, or *principal Motive* of any Action, which to our *moral Sense* appears *Virtuous*. (Hutcheson 1729, p. 196)

<sup>16</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 186.

<sup>17</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 196.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted from Strasser 1987, p. 518.

<sup>19</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 285.

Calm self-love, an affection that does not exclude reflection upon the consequences of one's actions, and which is based on a rational apprehension of good or evil, allows for benevolence to motivate the agent in the appropriate degree and removes eventual obstacles. In this case, there is no opposition between interest and benevolence. But when it is passionate, self-love counteracts "our *natural Propensity to Benevolence*."<sup>20</sup> Calm and reasonable self-love will discover the pleasures that can be gained by reflective consciousness of benevolent motives and will thereby provide an additional motive of a second order for virtuous actions. This motive by itself does not constitute virtue, but it supports benevolent motives and virtuous behaviour by attracting the agent's attention to the pleasure arising from the consciousness of benevolent motives.

Secondly, Hutcheson claims that actions motivated by self-love in its calm form are to be considered as morally indifferent, as far as they have "no hurtful effects upon others."<sup>21</sup> Self-love or interestedness in this sense is even described as important for the good of the whole.<sup>22</sup> Despite his generally critical point of view, Hutcheson reserves a place for reasonable self-love in his conception of how one should live.

## 2. Butler's conception of human nature

Joseph Butler (1692-1752), Bishop of Durham, is the author of the *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1726) and of *The Analogy of Religion*, which contains the *Dissertation upon the Nature of Virtue* (1736). His approach in the *Sermons* is relatively close to Shaftesbury's, with whom he argues that virtue is in every rational agent's interest. He asserts that there is "no peculiar contrariety between self-love and benevolence", and that self-love and conscience recommend to us the same course of action, i.e. the virtuous one. Butler also stresses that virtue consists in following our nature, vice in deviating from it.<sup>23</sup> Thus, his conception of human nature deserves a great deal of attention.

According to Butler's view, human nature is constituted by a system of several 'principles' that stand in hierarchical order. Firstly, there are *particular appetites*, *passions*, and *affections*, which aim at 'external' objects.<sup>24</sup> The appetite of hunger, for example, aims at an external object, food, and its satisfaction provides the agent with pleasure. Te-

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<sup>20</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 270. Fieser 1992, argues that the distinction between (calm) affections and (violent) passions in Hutcheson is based on a class distinction between emotions arising from an immaterial soul, involving "rational perception of one's situation" on the one hand, and emotions arising from "disturbances within a material body" on the other hand. Cf. e.g. Hutcheson 2001, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 174.

<sup>22</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 285. Cf. Hirschman 1978, pp. 65f.

<sup>23</sup> For these claims, cf. Butler 1970, p. 14: Preface, §39; p. 39: Sermon 3, §9; and p. 7: Preface, §16.

<sup>24</sup> The difficulties of the distinctions between internal and external objects as well as between particular and general affections will not be discussed in this paper. Cf. e.g. Duncan-Jones 1952, pp. 48ff., and pp. 59ff.

leologically speaking, this appetite has the function to make the agent take care of her body and of her life. Its object, however, is not the pleasure gained from the appetite's satisfaction, but food.<sup>25</sup> Pity or compassion aim at the relief of another in distress.<sup>26</sup> Its satisfaction provides the agent pleasure, too, but it aims at an external state of affairs, not at pleasure itself. Teleologically speaking, compassion is one of the principles in human nature that regulate behaviour in society, as does benevolence from a more general point of view by aiming at good for others. As in Hutcheson, benevolence, which constitutes the social nature of man, is conceived as irreducible to a desire for pleasure for oneself (which is called 'self-love' in Hutcheson, but not so in Butler). Its status is ambiguous, for sometimes Butler counts it explicitly in the particular affections, sometimes he seems to attribute it a status between a particular and a general affection.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, there is *self-love*, which Butler claims to be a *general affection* with an 'internal'<sup>28</sup> object: it aims at the agent's happiness in the most general sense of the term. Happiness, according to Butler, is not the same as pleasure, which is the effect of the satisfaction of *particular* appetites, passions and affections. Butler says in a very general remark:

[Self-love is] an affection to ourselves; a regard to our own interest, happiness, and private good: and in the proportion a man hath this, he is interested, or a lover of himself." (Butler 1970, p. 101)

Actions proceeding from self-love are labelled 'interested'<sup>29</sup>, but I will argue that there is a remarkable difference between Butler's and Hutcheson's understanding of this claim.

