

IS EGOISM TRUE? IS IT ALL OR ESSENTIALLY ABOUT ME DEEP DOWN NO MATTER WHAT I SAY OR DO?

TERMS

We live with other people so how may human nature tie in with that?

Philosophy says there are only two options being selfless or self-centred.

Others like to sub-divide that a bit.

One: selfless which is altruism.

Two: egoism which is selfishness that benefits you and automatically benefits those who encounter you.

Three: egotism which is selfishness that rises from malignant attitudes and spills over into sociopathic actions.

THE QUESTION

What are we asking here?

We are asking if anybody really can ever help another person without doing it in some way perhaps even a small one for themselves. We are not talking about the ethics of being self-interested but asking if human nature is just simply self-interested.

LET US SEEK THE ANSWER

What are the two forms of self-interest?

Egoism and egotism.

What is egoism?

Egoism is doing good for yourself and others for some self-concerned reason. Basically, it means doing good because you enjoy helping others.

What is egotism?

Egotism is helping others just because you want praise or money or a good reputation or to feel important or to patronise. It is wrong and mercenary simply because it is unnecessary and leads to danger for you.

How can selfishness be good?

Its a matter of terminology. Self-centredness is thinking of yourself but avoiding harming others. Not helping is harming so you have to help others. Selfishness is thinking of yourself even at the expense of the welfare of others. It is possible to be doing that even if no disadvantage to others is done. "If I don't want to help I would not help so you are lucky I want to help you."

What wording will we use

For this page we can use the term egoism or self-centredness. We will use egoism.

Is egoism the best?

It is kinder and the best. We like people to help us because they enjoy doing so. We want them to be like that too. This is the paradox of egoism, do it the right way and you do what everybody really wants - enjoyment.

But there are objections?

True. The few cases of inevitable harm do not justify throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

What options do we have in relation to altruism, egoism and egotism?

The menu is selflessness or thinking of yourself. There are no in-betweens so it has to be one or the other. With thinking of yourself you have to choose between egoism and egotism. There are no in-betweens.

But we can have a mixture of motives some of which are selfless?

We know but the main and top motives are either one or the other. When calling an act good or bad or selfish or unselfish you do not consider motives that hardly count but the main ones.

What motive, self-interested or selfless, has the most weight?

Self-interested. If you cannot help x unless you find something in it for yourself then self-interest even if it is about the 1% benefit shows you are so taken with yourself that you will not help unless you get even a small benefit. What it says about you is what matters.

What claim do we make about egoism?

We have attained full certainty that altruism is wrong and fictitious and evil so either egoism or egotism which are both interpretations of the principle, "Look out only for number one", is right. We have seen that the egotistic form of self-interest is unnecessary, self-defeating, wrong and irrational. So if we are not born egoists that is how we will end up anyway. We have to live in the real world.

Is looking-after-number-one what we have whether we like it or not?

Animals are egoistic and very often they are egotistic. Animals have wants but don't make choices. We evolved from animals and many of them behave like they have free will, the power to be altruistic or egoistic, though they do not. We are no different. Thinking of yourself not altruism is natural. We are like that by nature so we cannot become altruists any more than we can go back to being apes.

So?

Telling us to be selfless is an act of violence against our nature.

What is the main proof from consciousness that egoism is true?

I am aware that I am aware and that is the only true certainty. Everything else is called a certainty but is really just a strong probability. Morality says prioritise decisions based on things that are the most certain so I come first.

Elaborate?

Morality says a moral ought only applies if you can do something. You cannot really make another as valuable to you as yourself. It is immoral to be asked to!

Any other proofs?

Choice means you see what is on offer. You only have one thought and one desire at a time and it causes you to act. You are not aware of anything else the moment you choose so you really don't choose at all. The reasons are pushed into the background at the point where you react which is like forgetting. Choice is an illusion. You do something because you want to and not because you see it as good or altruistic and that is you being out for you rather than them. Nobody denies we want things but some deny that we have choice.

But surely we do choose?

We choose to shoot in the dark more than we realise. That is choice yes but not much of a choice. Choice has a strong undercurrent of irresponsibility so it is inherently self-interested.

But surely when you do good for others you are not thinking of your own pleasure?

Your desire is to see others happy which is the same as wanting to fulfil the desire. You protect yourself by realising that taking all the time is not natural so that is your reward.

