

# Plans for upcoming weeks

# Group presentations

- Executive summary
- Peer evaluation
- Lecturer's evaluation

# Group presentations

- Week 11. Stakeholders
- Week 12. Workplace and workers
- Week 13. Professions and leadership
- Week 14. Rights
- Week 15. Culture and ethics

# Group presentations

- Chapter 3: Defining and Prioritizing Stakeholders + Chapter 4: Three Special Stakeholders: Society, the Environment, and Government)
- Chapter 6: What Employers Owe Employees + Chapter 7: What Employees Owe Employers
- Chapter 9: Professions Under the Microscope + Appendix B: Profiles in Business Ethics: Contemporary Thought Leaders
- Chapter 8: Recognizing and Respecting the Rights of All
- Chapter 5: The Impact of Culture and Time on Business Ethics

# **Ethical Egoism**

# Is there a duty to help starving people?

- Each year millions of people die from health problems caused by malnutrition.
  - Over 5,200 children under the age of five die every day from dehydration brought on by diarrhea – 1.9 million per year (*and 9.7 million if death by other preventable causes is included*).



# Is there a duty to help anyone?

- Unfortunately, for the hungry, statistics do not have much power to move us to action.
- However, we respond differently to those who face health problems caused by a *sudden* crisis such as a massive earthquake or tsunami.



# What kind of duties do we have?

- ? Leaving aside the question of *why* we behave as we do, what is our *duty*? **What *should* we do?**
- Common sense might tell us to balance our own interests against the interests of others.



# The interests of others

- The needs of others are also deemed important, and when we *can* help others—especially at little cost to ourselves—we sense that we *should* do so.



☞ This is based on the assumption that we have duties to others simply because *they are people who could be helped or harmed by what we do.*



# Egoism as morality?

☞ Other people's interests count, from a *moral* point of view.

- According to **ethical egoism**, however, we have no duties to others; in fact, each person *ought* to pursue his or her own selfish interests exclusively.



# Psychological Egoism

- Often confused with ethical egoism, yet quite distinct—because **it is not a *moral* theory.**
- **Psychological egoism** is a theory of *human psychology* and asserts that each person *does in fact* pursue his or her own self-interest alone.



