Metaethical problems for ethical egoism reconsidered

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July 6, 2009

Until recently it has been conventional to assume that ethical egoism is "ethical" is name only and that no account that considers one's own interests as the standard of moral obligation could ever count as seriously "ethical." In recent years, however, philosophers have shown increasing appreciation for more sophisticated forms of egoism which attempt to define self-interest in enriched terms, terms which characterize self-interest as a form of human flourishing in both material and psychological dimensions. But philosophers are still skeptical that any conception of self-interest could underpin ethical theory. This paper considers recent arguments by Richard Joyce, who is willing to concede enriched conceptions of self-interest, but who claims that egoism cannot support intuitions about counterfactual conditionals, or paradigmatic traits and uses of moral norms. I argue that ethical egoism can satisfy each of Joyce's requirements for morality, provided that it is taken to involve the very notion of enriched self-interest that Joyce is elsewhere willing to consider. In showing that egoism can count as a moral theory, I show, in effect, that Joyce's arguments for error theory about morality are really arguments for error theory about agent-neutral, *non-egoistic morality.*

1. Introduction

For much of the last century or two, considering the viability of ethical egoism as a moral theory was a formality to be addressed merely for the sake of dismissing it. Ethics textbooks would introduce the theory that moral obligation is based on self-interest only to knock it down quickly, before getting around to the real business of evaluating the dispute between deontology and consequentialism, both of which take it for granted that moral obligation assumes a special agent-neutral "moral point of view."[1] Part of the reason for this ready dismissal was the widespread view that the egoist is the antithesis of the moral person, on the grounds that one person's pursuit of self-interest was taken almost necessarily to involve conflicts with the interests of others, and that the job of morality is to avoid or settle such conflicts.

In more recent years, it has become clearer that this dismissal relied uncritically on impoverished views of the nature of self-interest. Particularly with the advent of virtue ethical and neo-Aristotelian theories that have come to rival deontological and consequentialist approaches, self-interest has come to be viewed in a more positive light, often as a form of human flourishing, not as rapacious indulgence.[2] On more sophisticated versions of egoism, then, self-interest can be determined by reference to the objective needs of a flourishing human life, not by reference to pleasure maximization or subjective preference satisfaction (pursuers of either of which are easier to see as coming into conflict). Arguably a *crude* version of egoism, one which defined self-interest in these more subjective terms, would not count as an ethical theory, not only because it would occasion more interpersonal conflict, but also, as we shall see, because it fails to define principles of long-term flourishing that are more characteristic of a moral code.[3]

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[1] Footnote textbooks.

[2] For recent positive treatments of self-interest, see Bloomfield (2008), Schmidtz (1997), Badhwar (1997), and Hampton (1997). For favorable treatments of self-interest in the virtue ethics tradition, see especially Hursthouse (1999, 163-191). For recent full-fledged advocates of ethical egoism, see Smith (2006), Hunt (1999), and Binswanger (1992).

[3] Preference utilitarianism is, of course, a sophisticated version of the original doctrine, but applied to egoism, it would do little to eliminate the conflict of interest problem. Of course, according to the sophisticated egoists, crude egoists are not *really* egoists at all. On the sophisticated theories, self-interest by its nature is defined by reference to the distinctive mode of flourishing of the living organism in question. As we will see, human flourishing is, itself, a sophisticated process, and as such, human self-interest is defined likewise. And it is not even obvious if any philosophers have ever

However controversial they may remain, recent defenses of ethical egoism have pushed the debate over its worth as a moral theory to a new level of seriousness, in which egoism is no longer viewed as an ersatz version of morality, to be dismissed only for the sake of contrast with legitimate disputes about the nature of morality. Critics of egoism increasingly appreciate that assuming self-interest to imply rapacious indulgence is akin to assuming that utilitarianism implies that pushpin is as good as poetry, Mill's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Symptomatic of this appreciation are the contents of a new anthology edited by Paul Bloomfield, *Morality and Self-Interest* (2008). While many of the authors are critics of ethical egoism, few take it for granted that egoism is a matter of crude hedonism, or that there are inevitable conflicts of interest between people. Instead the focus is often on whether a code of self-interest should count as a code of *morality*.[4] Especially noteworthy, in this respect, is the contribution by Richard Joyce (2008). Joyce initially expresses skepticism about Bloomfield's own proposal that one's violation of putative moral obligations always involves the frustration of one's own self-interest. But he ultimately considers the possibility that Bloomfield may be correct, and argues that even if "always, for everyone, necessarily" it frustrates one's self-interest to engage in acts of paradigmatic vice, and the concepts of morality and self-interest are coextensive, this does not imply the concepts mean the same thing. So there is still a serious metaethical question as to whether the prescription to uphold moral obligations on the grounds of self-interest would count as a genuinely *moral* prescription.

Joyce is a moral error theorist in the tradition of J.L. Mackie, and so argues elsewhere that even though ethical predicates like "…is morally good" are uttered with assertoric force (contra noncognitivism), they fail to refer to anything real. In defense of this conclusion, error theorists cite unusual properties of ethical predicates—such as their presuppositions about human autonomy, their reliance on inescapable categorical imperatives, their lack of explanatory value, their origins in religious or other supernatural metaphysics—and claim that not all of these properties can fit into a naturalistic worldview. Error theory's metaethical perspective therefore brings with it a special attention to the *meaning* of ethical predicates, such that an error theorist might be in a good position to analyze egoistic prescriptions for whether they count as genuinely *ethical*.

Joyce, of course, recognizes that error theory's conception of what is essential to ethical predicates is controversial. Even error theorists differ amongst themselves about what it is that is so peculiar about

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advocated crude egoism as an ethical theory. Thrasymachus was, perhaps, the prototype of an egoist, and perhaps sophists of his day held similar views. It is interesting, however, how Thrasymachus himself takes his view as a *rejection* of "justice," not as an egoistically-grounded theory of justice, underscoring that crude egoism is of course not an ethical theory. An oft-cited example is Hobbes, but his is a psychological rather than an ethical egoism (and it is spectacular how many philosophers confuse these two when looking for a target for ethical egoism). Nietzsche is a better candidate for an authentic historical ethical egoist whose view verges on crude egoism. To the extent that it does verge on the crude, however, it is once again noteworthy how Nietzsche himself embraces his view as a rejection of "morality." When Nietzsche is less crude, he himself speaks of the "virtues" of the higher type of man (such as as the "gift-giving" virtue.) Generally, it is sometimes embarrassing how critics of egoism have to manufacture targets of their critique, by appealing to the crude theory, when it is not clear if any such targets exist. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on egoism, characteristically enough, lists only one actual philosophical advocate of ethical egoism in its bibliography, Jesse Kalin (1970).

[4] Throughout this piece, I use "moral" and "ethical" interchangeably.

ethical predicates. Nevertheless, Joyce thinks there should be a level at which error theorists and non-error theorists alike should be able to agree upon some necessary conditions for counting as an ethical predicate. Owing to this agreement, "anybody—whether error theorist or not—should be extremely uncomfortable about any proposal to identify moral imperatives and values with prudential imperatives and values" (Joyce 2008: 61). To evaluate egoism against the requirements of morality, Joyce advances at least two general critical points. First, he contends that even if acts of self-interest are coextensive with acts of morality in the actual world, our intuitions tell us that this does not hold, counterfactually. Second, he argues that egoistic norms would not match the essential nature or paradigmatic use of moral norms. So even if the set of self-interested acts turns out to be coextensive with the set of moral acts, and even if the requirements of self-interest furnish a general, practical code for living, self-interest would at best furnish a contingent code of "prudence," not the code of necessary, categorical imperatives so characteristic of morality.

