Here is my reconstruction of Kurt Baier’s *reductio ad absurdum* argument against ethical egoism (hereafter “egoism”):¹

1. Egoism is true (assumption for *reductio*).

2. If egoism is true, then B ought to liquidate K.

3. If egoism is true, then K ought to prevent B from liquidating him.

Therefore,

4. B ought to liquidate K (from 2 and 1, modus ponens).

Therefore,

5. K ought to prevent B from liquidating him (from 3 and 1, modus ponens).

6. Preventing people from doing what they ought to do is wrong.

Therefore,

7. K’s preventing B from liquidating him is wrong (from 6 and 4).

Therefore,

8. K’s preventing B from liquidating him is not wrong (from 5).

Therefore,

9. K’s preventing B from liquidating him is wrong and K’s preventing B from liquidating him is not wrong (from 7 and 8, conjunction).

The argument is valid (meaning that all of its inferences are truth-preserving), and its grand conclusion, 9, is explicitly self-contradictory (hence false), so at least one of its premises—1, 2, 3, or 6—is false. Baier rejects premise 1. An egoist, however, can reject premise 6. To an egoist, whether it’s wrong to prevent people from doing what they ought to do depends on whether it maximizes agent utility. If it maximizes agent utility, then it’s right; if it doesn’t maximize agent utility, then it’s wrong. An egoist might also grasp the bull by the horns and reject premise 2 or premise 3 (or both).