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1 Egoism

Three psychological egoist theses of increasing strength:

1. A lot more human behavior is selfish than we're normally inclined to think.
2. *All* actual human behavior is selfish.
3. All *possible* behavior is selfish.

What does it take for behavior to be selfish?

1. That it's motivated by one's own desires?
2. That it's motivated by a desire for pleasure?
3. That it's motivated by an 'I'-desire?

1.1 Evolutionary Arguments for Egoism

The rough idea: members of species that evolved via natural selection (like us) will tend to act in ways that increase their reproductive fitness.

A quick worry: the link between acting in ways that increase your reproductive fitness and acting selfishly is not immediate.

- Kin selection—helping out my children or my siblings might help me get more of my genes into the next generation. But this needn't count as selfish by the lights of the definitions of selfish behavior considered above.
- Reciprocal altruism—it might be that I'm disposed to help people who've helped me, because that disposition generally leads to their helping me in return.
 - This will only make me unselfish if I help others even when I'm not motivated by the desire that they help me in return. Could natural selection ever favor a desire to help people that extends even to cases where they won't help in return?

2 Meta-Ethics

Here are two sorts of questions about morality.

1. Normative ethical questions. For instance:
 - Is abortion ever morally permissible?
 - If you've got five people who will die if they don't get organ transplants, and one healthy person who's a match for each of them, should you kill the one person and distribute his organs to the five?

- What (if any) sorts of redistributive taxation would a just society engage in?
2. Metaethical questions. For instance:
- What are we doing when we say that some action is right or wrong—are we reporting a belief about a matter of fact, expressing a preference (e.g., that people do/don't do the action in question), or something else?
 - Can normative ethical claims be true or false?
 - If they can be true, is their truth somehow relative to a perspective or set of values, or can they be objectively true?

2.1 Two Versions of Relativism (*Not the same two from the reading*)

1. Normative ethical relativism: when an agent performs an action, that action is right/wrong just in case it is approved/disapproved of by the agent's community.
 - Does this capture the idea, often associated with relativism, that we ought to respect/tolerate other cultures, and that it's typically wrong to interfere with them?
2. Metaethical relativism: when we say that an action is right/wrong, we're just expressing our own approval/disapproval of the action. There's no further sense in which actions are *really* wrong.
 - If this view is correct, is there any point to engaging in normative ethical debates?
 - Interestingly, versions of this view can actually accommodate the idea that certain actions are *really* wrong. It's just that saying "*X* is *really* wrong," or "It's a fact that *X* is wrong," or "*X* is objectively wrong" are just more ways of expressing (particularly strong) disapproval of *X*.

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