Chapter 33
Selfishness and Self-Concern

1. What is psychological egoism?

The term "psychological egoism" describes any of a number of doctrines regarding the nature of motivation. What makes a doctrine regarding motivation an egoistic doctrine is that it gives a prominent place to a person's concern for herself in explanations of why she does what she does. For a psychological egoist, a person's concern for herself is her fundamental concern, the concern from which all of her actions stem. Somewhere in back of whatever a person does, even when what he does is to help someone else, is a desire that one oneself come out ahead.

A person who rejects psychological egoism thinks instead that it is possible for people to act to help others without a thought for themselves. An action performed entirely out of care or concern for an another is an altruistic action. A person who rejects psychological egoism thinks that it is possible for people to be altruistic. (A person who rejects psychological egoism might still think that most people most of the time do not act altuistically, and even that most people never do so. To reject psychological egoism is not to be naive about human nature.) Stated negatively, then, psychological egoism is the broad doctrine that really there are no altruistic actions or, at any rate, no altruistic motivations. No one acts to benefit another when she believes that by so acting she will herself on balance suffer a loss.

Everything a person does, says the psychological egoist, is something that person does, at least ultimately, for themselves. The first form of psychological egoism we will examine is the doctrine that all actions are selfish actions. We will find that this doctrine fails in that it asigns an overly broad meaning to the word "selfish." The second form of psychological egoism we will examine attempts to improve on the first by limiting itself to motivations. It is the doctrine that all actions are performed for reasons of self-concern. We will find both that the arguments in favour of this doctrine are flawed and that the doctrine itself is implausible. We will then, in the final chapter of this part, try to devise a more plausible form of psychological egoism, and to defend it without committing the errors in the arguments we criticised.

2. To assist others is to act selfishly

Martin comes to a closed door while struggling to carry three bags of groceries. You happen to be passing by. Instead of continuing on your way, you pause to open the door for Martin. Perhaps you offer to carry one of his bags for him. Have you acted selfishly in assisting Martin?

Well, maybe you mean to impress Martin with your generosity. Or you think that by helping Martin, you increase the chances that Martin or someone else will someday help you. Or maybe by helping Martin you mean to enjoy the thrill of being kind to another person, or to enjoy the thrill of feeling superior to him. Perhaps you merely want to avoid an uneasy conscience.

If you helped Martin for one or another of these reasons, then you had a self-concerned motive for helping Martin. That is to say, you helped Martin out of a concern to benefit yourself. But would helping Martin for one or another of these reasons make what you did *selfish*? There's one good reason for thinking that it wouldn't. The good reason is the simple point that your action was directed toward the wellbeing of another person. Standardly, to call an action "selfish" is to imply both that it proceeded from a self-concerned motive and that it hurt or harmed or disadvantaged another. When no one is hurt or harmed or disadvantaged, the action isn't selfish, whatever the motive behind it. That is why it is not selfish to brush your teeth, or to study hard, or to take a coffee break, though each of these things you do for yourself and only for yourself. A person acts selfishly only when out of concern for herself she acts mindlessly of the harmful effects her actions could have and, thereby, ends up harming somebody in some way. To butt into line is to act selfishly, to take more than your share of the pizza is to act selfishly, to drive with music blaring from your open windows is to act selfishly, to refrain from clearing the clutter from your table is to act selfishly: in each case not only is the action intended to benefit oneself and only oneself, but it also actually harms another, and does so in part because the agent of the action doesn't care whether it harms another.

We see, then, that the doctrine that all actions are selfish immediately confronts a decisive objection. The objection is that some actions benefit others, and indeed are intended to benefit others. No action that benefits others is a selfish action. Therefore it is false that all actions are selfish actions. This objection relies merely on the fact that standardly the word "selfish" describes only actions that harm people.

That is not the end of the matter, though, for one attracted to the doctrine that all actions are selfish might say in reply that it is high time that we revised our understanding of the word "selfish." Perhaps "selfish" does presently apply only when a self-concerned action results in harm. But to distinguish between self-concerned actions that do and don't result in harm is to miss the point that all actions are self-concerned in origin. Our current use of "selfish" hides this important point from us. Thus, it would be best for us to widen the meaning of "selfish" to include self-concerned actions whether they harm others or not. All actions are selfish, concludes this reply, just in that all actions stem from self-concerned and, thereby, selfish motives.