Before discussing Butler's concept of self-love more extensively, the third important principle in human nature shall be mentioned. *Conscience*, the general principle of reflection, is the faculty endowed with moral authority. It approves and disapproves morally of actions, motives and characters. Butler distinguishes authority from mere power and puts emphasis on the fact that to have the highest *authority* in a system does not necessarily mean to have the highest *power*, although from a moral point of view conscience *should* govern our behaviour.<sup>30</sup> The hierarchy referred to above is a hierarchy in terms of authority, not in terms of the principles' actual power.

<sup>25</sup> Butler 1970, p. 20. (Sermon 1, §7)

<sup>26</sup> Butler 1970, pp. 49ff. (Sermon 5, §1f.)

<sup>27</sup> For a more extensive discussion, cf. Penelhum 1985, pp. 31-37 and Duncan-Jones 1952, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> To give a (very) vague idea of what 'internal' means, Butler specifies that self-love does not aim at "this or that particular external thing", and unlike particular affections does not rest "in the external things themselves." Rather, it seeks external things only "as a means of happiness or good". Butler 1970, p. 100. (Sermon 11, §5)

<sup>29</sup> Butler 1970, p. 13. (Preface, §35)

<sup>30</sup> Butler 1970, p. 33. (Sermon 2, §14)



Butler's approach to human nature is a theistic teleological one.<sup>31</sup> When he speaks of human beings' *real* nature, he does not refer to what can be observed in terms of behaviour. Neither does he refer to the ideal nature of man before the Fall. *Real* nature, according to Butler, is something that has been given by God, comprising different principles that form a system and stand in the hierarchical order introduced above. This constitution needs to be taken care of in the sense that its elements have to be cultivated and kept in their due degree. Human beings do obviously deviate from their real nature if they do not respect the hierarchical order of its principles. This is the case if particular passions overwhelm self-love's or conscience's power and produce an action against it. If an action is not motivated in accordance with the hierarchy of the different principles in human nature, it is against human nature and vicious:

Reasonable self-love and conscience are the chief or superior principles in the nature of man: because an action may be suitable to this nature, though all other principles be violated; but becomes unsuitable, if either of those are. Conscience and self-love, if we understand our true happiness, always lead us the same way. Duty and interest are perfectly coincident." (Butler 1970, p. 39)

Self-love and conscience, Butler claims, naturally lead the same way and recommend the same actions. Like self-love and conscience, which are not conflicting in the sense of recommending different actions, self-love and benevolence are also considered naturally compatible – in opposition to Hutcheson's view, where self-love and benevolence must first be *made* compatible by means of cool reasoning. One of Butler's arguments against a supposed contrariety between self-love and benevolence rests on his distinction between self-love as a general affection with an internal object, and benevolence as a particular affection with an external object. Gratifying (particular) benevolent affections thus naturally contributes to the gratification of (general) self-love, too.<sup>32</sup> There is no contrariety between the two.

The first quotation above from Butler's *Sermon* 11 suggests that Butler, like Hutcheson, claims self-love to aim at promoting our interest. But although his thesis concerning the relation between interest and self-love seems at first sight identical with Hutcheson's, it is fundamentally different. A precious hint is provided by a passage on Hobbes' presupposed use of the term 'interested':

[Hobbes produced] the confusion of calling actions interested<sup>33</sup> which are done in contradiction to the most manifest known interest, merely for the gratification

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<sup>31</sup> Penelhum 1985, pp. 16f. and Duncan-Jones 1952, pp. 41ff.

