

RATIONAL/ETHICAL EGOISM TESTED AS A MORAL THEORY

We are leaving aside the notion that we cannot help anybody unless we find something in it for ourselves such as a good feeling or whatever. If it is true that we are always more or less self-interested then we have to live with that and have to say, "It is just the way we are. Ought implies can so no moral rule should be telling us to be for the other and not ourselves if we cannot do it. If we cannot be unselfish then we have to find the least harmful way to be selfish. Being about yourself does not mean you will necessarily ignore others. As a social being you cannot be properly self-interested without trying to fulfil yourself by helping others." Morality says that you cannot be asked to do the impossible so if we are naturally self-interested and not other interested even if we seem to be then we SHOULD make self-interest the central value.

Being for yourself is egoism. Some egoists say that egoism just describes what people are and what they do. They are psychological egoists. Others say that this should be the case - they are ethical egoists. It is said that psychological egoism has nothing to do with any idea of how one should act. But is it merely natural? If we cannot help seeing then we should see. If we cannot help being self-centred we should be. The principle is that you cannot be criticised or told you should not do what you cannot help doing.

What we are asking is should we be self-interested and is that good for us and others? Is it the best? Moral is best so is mature self-interest the true moral outlook?

DEFINITIONS

Egotism is trampling over others to get what you want.

Altruism is trampling over yourself so that you give gains to others and don't keep them for yourself. You either do that for you want to demean yourself and/or see others as only seeing you as a commodity and you decide to play along.

Egoism is the notion that all we do even the good we do for others should be only or chiefly about ourselves and what we want. Egoism says that all that you do should be about you and nobody else. You only help others for your sake not theirs.

As clarified earlier, it is ethical egoism that we are examining in this study.

WHY BE AN EGOIST?

Everybody wants to help others to get some kind of reward even if it is only a good feeling so everybody wants to be an egoist. Many egoists are much loved. It is safe to say that everybody gives in to the "temptation" to become an egoist but few want to admit it.

Helping x because you want to inherit her money sounds selfish. But it is really how good you think the money will make you feel that you want so if you help her for no reason but to feel good you are essentially doing the same thing. Whether it is about money or not it is about what feeling you will get. Egoism then is practical.

Others want you to get a good feeling out of helping them for nobody wants to be served by a person with no feelings.

So though doing good for others may be about you trying to feel fulfilled and that is self-centred others want you to be so the paradox is that selfishness and serving go together and serving is not really serving anybody but yourself. If a wife cares about her husbands happiness and not her own or the relationship then it perhaps is okay for him to have an affair? This is the kind of nonsense that comes from glorifying self-sacrifice.

WEAKNESS

Egoism and altruism both say that if you do something out of moral weakness that is self-interest. Weakness comes from self-interest.

Weakness in some way is a feature of all that we do for we all have fears so there is no such thing as a truly altruistic act.

THE "EVIDENCE" AGAINST

What is the case against egoism being an acceptable even if not ideal description of what it is to be moral?

"An act should not be categorised and dismissed as self-centred and self-interested simply because a minor motive in it is for your benefit or it benefits you more than you intend." But why are you accepting that motive? Why can't you help that suffering patient for them and not you? You are weighing their wellbeing against the 1% or whatever of self-interest. You are equating. So the act is self-centred though it is easily seen why it passes for not being very self-interested.

Getting a reward or possibly getting a reward for doing something for someone even it is just a good feeling makes your altruism suspect. In altruism, if the intention or benefit is accidental and not-intended then it is not selfish. But it seems obvious that nobody can really claim to have done it out of pure altruism. So they should say that there is a selfish bit. Suppose there is. What if the selfish bit is secondary not primary? Primary is essential and secondary is non-essential. What if your essential reasons for helping x are so that x will get well but your non-essential, secondary, reason is that you will be praised? The secondary is more important to you than you say. If it were not you would just drop it. The two are primary reasons.

All hurting of others involves an element of wanting to hurt them for the sake of it. They are not you and you cannot be as sure that they exist and suffer like you would for you are not them. But altruists have this problem too. I am not x so I cannot know if x can suffer the way I could or if x is real in the way I know I am real. Altruism blames this perception for evil and harm when it has it itself. Altruism itself harms anybody who is not an altruist by lying about them.

It is said, "People hurting themselves proves they are not self-centered. They are taking hard dangerous drugs." The answer is that they are self-centred. What they are doing makes them selfish.

People risk their health and lives in a way that benefits others. The answer is that just because my sacrifice helps you that does not make me unselfish. We have seen that hurting yourself is not necessarily a form of self-sacrifice or a proof you are unselfish.

The answer to, "Just because I want to help you does not mean I am doing it to satisfy myself or for me" is, "Just because my sacrifice benefits you, it does not make me unselfish." So we are back where we started.

At best we do not know. That people won't admit they don't know shows that altruism is really really unlikely to happen. Altruism is not praiseworthy if it is built on pretending you know more than you do! That would be selfishness pretending to be altruistic.

Abusing yourself for the sake of selfishness is being selfish. And other people have to suffer because of you and somebody who has always cared for their health may have to do without a hospital bed that you have put yourself in. So you should never call any act a pure sacrifice. Why? For abusing yourself in the name of selflessness is as bad.

