

Reading Guide #2

Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism"*

Rand "The Virtue of Selfishness"*

1. What is the difference between psychological egoism and ethical egoism? What is psychological egoistic hedonism and how does it relate to psychological egoism?
2. Criticize the following argument:

Suppose I help a stranger out, apparently out of selfless generosity. Isn't it true that I'm doing precisely what I most want to do, and therefore isn't it true that I am in some sense being exactly as selfish as someone who does not help the stranger out. After all both of us are just doing what we want to do. (See page 550 in Feinberg)

3. On page 554, Feinberg distinguishes between wanting a thing or event and wanting the sensation that arises from getting that thing. Using your own example, explain this distinction.
4. Do you think that most of the time people want things or the sensations associated with getting those things? In order to decide this question, you might want to ask yourself if you would substitute one of your favorite activities with a drug that simulated the feeling you had when you engaged in this activity.
5. **One argument for psychological egoism points out that whenever we appear to do something selfless, we still have the pleasant satisfaction that we are doing the right thing. Assuming that the objector is correct in thinking that some pleasant self-satisfaction sensations do arise whenever we do the right thing, do you think that this self-satisfaction is always the ultimate motive of their action? [Hint: your answer here will depend on your answer to #4 and should reflect an understanding of why someone might answer 'no' to #4.]**
6. An altruistic action, in common speech, is one in which you sacrifice yourself for the sake of someone else. On Rand's view, altruism is elevated to a normative ethical theory (i.e. a theory which tells us, in all cases, what we ought to do). State this theory. (Your answer should have an "ought" in it.)
7. **According to Rand, when it comes to distributing goods, there are two questions that must be answered:**
 - 1) **what counts as a good thing?**
 - 2) **how should we distribute these good things?**

How, according to Rand, does altruism answer (or not answer) these two questions?

8. **This question asks about the possibility of having bad desires. Suppose that the only time that you act upon those desires is in a virtual world so that no one gets hurt by these desires? Imagine for example that there is a very elaborate virtual reality machine that can simulate down to the feeling, touch, and smell just about any experience. If I satisfy my desires in this**

virtual world only and never in the real world, are these desires in any sense bad ones? Explain how this is possible or give a persuasive example.

9. Rand disagrees with altruists who say that pursuing your own interest is immoral because it hurts other people. But, she thinks that there might be other reasons that something could be wrong besides for the fact that it hurts other people. Can you think of an example? [Hint: think of question #3]