There is something worth discussing in this reply, something we will discuss in the next section, namely, the egoistic doctrine according to which all actions are intended to realize self-concerned ends. That doctrine, though, dispenses with the word "selfish." The reply as stated above urges that we continue to understand psychological egoism as the doctrine that everyone is always selfish. So let us first see what is wrong with the reply before considering what might be right in it.

We can, of course, change our linguistic behaviour so that the word "selfish" no longer means what it currently means. And we should change it if doing so would improve our understanding of the world in some way. (The word "fish" used to apply to whales as well as to cod, tuna and sharks. We see things more clearly now that it doesn't.) Changing our linguistic behaviour with regard to the word "selfish," though, would not improve our understanding of things. The distinction between actions that harm others and those that don't (and between those that merely don't and those that benefit others) is a real distinction, and one that is useful to us to mark in our language. Selfish actions are a particular complex sort of self-concerned

actions. To hold that stemming from a self-concerned motive is enough to make an action selfish would be to fail to mark in language a difference both real and worth marking.

3. All actions are intended to promote self-concerned ends

To this point our discussion of psychological egoism has been focussed on a rather small issue. That issue is whether an action can fairly be described as selfish just in virtue of its stemming from a person's concern for himself. Our conclusion is that it cannot be so described. Along with stemming from self-concern, an action is selfish only if it causes another person some harm (maybe just minor harm) and does so in part because the person who performed the action didn't care whether it caused another person harm.

The doctrine with which we began, then, the doctrine according to which all actions are selfish actions, must be false. There are actions, we said, that bring others benefit; thus these actions, whether they stem from self-concern or not, are not selfish actions. And so, since some actions are not selfish actions, it is false that all actions are selfish.

Because our discussion was focussed on the small issue whether an action is selfish just in virtue of stemming from self-concern, we were able to show that not all actions are selfish while allowing that maybe all actions stem from self-concern. We did *not* say that all actions *do* stem from self-concern; we said only that *even if* all actions stem from self-concern, still it is false that all actions are selfish. But what of the claim that all actions stem from self-concern? That itself is an interesting claim. Indeed, it might well be what the advocate of psychological egoism had in mind all the time. His use of the word "selfish" was just a misguided way of dramatizing his doctrine. So let us turn to this second doctrine, the doctrine that all actions are intended to promote their agents' self-concerned ends.

What, exactly, is it to be self-concerned? There are two ways in which the idea of self-concern can be understood, and we will need to distinguish carefully between them. Most commonly, when we describe a person as self-concerned we mean to say that he is concerned to promote such ends as his own wealth or status or looks or security or pleasure. In this sense, a person who hoards his money is self-concerned, as is one who seeks fame or power, or is always checking himself in a mirror, or hires a body-guard, or is out dancing and drinking every night. On this common idea of self-concern, there is some short list of things that count as self-concerned ends. Things not on the list about which one might be concerned, say, one's sister's financial security, or one's child's happiness, or the state of higher education, or child poverty, are not items of self-concern. When a person does something intending to increase his wealth, he is acting out of self-concern, and when he does something intending to increase someone else's wealth he isn't. Or at least so we might ordinarily think.

The second way in which the idea of self-concern can be understood makes no reference to a short list of ends. Instead, on this idea one is acting out of self-concern whenever one acts to promote something one values, whatever it is that one values. A person who values his sister's wellbeing, who is concerned that his sister does well, and who acts on this value or concern is, given this second sense of self-concern, acting in a self-concerned way. He is acting to promote something that he himself is concerned to promote. We will set this second sense of self-concern aside until the next chapter, in order to discuss the first sense of self-concern, the sense in which only certain concerns count as instances of self-concern.

Sometimes we act intending to promote our own good, sometimes we act intending to promote someone else's good. Sometimes we are concerned with ourselves, sometimes we are concerned with others. Sometimes we buy a beer for ourselves, sometimes we buy a beer for our friend. At any rate, that's how things appear. Are appearances deceiving? The form of psychological egoism we are no considering says that appearances *are* deceiving. According to it, when we buy a beer for a friend, it is actually only at a superficial level, if at all, that we are intending to benefit him. Really what we intend to do by buying a beer for a friend is to serve one or another of the items on the short list of self-concern. We intend, for instance, to look good in his eyes, or to impose an obligation on him to do us a favour some day, or something else connected with our concern for our wealth or status or looks or security or pleasure. Recall the time you helped Martin by holding the door open for him when he was laden with groceries. Of course you meant in your action to ease Martin's burden. But your reason for easing Martin's burden was, in end, to benefit yourself.