In the course of this paper, I will review the content of some of these sophisticated versions of egoism. While I will mention how they propose to answer the "conflicts of interest" objection, it is not my purpose to show, in detail, how the objection is to be answered. My purpose is rather to show, contrary to conventional wisdom that equate egoism with crude egoism, that the implications of the sophisticated accounts of self-interest are adequate to formulate a genuinely *ethical* theory. To show this, I will focus on Joyce's two critical points, and argue that they do not drive a wedge between morality and self-interest in the way he contends. Concerning "intuitions" about counterfactuals, I will argue that to the extent that we should have any concern about them, egoism can meet their demands. But this is only to an extent: what Joyce considers as "intuitions" are, I think, really pre-theoretical judgments which we should expect both philosophers and ordinary people to get right much but not all of the time. At the same time, I think that when the nature of ethical normativity is properly understood, egoistic norms have it and can be used in all of the prototypical ways.

Altogether, I do not argue that egoism is the *correct* ethical theory, but I do claim that there is no reason to deny that sophisticated forms of egoism are *ethical* theories. And I do recommend that these more sophisticated versions of ethical egoism should be studied alongside the major normative ethical theories, and evaluated not according to whether they are *ethical* theories, but whether they are *adequate* moral theories. In the end, I think that ethicists who dismiss egoism as ethical in name only are missing out on an important debate.

2. Moral intuitions about counterfactuals

The first of Joyce's challenge to egoism I would like to examine is a specific appeal to the ethical intuitions. This is not the first point he considers: at first he spends time disputing the effects of moral action on one's self-interest in the actual world. I will return to this dispute later, because I think examining questions about the nature and reliability of moral intuitions will condition later discussions in useful ways.

Joyce asks us to consider our response to a thought experiment about a Nazi SS guard. This particular guard knowingly, willingly forces Jewish children into gas chambers, and by hypothesis he is not

exculpable on the grounds of "only following orders" or avoiding other threats. His is a prototypically immoral act ("if any action is a moral crime, it is his") (62). Joyce asks us to assume for the sake of *reductio* that egoism is correct and self-interest is the only standard of moral obligation. He takes this to imply that we must accept the counterfactual that "if the guard had killed all those innocent people *but had managed somehow (magically, perhaps) to avoid the consequential self-harm*, then there would have been nothing wrong (i.e., morally/prudentially wrong) with his actions" (62).[5] Joyce finds this counterfactual "appalling," and asks us to reject egoism on the grounds of its absurdity. In this section, I will argue that, properly construed, egoism does not imply any worrisome counterfactuals. To see this, I will need to digress somewhat about the nature of counterfactuals, and about egoism's status as a kind of nomological generalization.

It is telling that Joyce has to stipulate that the guard's avoidance of self-harm is to be regarded as counterfactual, made possible even by magic, for it implies that he thinks such avoidance is not possible in the actual world. No doubt he is aware that that there are accounts of self-interest available that would rule out the realistic material and psychological profitability of such acts under normal circumstances. (I'll examine one strong contender's case for this, shortly.) His point, however, is that if we were to take egoism as a nomological generalization about morality, it would be (like any other nomological generalization) counterfactual-supporting, with implications in non-actual circumstances.

So, is it true that egoism supports *this* particular counterfactual? It is not entirely obvious that it does. To see this, let's consider some parallel examples of non-ethical generalizations and the kinds of counterfactuals they support. Here is a standard example, adapted from Nicholas Rescher (1961), concerning beliefs we might accept about match *M* , (1) through (5), and what happens when we reject one of these beliefs, (1), and choose among different counterfactual conditionals to adopt:

Beliefs: (M1) *M* has not been struck (known fact).

(M2) *M* has not been lit (known fact).

(M3) *M* is a dry match (auxiliary hypothesis 1).

(M4) *M* is located in an oxygen-containing medium (auxiliary hypothesis 2).

(M5) All dry matches located in an oxygen-containing medium light when struck (accepted covering law).

Assume counterfactually: Assume *M* had been struck. (supposing (M1) is false.)

Conclude either:

(MC1) If the match had been struck, it would have been lit. *Or*

[5] Joyce does not say that the guard's *motivation* is actually self-interested, only that he escapes any resulting self-harm. I would say that there is a burden of proof on the critic of egoism here to show that there actually is a self-interested goal to be achieved through such action. As I have already mentioned, it is not enough to show that some fleeting pleasures (let us say, of a sadistic variety) are achieved. This would confuse egoism with hedonism. For the sake of argument, however, I will assume that it is conceivable that something besides hedonic satisfaction is achievable through this action. Perhaps the guard at least thinks that he will gain from plundering the fortune of the family in question.

(MC2) If the match had been struck, *M* is not a dry match. *Or*

(MC3) If the match had been struck, *M* is not located in an oxygen-containing medium. *Or*

(MC4) If the match had been struck, *M* is a dry match located in an oxygen-containing medium that does not light when struck.

Rescher argues that we will adopt (MC1) and suppose that (M2) is false, because we have great confidence in our covering law (M5), and we have no reason to believe that our auxiliary hypotheses, (M3) and (M4), fail to hold.

A parallel counterfactual conclusion concerning morality and self-interest might be constructed as follows:

Beliefs: (K1) Killing innocents is not presently in one's self-interest (known fact).

(K2) Killing innocents is not moral (known fact).

(K3) All pursuit of self-interest is moral (accepted covering law).

Assume counterfactually: Killing innocents is presently in one's self-interest. (supposing (K1) is false)

Conclude either:

(KC1) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, it would be moral. *Or*

(KC2) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, there would be immoral self-interest.

I presume that Joyce would think that if we accept (K3) as a generalization with strength equal to that of "All dry matches located in an oxygen-containing medium light when struck," we would have to conclude with counterfactual (KC1). But he thinks (KC1) is absurd, so instead he rejects (K3) and, in the end, embraces counterfactual (KC2), contrary to what ethical egoism tells us.

Does ethical egoism really imply (KC1) under our counterfactual assumption? Notice that unlike the generalization concerning the striking of matches (M5), Joyce's egoistic generalization (K3) does not specify the conditions under which it applies. What if the ethical egoist's generalization were treated less like a stipulation without context and more like a qualified scientific generalization? What if the Nazi's counterfactual situation is one in which one of the auxiliary hypotheses fails to hold?

In fact there is reason to think that egoistic generalizations are akin to scientific generalizations in the most sophisticated egoistic theories. Any theory that regards self-interest in terms of *eudaemonistic* flourishing is making a *biological* generalization. Of special note is Tara Smith's recent work (2000, 2006, 2008) explicating and developing the views of Rand (1964).[6] On this view, egoistic prescriptions are hypothetical imperatives generalizing about the necessary conditions for human flourishing. Flourishing is in turn conceived as objective well-being, a distinctive state of a living creature that must be actively achieved and sustained, not a mere quantity to be maximized or a homogenous stuff that one can passively

[6] See also Wright (2008).

receive (or bilk) from another. Included among the necessary conditions for achieving *human* flourishing is acting consciously on principles required for the *long-range* flourishing of a rational being. Long-range flourishing of a rational being requires not only the securing of physical needs through creative production, but also the fulfillment of psychological needs such as productive purpose and self-esteem. Further, the fulfillment of these needs—particularly the fulfillment of psychological needs—is valuable not merely as a means to the end of physical survival, but also as a constitutive part of the end of living a human life. These constitutive values include the pursuit of a productive career, the enjoyment of art, and the protection of the interests of friends and lovers, not merely as means to the end of self-interest, but as essential parts of it (Hunt 1999).[7] With regard to the interests of other people in general, the egoist generally sees their value either as complementary or conducive to one's self-interest, for reasons reflecting all of the above considerations. Just as our own lives are improved by thinking and production, so we value the lives of others who are left free to think and produce, since the products of each activity can be exchanged to mutual benefit. At the very least, the egoist respects the rights of all human beings because of the potential humans have to offer value for value, and because of the general value of living in a free society from which each person benefits.