<sup>32</sup> Butler 1970, pp. 103f. (*Sermon* 11, §11)

<sup>33</sup> Hobbes did not say this. The terms 'interest' and 'interested' as well as 'self-love' are hardly ever occurring in Hobbes' moral philosophy. But at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, his claims were reformulated as claims about self-love and interest.

of a present passion. Now all this confusion might easily be avoided, by stating to ourselves wherein the idea of self-love in general consists, as distinguished from all particular movements towards particular external objects..." (Butler 1970, p. 11)

When is an object or a state of affairs in an agent's interest according to Butler? Apparently, it is not the fact that it gratifies a present passion or desire. An alternative answer could be to claim that something is in an agent's interest if it allows realising more, or more important desired goals in the long run, eventually at the cost of not realising presently desired short-term goals. A typical example would be the recommendation to save money for a later bigger pay-off instead of spending it immediately. Butler's claim would then be that Hobbes applies the term 'interest' incorrectly, because he also refers to desires as interested if their gratification makes the gratification of other desires impossible, although the latter promise to procure more pleasure in the long run. In this reading, the concept of interest remains linked with pleasure, or with personal advantage in general - as proposed by Hutcheson. Something is in the agent's interest if he desires it as a means for pleasure, given a calm consideration of his private good.

The following reflections will show that Butler's passage is not based on a distinction between short-term and long-term selfish goals. For him, the concept of interest is not linked with pleasure, but with his teleological conception of human nature. In this point Butler's approach is very close to Shaftesbury's.

### 3. Shaftesbury on interest

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), is most famous for his theory of the moral sense. His claim that virtue and interest agree has already been mentioned above. In this digression I want to highlight that Shaftesbury uses the term 'interest' in two fundamentally different meanings, as has already been discussed by others,<sup>34</sup> and I want to argue that these differences are reflected in the differences between Hutcheson's and Butler's concepts of self-love. The first context in which Shaftesbury uses the term 'interest' is the opposition between interest or *interestedness* and *disinterestedness*. This opposition is mirrored in Hutcheson's classification of principles of actions as interested (or proceeding from self-love) and disinterested (or proceeding from benevolence). In Shaftesbury, on the one hand, actions and motives are labelled 'interested' or 'selfish' if the agent aims for "private advantage, a narrow self-end or the preservation of mere life."<sup>35</sup> Actions and motives aiming for the good of the public, on

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Stolnitz 1961, pp. 132ff. and Glauser 2002, pp. 46f. Stolnitz distinguishes between a *conative* and an *axiological* notion of interest, the first referring to what the creature supposes to be her good and desires as such, the latter referring to what is its real good - which is not necessarily the object of her desires.

<sup>35</sup> Shaftesbury 1999, p. 56. It is noteworthy that in this passage, Shaftesbury discusses Hobbes and La Rochefoucauld.

the other hand, are regarded as disinterested. This opposition between interestedness and disinterestedness presupposes desires for both cases, and it is based on a distinction between the objects of these desires. Interests in the present, conative reading of *interestedness* are gratified, to put it like this, by the satisfaction of self-directed desires. Of course, the desires constituting these interests can be erroneous<sup>36</sup> and aim at an apparent, not a real good.

However, when Shaftesbury claims that virtue is in our interest, he refers to what Stolnitz and others call the 'axiological' notion of interest. Let us capture one of its central features by a distinction which is similar to Williams' distinction between internal and external reasons:<sup>37</sup> The sentence "I is in A's interest" (where 'I' refers to an object or state of affairs and 'A' to an agent) can have two readings, one of them 'internal', the other 'external'. In the internal reading, the sentence is falsified by the absence of an appropriate motive (or desire), in the external reading it is not. If Shaftesbury speaks of virtue as being in our interest (singular), this does not presuppose a motive for action, for he uses an external notion of interest. According to this reading, virtue can be said to be in the interest of a rational agent even if she has no desire at all to act virtuously. In other words, claims about an agent's interest in the external reading are not false if there is no appropriate motive or desire in the agent. For Shaftesbury, what is in the agent's interest in the external sense has to be determined by looking at her nature and at her position as a creature in a system or species, not by looking at her desires.