# Is altruism possible?

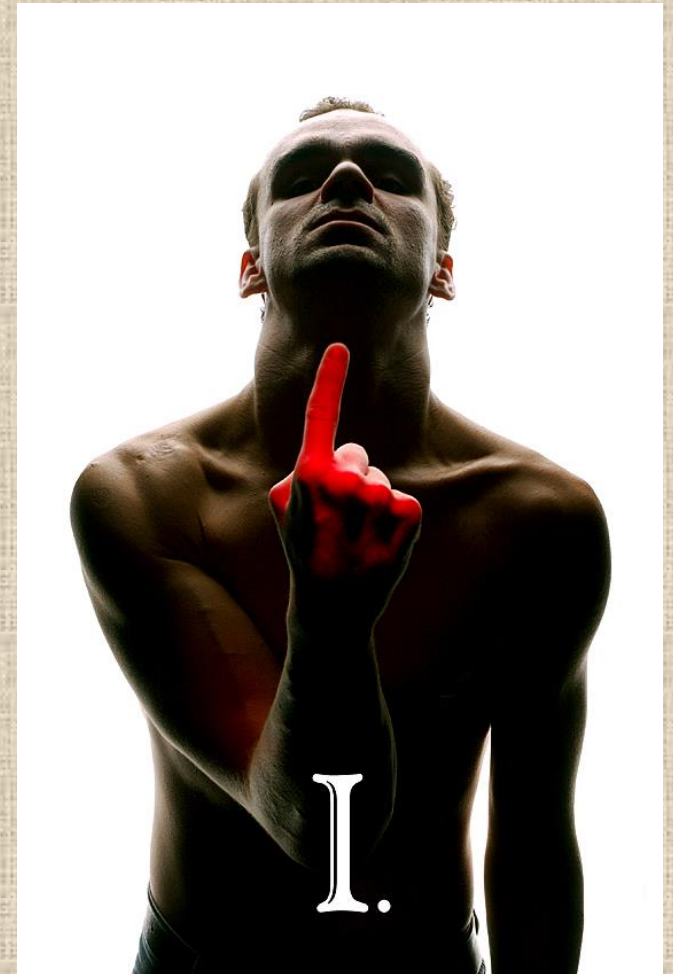
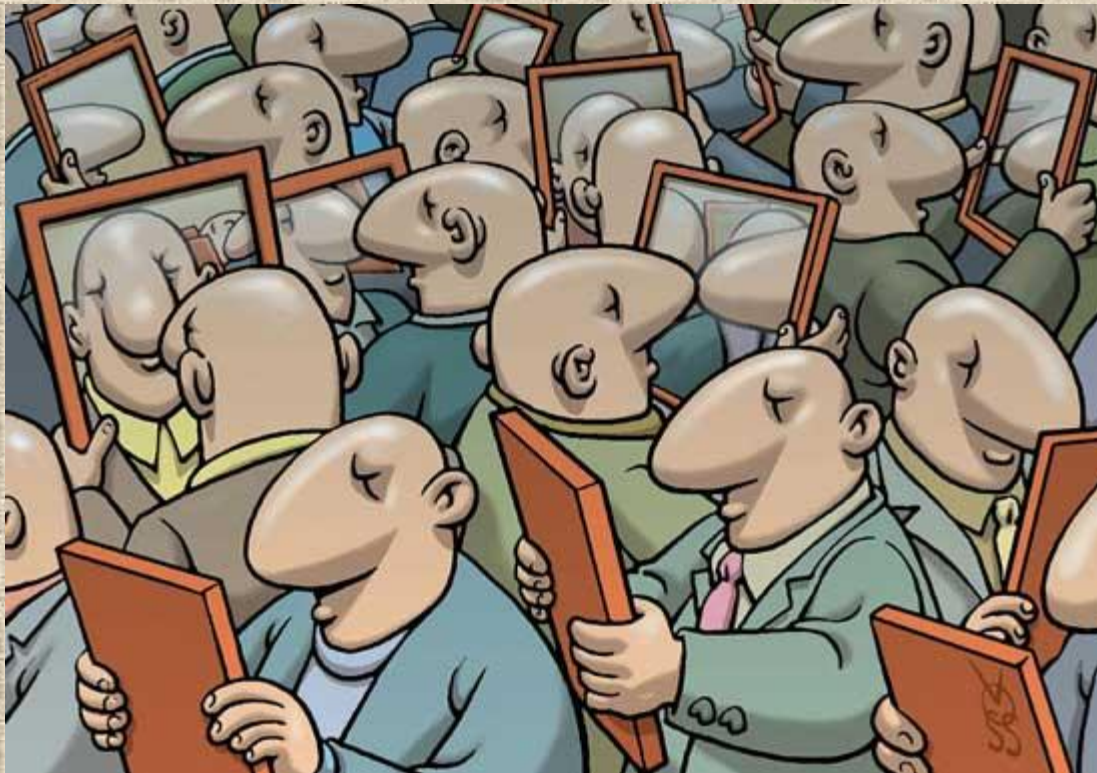
☞ Though few of us have saved lives, acts of altruism appear to be common.

- ✓ People do favors for one another.
- ✓ They give blood.
- ✓ They build homeless shelters.
- ✓ They volunteer in hospitals.
- ✓ They read to the blind.
- ✓ Etc.



# Is altruism an illusion?

- According to psychological egoism, altruism is an illusion. In reality, we only care for ourselves.
- ? Could this theory be true?



# The Argument that We Always Do What We Want to Do

- The actions of even the so-called altruist are merely dictated by selfish desires to do what he or she most wants to do.
- ∴ Since this is so, psychological egoism must be true.



# The Argument that We Always Do What We Want to Do

! This is a flawed argument.

- There are things we do, not simply because we *want* to, but because we feel that we *ought* to.
- The mere fact that you act on your own desires does not mean that you are primarily looking out for yourself; it all depends on *what* you desire.
- ☞ If what you *want* is to help someone else, then your motive is **altruistic**, not self-interested.



# The Argument that We Always Do What Makes Us Feel Good

- So-called altruistic actions produce a sense of self-satisfaction in the person who performs them.
- ∴ People sometimes *seem* to act altruistically, but it is not hard to discover that the ‘unselfish’ behavior is actually connected to some benefit for the person who does it.



Mother Teresa's actions, for example, were motivated by the belief she would be handsomely rewarded in heaven.



# The Argument that We Always Do What Makes Us Feel Good

! This argument is likewise badly flawed.

- The fact that one has a self-interested motive doesn't mean that one doesn't have benevolent motives as well.

☞ If I see a child drowning, my desire to help that child will usually be greater than my desire to avoid a guilty conscience.



# The Argument that We Always Do What Makes Us Feel Good

- We may derive satisfaction from getting what we desire, but the object of our desire is not usually the feeling of satisfaction itself.
- ☞ Our desire to help others often comes first; the good feelings we may get are merely a by-product.