The notion that I deny myself now for the sake of having a good future proves I am not egoist is so silly that we will pass over it.

ABSURD TO BE COMMANDED TO THINK OF YOURSELF

Ethical egoism says it is never ethical or moral to do something without thinking of yourself. It is a problem how it turns it into a command and condemns the baker who works to give you bread for nothing.

The answer is we are not saying there is any real commanding. It is practical to get ice off your footpath but not a command. It is a practical directive not a command.

And realistically the baker has to think of his own interest in order to be able to keep giving you bread. What if he puts work before his food and dies?

Why are we saying it is never ethical or moral? Why are we not saying it is morally indifferent? It could be that we should be self-interested and if we are not that is not immoral but is in fact no different to choosing an apple over an orange. It is morally irrelevant or indifferent. Weak versions of ethical egoism say that it is either morally indifferent or only slightly immoral so it does not really matter.

Altruism does not command you to care about yourself for yourself but commands you to care for yourself just so others can benefit. So we have a kettles and pots argument here from those who complain that ethical egoism commands.

With ethics you need punishment if you don't comply so it seems odd to punish somebody for not being an egoist or doing the egoist thing. But a person who does good only because others think he should is an egoist anyway. The law cares about

outward crimes and if they are done deliberately and nobody is going to ask how your crime degraded you for it is not about you.

So I command myself to be an egoist in a metaphorical sense. This command is so basic that to claim God gives me commands is absurd. "I command me to find something for me in all I do for God or anybody else" contradicts, "God comes first and he commands me to be loving and compassionate."

ABSURD FOR THE EGOIST TO TELL OTHERS TO BE EGOISTS

It is a contradiction to say that ethics is about what your good is and that others should work for your good. Egoism is everybody telling everybody to look out for themselves. It seems that it is not egoism to throw away what you need like that and tell them they can take it.

The answer is that egoists can and do work well together. Competition is necessary for an egoist to be a proper egoist and to learn.

It does not matter if you are altruist or egoist, if you do not have the most important resources there will be war. There is enough to go around to keep egoists reasonably happy. If you want to feel good about the good you do for yourself and others that is a very unifying thing. Conflict only happens over resources which is why we need to get back to that basic.

Forms of egoism that say it is up to you to be egoistic and others are not called on to be the same are mistaken. They forget that if egoism is good and leads to good then everybody should pursue it. Something can be good in itself or good for me. But there is a sense in that good for me is good in itself as well. The two are not opposites. It is the way good is good and not just any connection between me and goodness that gives me reason to pursue the good. Pain is bad and not bad just because I have it. That is why I must try to help those who are in pain.

The argument against recommending egoism only condemns not egoism but those who encourage it! It is not an argument against egoism at all.

CONFLICT?

As it is assumed to be arbitrary to put yourself before another or x before y as an egoist might do conflict then has to happen.

Ethical egoism is thought to force people into conflict. The theory seems to suggest, "Fight if you have to." A rich pensioner with loads of money may be looked after kindly by the carer who is happy to get a weekly wage from keeping her alive. The nephew may want her to die to get her money and give it to charity. What if there is only one seat at the concert and John wants to go and Andy wants to go. Ethical egoism tells them to go. But who gets the seat? This seems to show ethical egoism is inconsistent. But in fact it is not the theory's fault that there is only one seat. One will get the seat. The theory only asks you to seek the seat if it is there. It is silent on whether it is best for John or Andy to get the seat.

The theory says you must not do harm to another to get what they have for that is not egoistic. To hurt another is to say another should hurt you to get what you have. It is a theory encouraging competition not conflict.

[Conditional egoism is the idea that egoism is fine as long as the end product is ethical or good or morally acceptable. So you can selfishly covet your rich relative's money but not as long as it is only for you. It is fine if you want it so that you can give it to a charity. There is a problem in working out what is really for the common and public good but the argument claims that conditional egoism is the best method in an unpredictable world and is not a panacea.]

QUESTION BEGGING

You might reason, "Doing x [eg donating to the homeless shelter] helps my self-interest". But what about, "Doing the absurd helps my self-interest too for I want to be bigger and stronger than the truth"? Critics of egoism say that egoists cannot oppose the latter. It would have to be a hypothetical scenario then for nobody can really take that attitude. Using nonsense as a crutch leads to you losing your grip on what is real for absurdities lead to more absurdities and reality cannot really be kept at bay. It bites back.

An altruist then could be an egoist trying to master truth and reality with the self.

Question begging is a sign of selfishness for it is about what you want to believe and not the truth. So it is question begging to say that people are at core altruistic or egoistic.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Now if I should put myself first what happens if part of my mind is put into another body? Now there are two of me. What if both bodies have all my memories? It is said that neither can care about me for they will have separate lives. Some say that neither is to be identified with me for there are two. There being two mes means there is no me any more.

Some say it is not continuity that makes me me but memory. But these two have all my memories.

The answer is that when the split happens each me has to be an egoist and if they are me or not is beside the point.

CONCLUSION

The failure of arguments against ethical egoism tell us to embrace it. And yet there are arguments for it. Regardless, people are forced by the realities of life to submit to it in a what is in it for me kind of way. We have egoism all around us and that can be and is a good thing. Ethical egoism is about self-growth in tune with others. It connects people together with good feelings.