Can you answer the objection that a desire being mine does not mean I only have it for I want to feel fulfilled by having it and also by exercising it?

Owning a desire does not mean it is about me. But desire is part of what I am. Its not a faculty but part of my personhood. A person is a kind of desire-haver. So the logic fails.

Any other proofs to support that?

Altruism says to treat the other as an equal for the alternative is you being condescending. Patronising poses as charity. You want to make other equal to yourself but you cannot. You work up the desire and create it. A desire to help is not the same as a desire to help as an equal. That is why the helping of another as your equal is self-indulgence. It is self-indulgence in the way getting yourself to like cheese and eating it is.

What other proofs are there that wanting to help is not an unselfish thing?

You are egotistic if you want money at somebody's expense though you know it will bring you misery. So egotism can be about wanting something even if it is not pleasure. If so then selfless is not necessarily really selfless. Egotism as in using others for happiness is stronger than egotism that uses them for what you know will make you miserable. In the latter case the only pleasure you have is being doing what you want. That is a pleasure in itself. So merely wanting to fulfil your desire to help is making it about you.

How could it be egotistic to seek money when you know it will only bring misery and would amount to seeking pain rather than money?

It is still about YOUR choice and you. A egotistic choice to suffer is still an egotistic choice. While pleasure is self-centred it is not the only way to be self-centred.

Does the fact that when I "choose" and what happened before to bring me to this point is now out of my mind tell me anything?

That thinking and responding to pleasure stimuli are two separate powers. This not-thinking has to be done to allow us to attain to the goal of the pleasure. It is part of getting the pleasure. You would not be doing the action except for the pleasure. It's at the back of your mind, in your subconscious if you like, but its still there and it is motivating and driving you.

But I am not always having pleasure now am I especially when I aim for future pleasure?

Wrong. This subconscious driving force makes it pleasurable to go along with it even when the future pleasure is in your distant future. There is a pleasure in anticipating pleasure. The pleasure is not your main goal but your pleasure at thinking of the goal and reaching out to it is. Every moment you experience pleasure of some degree that is accompanied by a thought that determines what you will do the next moment.

Are we egoistic creatures even when we do good for others?

Being good implies caring about the values of love, compassion, kindness and justice so if altruism is good then that is what we have to care about. We do the good no matter what it is mainly because we want to. The good is a secondary matter and sometimes we don't even care about that. So in helping we are more out for ourselves than we would be doing anything else.

Is there an objection about how motives come from other motives?

Some say that to desire the desire you have to desire the desire that makes you desire and have a desire for the desire that makes you desire the desire the desire and so on to infinity which is ridiculous. But this is wrong. If true it would mean we have an endless list of motives for everything. But it starts somewhere. The foundation desire is the desire for happiness.

What is happiness?

Happiness is not just pleasure it is sensible pleasure for we reject happiness often when it will mean less happiness in the future. Happiness that we snatch knowing it is a mistake is not full happiness or contentment for it is accompanied by at

least a little pain and worry. This basic drive for happiness manifests in different forms.

What does our fundamental drive for happiness tell us?

That everything is used as a means to try and open the door to happiness or cause it. I am about my own happiness first and foremost.

Does it make sense to categorise egoism as good and bad and neutral?

We have answered that except in relation to neutral. Neutral would be when you do what is as much egoism as egotism or egoism as altruism. Neutral is a choice when something is left out say selflessness or egotism. So it is not really neutral then. Real neutral is when the motive is as altruistic as it is egoistic and egotistic. Each one is a third of it. That is too neat and suspect. It would take choice for it to be all three and so precise.

But what about neutrality as in how your work results in what you would expect from something being in one of those categories?

Many believe that self-interest in terms of results is never always bad. Sometimes it is good or for the best and other times it is neither good or bad ie neutral.

What if it is neutral?

Then nobody really can tell if an act is egoistic/egotistic/selfless or what for it can be any combination.

What about the idea that you must look after yourself before you can help others and be well enough to help them?

That can apply either to altruism or egoism. The person who is about everybody else has to look after themselves in order to manage to help others. It is not about self-care but using it as a means to help others.

What about the idea that you must love yourself and then loving others becomes possible?

That is definitely egoism.

Why?

If you say you can only love others if you start to love yourself that turns others into afterthoughts.

Does that mean it is wrong?

It means that if it is true then it is the way we are and we have to live with it.

