

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN ALTRUISM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*Psychological egoism* is a perspective that humans are motivated, always, deep down by what they perceive to be in their self-interest. *Psychological altruism*, on the other hand, is the view that sometimes they can have ultimately altruistic motives.

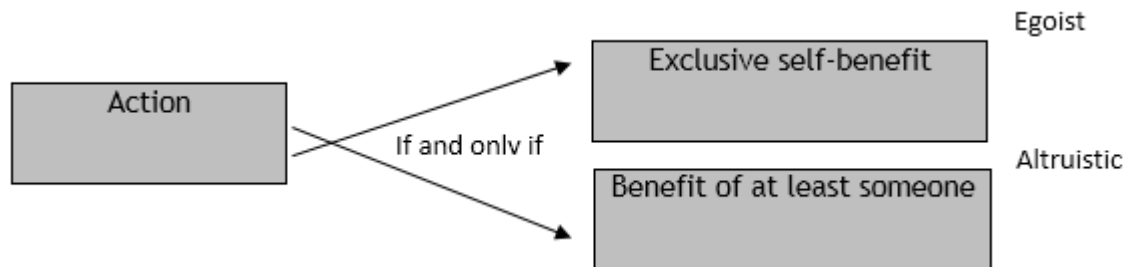
To cite an example suppose that Jack is saved by John from a capsizing boat in the river. What was the ultimate motive behind the John's act? Why he did, what he did? Wouldn't be it odd to suggest that John had some vested interests and benefits associated? After all in the process he risked his own life. Here the psychological egoist holds that John's apparently altruistic act is *ultimately* motivated by the goal to benefit himself, whether he is aware of that or not. John might have wanted to gain a good feeling from being a hero, or to avoid social reprimand that would follow had he not helped Jack, or something along these lines.

## II. STRUCTURE FOR DEBATE ON ABSTRACTS

Psychological egoism speaks of motivation, usually with a focus on motivation behind intentional (human) action. It is defined on terms of people's actions in terms of hidden, ulterior motives. Abraham Lincoln usefully illustrates that we are all ultimately self-interested when he suddenly stopped to save a group of piglets from drowning. His interlocutor seized the moment, attempting to point out that Lincoln is a living counterexample to his own theory. But Lincoln reportedly replied: "I should have had no peace of mind all day had I gone on. I did it to get peace of mind, don't you see?"

The psychological egoist argue that descriptions of our motivation, like Lincoln's peace of mind, apply to all of us in every instance. So it is important to demarcate the ideas of the competing egoistic versus altruistic theories.

## III. EGOISTIC VS. ALTRUISTIC DESIRES



Here 'desire' in a broader sense implies a motivational mental state, which is often regarded to as 'motive' in some sense or other. As professed by certain philosophers the psychological egoist claims that the ultimate desires concern oneself in some or other sense of one & all. For example, suppose that Mary wants to save a woman who appears in front of her, but she doesn't realise that she's looking in a mirror and she, herself, is drowning. If her desire is ultimate and is simply to help the other woman, then it is necessary to count her desire as concerning someone *other than herself*, even though he is in fact the man with his hair on fire.

Here a philosophical distinction must be drawn between desires that are for a means to an end and desires for an end in itself.

## IV. PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS

### A. Desire Satisfaction

Many believe that all of one's action are, in some or other way, motivated by one's own desires, which directly seem to support the arguments of psychological egoism for it is in a way satisfying our own desires. This tempts to argue for

psychological egoism as if it is based on what seem to be conceptual truths about intentional action. This further contrasts between motives for any action: one based on our desires, another based on equivocation on the word 'satisfaction'. Wherein satisfaction is further differentiated as desiring satisfaction of one's desire and one's own desires.

The claim that everyone tries to satisfy their own desires, and that actions are motivated by a desire, fairly establishes the psychological egoism. Though the claim is a fairly uninteresting one, since it negates the scenario when we are motivated by self-interest. To quote an example, if Mother Teresa did not have an altruistic desire for the benefit of others; it is, then, a count against her that she sought to satisfy it - that is, bring about the benefit of others. The argument here falsify the reasoning for psychological egoism which relied on the self-interest as desire satisfaction.

### B. Simplicity and Parsimony

The idea is merely to gain the favour of one's boss i.e. Although actions may vary, the ultimate source is self-interest. Returning someone's wallet may not seem an altruistic act,

however is egoist in a way that is done merely to avoid the pang of guilt that would follow keeping it. Here one might contend against whether psychological egoism is more parsimonious than psychological altruism or not.

### C. Moral Education

Humans have this normal tendency, and are motivated ultimately, to gain pleasure and avoid pain. However just as society progressed it made way for a construct to develop the ideas of living with set of rules, which further defines morality and ethics of society. This construct, as is evident from experience, is taught, or engraved upon, to the individuals with reward and punishment. Here the seemingly altruistic ultimate desires are observed as merely instrumental to egoistic ones, where one come to realise that he/she should be concerned with the others' interests in order to gain rewards and avoid punishment for oneself, all in accordance with the social construct.