# Conclusion about Psychological Egoism

- Every attempt to use the theory to account for *all* human action seems strained and implausible.
- ∴ **Psychological egoism is not a credible theory.**
- ☞ Thus, *it is not pointless to talk about whether we should care about others.*



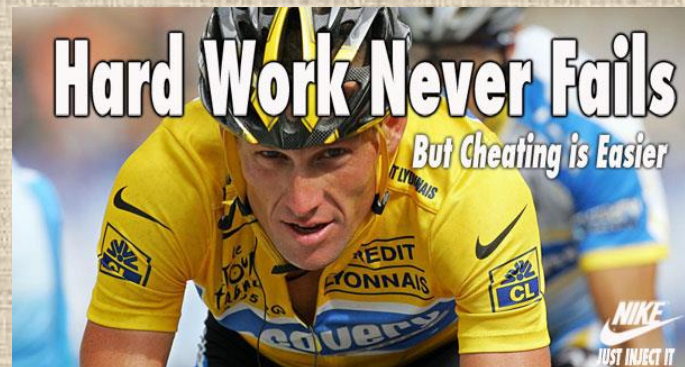
**BREAK TIME**

# Ethical Egoism

- **Ethical egoism** is the radical idea that the principle of *self-interest* accounts for *all* of one's moral obligations.
- Sometimes one's interests may happen to coincide with the interests of others—in that by helping oneself, one will coincidentally help them, too.



The benefit to others is not what makes an action *right*, however. An action is *right* only insofar as it is to one's own 'advantage.'



# Forms of ethical egoism

- Personal ethical egoism – the belief that only I should act from the motive of self-interest, nothing is stated about what motives others should act from.
- Individual ethical egoism – prescriptive doctrine that all persons should serve my self-interest (egotism).
- Universal ethical egoism – all persons should pursue their own interests exclusively.

# Problems to solve

- Without knowledge of the world, how can we truly know what's in our best interest?
- What exactly “own interest” means? Does this phrase talk about short-term or long-term benefit, pleasure, happiness, preference, or something else?

# Ethical Egoism

- One should not, however, always do what one *wants* to do (for example, set up a meth lab).

☞ A person *ought* to do what *really is* in his or her best interests, over the long run.



# Ayn Rand's Argument

Ethical egoism is associated with Ayn Rand (1905-1982) more than with any other 20<sup>th</sup> century writer.

- Altruism, according to Rand, leads to a denial of the value of the individual (and his projects and goods).
  - “If a man accepts the ethics of altruism, his first concern is not how to live his life, but how to sacrifice it.”



# Ayn Rand's Argument

- The argument is that since:
  - each person has one life to live, AND
  - altruism rejects the value of the individual, WHEREAS
  - ethical egoism views the individual's life as having supreme value,

∴ then ethical egoism is the moral philosophy we ought to accept.



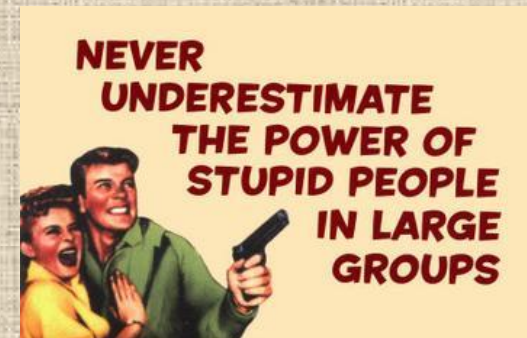
# Compatible with Commonsense Morality

- Ethical egoism claims that all our commonsense moral views regarding duties are ultimately derived from the one fundamental principle of self-interest.

☞ *It is to our own advantage* to avoid harming others. Otherwise, they might harm us.

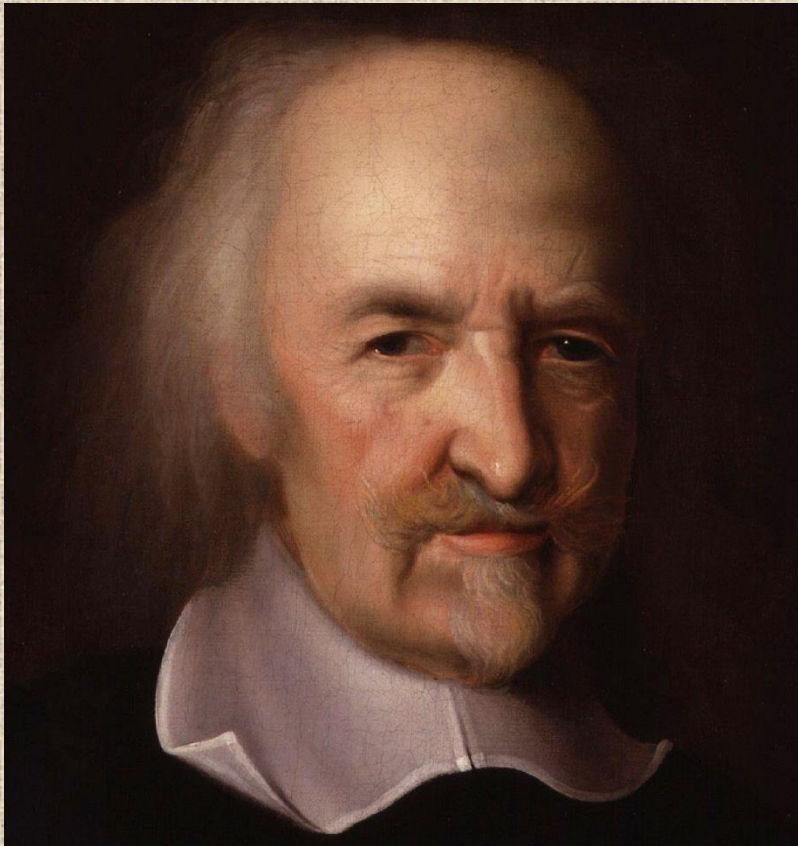
☞ *It is to our own advantage* to be truthful. Otherwise, others may be dishonest to us.

