

Things I Need to Know About Amoralism

What is altruism?

- Dawkins (2016): A being is ALTRUISTIC if behaves in such a way as to increase another entity's welfare at the expense of its own; behavioural definition, not subjective
 - Group selection: in the struggle for existence, "a group, such as a species or a population within a species, whose individual members are prepared to sacrifice themselves for the welfare of the group, may be less likely to go extinct than a rival group whose individual members place their own selfish interests first."
 - Altruism as a functionalist idea
 - Trade unionism (altruism within a group often goes with selfishness between groups) observed
 - BUT at which level does this apply? Family, nation, race, species, or all living things?
- The above is a descriptive claim but we can make a prescriptive claim where a moral framework holds that one ought to be altruistic
- Lack of altruism ≠ amoralism
 - There can be a moral theory which holds that individual's interests a lexical priority over the interests of others – help others where it won't harm you to do so
 - Such a moral system that could tolerate (and indeed seems to license) the lack of altruism as defined
 - Note that this merely holds that one ought to prioritise one's personal interests over others' but Ethical Egoism holds a more extreme case where only one's personal interests should be considered and to do otherwise (e.g. to be altruistic) is immoral

What are the motives for being moral according to the variety of moral frameworks?

Moral Framework	Explanation	Evaluation
<p>Sidgwick: Ethical Egoism</p>	<p>Ethical egoism is the moral law that I morally ought to perform some action if and only if, and because, performing that action maximises my self-interest (SEP). (Morality for the ethical egoist consists in each and every agent maximising their own self-interests.)</p> <p>It follows the Nietzschean idea that each of us should do whatever makes our lives the best it can be for us.</p> <p>In this doctrine, other people's well-being has independent value (reason-giving force) from the agent. In fact, to help others would be worthy of moral contempt among ethical egoists because it shows that the agent is not prioritising their own self interests.</p>	<p>G.E. Moore: Ethical egoism is self contradictory; If I am an egoist, I must hold that I must maximise "my good" X (i.e. my possessing of X is good, since I cannot possess the goodness) so I should maximise my possession of X and others should also maximise my good (for my possession of X is all I care about as an ethical egoist); BUT if X is good then everybody ought to be maximising X; this thought is incompatible with the idea that I should maximise my possession of X</p> <p>BUT my possessing of X is good does not mean others' possession of X is good (e.g. my possessing of inexpensive fashion earrings is good because I have my ears pierced and it can help my look better and therefore increase my welfare but my dad's possession of those earrings would be useless to increasing his welfare because he does not have his ears pierced, nor would enjoy wearing those earrings)</p> <p>ALSO Broad (1942): it is not part of egoism to hold that what is good ought to be pursued by everyone</p> <p>ALSO We can solve the problem by saying that I desire X but morally, as an ethical egoist, everybody ought to be desiring and pursuing X too, even if that means that it would be harder for me to access X in the competition for scarce resources</p>