If psychological egoism is true—if, that is, the doctrine that says that anything anyone does is something they do ultimately in order to satisfy one of their self-concerned ends is true—then appearances certainly are deceiving. It very much appears that people often do such things as hold open doors for others merely in order that others have an easier time of things. Strangers will help one to shovel snow from around one's car, co-workers will cover for one so that one can tend one's sick child, people will alert you to the fact that you dropped your keys—and, it seems, without any care to receive a reward for doing so. And, of course, there are dramatic examples of selfless concern for others, cases in which people risk limb or life to help another—and there are cases, moreover, in which they willingly lose limb or life trying to help another. What the psychological egoist needs to do in face of such examples is show us that appearances *are* deceiving. He needs to present us with an *argument* that whenever we do something we do it intending to promote one of the items on the short list of self concerns.

4. Failing to understand what's required

The psychological egoist who says that every action is intended to promote a self-concerned end needs to construct for us a persuasive argument to back up what he says. Otherwise we are entitled in good faith to reject his doctrine simply on the basis of what seem to us to be examples of people acting to help others without intending thereby to promote any of their self-concerned ends. It is important to notice that we are not thereby rejecting psychological egoism as something we know to be *false*. We are not, that is, rejecting it on the basis of an argument that it is false. We are rejecting it simply as unproven and in conflict with what we are inclined to believe. Until the psychological egoist provides a persuasive argument in favour of his doctrine, we have reason to pay it no mind, even if we haven't actually disproven it.

What argument does the psychological egoist have that in everything we do, we intend to serve ourselves? In the next section we will discuss an argument for psychological egoism that repays careful study. In this section, though, we will examine a point advocates of psychological egoism sometimes make in defending their doctrine, a point that they think speaks in favour of it, but that actually is irrelevant to it. Some advocates of psychological egoism (mainly introductory philosophy students, as it turns out) don't really understand what is required in a defence of psychological egoism, and so think that an irrelevant point is actually

relevant. Our task here will be to see why this point, though true, is irrelevant to the fortunes of psychological egoism.

You made life a little easier for Martin by holding the door open for him. But pausing and holding the door open for him cost you some time and effort. Why, then, did you do it? In order to make Martin's life a little easier for him, you reply; the time and effort you took was worth it. Maybe that is part of the answer, the psychological egoist allows. But, he adds, you also could have done it for the pleasure of feeling yourself to be a helpful person, or for the pleasure of hearing Martin thank you, or in order to secure Martin's good will should you need help someday, or in order to avoid pangs of conscience. We must agree with the psychological egoist that yes, it is true that you could have helped Martin for any one of these self-concerned reasons. And, moreover, we must agree that if you did do it for any one of these self-concerned reasons, you would have done it out of self-concern, and not finally out of concern for Martin. Now, says, the naive defender of psychological egoism, for any action anyone ever performs, we can very easily suppose that in the back of the person's mind, as the real or final reason she did what she did, was a self-concerned end she intended to achieve. If there was some self-concerned end in the back of her mind, then, whatever she did, however much it happened to benefit others, ultimately she didn't do it in order to benefit others. In the end, she did it to benefit herself.

Because any action could have a self-concerned motive behind it, reasons the naive psychological egoist, it turns out that all actions are performed in order to achieve self-concerned ends. Thus, despite the fact that people on occasion appear to perform actions out of a concern for others, really no one ever acts ultimately to benefit anyone other than themself.

What is wrong with this reasoning? How does it fail to show what the psychological egoist needs to show?

The point the psychological egoist makes is true. For any action, no matter how other-serving it appears to be on the surface, that action might very well be ultimately self-serving. Any other-directed action, any action that in fact benefits someone other than the person who performed it, could well really be a self-serving action stemming from a self-concerned motive. The person who sacrifices herself for the good of another might deep in her heart have sacrificed herself in order to avoid pangs of conscience or in order to fulfil her desire that her name go down in history. This can be true even when a person sincerely thinks she acted simply in order to benefit another. We can be mistaken about our motives; indeed sometimes we have reasons to be mistaken about them. We can never pretend to know for sure what goes on in a human's heart, not even our own.

