

## ETHICAL EGOISM

- I. Definition of Ethical Egoism (EE): One ought, morally, always to act so as to maximize one's own (net) good. Alternatively, what makes an action morally right is that it maximizes the good of the agent performing the action.
  - A. EE is a prescriptive (*i.e.*, normative) theory. It does not purport to describe behavior or motivation. It *recommends* action.
  - B. EE is logically independent of *psychological* egoism—the theory that people are, in fact, *motivated only* by considerations of their own good.
    1. *PE does not imply EE*: People may be motivated to pursue only their own good, but not be *obligated* to act in ways that maximize their good.
    2. *EE does not imply PE*: People may be obligated to act in ways that maximize their own good but not be *motivated only* by considerations of their own good.
- II. Theories of Value Frequently Adopted by Ethical Egoists.
  - A. Hedonism: Pleasure, and only pleasure, is intrinsically good; pain, and only pain, is intrinsically bad. (Though ‘pain’ is often defined as the absence of pleasure or, more plausibly, these are put on a continuum).
  - B. Eudaimonism: Happiness, and only happiness is intrinsically good; unhappiness, and only unhappiness, is intrinsically bad. (Again, happiness and unhappiness are often placed on a continuum.)
  - C. Desire Satisfaction: This is a relatively modern theory of value. It holds that what is intrinsically good is what satisfies an intrinsic desire. (It does not hold that what is intrinsically good is *the satisfaction of an intrinsic desire*.)
- III. Problems with EE
  - A. EE fails a crucial condition of adequacy for a moral theory.
    1. *Condition of Adequacy for a Moral Theory*: Any adequate moral theory must provide a means of resolving conflicts of interest between individuals. (This is at least part of the *raison d’etre* of a moral theory.)
    2. When confronted with conflicts of interest between individuals, EE merely says to each individual, that she should do whatever she can to prevail. It offers no resolution of the conflict.
  - B. Counter Intuitive Consequences:
    1. EE not only permits one to callously refrain from expending the slightest effort to save another from disaster if one so chooses, it *requires* it.
      - a. The case of the Pampered Pompadour.