How might such generalizations about the necessary conditions for flourishing be qualified by auxiliary hypotheses? On the view just articulated, respecting the freedom of another person is viewed, under ordinary conditions, as necessary for maintaining one's own status as an independent producer endowed with self-esteem over the long range(Hicks 2003, Locke and Woiceshyn 1995). There *are* obvious conditions under which this generalization might not apply. An illustrative example involves circumstances, usually involving immediately life-threatening emergencies, in which long-range consequences are irrelevant in light of extreme short-term threats.[8] In an emergency situation, for example,

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[7] See also Smith (2000, pp. 128-130). Importantly, Smith gives us material we need to account for how the egoist objectively determines the types of values that are included as components of the end of flourishing, without relying on irreducibly normative standards: "Life must be understood recursively. 'Survival' refers to the continuation of an organism's metabolic processes as well as to other activities that foster that continuation" (Smith 2000, pg. 135).

I would read this to mean something as follows: life is cellular metabolism, plus everything that maintains cellular metabolism. A plant's life, for example, is not just the activity of individual plant cells, but includes, essentially, the overall process of photosynthesis, which enables the life of the individual cells. We would say that a plant is dead *qua* plant if photosynthesis ceases permanently, even if many individual cells are still functioning. Likewise, for human life, central organizing activities of consciousness are essential to human life *qua* human. For example rationality, productive purposes, and self-esteem are essential psychological means to the end of physical survival, but also help constitute part of what human life consists of. This is why we would regard a human being in a permanently vegetative state as no longer alive *qua* human life. In either case, special components of the life process are not merely means to the end of cellular metabolism, but become *part* of the end of living—as it were, take on a "life of their own"—by virtue of playing a central role as means to previous ends. (There is a respect here in which the *logical* ontogeny of values recapitulates their *developmental* phylogeny.)

By a similar line of reasoning, John Stuart Mill argued that means subordinate to the end of happiness could come to be part of the end of happiness (Mill 2001/1861, pp. 36-39). The sophisticated egoists treat objective flourishing, not subjective feelings of pleasure as the ultimate end of ethics, but Mill's account here applies *mutatis mutandis* to the relation between the means to and end of flourishing. Understanding the content of flourishing as generated in the recursive manner is important in showing that self-interest is not simply being defined so as to include everything previously accepted as moral on non-egoistic codes. As we shall be reminded of later in section 3, this conception patently does *not* include everything in traditional moral codes, which is part of what makes it egoistic as opposed to altruistic.

[8] See Smith (2006, pp. 94-100) and Rand (1964, pp. 49-56) on the topic of emergency situations..

respect for others' property may no longer serve the end of life: if one is being chased by a murderer, trespassing may be needed to escape. Likewise, extreme enough emergencies may even warrant the taking of innocent life (trolley cases are one example; hostage situations are another). On the present account, the effect that respecting others' property or life has on one's own flourishing is cancelled by the interfering factor of the emergency. This is to be understood in much the same way that the effect of striking a match is cancelled by the interfering factor of water.

But this does not mean that on the present account, violating property or taking innocent lives is thereby rendered "moral." On the present view, moral concepts relate to self-interest from a special perspective. According to the egoists I mention above, it is not simply that morality requires self-interest, but that *self-interest requires morality* (under usual circumstances). Human beings need a conceptualized code of values and virtues to help them plan how to achieve their self-interest in the long-range (Smith 2000, pp. 164-167). A virtue, for example, is a type of action motivated by a distinctive state of character which we conceptualize because the actions and habits it encourages have long-range beneficial consequences. Arguably we would not form moral concepts if our lives consisted entirely of emergency kill-or-be-killed situations. At best we would acquire scattered rules of thumb for avoiding obvious kinds of emergency, but projecting a long-range future would be impossible. For this reason, moral concepts do not apply one way or the other to such things as emergency situations.[9] So taking an innocent life in a trolley or hostage case is not immoral, but it is also not moral. The presupposition of the applicability of moral concepts is simply not in place.

Suppose, then, that our egoistic generalization is sketched below as (K4), accompanied by appropriate known facts (K1) and (K2), and auxiliary hypothesis (K3):

Beliefs: (K1) Killing innocents is not presently in one's self-interest (known fact).

(K2) Killing innocents is not moral (known fact).

(K3) Circumstances are not in a state of emergency, i.e. not immediately life-threatening (auxiliary hypothesis 1).

(K4) All pursuit of self-interest under non-emergency circumstances is moral (accepted covering law).

[9] Compare Hume's view of the inapplicability of the virtue of justice in emergencies: "Suppose a society to fall into such want of all common necessaries, that the utmost frugality and industry cannot preserve the greater number from perishing, and the whole from extreme misery: It will readily, I believe, be admitted, that the strict laws of justice are suspended, in such a pressing emergence, and give place to the stronger motives of necessity and self-preservation. Is it any crime, after a shipwreck, to seize whatever means or instrument of safety one can lay hold of, without regard to former limitations of property? Or if a city besieged were perishing with hunger; can we imagine, that men will see any means of preservation before them, and lose their lives, from a scrupulous regard to what, in other situations, would be the rules of equity and justice? The USE and TENDENCY of that virtue is to procure happiness and security, by preserving order in society: But where the society is ready to perish from extreme necessity, no greater evil can be dreaded from violence and injustice; and every man may now provide for himself by all the means, which prudence can dictate, or humanity permit" (Hume, 1998/1751, 15). The only point the ethical egoist would disagree with here is the contention that in such situations, ethics *gives way* to the motive of self-interest. Self-interest is what normally underpins ethics, but it fails to do so in emergency situations.

Assume counterfactually: Killing innocents is presently in one's self-interest. (supposing (K1) is false)

Conclude either:

(KC1) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, it would be moral. *Or*

(KC2) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, there would be immoral self-interest. *Or*

(KC3) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, it would be neither moral nor immoral, as circumstances would be in a state of emergency.

With all of the above in mind, the new counterfactual I list as (KC3) is not at all implausible. We do not accept (KC1) or (KC2), because our confidence in both (K2) and (K4) is very strong under the account I have presented. There must, therefore, be some auxiliary (K3) that fails to hold. Emergency circumstances, on this view, are ones in which morality has nothing to say: the act is neither moral nor immoral.

Perhaps there are *other* qualifications on egoistic generalizations, apart from emergency situations, and other auxiliary hypotheses that must hold for the pursuit of self-interest to count as moral, conditions that might not be operative in the particular circumstance Joyce describes. Of course there is no reason to think that Joyce's Nazi is going through an emergency, nor are his actions supposed to be exculpable on the grounds that he himself is being forced. But by Joyce's own hypothesis, circumstances are still not completely normal: the malicious guard is supposed to have magical powers that allow him to avoid the usual material or psychological consequences of his illicit act. Later I will consider more plausible tricks he could resort to in order to avoid harm, but for now, I want to say why I think the possibility of magic would cut against additional presuppositions about the applicability of morality, and later, similar points will apply to the more plausible tricks.