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<p>Hume: morality as acting from desires</p>	<p><u>Reason alone cannot be a motive to the will because it is bound to succumb as a slave to our passions</u>; our immediate actions are determined by passions (i.e. emotions, feelings, desires); reason provides information about the means to our ends, which makes a determines the direction of the will but impulse to act must come from passion</p> <p><u>Moral distinctions are not derived from reason but instead from moral sentiments</u>: feelings of approval (esteem, praise) and disapproval (blame) felt by spectators who contemplate a character trait or action (SEP); the vice or virtue of an action can only be uncovered by assessing the moral sentiments of the observer; Therefore, moral good and evil are not discoverable through reason alone</p> <p><u>Some virtues and vices are natural while others are artificial (like justice – although Hume’s idea of justice in <i>Treatise</i> is quite narrow)</u>; Natural virtues are those that our approval of them do not depend upon any cultural inventions or jointly-determined social rules; Artificial virtues depend on the presence of conventional rules for the common good</p>	<p>Some thinkers (e.g. Nagel and Parfit) argue against Hume, claiming that desires can be located within rationality: it is rational to take one’s own future desires into account, whether or not one now happens to desire the satisfaction of those future desires.</p> <p><u>Parfit’s objection</u>: departure from temporal neutrality is irrational; Time should not affect keenness to have things done or not done (future desires should matter as much as desires today); It would be irrational for someone to be indifferent over things that happen on Tuesdays because it is completely arbitrary; It is irrational to care about self-interest on some days but not others; Any discounting that occurs should be the result of epistemic uncertainty e.g. inflation considerations</p> <p><i>(not really relevant to Hume)</i></p> <p><u>Nagel’s objection</u>: It is irrational to base morality on something without a difference (such as between persons or between days); Suppose ‘somebody’ has a high chance of being tortured but you can push a reason to stop it; It should not matter what day of the week it is or who is going to get tortured – all that should matter is that torture is bad so you should stop it; We should push the button regardless of what we might happen to desire</p> <p>Henry Sidgwick’s objection to Nagel: my concern about my own existence far exceeds my concern about others’ existence, and it would be against common-sense to think otherwise; thus, we cannot just see ourselves merely as one person among others in the way Nagel described</p>

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Kant: morality as rationality	<p>To act rationally is to act ethically.</p> <p>Moral principles should be universalisable. This is achievable through reason, which – like morality – requires us to rise above our own point of view</p>	<p><u>Singer (2011)</u>: to define morality in terms of rationality is hollow; people would be led to do what is right just because it is right and not question it further, thereby leading to an illusion of confidence that some action is the right thing to do</p> <p><u>Singer (2011)</u>: rationality is too weak a condition for being ethical</p> <p>Universalisable egoist statement: Let everybody do what is in his or her interests;</p> <p>Non-universalisable egoist statement: Let everybody do what is in my interests (not universalisable because it refers to a particular person); non-universalisable so cannot be ethical imperative</p> <p>The non-universalisable statement can be adopted (universally) by agents A and B; It can be a valid reason for A to do things in her interest but cannot serve as an ethical reason for it because B would disagree; so the rational requirement for universalisability is weaker than the ethical one</p> <p>“A consequence of this conclusion is that rational agents may rationally try to prevent one another doing what they admit the other is rationally justified in doing” like footballers on opposite teams trying to get the ball</p>

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Plato	<p>Plato argues in the Republic that justice (an important aspect of morality) is to be conceptualised as harmony, both within the agent's tripartite soul (reason; spirit; appetite) and within the tripartite state (rulers; auxiliaries; producers). Justice is desirable for its own sake but also for the consequences it bring. An individual who is just would flourish even if they have a reputation of being the most unjust.</p> <p>According to Plato, justice cannot be defined as action-types. This follows from his discussion in Book I. Polemarchus proposed to define justice as always giving back what is owed, but Socrates (Plato's mouthpiece in the dialogue) argues that this cannot be the definition of justice as it would not be just to return a borrowed weapon to a madman, so justice cannot be defined in terms of action types as Polemarchus has done.</p>	<p>To conceptualise justice as morality would be inexhaustive: Plato talks about morality but only in a narrow sense pertaining to justice – a proper subset of morality. Someone can be moral but unjust e.g. more caring to not turn a blind eye on someone with unfair disadvantage.</p>

What does it mean to be an amoralist?

- The amoralist believes that there are no intrinsic reasons to be moral; *moral* reasons aren't really reasons
 - (1) No reason at all = amoralist but weird case
 - (2) The most challenging version of amoralism = Egoist
 - I have reasons to do things that in the long run will be good for myself (self-interested reasons for action but no other-regarding reasons for action)
 - I have reasons to take my hand out of a burning fire but not to lift yours (even if you were unconscious); I will help you only if it is good for me in the future
 - Other people's good are only instrumental to the egoist

Can the amoralist be 'moral'?