What does altruism say about looking after yourself for the sake of others?

That it is either neutral or a necessary evil. If it is just a way of getting yourself to do good for others then it is self-manipulation. If you did not trick yourself you would not help so in reality despite your behaviour you do not really value them or care about them. It is manipulative to manipulate yourself to help them for that leads them to feel cared for when they are not. None of that is good and the good you do is only sort of good so it is not neutral morally to look after yourself or to help others. No it is a necessary evil.

What does egoism say about looking after yourself so that you will fit in with others?

That involves manipulation too. Its just a way of manipulating others so you can fit in and avoid suffering. But it has the potential to be more honest - something altruism cannot have.

What is conditional love and unconditional love?

Conditional love is not love at all. Its like, "I love you if you keep making my tea in the morning". It's really the tea-making you care about and not the person. It is an imitation and often a good one of real love – I love you just because I love you which is what unconditional love means. Unconditional love denotes love that does not care what you do for it

will still be there for you. It values the person and not their qualities.

What is the proof from conditional and unconditional love that egoism is true?

A mother says she loves her son unconditionally. In truth she loves him because he was born from her body. She does not love him for being a person because there are loads of persons she does not love that way. The top example of unconditional love – motherly love - is a lie so all forms must be the same. Everything we do is for something selfish's sake.

If motherly love is either for her sake or the son's. Why can't it be both?

If you love your son for your own sake then that is conditional love. So the love has to be for the other person's sake only.

What components has unconditional or real love got?

To love is to value a person for being a person and for that person's sake – if it is for your own then you are not loving that person unconditionally but loving yourself - and to value their happiness next.

How does valuing their happiness relate to unconditional love?

If persons should be happy then it follows that a person is an absolute value and is more important than happiness itself. You cannot start saying a happy person has more value than one who is not.

Is that a problem?

Yes for we would rather our happiness was valued than us so this love cannot satisfy and is really useless. Useless or unwanted love is not love at all. Nobody wants to hear when they are in extremes of terminal agony that they cannot be put to sleep or even want to die because they are valuable.

What do all those considerations about unconditional love tell us?

That only conditional love is possible and therefore that we have no free will to choose between conditional love and unconditional love. Free will is no good to a God when it cannot make either of these possible.

Does anybody really value another person absolutely?

No because if say your mother could live forever provided you took on permanent and extreme mental and physical torture you wouldn't do it. Nobody would urge the ones they love to go for it and put life first. This tells us that unconditional love is a romantic illusion.

Is unconditional love as much a delusion as the grace of God?

The terrifying thing about it is that if God loves us unconditionally we are in trouble for he is boss and his love cannot warm our hearts but scare us to death. If he proves that unconditional love is possible then we are bad for not being like him. He has made us for suffering because we cannot love unconditionally though religion claims that free will was granted to us to be able to love that way. Free will for that reason is just a cover for abuse and belittling.

Why might unconditional love be impossible?

To love another unconditionally for their own sake is not easy or achievable for you are not as sure that they exist as you are that you exist so you must be doing it for your own sake. This may be the reason we are naturally produced as egoists for we can't be anything else. Any motive that is about you and not the other no matter how slight means your love is not truly unconditional. 99% unconditional love is an oxymoron.

Does forgiveness not count as an act of selfless and unconditional love?

Were we so unselfish or capable of selflessness we would not find it so hard to forgive even when what is done wrong is not the worst. We know we have faults ourselves that all add up to serious harm. We know that we have often willed terrible things to happen and would have carried them out if we had the power to do them psychically or just by willing.

Why do we find it so hard to forgive somebody who has hurt and degraded themselves by doing wrong?

Because we are not naturally unselfish. It shows us how little compassion we have.

Why are we so reluctant to take our punishment when we do wrong?

We don't mind as much when somebody else is punished so it is a sign that we should at least be considered self-centred until proven otherwise

Why are we so anxious to condemn people when there is no proof that we would be any better if we were in their shoes and in their precise situation?

We like to pretend to be good. Altruists pretend to be self-sacrificing and they have no right to expect us to believe them and their performances.

Why are we so keen to superciliously tell other people what to do?

Even when we don't, we would if we thought we could manipulate them while not making many sacrifices ourselves. An obvious example is the pope. It is okay for him to make trouble for people needing birth-control for he is celibate. The only preaching should be in action. It is also selfish for people who don't do much for others praise others for doing what they wouldn't do.