One implication of the claim that we need moral principles for long-range flourishing is that we should enshrine as a virtue the exercise of human rationality.[10] On this view, reason is portrayed as the basic human means of survival, which must be used to rearrange the environment to create the values necessary for life. On this view, it is precisely *because* human beings are neither infallible nor omniscient—nor, for that matter, *omnipotent*—that they require moral virtues of rationality and, consequently, productiveness. Precisely because neither knowledge nor values are created magically, we must discover rational methods of producing each. This general need for rationality necessitates a plethora of other corollary virtues, such as integrity, pride, honesty and justice, the last of which results from the value that rational, creative producers derive from other rational, creative producers.[11] Because we can't live by magic, we need to rely on our minds and the free minds of others in order best to solve the problem of survival. If this is true, it means that a world in which human beings are magical is a world in which

[10] On the egoistic virtue of rationality, see Smith (2006, pp. 48-74); Peikoff (1991, pp. 220-229); Rand (1964, pp.27-28).
[11] For a book length treatment of each of these egoistic virtues, see Smith (2006).

morality is unnecessary, and moral concepts are inapplicable.[12] So, Joyce's magic Nazi may achieve his self-interest, but his actions are *neither moral nor immoral.* Perhaps his victims, if they want to escape, should try using some magic, too. But in the Harry Potter universe this Nazi inhabits, there is no such thing as morality for him. If the thought experiment proposes that *only* the Nazi has magic, then we can regard him only as we would a race of invading alien super beings: as falling outside the bounds of our morality, but to be combated as we might a malicious force of nature.

A natural objection to this answer to Joyce on the grounds of the inapplicability of morality to magical beings is that it is reading too much into his aside about magic. We should really consider other more realistic tricks the Nazi might use, short of magic, which would relieve him of the usual harmful consequences of his killing spree. Perhaps he could become adept at avoiding Nuremberg-style trials. No doubt escaping criminal punishment is always possible—it happens far too often. Ever since Plato's myth of Gyges, philosophers have known that the ethical egoist looks to more than social consequences as a source of "punishment" for moral transgression. Guilt and remorse are the first-cited psychological consequences, but on a cognitivist view of emotions, at least, experiencing either feeling presupposes that the transgressor *already believes* that what he's done is wrong (Solomon 2006, Nussbaum 2003). Supposing that he would feel guilty of his crime presupposes that he has already been convinced of the truth of ethical egoism, but we are presently debating about whether a convincing case is available. So there is a point to the Thrasymachian dodge that the Nazi could become psychologically skilled at avoiding pangs of guilt and remorse. Plato's own candidate for the inescapable psychological consequence of vice, "disharmony of the soul," fails to beg the question, but lacks plausibility to the extent that it relies on his controversial tripartite division of the soul.

Still, the egoism we are considering does consider psychological well-being as an important component of human flourishing, so there may be something to the idea of "harmony of the soul," albeit understood under the terms of a different psychology.[13] Recently, Bloomfield (2008) has made a case for a more plausible mechanism by which mistreatment of others has inescapable psychological consequences: specifically, self-deceit and a resulting loss of self-respect. In essence, Bloomfield argues that a "pleonectic" who treats others with extreme disrespect either believes himself as specially valuable, or not;

[12] Compare, once again, Hume's view on the conditions for the applicability of the virtue of justice: "Let us suppose, that nature has bestowed on the human race such profuse abundance of all external conveniences, that, without any uncertainty in the event, without any care or industry on our part, every individual finds himself fully provided with whatever his most voracious appetites can want, or luxurious imagination wish or desire. His natural beauty, we shall suppose, surpasses all acquired ornaments: The perpetual clemency of the seasons renders useless all cloaths or covering: The raw herbage affords him the most delicious fare; the clear fountain, the richest beverage. No laborious occupation required: No tillage: No navigation. Music, poetry, and contemplation form his sole business: Conversation, mirth, and friendship his sole amusement. It seems evident, that, in such a happy state, every other social virtue would flourish, and receive tenfold encrease; but the cautious, jealous virtue of justice would never once have been dreamed of. For what purpose make a partition of goods, where every one has already more than enough? Why give rise to property, where there cannot possibly be any injury? Why call this object mine, when, upon the seizing of it by another, I need but stretch out my hand to possess myself of what is equally valuable? Justice, in that case, being totally USELESS, would be an idle ceremonial, and could never possibly have place in the catalogue of virtues" (Hume, 1998/1751, 13). Here he is not discussing magic, but a condition of nature that would have to be caused by magic, from our perspective, so I think the comparison is still apt.

[13] See, for example, Annas (2005).

either way, he must deceive himself. Either he deceives himself into thinking there are special facts about him that make him uniquely valuable, or he deceives himself by acting as if he valued his own life more than he really does. Either way, the pleonectic lacks genuine self-respect, and this is incompatible with cultivating genuine flourishing. The sophisticated egoist account considered above could improve on Bloomfield even further. Why, after all, is avoiding self-deception necessary for self-respect and genuine flourishing? If, for example, rationality is a central human virtue, then lying to oneself about the value of producing for oneself and leaving others free not only deprives one of self-esteem and the products others might produce freely, but reinforces the habit of *lying to oneself*. A habit of evading one's own knowledge is immediately detrimental to a rational being that survives, fundamentally, by means of his knowledge.[14]

A supporter of Joyce might, at this point, contend that we have lost our way. The whole point of the argument was to consider a *counterfactual*: suppose that the Nazi *could* preserve his self-interest even while committing a horrendous act of killing. There might be numerous psychological and existential considerations demonstrating the Nazi's inability to escape harm *in the actual world*, even when he can avoid particular social consequences. But Joyce's point is that it is at least *conceivable* that our self-interest might not include these facts, and thus that the *concept* of self-interest and the *concept* of morality are not equivalent, for would we still not regard the Nazi's acts as immoral even if, extremely counterfactually, he were able to preserve his self-interest?

Perhaps some people would still regard the counterfactual Nazi who is able to escape all consequences as immoral, but it is extremely important to remember that whatever pre-theoretical judgments we have about the counterfactual situation are conditioned by a) our understanding of the nature of morality in the actual world, and b) our understanding of the (sometimes superficial) resemblance between situations in the actual world in which we employ our moral judgments and situations in the counterfactual story. But if the world is as counterfactually different as Joyce is now forced to regard it, there are serious questions about whether the resemblance of that world to ours is sufficient for our ordinary judgments to apply to it. It is as if we are now dealing with an ethical version of Putnam's Twin Earth.[15] Whereas a chemically-uninformed Earthling visiting Twin Earth might judge a liquid similar to water in every superficial respect to be water, we know that it is not H_20 but XYZ, and that his judgment is false. Likewise, even if the Ethical Twin Earth Nazi who looks like a human being achieves his self-interest in spite of killing innocent people, we may now seriously wonder whether there are really principles of *morality* that apply in this world, or whether this counterfactual Nazi is really even *a human being*. Since it is only a being with the psychology of a rational, fallible being who needs to plan his life long-term who *needs* a code of morality, it is questionable whether our counterfactual Nazi's universe is one in which there is a need for making judgments of moral vs. immoral. The Nazi in this counterfactual world may not be resorting to magic to avoid these consequences, but his skills are as inexplicable as magic from our

[14] In my view, the more difficult question for the flourishing egoist here is *not* whether an account of human nature can explain the interest we take in respecting the freedom of others. Rather, it is how we are to regard morally those individuals who *don't give a damn about their own interests*. For more on this point, please see footnote #25 below.
[15] For more on a moral version of Twin Earth, and the way in which ethical terms function like natural kind terms, see Sayre-McCord (1997).

perspective on Earth. What's more, a being who is inexplicably able to escape the usual existential and psychological consequences *we* would suffer in the actual world is only questionably a *human* being.[16]

The above is an attempt to further specify the conditions under which generalizations about the morality of self-interest are applicable. If it is correct, then what we are imagining in the example of Joyce's Nazi is another instance in which we would have to affirm a counterfactual conditional like (KC3), (KC3*). Only now, it would concern another auxiliary hypothesis (K4*) concerning even more general presuppositions about the nature of human morality, that applies only to a being with a specific nature and the resulting specific existential and psychological needs. For example:

Beliefs: (K1) Killing innocents is not presently in one's self-interest (known fact).