The point the psychological egoist makes is true; the problem is that the point is irrelevant to whether psychological egoism is true. Those who reject psychological egoism can quite happily accept that, for all they know, their favourite example of a self-sacrificing other-directed action was really ultimately a self-concerned action. Who really knows? The point is irrelevant because it trades in what *could* be the case. Yes, it could be the case that an apparently other-concerned action was really self-concerned; but, on the other hand, maybe it was really other-concerned all the way down. The argument the psychological egoist needs must conclude that in fact all actions *are* self-concerned at bottom. Here he is arguing that since *any* action *could*, for all we know, be self-concerned at bottom, therefore *all* actions *are* self-concerned at bottom. But of course it does not follow at all from the fact that something

could, for all we know, be some way, that that something is indeed that way. It does not follow from the fact that the coin in my pocket could be a dime that the coin in my pocket is a dime. It does not follow from the fact that any action could be self-concerned that all actions are self-concerned. The point the egoist raises goes no distance at all toward establishing that psychological egoism is true.

Thoughtful and smart beginning philosophy students attracted to psychological egoism surprisingly often argue that since they can reinterpret supposed examples of other-directed actions so that they turn out to be examples of self-concerned actions, they have defused objections to psychological egoism or even argued in favour of it. For that reason, it is worthwhile exposing what is actually an obvious error in their reasoning. It is obviously an error to suppose that since an example can be reinterpreted in some way, that reinterpretation must be the correct interpretation of it.

There is a broader point here as well, as lesson to be applied elsewhere, indeed one to be applied throughout philosophy. That lesson concerns the place and functions of examples in philosophical thinking and debates. Philosophers love examples. They often rely on examples to illustrate what they say and to get their reader to focus on relevant details. They often use examples to stimulate and direct thinking on a topic. Useful as examples in philosophy are, there are some things examples cannot do. Primarily, examples are not arguments. One cannot settle a point with an example. One can settle a point only with an argument. The reason no example can be an argument is that examples need to be interpreted and evaluated, and no example is its own interpretation or evaluation. That the example in fact shows what it is intended to show is a matter to be settled only by argument. That is why the issue of psychological egoism cannot be settled by providing examples of actions that are entirely other-directed or by reinterpreting purported examples of other-directed actions in a way to reveal those actions to be self-concerned. What is needed to settle the issue are arguments for and against the claim that the examples are realistic and that one or another interpretation of them is the correct interpretation.

Take this lesson to heart. Certainly use examples in your own philosophical thinking and writing. Use them to stimulate your thought, use them to illustrate what you are saying, and use them to focus attention on what is important in the matter at hand. But do not think that any example is itself an argument. Do not think that constructing an example is a way of showing a claim to be true or a way of resolving a controversy.

5. The it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument

We are considering the egoistic doctrine that anything a person does, that person does in order to benefit himself. We are to understand the phrase "in order to benefit himself" to mean in order to maintain or increase his wealth or status or power or looks or security or pleasure, or at least to minimize loss to one or another of these (this list might not be exhaustive.) Put negatively, the doctrine reads that no one ever does anything believing that doing that thing will, on balance, diminish his wealth, status, and the rest.

If this version of psychological egoism is true, then any action a person performs intending to benefit someone else is really, at root, an action intended to benefit the agent himself. Benefitting another is a means the agent employs to benefit himself. And no one seeks to benefit another when he believes that doing so will involve a net cost to himself.

We saw in the previous section that a philosopher who would defend this doctrine cannot simply note that any action, no matter how much it appears to stem from a concern for others, might really be self-concerned in the end. It is true that any action might be self-concerned at bottom. But that point does not establish that all actions *are* self-concerned. A philosopher who would defend the egoistic doctrine regarding motivation we are presently considering needs to construct a persuasive general argument that whatever a person does, that person could not have done it except in order to benefit herself. What follows in paragraphs below might well be the very best argument the psychological egoist has for the particular doctrine we are now considering.

Whatever one does, when one succeeds in realizing one's intention in doing it, one experiences a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction or contentment. Whatever one does, succeeding at it brings one joy. If the task is minor, the joy is small; if the task is important to one, then the joy is great. But whether the action one performs is significant or trivial, it feels good to succeed. This, at least, is the contention with which a defender of psychological egoism might begin.

