

# Analysis of psychological egoism philosophy essay



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Psychological egoism is the empirical doctrine that the determining motive of every voluntary action is a desire for one's own welfare. On this view, even though all actions are regarded as self-interested actions, the egoist readily points out that people usually try to conceal the determining motives for their actions because such concealment is usually in their self-interest.

Psychological egoism is a theory about motivation that claims that all of our ultimate desires are self-directed. Whenever we want others to do well (or ill), we have these other-directed desires only instrumentally; we care about others only because we think that the welfare of others will have ramifications for our own welfare. As stated, egoism is a descriptive, not a normative, claim. It aims to characterize what motivates human beings in fact; the theory does not say whether it is good or bad that people are so motivated.

“ Ethical Egoism purports to tell us how to live”. As such, it is a consequentiality theory; that is, it maintains that the rightness or wrongness of acts depends on their consequences. More specifically, it says that right actions promote self-interests and wrong actions detract from self-interest.

Besides, Ethical egoism claims that it is necessary and sufficient for an action to be morally right that it maximize one's self-interest. It makes claims about what one ought to do, rather than describe what one does do.

One of the problems with this position is that it might not be in one's self-interest to have everyone act from the perspective of self-interest. This 'state of nature' would not be desirable (in Hobbes' terms, life would be “ beastly, brutal, and short”) and so it might ultimately be in one's self-interest

to enter into a contract with others that would place restraints upon self-interested actions.

### Teleological Theory

The teleological theory of ethics has broad appeal to many because it explains the rightness or virtue of action in terms of the good realized by it. The word “teleology” is derived from the Greek word “telos” that means “ends.” In this theory, you would consider the ends, or the outcomes of your decision. Teleology was explored by Plato and Aristotle, by Saint Anselm around 1000 A. D., and later by Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Judgement. It was fundamental to the speculative philosophy of Hegel.

Since this theory is concerned about the consequences of the decision, it is also referred to as consequentialist. For example, a moral theory that maintains that the rightness of an action is one which achieves the goal of maximizing happiness counts as a teleological theory.

The two main types of theory brought under the rubric of teleological ethics are Utilitarianism and Ethical Egoism.

Utilitarianism is clearly the most widely accepted teleological theory.

Some however, have accepted another teleological view—ethical egoism. Thus, in what follows we state and evaluate ethical egoism and different form of utilitarianism, in that order.

Utilitarianism is a moral theory according to which welfare is the fundamental human good. Welfare may be understood as referring to the

happiness or well being of individuals. Utilitarianism is most commonly a theory about the rightness of actions; it is the doctrine that, from a range of possibilities, the right action is the action which most increases the welfare of human beings or sentient creatures in general. Of the many moral theories now called Utilitarian, all share this claim that morality ought to be concerned with increasing welfare.

The sense of utilitarianism can be started in this way: the rightness or wrongness of an act or moral rule is solely a matter of the nonmoral good produced directly or indirectly in the consequences of that act of rule.

Utilitarianism has its historical origins in seventeenth century Britain although its central ideas may be traced back to Plato and ancient Greek discussions of eudaimonia. The most important developers and proponents of utilitarianism are Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832); He first attained attention as a critic of the leading legal theorist in eighteenth century England, Sir William Blackstone. Bentham's campaign for social and political reforms in all areas, most notably the criminal law, had its theoretical basis in his utilitarianism, expounded in his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, a work written in 1780 but not published until 1789. In it he formulated the principle of utility, which approves of an action in so far as an action has an overall tendency to promote the greatest amount of happiness.

In its historical context, utilitarianism aspired to be a movement of social reform. It was closely tied to its political aspirations, promoted a new conception of morality which eschewed references to God and religion, and took morality to be fundamentally an attempt to bring about as much

happiness of pleasure, to achieve the “ greatest good for the greatest number.”

Utilitarianism is divided into two branches which are Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism. The type of utilitarianism outlined to date is termed ‘ act utilitarianism.’ Every single act is judged by its individual consequences and decisions on morality reached. Act utilitarianism is entirely situational and consequences in terms of happiness cannot be applied across situations.

Rule utilitarianism removes this tension. The maximising happiness principle is applied not to an individual situation, but rather to that set of circumstances in general and the moral rule is then created. For example it is generally the case that murdering innocents does not maximise happiness for the majority therefore it is immoral on all occasions. Whilst this gets around certain unpalatability with utilitarianism, it does remove the true consequential nature of the system. Judgment on general consequences is not the same as judging the consequences of a specific circumstance.