(K2) Killing innocents is not moral (known fact).

(K3) Circumstances are not in a state of emergency, i.e. not immediately life-threatening (auxiliary hypothesis 1).

(K4*) The agent of action is a human (fallible, non-omniscient, non-omnipotent rational) being.

(K5*) All pursuit of self-interest by human beings under non-emergency circumstances is moral (accepted covering law).

Assume counterfactually: Killing innocents is presently in one's self-interest. (supposing (K1) is false)

Conclude either:

(KC1) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, it would be moral. *Or*

(KC2) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, there would be immoral self-interest. *Or*

(KC3*) If killing innocents were in one's self-interest, it would be neither moral nor immoral, as circumstances would be in a state of emergency or the agent would not be a human being.

There is another line of response Joyce employs against Bloomfield and any other egoist who is capable of dealing with the counterfactual Nazi case. This is to change the example and propose that examples of extreme evil are improper data for ethical theories. At one point in response to Bloomfield, Joyce concedes that the extreme pleonectic, the Thrasymachus-type who convinces himself of the value of systematic exploitation of others, surely is doing himself harm. Joyce's concession here is again

[16] Showing how a sophisticated ethical egoism entails KC38, rather than KC1, is, I think, the careful, logical way of responding to Joyce. A less careful way that slightly misses the point of his argument, though one that I think non-professionals might be likely to take, is to wonder, "Who cares what's in our interest in this counterfactual world? What's in our interest in the actual world is clearly not Nazi-style killing." This less careful response misses the point that Joyce is trying to establish: a disconnect between the concepts of morality and self-interest. But then again, it now seems that in Joyce's counterfactual world, *our* concepts of morality and self-interest may not be applicable. So I think there is naïve wisdom in the non-professional's response.

symptomatic of the increasing acceptance of ethical egoism's more enriched conception of self-interest. But Joyce questions whether the *moderate* wrong-doer must suffer a proportionately smaller amount of harm—and thus whether facts about the extreme pleonectic are relevant for the rest of humanity's moral guidance. What if one could get momentary pleasure out of being curt to a taxi driver, without affecting one's self-interest? Would it still be right? Joyce points out that being curt with him may, for example, cause one to miss out on opportunities for friendship, but no one can be friends with everyone, and everyone misses out on such potential friendships every day. Further, Joyce notes Bloomfield's point that that treating others disrespectfully requires both self-deception and mental compartmentalization. But Joyce can't see the harm in a just a little compartmentalization or just a little self-deception, and alleges that every human being exhibits some of both. What's more, Joyce thinks it hard to believe that moderate wrong-doing is harmful if the harm is so non-obvious to most people that it would take only a philosopher to point it out (as through a sophisticated egoist's theory). It would be strange that so many people could be so self-deceived as to regard the harms of wrong-doing as benefits.

There is much to comment on here, but I would first like to mention a point about methodology that will stay with us through the next section. Joyce himself notes that the way to answer Bloomfield's question, "Why does being morally bad have a deleterious effect on my self-interest?," without begging any questions against the error theorist is to take "being morally bad" to mean the non-empty "extension *that it is widely assumed to have,*" i.e., the "broad range of actions . . . that are widely thought to be morally bad: breaking promises, stealing, unprovoked violence" (53), and later, "strangling babies" (54). At this stage of the game, Joyce himself is giving the ethical egoist the opportunity to provide a *paradigm case argument* for why moral wrong-doing adversely affects self-interest. In that case, the egoist *should* begin by giving examples of radical wrong-doing and illustrate the obvious adverse effects on self-interest.[17] And we would expect that less radical wrong-doing would carry with it proportionately less of an effect on one's self-interest, in just the same way that adding more moisture to the match would make it proportionately less likely to burn as easily or for as long.

Leaving my methodological point aside, I now want to suggest that Joyce's objection concerning moderate harm fails to treat egoism's ethical generalization as a biological nomological generalization, as a statement of cause and effect like any other. Were he to do so, he would have less trouble seeing why we might need a philosopher or philosophical psychologist to point out the more subtle harm arising from subtle misdeeds, harm that is not obvious because it concerns extremely long-range, perhaps subtly psychological considerations. Particularly because we can't help but form regular habits concerning the right and wrong way to act, tolerating small amounts of destruction of our interests can snowball to the toleration of still further destruction, even if subjects don't usually realize this important but subtle

[17] Notice that by taking for granted paradigmatic instances of morality and immorality, we are not necessarily taking as data *everything* which is traditionally regarded as moral or immoral. This is part of the reason egoism is an *alternative* theory of morality: on less paradigmatic cases, such as helping strangers by sacrificing one's own interest, it will deliver patently different moral evaluations than altruistic theories. We are also not necessarily taking for granted everything that is regarded as *paradigmatically* moral or immoral. For more on this point, see my discussion of intuitions in the remainder of this section, and my discussion of the intuition that morality must be social, in the next.

psychological fact. But even isolated amounts of damage should be worrisome. If moral virtue is the cause and self-interest or the flourishing life is an effect, then we would expect to need philosophers to discover how subtle damage could result from moderate wrong-doing, in the same way that we require nutritionists to discover the kinds of subtle health effects of moderate malnutrition. The fact that I don't know that transfats are bad for me doesn't mean that they aren't, and the fact that I don't care about eating only a little transfat even when I'm told they're bad doesn't mean that transfat is not at least a little bad for me. Perhaps it has only a little effect, but the effect is real, nonetheless.

Of course one may be rationally willing to suffer the minor health effects of eating a little transfat, given the pleasure one takes in eating it. And Joyce can say that we may likewise choose to perform subtle misdeeds in spite of subtle effects on our self-interest. But here the analogy between nutrition and ethics ends, because whereas nutrition governs the achievement of only one specific goal, that of physical health, the purpose of an egoistic ethics is precisely to help us interrelate and reconcile a diversity of goals, including not only physical but also psychological health, for the purpose of determining what relationships among them best serve our *overall* self-interest.[18] If Joyce is willing to concede that, all things considered, certain kinds of subtle wrong-doing really do adversely affect our overall self-interest, if only in subtle ways, he can no longer say that we might or should be willing to suffer that small adversity, for there is no longer any further goal left to serve by doing so. Self-interest is by hypothesis the highest of the goals. Joyce can say that he doesn't see the "big deal" of suffering small adversities, and he's right, it's not a *big* deal. But it is still a small blow to our self-interest, and given that he has not given any reason to doubt whether it is real, Bloomfield and egoists still have a point. What's against our interest is against our interest. Even if we aren't aware of it, or when informed, don't care, just because we ignore or evade it doesn't make ignoring or evading it any better for us. Wanting to do something that is admittedly against our interest doesn't make it in our interest.[19]

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[18] Because of my point about the way in which life and flourishing are to be defined recursively (noted above in footnote #7), I don't see a problem with speaking of self-interest as a single overall end that is, at the same time, comprised of smaller, more specific ends. As I've suggested, an activity comes to be part of a larger goal of life when it is a central enough means to more basic forms of life, such that it is no longer merely a means to the end, but a part of the end itself.