- An amoralist can act like a moral person would (i.e. simulate morality), although without the necessary moral motives needed for actual morality
 - Behaviour extensionally equivalent to the moral person
- Peer judgements can make the egoist behave as if they are moral
 - In order to fit in with society, the egoist needs to conceal their egoism but that requires so much psychic energy
 - Conforming, despite having short term losses, is better for the egoist because they don't have to use so much psychic energy
 - No such conformation would be needed in a community of egoists
- Although psychic fatigue could be a legitimate for the egoist conforming to moral norms, psychological identification is not
 - Suppose A psychologically identifies with B so much (perhaps because they look alike) that B's welfare is also in A's personal interest

- E.g. If A sees B on a train track, A would throw themselves in front of a running train to save B (like how mothers would for their child)
- If A were to be an egoist, such an act would not have happened
 - The figure A sees on the train track and takes to be B might have been an eerily similar-looking wax figure and A would not have benefitted their own welfare to be trying to save B
 - Response: it is not B's actual welfare that matters for A if A were to be an egoist; it would be A's perception of B's welfare that matters for A's welfare; jumping in front of a train increases A's perception of B's welfare => this welfare increase would then have to be weighed against welfare losses A incurs by trying to stop the train
- There are a lot of concepts we use in everyday life that mix fact and value; if the egoist is to remain consistent then they have to not use fact and value concepts
 - Some terms have built-in concepts
 - Pain is non-pleasant state we ought to act to remove
 - If he is in "pain" then I have to remove his pain because to use the concept "pain" is to buy in to the value that one ought to remove pain in anyone
 - "Wretch" has built-in negative evaluations so we make an effort not to use the concept in a conversation
 - Just as there are some terms with built-in evaluations like "wretch," or "smelly" which carries with it a negative evaluation, there can be terms which carry in itself concepts that the egoist cannot subscribe to such that the egoist cannot use such terms
 - E.g. to see someone as a "person" is to understand they are to be treated morally etc. so the egoist cannot use the term "person"
 - They might refer to a person as a bi-pedal humanoid form instead
 - The egoist is trapped in having to avoid mainstream concepts and is put in a tricky conceptual spot
 - Egoist reply:
 - Being careful as such causes psychic fatigue so it is actually better for them to conform to norms
 - They can just detach values e.g. on your terms he is a person so in everyday life I can refer to him as person even though, as an egoist, I do not personally subscribe to that view
 - So the egoist can seem 'moral' because they behave and use the same terms as we do even if they do not have moral motivations
- Morality is the best means to whether the egoist is trying to achieve
 - If the egoist's life plan is to die heroically then they should do moral things because it is important to achieving their overall life goal

Can morality be based on self-interest? (Singer 2011)

- YES
 - Hare: distinguish between daily ethical practices and self-interested judgements for those practices
 - One can take a moment to stand back from my day-to-day ethical decisions and consider why I should act ethically – perhaps for self-interested reasons
 - If they reflect successfully, they will have reasons for taking up the ethical point of view as a settled policy to adopt in daily life
 - Then, in everyday situations, one can simply assume that what they are doing (i.e. doing what is right) in their interests
 - PP adds: but how does one assure that right for them means right for others? an egoist could follow the same process?
 - Plato's justification in the Republic: the just man is happy and the unjust man is miserable
 - Scientific evidence from psychology experiments show that happiness is correlated with giving (one may act ethically based off self interest)
 - Ethical activities such as giving blood and donating to charity have been found to be correlated with the agent's happiness
 - Not just correlation but causation
 - Nineteen female students were given \$100 each along with the option of donating some of the money to a local food bank for the poor.

- When students donated, their caudate nucleus, nucleus accumbens and insulae – became active. These are the parts of the brain that act as ‘reward centres,’ responding when you eat something sweet or receive money.
 - So, there is at least some evidence for a biological link between altruism and happiness.
 - BUT human nature is so diverse; findings not readily generalisable (low external validity) because sample is not representative of population and sample size is small
- NO
- F. H. Bradley: to defend morality in terms of self interest is to prostitute virtue, since we make people who do not like her for who she is want her for the pleasure she brings

References

- Shaver (2002) = SEP on Ethical Egoism
 - <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/egoism/>