According to Shaftesbury, creatures like animals *naturally* seek their interest in the axiological sense due to the (natural) constitution of their affections.<sup>38</sup> Rational creatures, however, can err and act against their own interest (in the external, axiological sense), or against their own nature, if they act on an erroneous representation of something as a good. Shaftesbury's conception of human nature is a teleological one, as in Butler. Human nature, the nature of rational beings, has to be developed and cultivated, by having the affections in the right degree.<sup>39</sup> As a rational agent's desires do not necessarily promote her interest (in the external, axiological sense), it is possible that she acts against her own interest. In other words, it is possible that the agent's interests in the internal, conative sense are in conflict with the agent's interest in the external, axiological sense.<sup>40</sup> This is the case if the agent erroneously represents something as being a good. An inter-

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<sup>36</sup> In the context of Shaftesbury's Stoic background, desires can be labelled 'erroneous', since they are conceived of as based on a false judgement about the good.

<sup>37</sup> Williams 1979, pp. 17f.

<sup>38</sup> Shaftesbury 1999, p. 167.

<sup>39</sup> Shaftesbury distinguishes between three classes of affections: 1. Natural (or social) affections, aiming at the good of the public; 2. self-affections, aiming at the private good. It is a necessary condition for rational creatures to be morally good or virtuous that both be in the right degree, i.e. not too strong and not too weak. 3. Unnatural affections aim neither at the good of the public nor at the private good and are always vicious. Cf. e.g. Shaftesbury 1999, p. 200.

<sup>40</sup> As with external reasons, it may be discussed whether there is something like an *interest* in the proposed external sense. In the context of both Shaftesbury's and Butler's teleology, however, this is presupposed.

est in the external sense can also be attributed to a species or to the public. If an agent promotes her 'real' interest (in the external sense), she makes it the object of her desires, and thus her interests in the internal and in the external sense coincide.

#### 4. Butler on self-love as love for our real self

The ambiguity in Shaftesbury's use of the term interest disappears in Hutcheson. He only uses the expression in the context of the opposition between interested (seeking pleasure for the agent) and disinterested principles of actions (seeking to promote the public good), thus in the internal, conative sense. The ambiguity disappears in Butler, too. However, unlike Hutcheson, who links the concept of interest with pleasure, Butler uses it in the external, axiological sense. What is in an agent's interest is not to be determined by looking at her desires and their objects, but by looking at what Butler calls her 'real' nature.<sup>41</sup> In other words: the content of what is in the agent's interest (in the external, axiological sense) is determined by something independent of her actual desires. Of course, the agent can desire what is in her interest in this sense. To act against one's interest, however, is not simply a matter of miscalculation of the best strategy for the satisfaction of one's desires, for it is possible that these are inappropriate from the point of view of the agent's real nature (in the teleological sense). The answer to the question why something is in an agent's interest is not that it procures the agent pleasure but that it accords with her nature. Since acting virtuously is acting according to our nature, it is in our interest.

In the context of Butler's theistic teleological conception of human nature, it is in the interest of an agent to cultivate her self by keeping her affections in the right degree and by respecting the hierarchy between the different principles in order to avoid deviating from her nature. This includes having benevolent or social affections as well as gratifying the appetites that allow the individual to preserve itself. As Butler claims in *Sermon 2* and in the discussed quotation against Hobbes, to gratify just any passion, or simply the strongest, will often violate our nature. This leads him to claim that reasonable self-love, which is a regard to the creature's private good and interest (in the external, axiological sense), must govern our behaviour.<sup>42</sup> It has to be noted that self-love is more than mere self-preservation, which just requires the satisfaction of certain particular passions, and more than a mere instrumental-rational attitude towards the satisfaction of one's desires.