Give an example of goodness pretending to be unselfish?

At funerals, you have to listen to the minister extolling the sacrifices made by the dead person. You know the minister is glad he never had to make them and he is approving of the pain that the dead person underwent while he wouldn't take as much.

Does empathy show we are not really as good as we pretend to be?

We know that it is bad for hurtful things to happen to other people but we never feel sorry for them unless we remember what it was like for us to have had similar experiences. It is not the person's pain that causes my pain but my memory of my pain. In the short-term, I cannot help what I feel for the past causes it. When I feel sorry for another person I am merely only indirectly feeling sorry for myself. This being true, one wonders how religion can have the nerve to say that suffering has a good purpose.

If I feel depressed all the time as an adult because my mother beat me up as a child and I go to therapy and end up happier have I helped my feelings?

It only looks as if I did. I could have been the kind of person therapy could do nothing for. It was the way nature turned me out that cured me not the therapy. The way I was made needed that catalyst. I do not create or make the goodness in me so I can never be called selfless.

Is religion altruistic or capable of it?

It is easy for religion to condone the calamities God sends when it doesn't have much bother with him. The answer is no. It goes out of its way to be about itself and goes beyond nature so it is egotism we have here.

Is it the case that if we are so selflessly good then we would be strict but we are too worried about what other people think and not what is good for them?

Yes.

Should those who demand sacrifice make plenty themselves first?

Yes. We are glad when somebody is tragically killed because it was them and not us. These things are at the back of our minds all the time though they are only shown when the conditions are conducive. They are still present and behind all our supposedly virtuous actions because they are present subconsciously. Any good we do it is only done because it suits us.

If we are so altruistic then why are we so changeable? Why are we such a peculiar mixture?

Good question. A wife can hate her husband more than anybody else in the world and then stand up for him when somebody says something slighting about him though it is really nothing. She believes he deserves to be talked about so

why does she stand up for him? One thing is for sure it is not for logic or because of reason so it must be for emotional gratification. If she were really altruistic she would be using her reason as she understands it and be behaving in a consistent way. Altruism hates reason but at the same time it would need it to exist.

If we are so altruistic then why do we love people who are good to us no matter what harm they have done to other people or can that be reconciled with altruism?

No. We are in effect saying, "I am glad it was them they hurt and not me. If it had been me I would not be their friend. I know that they would hurt me if I became the persons they have hurt. This relationship is false but I still love it." This love of enemies as long as they belong to other people has no resemblance to altruism.

If we are capable of being altruistic would likes and dislikes influence us so much?

No. These likes and dislikes are arbitrary by natural law. For example, some Christians like people to be celibate and others do not and it is just the way they are. We are not altruistic as shown when it is the end of the world for one when a love affair ends. One should be just grateful to be alive so long and to be living where one is instead of being dead or entrapped in a hell-hole in the Third World?

If we are so altruistic or able to be then why do we smuggle a prejudiced guess into nearly every judgment as if we know it all?

If Jake hits Billy we will side with Billy even if Billy was always a worse person. We certainly cannot use reason to defend this but only prejudice if we believe in free will.

Even if we are unselfish will selfishness emerge?

Selfishness is going to emerge and altruism is egotistical hypocrisy. The Humanist refuses to succumb to religious and altruistic propaganda and pretend that this problem of altruistic hypocrisy doesn't exist for it has to be admitted and dealt with. Dealing with it ensures that self-interest emerges not as egotism but as egoism and is properly balanced. The altruists and religionists have only their own agenda at heart as long as they turn their blind eyes to it and they can only succeed in increasing vice.

What is the proof from the limits of knowledge that altruism is a hoax?

You cannot be sure when you are helping a child that you are not helping a future mass murderer. Everybody seems prone to the everything happens for a reason or a reason can be made idea which amounts to saying that if you maul a child to death you can say maybe he would have grown up to be a murderous dictator.

What does it mean then if I am also a believer in God?

God goes with the notion that everything happens for a reason so I kill a child in a road accident I can tell myself that God let it happen for the child would grow up to become a monster or something as bad.

But do we know anybody that says that?

It is what they mean by their ideas even if they do not say it outright. The craftiness is just egotism.

What is the proof from human motivation and our inability to control all the consequences of our actions that altruism is a hoax?