[19] This paragraph presumes that Joyce has done or would do something like concede the adverse effect of moderate wrong-doing on self-interest, if ever so small. And perhaps he wouldn't. In a way he raises this challenge when he asks why there is any harm at all in even a small degree of compartmentalization, self-deception, or irrationality, and Bloomfield does not seem to have a ready answer. But as I've already noted, the more sophisticated egoism I've presented above has a better chance at providing an answer. Rationality is not just a nice thing to have, but the fundamentally important means to the end of human flourishing, and even partly constitutive of that flourishing. Ethics helps us to discover that we need to be rational *in principle*, because there is a general cause and effect relationship between the degree of our rationality and the degree of our flourishing as human beings, all things being equal. Identifying something like rationality as the fundamental source of our flourishing is a result of evaluating its importance in the context of all of the other values in our lives. We see it as the fundamental enabler of not only physical survival, but of the pleasures of recreation, art, friendship, love, etc. Even surrendering our rationality in small degrees in exchange for competing values is comparable to surrendering degrees of our eyesight. Perhaps we could conceive of cases where we might surrender some degree of our eyesight, if we knew it would save our lives, but we would do this only if we knew we would have multiple other sources of contact with reality and remain sane. For more on the egoistic value of a principled commitment to rationality, and virtue more generally, see Smith (2006, pp. 33-38, 188-192, 236-243), and Smith (2000, pp. 164-174).

The fact that people may fail to regard moderate wrongdoing as against their self-interest (or moderate self-destruction as wrong) points to the danger of treating our pre-theoretical judgments about morality as "intuitive" prima facie evidence, rather than simply as pre-theoretical judgments that might be false or even unjustified. It would be a mistake to take pre-theoretical physical judgments as justifiable data for a physical theory. Why treat "folk ethical" judgments as any more justified than we treat "folk physical" judgments? Of course, even the physicist or chemist has to begin with some facts about the world that everyone would acknowledge: the obvious observable facts that objects fall to the earth, that fire consumes wood, that water dampens fire, etc. The scientist's job is then to understand the *causes* of these observations by determining under what conditions they obtain. By the same token, when we try to formulate an ethical theory, paradigmatic cases of right and wrong—respecting other people vs. killing them, for instance—we are, in effect, taking as data the most obvious observable facts about human flourishing, and then trying to understand the conditions, subtle or otherwise, that make flourishing possible. This, I think, is why there is good reason for the ethical egoist to account for the more obvious "intuition" that rapacious indulgence is immoral. This is not, however, to concede that everything that every philosopher regards as intuitively moral or immoral should count as data for ethical theory. If we did, egoism would be a non-starter since it delivers obviously different implications than many philosophers are willing to countenance, intuitively. (We'll consider the issue of philosopher's intuitions in more detail in the next section.)

This response to Joyce's objection about moderate wrong-doing is not intended as a definitive defense of, for example, the self-interested value of completely unbreached rationality. It does, however, indicate the direction of such a response. Given that Joyce himself seems to recognize the general value of rationality, the burden of proof is on *him* to explain why there might be extenuating circumstances in which that value fails to apply. He would need, for example, to argue as we have argued above that whereas rationality generally has the causal power to sustain and realize human life, there are cases in which that power is cancelled by intervening factors (and that the Nazi is in this situation). And to meet this burden of proof, it will not be enough to say, for example, that we might obtain fleeting pleasures by abandoning rationality. That presupposes a general account of the value of pleasure, and as the account of objective flourishing we've presented sees it, pleasure is a value because of its role in indicating a successful state of flourishing, as well as by further promoting, complementing and realizing other modes of flourishing.[20] To relate an example from Plato's *Philebus*, we would not value the moment-by-moment life of an oyster even if it were lived in what would amount to a state of permanent orgasm.[21] There are facts about what it is to value our lives as human beings which explain this: pleasure is ordinarily valuable to humans when experienced in the context of anticipating our pleasures, experiencing them as lasting through time, being able to remember them, and especially when knowing them to be consistent with the totality of our other life-based values. Not only does a case for moderate wrong doing have to shoulder a burden of proof that

[20] See, for example, Smith (2000, pg. 89).
[21] *Philebus* 21a-d.

there is value in this wrong doing, but it is a burden that must be shouldered while keeping in mind the general presuppositions of morality (that it concern the flourishing of rational beings).

So far, my response to Joyce's counterfactual situation has relied heavily on an egoist account of the nature of human flourishing that is impossible to defend in the scope of this essay. I would not have even ventured to invoke as much of it as I have, if Joyce himself were not so seemingly willing to concede the accounts that sophisticated egoists venture to offer. Perhaps Joyce should simply have not been so willing. Critics of egoism, indeed, are quite likely to raise numerous objections about the self-interested value of rationality, its relationship to the value of life, and pleasure, and any number of other potential values. That is fine. The point is not that these objections are easy to answer; they're not. The point is that this is a debate concerning human flourishing and its requirements that has to happen. It is an "empirical" debate concerning biological and psychological facts about human beings, which facts, of course, we need to interpret through a philosophical understanding of the nature of value. Joyce seems too ready to dismiss the relevance of this empirical debate for the sake of "conceptual" issues. As it turns out, however, it is more difficult to separate the empirical and the conceptual than he might have guessed. In the second half of this paper, we will see that Joyce's second objection to ethical egoism involves much the same problem: making conclusions about the moral significance of the concept of self-interest without paying sufficient attention to the ramifications of the empirically rich conception of self-interest outlined (and often conceded by him) above.

3. The essence and paradigmatic use of moral norms

There is a second strategy available against ethical egoism that can concede the sophisticated egoist's account of what self-interest is, and even its application to counterfactuals in the way I have urged, while questioning egoism's status as the basis of a moral theory.[22] In a series of concessions, Joyce notes that his disagreement with ethical egoism might hold even if it turns out that performing actions thought of as paradigmatically immoral turns out to cause self-harm; that this is true always, necessarily, and universally; that the actions regarded as immoral *are* also often regarded as imprudent; that we succeed in dissuading people of immoral action by appealing to their self-interest; that being prudent is itself regarded as a moral obligation; that moral norms themselves need not be strictly other-regarding; and that prudence itself need not take a backseat to morality. But he thinks that all of these points are consistent with denying that the concepts of self-interest ("prudence") and morality are identical. Even if a code of self-interest comes close to having the same implications for action as those of a moral code, we might regard it at best as a code of "schmorality" rather than of morality.

What is essential to a code of morality? At one point, Joyce considers the suggestion that *any* systematic answer to the question "How ought one to live?" might count as a code of morality. He thinks

[22] Joyce does not separate his critique as crisply into two sections as I have. He sees our evaluation of the counterfactual Nazi as illustrating "the enormous difference between prudential and moral norms . . . at an intuitive level, without pretending to articulate what a moral norm is" (62). He then goes on to say that there are additional ways to articulate the difference, relying largely on issues of conceptual use to aid in the articulation. I take it that this means that the issue of intuition and of conceptual use are separate, and this is why I separate them as I do.

this is absurd: the answer "Do whatever the hell you feel like" would not count as a code of morality (59). Here I agree with Joyce, but it will be instructive to explain why. Joyce notes that it is not enough to give any answer to that question: at minimum there must be some constraints on the content of the code. It should at least endorse "keeping promises, refraining from stealing, not initiating violence, and so on" (60). As I have already indicated, I would also agree with Joyce that any moral code must contain at least of the most paradigmatic examples of moral prescriptions. Joyce offers the example of the counterfactual Nazi as one of his paradigms, but I have already spent some time explaining why I think it should not count as such. In any case, Joyce also thinks there is some other distinctive property, apart from answering the question "How ought one to live?" in a paradigmatic way, that makes something a moral code. Perhaps, he says, it is a kind of "mystical practical authority," or at least a special kind of "to-be-pursuedness" expressing a special kind of necessity or universality (60-1). It is, of course, about just this element of morality that error theorists are most likely to be skeptical. This is why I think it is important to show how ethical egoism can account for what is special about ethical normativity without embracing non-naturalistic accounts of this authority.

