

02 Psychological Egoism

- A claim that people only ever act out of self interest even if it may seem altruistic
- It's not saying we should act selfishly just that we always do, even when it looks like we're helping others.
- Whenever people help others, they do it:
 - To feel good
 - To avoid guilt
 - To gain social approval
 - Or to get something in return

03 Example of Psychological Egoism

You are donating a sum of money to a group of individuals who are requesting a donation

A psychological egoist would argue different things such as:

- 1. You donate because you feel empathy but empathy itself is what makes you feel bad, so donating relieves your discomfort.
- 2. You like the recognition that you get or you get some sort of tax benefit
- 3. It boosts your reputation, or gives a sense of moral superiority.



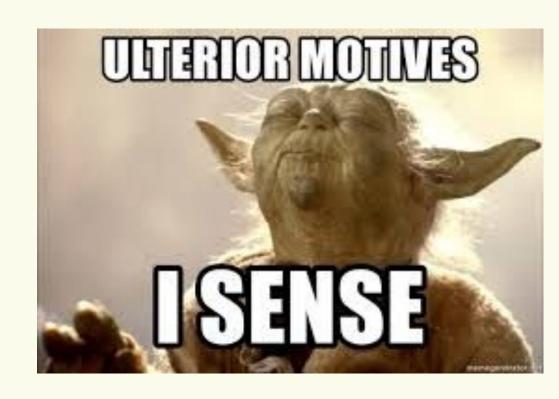
Psychological Egoism: Woke or Broke?

Question: does psychological egoism hold an objective or subjective understanding of human behavior?

Answer: Objective! The psychological egoist believes as truth that self-interested behavior is an accurate description of *how we are*.

A setup: Suppose I'm in a conversation with someone whom I dislike. I could make some excuse and leave at any time, but wait for them to finish before ending the conversation.

Question: how can we explain this behavior?





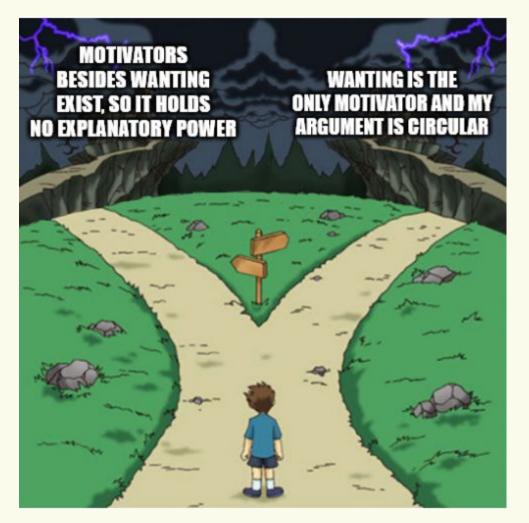
I didn't enjoy cleaning my room as a child, but I did it anyway. Did I actually want it, deep down?

Challenging the Psychological Egoist

The setup: I leave an unpleasant conversation later than I could have

- 1. Therefore: this implies that I can take actions I "don't want"
 - If not, they are assuming their conclusion ("people can only take actions that they want")
- 2. **It gets worse:** If we can, there must be other motivations or reasons for our behavior (e.g. being polite to my conversational partner)
 - The egoist can argue "I wanted actually to be polite"
- 3. But if we can "want" anything in this manner, then it is only vacuously (and trivially) true that "we do what we want"
 - This formulation of wanting is also unfalsifiable

Food for thought: If someone performs an action out of guilt or obligation, are they acting in their self interest? For example, two people volunteer at a soup kitchen. One from guilt, the other for joy helping others. Are both equally selfish?



The psych. egoist's claim is too ambitious. Could a revised premise save it?



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06 Rational Egoism

- A rational egoist standpoint would be to act in accordance to their desire (operative/direction)
- The moral standpoint would be that there has to be a compelling reason in order to deviate and act altruistically (reasoning)

07 Rational Egoism Examples

Scenario: A friend of yours has a difficult situation and they need advice. Your advice is a difficult truth, potentially risking your friendship

- "Lying would be easier, but telling the truth builds trust and integrity in the long term, which are more valuable to me. I want meaningful relationships, not fake ones."
- Honesty is moral here because it pays off in long-term relationships and identity.

Maximizing your own well-being and happiness is the ultimate goal, so you'd tell the truth

08 Problems with Rational Egoism

- 1. You ignore moral obligations unless they benefit you
- 2. Rational egoism is based on a naive view of how clearly people can calculate what's actually the best for themselves
 - a. Growth vs Comfort
 - b. Short vs Long Term Success
- 3. What happens when everyone acts in their own self interest?