

## Egoism III: Is Ethical Egoism Coherent

The worry: once someone has embraced ethical egoism they have already started down the ethical path; that is, they are already talking the language of 'should' etc. Mightn't it be that, as soon as one starts down that path, egoism becomes untenable?

To give substance to the point: suppose we say to the ethical egoist:

"You say that each person should just look after their own interests. So what do you reply when we ask if someone else, in performing some act that is in their own interests, hurts you. Should they do it or not? If you say 'Yes', then you seem to be giving up on egoism. If you say 'No' then you have to say what's special about you."

### MORE ON SAYING 'YES' TO THE QUESTION.

Is this really to give up on ethical egoism? Suppose the egoist says "They ought to try to do it, and I ought to try to stop them" Is that coherent? Must we think that everything that ought to be done, can be done consistently with everything else that ought to be done?

### MORE ON SAYING 'NO' TO THE QUESTION

So what is so special about you? That you are you? But that is a truism, and it is hard to see the relevance. If you can say something about what is special (perhaps, for instance, you are particularly clever) then it isn't really egoism, but, in this case, meritocracy. Rachels pushes this point further. He likens egoism to racism and sexism. He thinks that it is part of the very idea of morality that any different treatment must be justified by pointing to some relevant difference.

### AVOIDING THE QUESTION ALTOGETHER

Suppose the egoist simply refuses to answer the question. Does that get them off the hook? Not it seems once they have entered into the practice of using moral talk; and they entered that practice once they made their statement of ethical egoism. But suppose they simply refuse to enter the practice?

### CAN WE CONVICT THE EGOIST WHO REFUSES TO HAVE ANY TRUCK WITH MORALITY OF INCONSISTENCY

A very hard question. Certainly we might think that they are missing out on something. But that isn't inconsistency. Kantians (i.e. followers of Kant) think that they are inconsistent. Humeans (i.e. followers of Hume) think that they are not. We can't resolve the issue here.