☞ *It is to our own advantage* to keep our promises. Otherwise, others may break their promises to us.



# Commonsense Negative Duties

- Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) used this line of reasoning.



- Hobbes formulated a negative version of the Golden Rule:  
*“Do not that to another, which thou wouldst not have done to thyself.”*

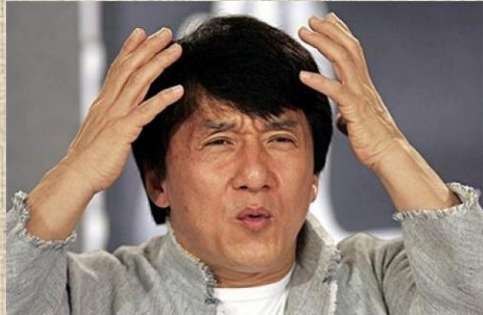
# Does the commonsense argument succeed?

- There are two serious problems.
- ☞ It shows only that it is *mostly* to one's advantage to avoid harming others.
- ☞ If you could 'profit' by exploiting, harming, or killing others, **ethical egoism cannot explain why you *should* do otherwise.**



# Reason and Impartiality

- Suppose it is true that contributing money for famine relief is somehow to one's own 'advantage.'



☞ It doesn't follow that this is the *only* reason to do so. Another **reason** might be *to help starving people*.



# Ethical Egoism and 'Wickedness'

- Suppose that someone could actually 'benefit' by doing things we construe as 'wicked.' For example:
  - Feeding a baby acid to fake a lawsuit for money.
  - Shooting a letter carrier seven times to go to prison rather than to become homeless.

? Wouldn't ethical egoism have to approve of such actions?



# Unacceptably Arbitrary

- Ethical egoism is a moral theory of the same type as racism, sexism, etc.



- It advocates that each of us divide the world into two categories. The interests of one group (ourselves) are more important than those of the second group (everyone else).
- ?
- But ask: What makes me so special? What *justifies* placing myself in the special category?
- ☞ **Failing to provide an answer, ethical egoism is as arbitrary as racism.**

# Implications of Impartiality

- ∴ ***We should*** care about the interests of other people because their needs and desires are comparable to our own.
  - Consider again the starving children of the world.



# Consider

? What is the difference between us and them?  
Does hunger affect them any less? Are they  
less 'deserving' than we are?



**CAN YOU NAME ANY PROS OF  
ETHICAL EGOISM?**

# Pros of ethical egoism

- Encourages self-awareness.
- There are more opportunities for personal improvement.
- Everyone would have an opportunity to provide for themselves.
- Allow people to implement self-care routines.
- No one can manipulate you when practicing ethical egoism.
- Eliminates the autopilot approach that people take in life.
- Productivity would rise in society when ethical egoism is in control.

**AND WHAT ABOUT CONS?**

# Cons of ethical egoism

- It is an approach that would create a self-centered society.
- There would be a loss of empathy in society with ethical egoism.
- It would lead to a breakdown in workplace relationships.
- Ethical egoism eliminates the concept of objectivity from society.
- It would only work if everyone was practicing this theory.
- There is no solutions offered when conflicts of interest arise.
- Ethical egoism goes against the principle of impartiality.
- It isn't always in person's best interest to pursue their own self-interest.

# Prisoner's dilemma

- You confess: you get 6 month, your friend gets 10 years.
- Your friend confesses and you not: the opposite happens.
- Both confess: you get 5 years.
- No one confesses: both get 2 years.

**What you would choose?**

# Conclusion

- The realization that we are on a par with others is the deepest reason our morality *must* recognize the needs of others.



☞ That is why *ethical egoism ultimately fails* as a moral theory.