Feelings of pleasure or satisfaction or contentment are themselves great motivators. The thought that doing something will bring one joy is itself a powerful motivation to do that thing. "Why did you do that?" someone asks. You answer, "Because I enjoy doing it, it's fun to do, it brings me pleasure or satisfaction or contentment to do it"—this is a fine and final answer. (Imagine that someone now asks, "Why do you do things you enjoy, that are fun, that bring you pleasure or satisfaction or contentment?" Can you make sense of their question?) This point, that we are attracted to do that which we believe would bring us pleasure, perhaps seems even more obvious and acceptable than the previous point, that when one succeeds at something one experiences a feeling of pleasure.

Finally, consider what sort of concern the concern for one's own pleasure is. Is it a concern for something on the list of self-concern, or is it a concern for the wellbeing of another? Plainly it is an item of self-concern. One motivated to do something by the thought that doing it will bring one pleasure is acting out of concern for himself.

Now, says the defender of psychological egoism, bring these three points together. To act intending to experience pleasure is to act to benefit oneself, the thought that one will experience pleasure is a strong motivator, and one always experiences pleasure when one realizes one's goals, whatever those goals are. Here, says the psychological egoist, is a persuasive argument that employs only these three uncontroversial points: Since one always experiences pleasure when one realizes one's goals, and the thought of experiencing pleasure is a powerful motivator, it must be the case that that thought of experiencing pleasure is one's motivation in doing what one does. That means that one does what one does intending to experience pleasure. The intention to experience pleasure is a self-concerned intention. Therefore, all actions are self-concerned in intention. This conclusion, that all actions are self-concerned in intention, is just the doctrine of psychological egoism according to which anything a person does, that person does in order to benefit himself.

What, if anything, is wrong with this argument?

6. Criticising the inference in the it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument

An argument is a set of propositions, one of which is the conclusion, the others of which provide a ground from which the conclusion is inferred. In a good argument, the conclusion is strongly supported by premises all of which are true. There are, then, two targets toward which one who rejects an argument can direct her critical fire. She might challenge an argument by calling into question one or another of its premises. Or she might challenge it by denying that the inference from the premises to the conclusion is strong enough to warrant the claim that if the premises are true, then most likely so too is the conclusion.

In this section we will investigate the contention that the inference from premises to conclusion in the argument of section 4 is weak. In the next section we will see whether anything can be said against any of the premises of that argument.

If the inference from premises to conclusion in the it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument is indeed weak, then even if the premises of this argument for psychological egoism are true or acceptable, still, those premises give us no good reason for thinking that psychological egoism is true. The conclusion of the it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument, remember, is the egoistic doctrine that anything a person does, that person does in order to benefit himself. If the criticism we will investigate is sound, then the three premises might well be just as uncontroversial and acceptable as the psychological egoist says they are, and yet we be justified in continuing to reject psychological egoism.

The premises of the argument, again, are: 1) to act intending to experience pleasure is to act to benefit oneself; 2) the thought that one will experience pleasure is a strong motivator; and 3) one always experiences pleasure when one realizes one's goals, whatever those goals are. Now suppose (just suppose) that each premise is true. Must we conclude, given that supposition, that people always act in order to benefit themselves by experiencing pleasure? No, we needn't draw this conclusion, and indeed we ought not to. The premises imply nothing more than that we *do* experience pleasure when we accomplish a task; they do not imply, as the argument supposes they do, that we perform tasks *in order to* experience pleasure. Pleasure, say the premises, always accompanies success. But that something always accompanies something else doesn't mean that that something is either the cause or the point of that something else. That pleasure always accompanies success doesn't indicate that pleasure (or the thought of pleasure) was the cause or the point of undertaking the task.

The gap between the premises and the conclusion of the it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument will become plain when we look at an analogous argument. Martin, let us say, wants to bake a potato and so he bakes a potato. (Perhaps he's making dinner for his son.) Martin knows that when the potato is baking in the oven, the kitchen, the dining room, maybe even the living room, will fill up with the pleasant odour of baking potato. Martin knows that this will happen, he anticipates it happening, and he is happy when it happens, for he likes the warm smell of baking potato. And yet, Martin did not bake the potato in order to experience the smell of baking potato. Martin baked the potato in order to have a baked potato (and he did that for some further reason, perhaps that his son eats well). It would be a mistake for one to argue that because Martin likes the smell of baking potato and knows that by baking a potato he will produce that smell, Martin baked the potato in order to enjoy the smell of baking potato. (Martin *could* have baked the potato in order to enjoy the smell, but on this occasion he didn't.) Not every consequence of an action is an intended consequence of that action—not even is every anticipated and welcomed consequence of an action an intended consequence of that action.

