

Egoism

on ethics and selfishness



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The Ring of Gyges

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From an Ancient Persian tale retold by Plato in *The Republic*.

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- If you had such power, would you be able to resist the temptation to act on your selfish desires?
- Are people inherently selfish and only kept in check by fear of getting caught?

The philosophy of selfishness

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These are related but different ways of pointing out the limitations of ethics, as either *unrealistic* or *counter-productive*.

Psychological Egoism

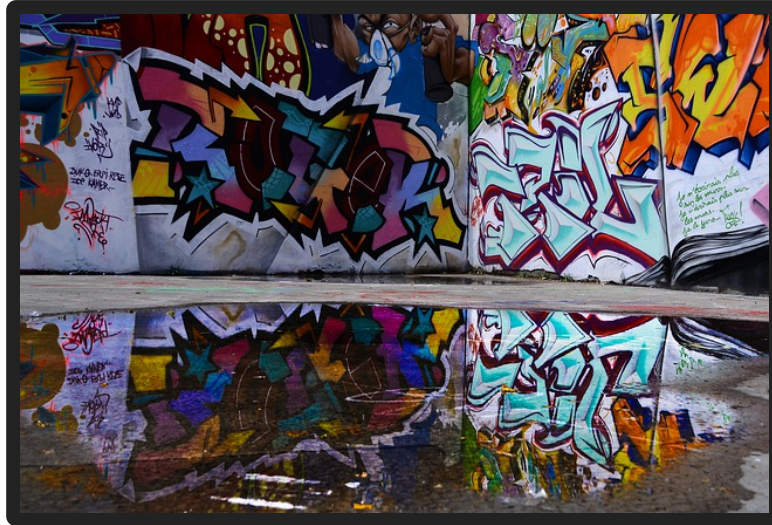


Psychological Egoism



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- Claims that ethics is *impossible* since there are is such thing as "selfless good deeds."
- Presents itself as a realistic alternative to sentimental idealism about human beings.

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- How is this not just a cynical dismissal of generosity and a theory to be taken seriously?
- Let's consider the arguments...

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- But perhaps there is a subtle shift of meaning here: does it follow that all motives are *for my sake alone* just because they are *my motives*?

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- Good theories need evidence to back them up.
- PE has *unlimited evidence* to back it up, since *any* action that seems altruistic can be dismissed as the result of hidden selfish motives, so it's a great theory, right?

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- The problem here is a logical problem: this argument is **INVALID**.

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- This argument is **INVALID**, and shows our explanation to be a bad explanation.

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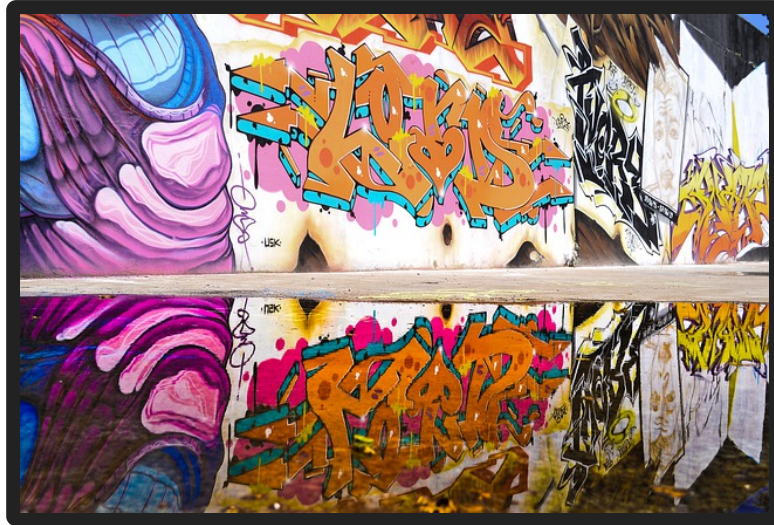
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- The problem with Psychological Egoism is that it is *non-falsifiable*.