Here I think it is crucial to concede Joyce's point that nobody thinks that "every act of imprudence is a moral wrong." It may be imprudent to have too much coffee before bed, but it wouldn't count as a moral crime (51). Indeed I suggest that it is a mistake to assume that ethical egoism claims to *identify* morality with prudence or self-interest. Ethical egoism claims that a moral code is *based on* self-interest, but this does not mean that every aspect of self-interest is one that morality concerns itself with. This, I think, is key to explaining the distinctive nature of ethical normativity as exemplified by egoism. There is nothing special about the nature of ethical necessity: whatever kind of necessity is involved in hypothetical imperatives should suffice.[23] Answering the question "How ought one to live?" provides us with the distinctive antecedent for ethical hypothetical imperatives: *if one wants to live,* then one must X.[24] This is the distinctive end—one's life as a whole—which Greek ethicists concerned themselves with long before it was alleged that morality demanded a special mystical or categorical authority (Anscombe 1958, 5-9).

But it is not only the *end* of ethical norms which distinguishes them, for it is plausible that our degree of coffee intake could indeed affect the extent of our flourishing. Ethical norms also highlight a

[23] Here the usual Kantian concern is that if ethical imperatives are hypothetical, some agents might not share the goal referenced in the antecedent, in which case morality would not be universally binding. Rand's and Smith's view is that individuals may not care about their interests, or even want to live a human life. In this case, there are still a number of ways to criticize the amoralist. One is on the basis of simple irrationality, since there is no life other than a human life they can live. More importantly, those of us who do want to live are still affected by the actions of the amoralist, and need to judge them by the only standards available to us. When we judge others, we don't suspend our own value system and evaluate others on the basis of alternate, non-life-based standards. We can't do this; there are no expressible terms in which this evaluation can take place. Underlying Rand's metaethics is that the very concept of "value" is meaningful only with reference to the needs of a living organism. In a universe without living organisms, nothing would distinguish means/ends relationships from mere inanimate causal chains. For this reason, we cannot characterize any "alternative" non-life ends individuals wish to pursue as equally determinative of *value* imperatives. See Smith (2000, pp. 108-111) and Binswanger (1992, pp. 99-102).

[24] Keep in mind that what counts as a genuine *human* life is immensely important to how the X is filled in here. As I have urged, especially in footnote #7, human life is not limited to biochemistry, and this implies that X must include a broad array of biological and psychological requirements.

distinctive type of *means* to that end.[25] The constraint here is epistemological: in order to think about their lives as a whole, human beings need to isolate a set of fundamental *principles* to guide the long-term course of their lives and describe the overall kind of person they want to be, rather than a list of rules of thumb for dealing with exigencies as they arise. Our lives are complex and multifaceted, and we need to identify the essentials that make for a good life amidst the many variations and complexities. Identifying moral virtues serves the cognitive end of distilling our understanding of the good life into these essentials, thereby freeing up cognitive space to deal with other problems (Smith 2006, 34-37). Ethical norms are thus at a level of abstraction that preclude considerations about how much coffee one should drink on a daily basis, and extend to the timeless needs of human beings across all cultures, whether or not they drink coffee. In fact I have already dealt with moral norms conceived this way in my previous section on counterfactuals, since there I described them as *nomological generalizations* about values and virtues as they bear on human flourishing.

A contemporary sophisticated egoist code such as that described by Smith echoes the ancient tradition, and identifies basic virtues (such as rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, and pride) which are needed to realize basic values (such as purpose and self-esteem). It is not merely a code of *prudence* that gives rules of thumb for improving one's nutrition or stock portfolio. Integrity, honesty, and justice are virtues that humanity has long cherished. Of course it recognizes others (rationality, independence and pride, in particular) that non-egoistic codes have either failed to uphold or condemned. But that is what makes it an *egoistic* code, and as I have urged, it is not essential that a code of morality uphold every virtue that every code has ever cherished. What makes it an *ethical* code is its highlighting of fundamental principles of virtuous action. This, incidentally, is one of the reasons that *crude* egoistic theories might very well not count as ethical theories, though sophisticated egoism does.

In some cases Greek ethical theories featured many virtues that are not recognized by more contemporary theories. Were they not still ethical theories? At one point while considering whether to count egoism as a moral code, Joyce proposes using something like a paradigm case argument, this time not to make sure that egoism counts as immoral those *acts* that are paradigmatically immoral, but to make sure that it functions like those *codes* which are paradigmatically moral codes. The list of paradigms he endorses is revealing:

> At one end we have value systems that clearly count as *moralities*: Christian ethics, deontological systems, Moorean intuitionism, Platonic theories about the Form of the *Good*, and so on. . . . At the other end we have things that clearly don't count as moralities: the rules of chess, etiquette, doing whatever the hell you feel like, and so on. . . . Somewhere on this continuum will lie normative frameworks for which it is not immediately apparent whether they count as moralities.

Having presented the difference between a moral code and mere rules of prudence, we can agree with Joyce that there is this continuum. But the way he characterizes the "morality" end of the continuum is curious. While he mentions Plato's Form of the Good, notably missing as paradigm cases of moralities are Aristotle's *eudaemonism*, Epicurean hedonism, and other ancient Greek theories which are arguably more

[25] I am using "means" here as broadly construed to include not only actions that result in a particular state of affairs, but also activities or states of character that are constitutive parts of the end of human flourishing.

egoistic than his paradigms.[26] That even includes Plato's own view, expressed earlier in *The Republic*, that the moral virtue of justice is valued because of its advantage in securing "harmony" for the individual's soul (though Plato is arguably less egoistic than Aristotle, precisely because of the role that the form of the Good comes to play in orienting the individual's ethical ambitions away from flourishing in the natural world). Any paradigm case argument that misses not only some of humanity's first moral theories, but some of its most cherished, is a weak paradigm case argument.

Joyce could respond by saying that an egoist morality might feature the distinctive characteristics of paradigmatic moralities, but insist at the same time that it exhibits too many extra characteristics, namely those which offer personal guidance independent of one's social relations. Of course our mention above about the egoistically-oriented Greek theories calls into question whether social obligations are really paradigmatic of morality, or only paradigmatic of moralities in our culture.[27] Still, the conviction that morality is essentially social is a strong one among many philosophers, and it is worth commenting on it

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[26] There are of course those who would dispute the egoism of the Greeks, or at least of the virtue ethical theory that is taken to have been adopted by Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicurus. Annas (2008), writing in the Bloomfield anthology, disputes whether virtue ethics, at least as it is interpreted by its contemporary advocates, is egoistic. I disagree with Annas' overall critique for a number of reasons I can only briefly summarize here. First, her reason for trying to show that virtue ethics is not egoistic is because, throughout her piece, Annas largely takes it for granted that egoism could not be a genuine ethics. She points out that not every traditionally-regarded virtue might be endorsed by an egoistic ethic: for example, some acts of courage in the defense of strangers might not be regarded as genuinely moral. But I think that theories need to agree only over the most paradigmatically ethical of the virtues for them to count as ethical theories. It is question-begging to assume that the agreement must be complete.

Second, Annas argues that a theory that holds flourishing or *eudaemonia* as basic to its account of morality need not be egoistic as long as flourishing can be defined in terms of independently specified virtues, which virtues may or may not benefit the agent. This may well be the aim of some contemporary virtue ethics theories, but I doubt that it is true of, say, Aristotle. At one point, Annas even criticizes Aristotle's account for attempting to define flourishing in terms that are independent of the virtues (214) (which I think he does, if the human function argument is any indication). See also Gottlieb (1996) for a defense of Aristotle's status as an ethical egoist.