The other main branch of Teleology theory is Egoism. In philosophy, egoism is the theory that one’s self is, or should be, the motivation and the goal of one’s own action. Egoism has two variants, descriptive or normative. The descriptive (or positive) variant conceives egoism as a factual description of human affairs. That is, people are motivated by their own interests and desires, and they cannot be described otherwise. The normative variant proposes that people should be so motivated, regardless of what presently motivates their behaviour. Altruism is the opposite of egoism. The term “ egoism” derives from “ ego,” the Latin term for “ I” in English. Egoism should

be distinguished from egotism, which means a psychological overvaluation of one's own importance, or of one's own activities.

The most plausible form of ethical egoism, embraced by such philosophers as Ayn Rand and John Hospers, is called universal or impersonal rule egoism: each person has a moral rule that will be in the agent's maximal self-interested over the long haul. For the ethical egoist, one has a duty to follow "correct" moral rules. And the factor that makes a rule a "correct" one is that, if followed, it will be in the agent's own best interest in the long run. Each person ought to advance his/her own self-interested and that is the sole of foundation of morality.

Ethical egoism is sometimes confused with various distinct issues. First, there is individual or personal ethical egoism, which says everyone has a duty to act so as to serve my self-interest. Here, everyone is morally obligated to serve the speaker's long-term best interests. Second, there is psychological egoism, roughly, the idea that each person can only do an act that the person takes to maximize his or own self-interested. Psychological egoism is a descriptive thesis about motivation to the effect that we can only act on motives that are in our own self-interest. Psychological egoism is sometimes used as part of an argument for ethical egoism, but the two are distinct theses.

Psychological egoism is also called the "pleasure principle". It is the most famous descriptive position, claims that each person has but one ultimate aim: her own welfare. Psychological egoism insist that people are capable of desiring the happiness of other only when they taken it to be acting

unselfishly and disinterestedly when they take the interests of others to be means to the promotion of their own self-interest.

Furthermore, it allows for weakness of will, since in weakness of will cases I am still aiming at my own welfare; I am weak in that I do not act as I aim. And it allows for aiming at things other than one's welfare, such as helping others, where these things are a means to one's welfare.

On the other hand, Ethical egoism is a normative theory that states that our actions ought to be done from the perspective of self-interest. Besides, it also claims that it is necessary and sufficient for an action to be morally right that it maximize one's self-interest.

In the strong version, it is held that it is always moral to promote one's own good, and it is never moral not to promote it. In the weak version, it is said that although it is always moral to promote one's own good, it is not necessarily never moral to not. That is, there may be conditions in which the avoidance of personal interest may be a moral action.

There are three distinct types of ethical egoism: Personal ethical egoism, Individual ethical egoism and Universal ethical egoism.

Personal egoists maintain that they are going to act in their own self-interest and that anything else is irrelevant to them. They actually have no interest in telling other people how to act all, and in this sense, their position is hardly a moral theory at all. ( ) In fact, the only things which they concern in life is to further their own self-interest.

Second, Individual Ethical Egoism is a belief that can't be consistent unless it applies to just one person. In other words, this belief is not universalizable. The difference between personal egoism, which is hardly an ethical theory at all, and Individual ethical egoism is that latter does make a claim about how other people ought to act.

Lastly, the Universal Ethical Egoism. Whereas individual ethical egoism think everyone ought to act in their own self-interest, universal ethical egoists think that each individual ought to act in his or her own self-interest. Each person, universal ethical egoists maintain, ought to be out for himself or herself.

## Egoism

The term "egoism" is ordinarily used to mean "exclusive concern with satisfying one's own desires, getting what one wants." Dictionaries tend to support this. They call "egoism," for instance, "1. selfishness; self-interest. 2. conceit" (Webster's New World Dictionary). The term "egotist" is often a substitute, although it's defined differently, for example, as "excessive reference to oneself." The ego is the self. But we should distinguish first between "selfishness," "self-interest," and "interest of the self." They usually mean, respectively, "Concern exclusively and for indulging one's desires," "consideration based first on what is good for oneself without the exclusion of others," and "that which motivates an autonomous person." These will help us appreciate what follows

## Philosopher opinions about egoism



“ Every individual serves his own private interest...The great Saints of history have served their ‘ private interest’ just as the most money grubbing miser has served his interest. The private interest is whatever it is that drives an individual” (Friedman, 1976). “ But whatsoever is the object of any man’s Appetite or Desire, that is it which he for his part called Good: and the object of his Hate and Aversion, Evil...For these words of Good and Evil...are ever used with relation to the person that used them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any Common Rule of Good and Evil” (Hobbes, 1968: 120).

