

Altruism And Self-Love
by Joseph Butler (1726)

... MANKIND are by Nature so closely united, there is such a Correspondence between the inward Sensations of one Man and those of another, that Disgrace is as much avoided as bodily Pain, and to be the Object of Esteem and Love as much desired as any external Goods: And in many particular Cases, Persons are carried on to do Good to others, as the End their Affection tends to and rests in; and manifest that they find real Satisfaction and Enjoyment in this Course of Behaviour. There is such a natural Principle of Attraction in Man towards Man, that having trod the same Tract of Land, having breathed in the same Climate, barely having been born in the same artificial District or Division, becomes the Occasion of contracting Acquaintances and Familiarities many Years after; For any thing may serve the Purpose. Thus Relations merely nominal are sought and invented, not by Governors, but by the lowest of the People; which are found sufficient to hold Mankind together in little Fraternities and Copartnerships: Weak ties indeed, and what may afford Fund enough for Ridicule, if they are absurdly considered as the real Principles of that Union: But they are in Truth merely the Occasions, as any thing may be of any thing, upon which our Nature carries us on according to its own previous Bent and Bias; which Occasions therefore would be nothing at all were there not this prior Disposition and Bias of Nature. Men are so much one Body, that in a peculiar Manner they feel for each other, Shame, sudden Danger, Resentment, Honour, Prosperity, Distress; one or another, or all of these, from the social Nature in general, from Benevolence, upon the Occasion of natural Relation, Acquaintance, Protection, Dependence; each of these being distinct Cements of Society. And therefore to have no Restraint from, no regard to others in our Behaviour, is the speculative Absurdity of considering ourselves as single and independent, as having nothing in our Nature which has Respect to our Fellow-Creatures, reduced to Action and Practice. And this is the same Absurdity, as to suppose a Hand, or any Part to have no natural Respect to any other, or to the whole Body.

But allowing all this, it may be asked, "Has not Man Dispositions and Principles within which lead him to do Evil to others, as well as to do Good? Whence come the many Miseries else, which Men are the Authors and Instruments of to each other?" These Questions, so far as they relate to the foregoing Discourse, may be answered by asking, Has not Man also Dispositions and Principles within, which lead him to do Evil to himself, as well as Good? Whence come the many Miseries else, Sickness, Pain, and Death, which Men are the Instruments and Authors of to themselves?

It may be thought more easy to answer one of these Questions than the other, but the Answer to both is really the same; that Mankind have ungoverned Passions which they will gratify at any Rate, as well to the Injury of Others, as in Contradiction to known private Interest...

If it be said, that there are Persons in the World, who are in great Measure without the natural Affections towards their Fellow-Creatures: There are likewise Instances of Persons without the common natural Affections to themselves: But the Nature of Man is

not to be judged of by either of these, but by what appears in the common World, in the Bulk of Mankind.

I am afraid it would be thought very strange, if to confirm the Truth of this Account of Humane Nature, and make out the Justness of the foregoing Comparison, it should be added, that from what appears, Men in Fact as much and as often contradict that *Part* of their Nature which respects *Self*, and which leads them to their *own private* Good and Happiness; as they contradict that *Part* of it which respects *Society*, and tends to *public* Good: That there are as few Persons, who attain the greatest Satisfaction and Enjoyment which they might attain in the present World; as who do the greatest Good to others which they might do: Nay, that there are as few who can be said really and in earnest to aim at one, as at the other. Take a survey of Mankind: The World in general, the Good and Bad, almost without Exception, equally are agreed, that were Religion out of the Case, the Happiness of the present Life would consist in a Manner wholly in Riches, Honours, sensual Gratifications; insomuch that one scarce hears a Reflection made upon Prudence, Life, Conduct, but upon this Supposition. Yet on the contrary, that Persons in the greatest Affluence of Fortune are no happier than such as have only a Competency; that the Cares and Disappointments of Ambition for the most Part far exceed the Satisfactions of it; as also the miserable Intervals of Intemperance and Excess, and the many untimely Deaths occasioned by a dissolute Course of Life: These things are all seen, acknowledged, by every one acknowledged; but are thought no Objections against, though they expressly contradict, this universal Principle, that the Happiness of the present Life consists in one or other of them. Whence is all this Absurdity and Contradiction? Is not the middle Way obvious? Can any Thing be more manifest, than that the Happiness of Life consists in these possessed and enjoyed only to a certain Degree; that to pursue them beyond this Degree, is always attended with more Inconvenience than Advantage to a Man's self, and often with extreme Misery and Unhappiness. Whence then, I say, is all this Absurdity and Contradiction? Is it really the Result of Consideration in Mankind, how they may become most easy to themselves, most free from Care, and enjoy the chief Happiness attainable in this World? Or is it not manifestly owing either to this, that they have not cool and reasonable Concern enough for themselves, to consider wherein their chief Happiness in the present Life consists; or else, if they do consider it, that they will not act conformably to what is the Result of that Consideration: *i.e.* reasonable Concern for themselves, or cool Self-love is prevailed over by Passion and Appetite. So that from what appears, there is no Ground to assert that those Principles in the Nature of Man, which most directly lead us to promote the Good of our Fellow-Creatures, are more generally or in a greater Degree violated, than those, which most directly lead us to promote our own private Good and Happiness.

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