

Should we just assume psychological egoism is true?

Is everything you do more about you than anybody else? Is it more about others?

If you will not help John who is suffering unless you find even 1% of a benefit in it for yourself then you are still more for yourself than him. Otherwise you would just help. Self-concern however small gets the balance scales to work so that you will act. That shows much much value you put on self-interest and yourself.

Our question is are you an egoist or an altruist?

We are assuming that we do not know and perhaps cannot know so we need to make an assumption.

ASSESSING MOTIVES

Motives alone can answer the question - is the human individual out for herself/himself or for others?

You give what is in your fridge to a stranger in need. Even if you look inside yourself you may not see reasons why the altruistic act you did was not really as other-centred as it seems. Good results of your actions and how good you feel for doing them blind you to the selfish motives.

Why do you not see clearly? You want to be blind in case you end up fearing that others - especially those closest to you - do not truly care for you.

So there has to be a bias. You would be mad to assume any different.

I ONLY REALLY KNOW ME

The ultimate reason I tend to put myself first is that only I can be me and I cannot do something for somebody else in their place. I cannot go to the doctor when you are sick not me - I cannot go for you. That is not selfishness for you cannot help it. What is it then? It is self-centredness which does not necessarily raise any moral questions. It would if you could really give yourself but do not.

RISKING

You may say that people do sacrifice for others. But it is not strictly speaking giving so much as risking. Risks can be selfish or unselfish. A man whose children needs him but who jumps into the current to save somebody who he knows may not in fact be in trouble is not a hero but is selfish. Even if the person is in danger and he jumps in for no other reason than to be classed a hero he is selfish. He is not being a father.

Taking money you find on the street and keeping it in case somebody left it there for you is dishonest. It is not taking but stealing simply because you are not sure. That is an example of how risking can look like sacrifice.

THE EVIDENCE FOR ALTRUISM IS NON-EXISTENT

People are not mostly altruistic for they are not among the poor serving them. They are not very generous or as generous as they could be. People prefer going clubbing to going to the soup kitchens to feed the poor. When a man jumps into the river to save a stranger child and endanger his own life to save the child we cannot consider him an altruist for he is a slave to his emotions and is panicking. A man who becomes a fireman would not do it if he felt he would one day be burned to death saving children from a burning house. He takes the risk but by taking risks we risk the welfare of our children who may have to live without us if the risk proves to be one risk too many. So we cannot really say he is an altruist.

People are not mostly egotistic for life cannot function if everybody steals and lies and cheats.

People then must at least be mostly egoistic.

SAYING OTHERS ARE SELFLESS IS INCOHERENT

Those who say they love good for its own sake are liars. They only love how they think it eventually overcomes evil and

leads to more good. That is not loving goodness but it's utility. If you were genuine you would love good no matter.

People may do good for others and say they do not do it to feel good but if they feel good then well and good.

Listing all your good qualities and the things you do well will help you feel good but for a while. The problem is that you are saying your actions are what make you matter when in fact you matter because you are a person. You are using your behaviour to rate yourself and thus treating yourself like a thing or as if you are just about the actions. The idea of deserving is at back of our minds all the time.

Revenge tends to not care if others INCLUDING God are hurt while the target is attacked. Take men who hurt their woman's child to hurt the woman. If we do that for revenge which is so dangerous for us why can't good be equally illogical? What if I am only kind to others for in some way I don't even realise, I see it as being kind to me as if others are me in a sense? Good should be under greater suspicion of being illogical despite appearances for it benefits me. My brain rewards it and I tell myself "I did the right thing."

MIXTURE?

What most people say is, "People are always a mix of selfish and unselfish." You switch. Others say you can act for self-interested and other-centred reasons at the same time. We have refuted that with John above.

They cannot say such things when they cannot see the motives. So they assume they can say them because how they act! That is really silly for it is guesswork. They end up looking good putting nice interpretations on what people do.

They say you can't say everybody is always altruistic no matter how it looks from their behaviour. They say you can't say everybody is always egoistic no matter how it looks from their behaviour. They say you can't say everybody is always egotistic no matter how it looks from their behaviour.

The question is obvious: If you can't say people are by default altruistic, default selfish then why on earth are you allowed to say they are by default both? What if there is a general default but individual ones might vary? Maybe Ann's default is to be 70% self-interested and Toby's is 10%?

Play the same game with "People are mostly altruistic..." "People are sometimes altruistic..." You get the same problem.

Why stop there? Why not, "Black people are mostly altruistic.." "Whites are mostly egotistical..."

If you can't say everybody is always altruistic or egoistic then how can you say that people are either egoistic or altruistic? How can you say they are sometimes egotistic? How can you say anything? It seems we have to assume and make do with assuming. If we have to assume, it is better to assume psychological egoism is true. An egoist should be more predictable than an altruist or an egotist. The egoist should be more controllable. We all know that people do better if we offer them sincere praise - that is if we appeal to their egos. That is an example.