<sup>41</sup> Penelhum 1985, pp. 20ff.: "[Man's *real* nature...] cannot be identified with man's nature as we see it in action all the time [...] neither can it be identified with an ideal or perfect nature which is untouched by temptation or evil." Man's *real* nature, obviously in a teleological sense, lies in the hierarchy introduced above, where conscience has the moral authority over the other principles and self-love over the particular passions. To respect one's real nature means to respect this hierarchy.

<sup>42</sup> Butler 1970, p. 103. (*Sermon 2*, §11)

If self-love is the faculty promoting our interest or having a regard to our interest in the external, axiological sense, which is linked with a teleological conception of human nature, then claims like the following are not as Hobbesian (in the sense in which Hobbes was often discussed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century) as they might appear at first sight:

Neither does there appear any reason to wish self-love were weaker in the generality of the world than it is. [...] The thing to be lamented, is not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough.” (Butler 1970, p. 14)

And in another passage, Butler claims that:

Upon the whole, if the generality of mankind were to cultivate within themselves the principle of self-love [...] it would manifestly prevent numberless follies and vices.” (Butler 1970, p.15)

If Butler understood interest and self-love the way Hutcheson does, then he would defend the very Hobbesian theses he claims to attack. But obviously he wants to give an account of what self-love *really* is, and presents a different account in his theory of the passions and affections. Self-love, for him, is not interested in Hutcheson’s sense, i.e. only aiming at pleasure for the agent. Thus, he can claim that men should have a greater regard to their own interest, or that self-love should be stronger than it generally is.

When is self-love at work according to Butler? When does a rational agent love herself? As in Aristotle, the self that is loved is obviously not the self that is merely seeking pleasure, but the flourishing self that has its affections in the right degree and hierarchy or at least aims at reaching this state. It is most accurate to read Butler’s love of the self as a kind of *caring* about one’s ‘real’ nature, or one’s ‘real’ self and its cultivation, where self-love as a general affection governs the particular affections, passions, and appetites. As such, self-love is not in opposition to benevolence. Firstly, because there is no opposition in the objects of benevolence and self-love, which are of a different order, secondly, because if benevolence is part of human nature and self-love is to make us respect and cultivate this nature, then to love oneself is to support benevolence.<sup>43</sup>

Concerning the example of the cultivation of benevolent affections, Butler claims:

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<sup>43</sup> However, Butler mentions that self-love can be too strong or immoderate: Butler 1970, pp. 102f. (Sermon 11, §9) This may be interpreted as a reflection of the rather dominant contemporary conception of self-love as a source of egoistic motives. But in the context of Butler’s theory of human nature, to say that self-love is too strong means something different: If an agent focuses all her attention on the object of self-love, which is her self’s flourishing, then this is inconsistent with her nature as a rational being, since she will neglect the satisfaction of her particular passions, selfish *and* unselfish ones, and thus harm herself.

...there is such a thing in some degree as real good-will in man towards man [i.e. benevolence, Ch.M.]. It is sufficient that the seeds of it be implanted in our nature by God. There is, it is owned, much left for us to do upon our own heart and temper; to cultivate, to improve, to call it forth, to exercise it in a steady, uniform manner. This is our work: this is virtue and religion.” (Butler 1970, p. 19)

I take Butler to say that the agent who loves herself will do this work and actively take care of cultivating her self, or her real nature.

### *Concluding remarks*

According to Hutcheson, self-love is a source of egoistic motives and desires, aiming at pleasure for the agent. A certain degree of self-love is necessary for the good of the whole. But from a moral point of view, Hutcheson remains sceptical about self-love, because it is often opposed to, or at least an obstacle to, the natural benevolent inclinations of rational agents, which constitute the moral good.<sup>44</sup> However, if the agent discovers the pleasures to be gained by the consciousness of benevolent motives, then calm and reasonable self-love can produce motives of a second order that support benevolent motives. Butler, on the other hand, wishes self-love in general to be stronger than it is. Its object is the real self and its cultivation, not pleasure. Here he follows Aristotle. Self-love, according to Butler, is not a source of motives that are opposed to benevolence. Next, when Hutcheson speaks of self-love as an interested principle of actions, or as promoting our interest, he does so by referring to an internal conative and hedonistic notion of interest. Butler refers to an external axiological and non-hedonistic notion of interest, which is linked with his theistic teleological conception of human nature. Thus, the difference in these two approaches to self-love is mirrored in their notion of interest. Furthermore, since the object of self-love in Butler is our real nature, our real self, not pleasure, his account differs fundamentally from Hutcheson’s. Also, Hutcheson’s concept of self-love can hardly be understood as a kind of love, whereas Butler’s approach may be interpreted as a special kind of love towards a self one wants to cultivate.