And so we cannot draw from the premises that the thought of pleasure is a powerful motivator and that succeeding in a task always brings pleasure the conclusion that people do what they do in order to experience pleasure. We cannot draw this conclusion, for the experience of pleasure might in any case be a by-product of what we are doing, not the reason why we are doing it, even though we like pleasant experiences and even when we anticipate that success will be pleasant.

The it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument fails, then, to provide reason for thinking that people always do what they do in order to benefit themselves. It fails, for the premises do not strongly support its conclusion. The premises do not strongly support the conclusion, as it is possible in any particular case that the benefit the agent of the action derives from the action is merely an unintended consequence of the action. It is possible that the benefit the agent derives from the action was no part of the agent's reason for performing that action. But maybe the flaw in the it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument can be repaired. It is at least suggestive, and it should be troubling to those who reject psychological egoism, that pleasure or satisfaction or contentment do attend success, whatever the task is, and that thoughts of pleasure and satisfaction and contentment are themselves strong motivators. In the next chapter we will see whether these points can be exploited in a somewhat different way in arguing for a form of psychological egoism. Of course, these points will be available to us to exploit only if we have reason for thinking them true. We have been assuming that they are true in order to see what does and doesn't follow from them. Let us now turn to the question whether they are true.

7. Criticising a premise of the it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument

The it's-pleasant-to-succeed argument has three premises. They are: 1) to act intending to experience pleasure is to act to benefit oneself; 2) the thought that one will experience pleasure is a strong motivator; and 3) one always experiences pleasure when one realizes one's goals, whatever those goals are. Are these premises true? Do we have reason to reject one or another of them?

Premises 1) and 2) are difficult to fault; if any of the three is unacceptable, it is premise 3). Nonetheless, we should take a minute to examine premises 1) and 2), if only to assure ourselves that we understand them well.

The phrase "to experience pleasure," found in premise 1), is somewhat mysterious. It suggests that pleasure is something apart from the activity in which one engages. To say that one acts intending to experience pleasure is to suggest that one's activity is merely the means by which one realizes one's goal, that being to experience pleasure. This suggestion seems artificial. Really, what we do is engage in pleasant activities. The pleasure is part and parcel of the activity itself. Engaging in the activity is our goal, and engaging in the activity is pleasant. Perhaps there is such a thing as experiencing pleasure, and perhaps sometimes we do this or that as a means by which to achieve our goal of experiencing pleasure, but these times must be exceptional and few. (Can you think of an activity that directly produces pleasure but that isn't itself a pleasant activity?) Most often we intend to play tennis, say, or to read a book, or to work in the garden, or whatever, as an end in itself, not as a means to anything else. In intending to play tennis, or whatever, we intend to engage in a pleasant activity and, thereby, to have a pleasant experience. Said more naturally, we intend to have fun playing tennis or to enjoy ourselves in reading a book.

We can rephrase premise 1) to take account of the point that engaging in some activity and experiencing pleasure are seldom if ever two different things. We can rephrase it to say "To engage in a pleasant activity because it is a pleasant activity, or to do something one enjoys because one enjoys doing it, is to do something intending to benefit oneself." This premise is certainly unobjectionable. To do something in order to have fun doing it is certainly to do something for one's own benefit.

Premise 2) can likewise be reformulated in order to take account of the point that we usually engage in pleasant activities rather than engage in activities (one thing) in order to experience pleasure (another thing). We can reformulate it to say: "the thought that an activity is pleasant or enjoyable will strongly motivate one to engage in that activity." This premise, too, seems unobjectionable. Clearly if one thinks of something that it would be fun to do, one is motivated to do it. (That one is motivated to do something doesn't mean one will try to do it. One might be more strongly motivated to do something else.)

The only real trouble comes with premise 3). Is it true that completing a task is *always* pleasant or satisfying? It is important that this premise is not understood as the trivial claim that in completing a task, one satisfies a desire. What is needed is reason to think that always satisfying a desire is pleasant. Is there any reason to think this? Why not think instead that sometimes satisfying a desire is affectively neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant?

In any case, even if premise 3 is true but not trivially true, it is not enough, as we saw in the previous section, to justify the claim that we do whatever we do in order to experience the pleasure of satisfying a desire. Whatever one thinks of the premises of the It's-pleasant-to-succeed argument, those premises do not support the conclusion that for anything one does, one does it intending to benefit oneself.