

Weak Psychological Egoism - we only act for another if we expect a possible reward

Are we at least a little self-interested even when we act for another?

Weak psychological egoism is an interesting theory. It says that there is a bit of self-interest in all that we do no matter how sacrificial it seems.

Strong says we act just to get something.

Weak says we act in case we get something.

I would assert here that being able to do something in case there is a reward is like turning your action into a sort of reward. You reward yourself with the expectation.

Intention is desire and intention is always expecting a reward

Strong psychological egoism means that the person intends to get a reward. Soft says the person merely expects a reward. It has to be about intention. You cannot say that a person doing a sacrifice and getting a reward is self-interested just because they got a reward.

Some supporters of weak think that we intend to get at least a small benefit from what we do. They would see the fact that we like to fulfil our will as a benefit. You must like something a bit otherwise you won't do it. Liking means you take some pleasure in it. Here the expectation is that our intention will not hurt us and that is a reward in itself.

Psychologists tell us that we have a lot of conscious and unconscious motives for any action we perform. You can be altruistic and not realise you in fact are not altruistic. People only intend to do something when they expect to get even a little something out of it even if they think they do not intend to or it might not happen.

There is something not other-centred about doing good when you expect some good for you MAY come from it. Knowing something good for you WILL come for it makes it more egoistic or more about you even if you have no intention.

Do you really have no intention? Who says you are admitting to yourself or that you are aware. It is easy to think you do not intend to get something when you do intend. Intending and expecting go together. Expecting a reward can hide your intention to get it even from yourself.

The feeling that you can do what you do even if you don't like it is a reward and you know to always expect that reward.

If expecting a benefit for yourself to come from what you do is self-centred even if you don't intend it then clearly the more you expect the good the more self-centred you are. A major expectation is not that say people will praise you or that you will feel good. The biggest expectation is that you will feel that you can do what you choose to do and that feeling even if dull is still a reward. That feeling is behind every reward you see for what good is any gift or reward if you are going to feel like a machine? The feeling is ultimately what other rewards are about. They mean nothing without it.

You always gain from whatever you intend to do. If you give all your money away to the poor you gain in the sense that you did what you wanted to do and expectations and potential rewards motivated you. It might not have felt that pleasant but it was what you wanted to do under the circumstances. You deprived another of the chance to be as good as you. When you act somebody else cannot.

Jesus said that those who give out of their wealth are still selfish in doing so. They expect to still be rich after giving so they cannot claim to be selfless.

Even when we hate doing something, we like it enough to do it. The reward we expect when we do things we hate is so that we can feel stronger when bad things happen to us. There is a freedom and a protection in doing what you despise.

Self-interest is a drive. We need friends and we need family. We gain from helping them so we help them for ourselves. Self-interest is fuelled by expectations.

I expect to gain fulfilment from seeing good happen to another.

Unless I know my action will really benefit the other person forever I cannot be an altruist. In so far as I don't know, I am doing it not because it is right but because I want to be right. My expectations from acting are about me.

Desire is about me and my expectations

A desire can never be completely about the other person.

Strongest motive is to fulfil a desire. You want to satisfy your desire for having expectations and for specific expectations .

Is to feel love to love the feeling or the person? Is the love that seems to be about another really about the other person?

Desire is the wish to gain. People say it is the wish to gain or the wish for another to gain. But the latter tries to cover up the fact that your gain is to see the other gain. It is about you though it looks like it is not. The motive is self-interest. Another benefits but that does not mean it is not about self-interest.

Objection

There is only one real objection to psychological egoism in all its forms. "Just because a desire is mine that does not mean the desire is about me, mainly about me or partly."

This treats desire as a possession but it is not. It is an experience. "Just because my toe is hurt does not mean my toe is what I am about" is a possession statement. "I want to help" is a different kind of statement. Ironically a lie has to be told about desire and it has to be downgraded to a thing you have as if it is not what being a person is about in order to deny that we are really selfish. It is degraded to the value of something you own such as a hairbrush. A desire punishes you if you resist it.

It makes no sense to say that a desire is a bit about you but mostly about the other person. The desire is about you but the content about somebody else. Get it?

The fact that we all have expectations which influence our motives in all sorts of hidden ways shows that weak psychological egoism is a definite fact and not a mere opinion.

Religion causes strong egoism

On the human level, it is natural to expect other people to praise you or be inspired by you if you do something to help another. That approval makes you a weak psychological egoist. But what if you have something that can be lived without such as faith in a loving God or a faith in a religion? That is an extra. That is a new expectation. You are more than just expecting approval from others that they may not give. You are looking for more than that. Thus religion turns a weak psychological egoist into a strong egoist. The religious do-gooder cannot ask anybody to really believe that she or he does the good without intending any reward or approval.

FINALLY

Weak psychological egoism is definitely viable and a respectable viewpoint. It may be called weak. Some say, "That only means it does not go full throttle and call everybody calculating." It could still only be a few steps below the full throttle. Weak does not mean it is weak like tea that is almost water. The theory does not call everybody calculating but calls everybody self-interested. The difference between strong and weak may not be important at all or important in most individual cases.

We wonder if weak psychological egoism leads to strong and if it does not then if we are resisting.

It is certain that nobody does anything for another without intending to get some kind of reward and without expecting a reward. We all have the potential to become all about ourselves quite rapidly. Religion makes the ego problem worse.

We pose as other-interested as if we have nothing to gain at all or nothing good to expect for ourselves. That is why the other person is so pleased with us.

It is egotistical to lie. Even if strong psychological egoism that we only care about ourselves is false. Suppose then that weak is true. Then strong psychological egoism as in lying to others is true. The lie is so ingrained that we literally are the lie. In that respect we are not weak psychological egoists.

Those who say we should help others without any intention of gaining from it are hypocrites. They are dangerous for they give us an impossible morality that will only lead to frustration and anger and disillusionment.