The questioner should examine her or his own psyche and see if there is any altruism, egoism or egotism there. Examine your own motives for you cannot examine anybody else's.

UNSELFISHNESS CAN NEVER BE PROVEN - ITS A MERE ASSUMPTION

We can do something that benefits somebody else when it is really all about us or mainly about us.

Everybody admits the existence of self-interest. But the existence of other-interest can never be proven. For example, you are considered selfish if you hoard your money up and don't share it. Doing this does you no favours and you will know it. But it is still selfish. And if you give everything away for the poor its considered unselfish even though this may do you no favours either! It is more reasonable to assume that human nature only cares about itself.

DEFAULT

The refutations of psychological egoism and the doubts certainly show that nobody has the right to tell somebody not to assume psychological egoism! That alone is enough to turn the theory into a default. And it is natural to assume people are for themselves.

Many contend that psychological egoism is irrefutable. I disagree. You can examine yourself to see if it is true or not.

Psychological egotism is definitely refuted.

If psychological altruism or egoism or egotism cannot be proven then which of the following should we assume?

(By mostly we mean all people as they are the most of the time.)

Should we assume that people are mostly egoistic?

Should we assume that people are always egoistic?

Should we assume that people are mostly altruistic?

Should we assume that people are always altruistic?

Should we assume that people are mostly egotistic?

Should we assume that people are always egotistic?

Experience does not show we are eager altruists or egotists so choose egoism. It is the safest choice anyway.

RELIGION

We must remember that the Bible teaches that we are all sinners and because God is happy with nothing we do we need to be saved by one who earns our salvation for us: Jesus Christ. Why all the hostility towards psychological egoism, a harmless doctrine, when it is all right for Lutherans and Calvinists and true Bible believers to teach that natural man does nothing but sin or be egotistic?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

If you're truly selfish, you will never act selflessly - it will only be a pretense. If you're truly selfless, then selfishly accruing resources will actually help other people, as you're likely to NOT use them on yourself. I take it as proven that in any conflict, the less selfish should win, as it causes less collateral damage. But if we are all selfish then it follows that the "less" selfish just do selfishness in a less ugly way than the "more" selfish. There is no more or less. It is just selfish.

There is no action without a goal. You have a goal and that is why you act. Doing nothing has results and is an act and a decision too. If you are unselfish then you are creating goals that contradict what you want. Your goals are about others then not you. The trouble is no matter what you do you have a goal that you want. The goal of being selfless is still a goal thus you cannot really be selfless. It is your goal, it is part of you. It is still self-centered.

The question is that even if we cannot help it being about our goals - and being selfless is yet another self-centred goal of mine - is self-centred automatically bad?

Being self-centred is seen as bad for it supposedly makes a justification for dangerous competition. If I judge that it is good for me to be selfish then I judge it bad for the other person to be selfish. Somebody has to be willing to hurt the other to succeed. This is an argument from consequences. It does not follow from selfishness being bad or having problems that I am not by nature selfish. The argument is central to the debate. It is ultimately the only one the altruist brigade have got. Thus altruism is based on a lie and is thus not truly selfless. It is immoral never mind self-centred.

Altruism frees you from yourself and that paradoxically is self-centred for it does not feel good to be directed all the time by your desires. The desire to feel you are free from your desires is itself a form of self-interest.

It puts motive first before results and that shows it is about you.

ASSUME WEAK OR STRONG PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM

Weak argues that we only do good when we expect a reward. Strong says there is more than expectation going on - we just want to grab but in a social way.

It would seem that it is enough to assume weak psychological egoism is true. Strong would be unnecessary. Reason says that you must not assume anything too strong or too complicated when something simpler would explain the data.

We are only taking it as a sensible hypothesis - its not proven. Thus it is weak psychological egoism. Strong could be true however. We have to remain open to that.

Strong belief in weak can be as intense as weak belief in strong! It can make either take the same strong action!

Don't be fooled that weak psychological egoism really is weak. The bottom line it is still strongly saying we are out for ourselves. Both strong and weak firmly say we are for ourselves but differ only in HOW we are for ourselves.

FINALLY

Even if we could be altruistic it does not follow that any of our actions are altruistic. Pretend that altruism is possible. Perhaps there is a bit of altruism in all our actions but the main reason we do anything is for ourselves. In other words, an egoistic action that has no trace of altruism in it is still egoistic and still as egoistic as an egoistic action that is mainly egoistic though there are altruistic elements there. It is easier to assume that people are egoistic in tendency and not altruistic than to assume that they are altruistic.

A desire calls for you to be fulfilled by doing it so how anybody could avoid thinking, "I should assume psychological egoism is true", is extraordinary.

It is natural to assume that nobody really wants nothing out of us. Logic tells us to assume it too. And the evidence tells us we may assume it.

Weak psychological egoism is the default. Altruism is a fiction for when dissected it shows egoistic concerns after all. Weak is egoism and calling it weak is misleading. It is as strong as strong but in another way.

I would caution that weak psychological egoism is not really weak but is a different version from strong.