We can only hope or believe that the good we do actually does good. We could help a beggar man with money and he could use it to buy pain-killers to kill himself with. It is about what we think not the other.

But we did this because we intended to be good and that is what counts surely?

But that is really an attitude of, "As long as I have a good motive I don't care if it works or not. My motive is really about me and not the other person." Another thing it says is, "It's the rule to have good motives. I can have a good motive just for the sake of the rule. I do it for the rule."

Can you say human nature is egoistic though it is not ingrained?

Yes. I can be made to be for myself or I can be INDIRECTLY made to need to be and have to be egoistic.

So we are saying DNA makes you egotistic but even if it didn't there are other ways for it to become ingrained?

Yes. Egoism even if not ingrained in our makeup is what we have whether we like it or not or what we live by whether we realise it or not. So in that sense it is part of human nature. I do not have to eat but I do and my nature is that I am an eating creature. This is an example of ingrained being indirect.

What if we cannot prove it is our nature?

We can. It is proven. And we have shown that you may as well count everybody as an egoist anyway.

What is the proof from the arbitrary nature of society's morals that altruism is a hoax?

Altruism is really egotism in disguise – it is vicious and unnatural and deceitful. For example, nobody really knows what a fitting punishment is for any criminal. Nobody agrees on it.

Can you refute the examples that show that we do not just go after benefits for ourselves in all that we do?

Yes.

Isn't knowledge something we go after though it will not bring us a lot of pleasure showing that we are not all about ourselves?

But without knowledge you cannot be happy for the brighter you are the better you can think of a way to be happy and to cope.

Surely if you were just out for yourself you would not care if others think well of you or not after you die?

It gives you pleasure now to want people to miss you after you have gone. If you don't want them to then you don't think much of yourself now.

When you are not your child and you want that child to have a good successful life how can anybody say you are self-focused?

You made them and worked for them and want the thrill of being considered a good parent and because nature forces you to have feelings for their welfare. You see children as extensions of your body and your personality so you love yourself in them.

Persons can choose to die horribly to save strangers so how can you question their altruism and sacrifice?

Suggested Answer: They do not want to die but to live. But they feel their life will be worthless with the burden of guilt if they do not die for them. They feel forced by this fear to give up their life.

Suggested Answer: They see the full horror of life and what can happen and seeing that ugliness makes them want to react to the terrible evil by trying to escape it by going into non-existence. The vision of evil when it is happening has maximal power and force. The evil seems less bad when the moment is over. The evil forces them to try to escape.

Suggested Answer: We do nothing unless we feel like it and the persons are taken over by raw emotion. It is the emotion that makes them crazy so they risk their lives. It is not the goodness in them that wishes to save a life. If they didn't have the emotion that strongly they wouldn't bother. They cannot think so it is not a real risk – real risks go with informed calm consent.

Suggested Answer: Does anybody see death as real? People who commit suicide often have forgotten that it is annihilation and seem to picture death as getting rid of current problems and enjoying that freedom!

Suggested Answer: The questions about what being loving and good and selfless make us feel unprotected. We know that we cannot get the safety we crave from altruism or morality or egoism or anything. Death to some is an escape route though they not be aware. You always know more than you realise.

Are you not mad for saying that nearly everybody is wrong for saying altruism is possible and not only that but an important reality?

Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism all command people to check why they do the things they do. The thoughts and feelings associated with the act have to be identified and their role in the act has to be discerned. The devotees must start to admit the truth that altruism is deception. They know already.

What is the link between egoism and Maslow's self-actualisation the term he coined?

He defined it as "the desire to become more and more of what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming." He saw love etc as a means for getting this. He is saying what we are saying. Good deeds and love are about me even if I don't realise it.

Conclusion

No argument for human beings being capable of being unselfish works. It is hardly selfless to say you can be selfless when you cannot really show it! So you cannot be human without being for yourself. "Ask not what others can do for you but what you can do for them." That sounds good but it is a cynical trick. Human nature is not like that. And moreover human nature responds to what is around it so egoism is directly programmed into human nature and indirectly as well. It is not a matter of just being egoist - it is reinforced. Human personhood is inveterate in being about itself in its construction and also inveterate in simply having to be about itself because of the world around. There is direct programming and there is another direct programming that lets reality program you. Direct and indirect force does not necessarily imply strong and weaker force. Indirect can be the strongest programmer. Egoism is natural but can at times get corrupted into egotism.