### Criticisms

Egoism is sometimes criticized for attributing too much calculation to spontaneous acts of helping. People who help in emergency situations often report doing so “ without thinking” (Clark and Word 1974). However, it is hard to take such reports literally when the acts involve a precise series of complicated actions that are well-suited to an apparent end. A lifeguard who rescues a struggling swimmer is properly viewed as having a goal and as selecting actions that advance that goal. The fact that she engaged in no ponderous and self-conscious calculation does not show that no means/end reasoning occurred. In any case, actions that really do occur without the mediation of beliefs and desires fall outside the scope of both egoism and altruism. People jerk their legs when their knees are tapped with hammers, but that refutes neither theory.

### Classical Egoism

A more promising ethical egoism states that each person should live so as to achieve his or her rational self-interest. (I have called this “classical” egoism to indicate its pedigree in Aristotelianism. It is also captured by the term “eudaimonist ethics.”) Accordingly, as living beings we need a guide to conduct, principles to be used when we cannot assess the merits of each action from the start. As living beings we share with other animals the value of life. But life occurs in individual (living) things. And human living, unlike that of other animals, cannot be pursued automatically. We must learn to do it. And the particular life we can pursue and about which we can exercise choices is our own. By understanding who and what we are, we can identify the standards by which our own life can most likely be advanced properly, made successful, become a happy life.

### Business Ethics and Egoism

Egoism is of concern in the examination of business ethics, both when we use the latter to refer to how people in commercial and business endeavors ought to act, and what kinds of public policy should govern business and industry – to wit, capitalism, which arises from a legal system that respects and protects private property rights, and is an economic system that is closely linked to versions of egoism. Adam Smith, the founder of modern economic science, advanced something like a psychological egoist position about human motivation (although arguably Smith was not thoroughgoing in this – for example in his Theory of Moral Sentiments he advances a different position).

### Arguments for Psychological Egoism

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There are several arguments which are strongly supporting the psychological egoism which is the empirical doctrine that the determining motive of every voluntary action is a desire for one's own welfare.

Firstly, the arguments which favor in psychological egoism argues that people are ego and selfish because people always act as what they desire to. This arguments state that people always act according to self-interest and every voluntary action are selfish. For example, a shopkeeper who is being honest and returned the changes that left by the customer after purchasing good is defined as an act which is ego and self interested because the shopkeeper knows that being honest will help the business and maintain the good name of the shop. Thus, psychological egoist said that people are acting what they want due to their desire and also self-interest, therefore, people are ego and selfish.

Besides, psychological egoist states that people are ego and selfish because they always act to get the pleasure and satisfactory. This argument indicates that every action of the people is aimed to get a good feel or being satisfied or in simple words, people acted to get the good feeling which may be gained after doing this action. For example, one who participates in the donation of blood do so due to the satisfactory and the good feeling which one may gained by donating his own blood. One might feel that he can help the people who need the blood and hence he feels satisfied by the action of donation of his own blood. Hence, this action which are acted to get the pleasure and satisfactory is pointed out by psychological egoist as the statement of people act are always ego.

Apart from that, one of the arguments in favor of psychological egoism indicates that people act is ego because they wanted to gain benefits from their action. This argument argues that people's actions are done to get benefits such as fame, becomes popular, liked by others and so forth. For instance, from the perspective of the argument, a soldier who saved his comrade's life acted bravely to get an award or a reward such as a medal. Arguments favor in psychological egoism also states that those who donates money to the poor, beggar or charity acting generous and donates money to the charities because they are enjoying the feedback from their action as they will get a good fame, becomes more popular and also being liked by the people due to their generous action.

As a conclusion, arguments for psychological egoism states that each of the human's voluntary actions are being acted due to their desire to gain satisfactory, benefits and also because of their self-interest. Thus, these arguments agree the view of psychological egoism which states that people are ego because they are acting for their own good.

### Arguments against Psychological Egoism

Many of the arguments oppose the theory of psychological egoism which states that human acts are selfish because people act according to their own desire. These arguments strongly disagree on the view of psychological egoism due to the consideration of several factors and using counter-evidence.

Firstly, the arguments against the psychological egoism states that human has genuine benevolence and genuine malevolence. This argument argues <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-psychological-egoism-philosophy-essay/>

that human acts may be due to the capable of genuine benevolence and genuine malevolence which is the kind and the evil that planted in the human's mind or spirit. For example, Mother Teresa who helped a lots of poor, sick, old and also children lent her hand to those needy because of her genuine benevolence, neither because of her own self-interest nor benefits. Hence, the opponents pointed out that the psychological egoism is false because there will be people who act voluntarily upon the genuine benevolence.