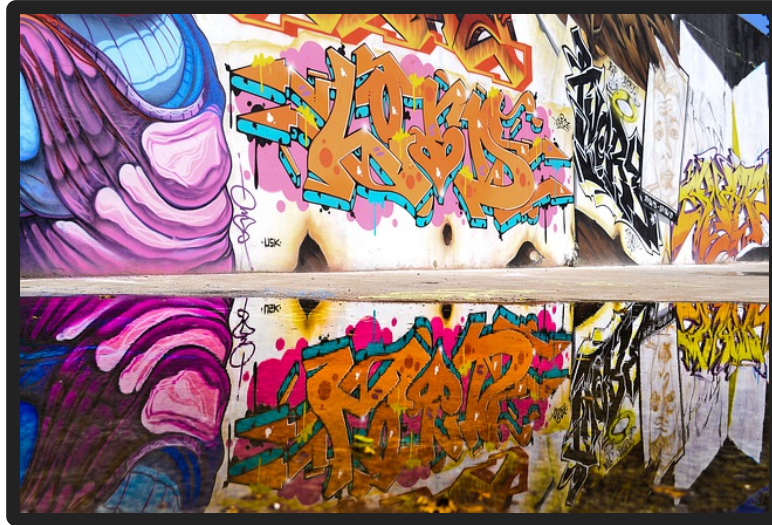
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- The best explanations are one that *can* be tested and that have not yet failed.
- They is *falsifiable* but not *falsified*.
- The problem with Psychological Egoism is that it is *non-falsifiable*.
- No matter what examples of unselfish activity we give to a backer of this theory they always have a response, so there is no possible test that the theory can fail.

Ethical Egoism

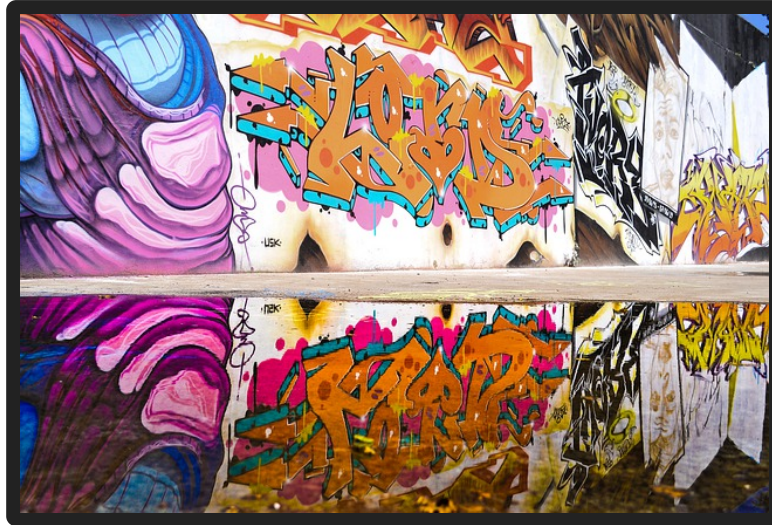


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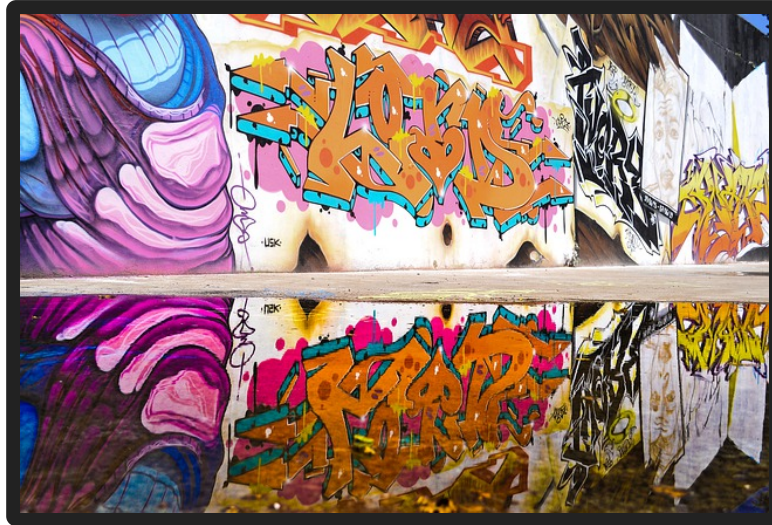
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- Claims that ethics is *self-defeating* since acting for the sake of others ultimately leads to a worse outcome, for *all of us*.
- Often used in political and economic arguments about capitalism and socialism.



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