On the contrary, even in the absence of any sanction, there is evidence, that children as young as in months will invariably spontaneously help a person, who in their opinion is in need. It is implausible that children've learned moral values at such a young and tender age that this behaviour will benefit themselves in the longer run. The evidence, however, undermines the argument of morality by indicating that one's concerns for others' welfare is not universally learned from birth.

### D. Self Other Merging

In the benevolence one often confuses with the conception of everyone, and often blur that very idea, which is another argument for psychological egoism. You may like to consider the paradigm of apparent selfless motivation driven by the concern towards loved ones e.g. family and kins. Here it is because children resemble us in body & mind and one tend to empathise for others if they are in need when they are similar.

Still one might contend the very account of self other merging view if it is able to explain helping behaviour in an egoistic way.

### E. Butler's Stone: Presupposition & Byproducts

Pleasure, if we talk about, is derived from something materialistic and is observed upon getting something (like food). Pleasure accompanied with the fulfilment of desires is merely a byproduct of our prior desire for what gave us pleasure. For instance, Successful selection into IITD would make a student happy, if he wanted the selection; but it wouldn't if he wanted an AIR 1.

| Arguments pertaining to the context |

- Benefit from helping others : Experiential Pleasure
- Benefit presupposing a desire for what generated it, not result
- Benefit from desires other than in relevance with self-interest

Here the aforementioned benefit channels suggests that psychological egoism is false and prescribes that pleasure can't be our universal concern because it's sole occupancy presupposes a desire for something other than pleasure itself. The argument have been endorsed by many philosophers, not only against hedonism but more against egoism. On the contrary few suggested these arguments as flawed since conclusion doesn't follow the premises. Even if a desire for the pleasurable object is presupposed for the experience of pleasure, it is left open whether desire for what generated the pleasure is merely instrumental to a desire for pleasure.

*Desire to End Thirst → Drinking Water → Pleasure*

Here one experiences pleasure upon drinking some water and same helps in creating an inference about the existence of a desire to end thirst. Parallel to that, the egoist maintains that an ultimate desire for pleasure precedes the desire to end thirst:

*Ultimate Desire for Pleasure → Desire to End Thirst → Drinking Water → Pleasure*

This egoistic picture is in congruence with the claims of presupposition, thus even if the premises are true it doesn't follow that egoism is false. It is to be noted that one shouldn't establish their view by simply pointing to the pleasure or self-benefit accompanied with it. For self-benefit often is what we ultimately desire, which upon a closure look reveals that benefits such as pleasure are merely the byproducts. Perhaps it is best seen as a formidable objection to a certain kind of argument for egoism, rather than a positive argument against the theory.

### F. Unfalsifiability

If any action could be accorded with the altruistic view i.e. as motivated by some sort of desires for others' wellbeing, a greater criticism and worry for psychological egoism is outlined. Psychological egoism needn't address our all ultimate desires as selfish, however Feinberg's point is that we need to know what would count as empirical evidence against the existence of egoistic ultimate desire.

The objection to psychological egoism is associated with few substantial problems. First, empirical theories pose issues on the falsification criteria and is problematic to be considered. Second, problems afflicting psychological egoism on this front will also apply to the opposing view. Given the view that psychological altruism is a pluralistic thesis that includes both egoistic and altruistic perspectives and motives. Third, and most important, a charitable construal of psychological egoism renders it falsifiable. Psychological egoism, thus, stands briskly on the argument whether ultimate desire is egoistic or not; and could be falsified, if not. Although ultimate motives of people may not be know, the view is in principle falsifiable.

### G. The Paradox of Egoism

The paradox of hedonism is often employed in the objection to various forms of psychological egoism; with hedonism as the prime target, the paradox is that we tend to attain more pleasure by focusing on things other than pleasure. On the other hand if egoism is at the point of contention, the

idea that we tend to benefit ourselves by focusing on our own benefit doesn't hold true. This contrast in the thesis is problematic for a theory built upon the idea that our ultimate desires are for our own wellbeing.

Several worries have surfaced about the premises of the argument, such as the claim that ultimate concern for oneself diminishes one's own wellbeing. Paradox appears to be a potent issue, though only for a particular version of egoism that suggests ultimate concern for oneself, such as normative egoism. The vanity of ultimate concern for oneself could only undermine claims such as "One only ultimately cares about his/her own wellbeing" since this allegedly would not lead to happiness. On the other side since psychological egoism is a descriptive thesis, even when egoistic ultimate desires lead to tragic or unhappy states, that would only be regarded as something which egoistically motivated people find unfortunate.

## V. CONCLUSION

Philosophical arguments against psychological egoism aren't as powerful as we might expect given the widespread rejection of the theory among philosophers. So the theory arguably is more difficult to refute than as many have tended to suppose. However the theory makes a strong universal claim that our desires are egoistic. On the contrary Altruism speaks of doing something without a brink of self-interest. It is though observed that these are the two extremes of behaviour and there has to be an intermediary, which is coined as 'Psychological Altruism' which talks about having goal for benefitting others.

## REFERENCES

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