Besides, opponents of psychological egoism said that self-interest and interest in the welfare of others are not necessarily incompatible. This argument states that people may be acting due to the completely self-interest and welfare of others. For instance, a business man never cheats his clients and customers because he knows that this action is good for businesses. From the point of view of the psychological egoism opponents, the business man does not cheat his clients and customers had take care the welfare of them and the business man did this for the good of his business which is the self-interest. The psychological egoism opponents hence state that people act not only for their self-interest but also may contain the interest in others' welfare.

Apart from that, the argument against psychological egoism also states that human motives are oversimplified according to the psychological egoism. The opponents of psychological egoism state that one can has many motives when one is doing an action and only one of the motives may be the self-interest or benefits. For example, a father who gave his seat to an old lady on a bus may act so due to multiple reasons. From the perspective of

opponents of psychological egoism, he may wanted to be the model to teach his son a lesson on giving a seat or lending a hand to the needy, he may wanted to get the satisfactory or good feeling after helping the old lady, he may also helped the old lady because of compassion and he may thought that it is dangerous for an old lady standing on a moving bus. Among the several reasons that are listed out, there are only one reason states that this father helped the old lady due to his self-interest. Thus, the opponents believe that human's act is not solely due to the egoism but there might be other factors which are taken into the consideration before a human act.

As a conclusion, opponents of psychological egoism indicates that human acts are not solely because of self-interest nor benefits but can be causes by other factors such as the genuine benevolence, compatibility of self-interest and other's welfare and also multiple of motives. These opponents believe that there will be some human actions which are acted against ego and truly out of a kind heart which is altruism as what have been done by Mother Teresa.

### Arguments For and Against Ethical Egoism

Ethical egoism is the prescriptive doctrine that all persons ought to act from their own self-interest. It differs from psychological egoism, which claims that people can only act in their self-interest. Ethical egoism also differs from rational egoism, which holds merely that it is rational to act in one's self-interest. These doctrines may, though, be combined with ethical egoism. Ethical egoism is divided into three branches which are individual ethical egoism, personal ethical egoism and universal ethical egoism.

One of the arguments for ethical egoism is looking out for others are self-defeating. We ought to do what will promote the interests of everyone alike. The interests of everyone will be best promoted if each of us adopts the policy of looking to our own interests exclusively. Therefore, each of us should adopt the policy of looking to our own interests exclusively.

The other argument for ethical egoism is the Ann Rand's argument.

According to Ann Rand's argument, we each ought to regard this one life as of supreme importance or ultimate value to us since we each have just one life. Ethical egoism and only ethical egoism allows each individual's life to be of supreme importance or ultimate value to them. Other moral theories all directly or indirectly enjoin altruism. Altruism regards the individual life as something one may be required to sacrifice for the sake of others. So, altruism does not allow each individual's life to be of supreme importance to them. Therefore, we all ought to be Ethical Egoists.

The third argument in favour of ethical egoism is egoism can account for ordinary morality. Egoism provides one fundamental principle from which the rest of morality can be derived. However, there is a problem with this argument since other moral theories arguably do an even better job of this.

According to Kurt Baier's argument, morality is supposed to help us resolve conflicts of interest. Ethical egoism gives no help in this regard so ethical egoism is not an acceptable morality.

The other argument against ethical egoism is the self-contradictory argument. People will often have conflicting duties. For instance, according to ethical egoism, it is in A's best-interest to kill B so A has a duty to do so

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and it is in B's best interest to avoid being killed so B has a duty (by ethical egoism) to prevent it. It is wrong to prevent someone's doing their duty. So ethical egoism entails a contradiction, it is not wrong for A to kill B since it is in A's best-interest to kill B but it is wrong for A to kill B. B has a duty to avoid being killed and it's wrong for A to prevent B from doing B's duty. Therefore, ethical egoism is false.

Other than that, the third argument against ethical egoism which is Rachels' argument discuss that we can justify treating people differently only if we can show that there is some factual difference between them that is relevant to justifying the difference in treatment. Ethical egoism says we should treat others and ourselves differently but there is no factual difference between self and others that justifies this difference in treatment so ethical egoism is unacceptably arbitrary. Rachels' comments on this argument shed light on why we should care about others interests. For the very same reason we care about our own because they are in all relevant respects like us.