In the light of Hutcheson’s accounts of self-love and interest, which were more influential than Butler’s throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is obvious why Frankfurt’s claim that self-love is disinterested surprises the reader. But Frankfurt considerably changes the framework not only with respect to the concept of self-love, but also with respect to his concept of interestedness. What was relevant for the 18<sup>th</sup>-century distinction between interestedness and disinterestedness was the opposition between acting on *selfish* motives and acting on *unselfish* or benevolent motives. In this context, to be interested meant to be *selfishly* interested. In Frankfurt’s use of the term, however, a concern for another person is said to be ‘interested’ if it does seek an ulterior purpose from the well-

<sup>44</sup> Hutcheson 1729, p. 270.

being of the beloved, or if it is motivated by interests other than those of the beloved. This definition of the term ‘interested’ leaves it open whether the person is concerned about the well-being of another person for *selfishly* interested reasons (such as the benefits she derives for herself) or for *unselfishly* interested reasons (such as the well-being of a third person, whose well-being depends on the existence of a certain kind of relation between the person that is concerned and the person the concern is about). In Frankfurt’s approach, the opposition between interestedness and disinterestedness is no longer linked with the opposition between selfishness and unselfishness. This leads to a different view on the case of the person that cares about someone else in order to provide benefit to a third person. According to Frankfurt, this relation is *interested*. According to the predominant 18<sup>th</sup>-century view on interestedness, it is *disinterested*, because it is *unselfish* (even though it aims at an ulterior purpose from just the well-being of the person one cares about).

Frankfurt calls self-love ‘disinterested’ because like any other form of love, it does not seek an ulterior purpose (such as pleasure for the lover) from the well-being of the beloved, which in this case is the self. If we accept this way of using the term ‘disinterested’ as well as the assumption that self-love is a kind of love, we might still add that Frankfurtian self-love is *selfishly* disinterested, since it is undeniably one’s own well-being which is in its focus. This attracts attention to a feature that is far more essential to the concept of self-love than whether or not it does seek an ulterior purpose from the well-being of the beloved.

It may be noted that Butlerian self-love is not *necessarily* selfishly interested, as it is perfectly compatible with benevolent or (unselfishly) disinterested motives (in the Hutchesonian sense of the terms). Its superior place in the discussed hierarchical order reminds us of Frankfurt’s characterisation of loving oneself as being wholehearted, i.e. not suffering from volitional ambivalences or conflicts between desires.<sup>45</sup> This is to be understood without the theistic teleological burden of Butler’s account. For Butler, the kind of well-being self-love aims at is the cultivation of one’s real nature, for Frankfurt it is volitional unity in order to avoid internal conflicts. Both agree (against Hutcheson) that self-love does not simply aim at pleasure for oneself. Frankfurt’s focussing on volitional unity may indeed give room for a characterisation of his account of self-love as being not *necessarily* selfishly interested (in the Hutchesonian sense of the terms), since the concept of volitional unity or wholeheartedness by itself does not exclude the cultivation of disinterested and unselfish motives, such as benevolent ones. However, to characterise it in Hutcheson’s sense as plainly (unselfishly) disinterested would indeed flirt too egregiously with the absurd.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Frankfurt 2004, p. 95.

<sup>46</sup> I wish to thank Richard Glauser for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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Received: November 3, 2006

Accepted: December 17, 2006

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