Third, Annas thinks generally that theories which attempts this "substantive" definition of flourishing, in terms of a single "determinate state *F*," are both more likely to be egoistic, but at the same time less likely to count as ethical. She states that a "substantive" definition of flourishing would have to be in terms of such things as financial prosperity and security, or even in such terms as extreme financial prosperity and "having a trophy spouse." In that case, Annas doubts that genuinely *moral virtues* are necessary or sufficient to bring about these goals. I disagree that this is the only available route to define the "determinate state" constituting flourishing. I have urged that ethical egoism is a kind of biological generalization concerning the distinctive way of life for human beings. There are general conditions about the material and psychological well-being of human beings, without which the mere possession of extreme wealth and a "trophy spouse" would not constitute flourishing. (See also footnote #7 above concerning the recursively specified definition of life.) Aristotle may not have fully recognized how all of the distinctive modes of human life were causally related (in particular, how theoretical reasoning was connected to practical reasoning), but the absence of unifying *episteme* about virtue does not mean such is not possible—and I think Aristotle's theory states the preliminary knowledge that is needed for just such an *episteme*.

Finally, I have serious doubts about the explanatory efficacy of Annas' rival, "formal" approach to defining flourishing, in terms of independently specified virtues. She says that there is no reason that virtue ethicists must accept that there is a "determinate state F" that all virtues must have in common or derive from. While I agree with her that it is implausible to expect that scientific explanation is deductive-nomological, and I think that theories must begin with pre-theoretical data from which to generalize an account, in this case, of virtue, there must still be some grounds on which to regard the pieces of data as similar. Without such a basis, I worry that virtue ethics fails to have a naturalistic basis in just the way error theorists are concerned it does not. But I do not see how this can be done with virtues as abstract as courage, honesty, justice, etc., which possess nothing perceptually similar. If there is a pre-theoretical basis for identifying moral values, my suspicion is that the pre-conceptual sense of similarity will come through our pleasure/pain mechanism, and this is not a favorable point to the non-egoistic approach

[27] On this point, see also Paul Bloomfield's review (2007) of Joyce (2006), in which he contends that a "pro-social" attitude is essential to morality. Bloomfield points out that even if Greek philosophers regarded egoism (as in the form of Thrasymachus' view) as false, still they saw it as a candidate *ethical* theory.

here briefly even though Joyce does not appeal to it explicitly. Finlay (2008), also writing in the Bloomfield anthology, argues that morality is "purely and essentially other-regarding." According to Finlay, "To my ear it is absurd to condemn a person as *immoral* because he sacrificed too much for the sake of others—unless some others were somehow harmed by that sacrifice" (140). In essence his argument amounts to an appeal to "our ordinary grasp of the meaning of 'moral'." According to this meaning, the way to characterize sacrifice that is "too much for the sake of others" is not as immoral, but as supererogatory, as going above and beyond the call of duty.

Finlay's ear may tell him this is absurd, but arguably it would not have been absurd to the ancient Greeks, nor to Spinoza, nor Stirner, nor Nietzsche. The point is not that we can automatically assume that the Greeks or others were right, but that surely they had ethical theories, and that what sounds absurd to "our ear" is often culturally idiosyncratic. The brazen appeal to intuition seems to discount centuries of cultural influence—particularly via the Christian religion—that transformed the popular conception of virtue radically, from a view of virtue as strength to a view of it as meekness, as Nietzsche characterized the "slave rebellion" in ethics. Paying attention to these intuitions, especially to answer questions about topics as abstract as the nature of morality as a whole, is simply unreliable if a source of evidence at all. I have already argued that the "intuitions" most worth relying upon are simply pre-theoretical judgments about obvious facts concerning human flourishing, facts we would expect ordinary people to grasp as well as the most erudite philosopher. But when it comes to discerning the more subtle requirements of human flourishing and the meaning of more abstract philosophical concepts, we need philosophy to separate what we know from what we have been influenced to believe by cultural authorities. Philosophers disagree about how to do this. To my ear, we would require the moral virtues of courage and integrity and intellectual honesty to live on a desert island, and I don't think I'm alone in thinking this. Most people also regard productiveness as something like a moral virtue, and it is needed more than ever when one is in isolation from society. True, justice and aspects of honesty are other-regarding, but what they share in common with the other virtues is not their social nature, but their role in answering the big "how should I live?" questions of life.

There are, of course, those who would urge that the above is a merely linguistic dispute about how to use the word "ethics" or "morality." I disagree, and so, it seems, does Joyce. Joyce emphasizes that the question here is not just about how we label codes as moral or non-moral, but how we *use* these concepts:

> What determines whether something is a morality or a schmorality? In my opinion, the answer turns on how the concept *morality* is used. If concept A is used in a certain manner, but turns out to be problematic for various reasons (i.e., it is uninstantiated by the world), and concept B is an instantiated contender for replacing A, then B can be an adequate successor only if it too can be used in the same manner (65).

Joyce gives an example of how this approach explains the difference between modifying an existing concept and replacing it with an entirely new one. He notes that even though it turns out that there is no such thing as absolute simultaneity in physics, we can still use the relativistic concept of simultaneity in the same way as the absolute concept for ordinary circumstances, because we can make roughly the same

predictions with relativistic simultaneity as we would with absolute simultaneity for slow-moving objects (even if not for ones moving close to the speed of light). By contrast, he notes that once we realized there are no "diabolical supernatural forces in the universe," we had no further use for the concept "witch." We might continue to use the *word* "witch" to describe certain women who were culturally marginalized, or women who were *believed* to have diabolical supernatural powers, but this is no longer the same concept as the one used in the Middle Ages, but a replacement.[28] We do not use the new concept to condemn the same culturally marginalized women to death, for instance (we no longer have anything to fear about them). This means we become error theorists about witches, in the same way that Joyce is an error theorist about morality. We decide when a concept is to be replaced when it cannot be put to the same use as the older concept.[29]

To what use do we put the concept of "morality"? Joyce suggests some of the following as examples:

> If a contender for satisfying our pretheoretical desiderata for *morality* turns out to be something that we couldn't even use for the purposes that we have customarily put moral discourse—if, for example, we couldn't use it to justify deserved punishment, if it couldn't undergird the emotion of guilt, if it couldn't act as a bulwark against a range of motivational infirmities—then we have good reason for thinking that we have in our hands but a *schmorality* (66).

Why, then, does Joyce not think an egoistic code can be used for these purposes? I will begin by dealing with his first example, the issue of justifying deserved punishment, and argue that ethical egoism has the resources to account for what, to Joyce, seems inconceivable.

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[28] I think there are other examples of concepts that we can regard as continuous through *partial* change of use without counting as replacements. A good example is the concept of "function," understood in the context of biological teleology. Prior to the Renaissance, if a natural scientist said that a heart's function was to pump blood, he probably meant that this was the effect intended by God to suit his wider purposes. As the scientific revolution commenced, it became increasingly unacceptable to resort to conscious purpose in nature as an explanatory device. This led many philosophers and scientists to entertain "error theory" about biological function. The scientifically respectable thing to do was to speak of one effect of an organ among others, without specifying any as the function or goal. But in the past few decades, a number of philosophers of science have shown that this pessimism about "function" was never necessary (Wright 1973, Binswanger 1990). The theory of evolution by natural selection, together with other ordinary facts of biology, helps us isolate the *function* of an action as the regular outcome of that action which is at the same time a type of outcome whose previous instances made that action possible. So the heart, for example, functions to circulate blood, because past instances of blood circulation (both on the part of one's ancestors, and in one's earlier life history) made the continued existence of the heart possible. This concept of "function" serves much the same inferential use as earlier, purpose-based versions of the concept. Mainly, it enables us to explain why an organism has a particular organ, structure, or behavior pattern. If we know that a heart's function is to circulate blood, we can infer *why* the heart exists: it exists because in the past, blood circulation allowed an organism (together with its heart) to survive. We can infer that if an organism loses its heart, it will thereby fail in its function. So we don't need to be error theorists about function, even if we can't make some inferences from the existence of biological functions that we don't take to be the results of conscious purpose (such as those concerning the nature of the designer entity whose purpose it was allegedly to design organisms with such functions).) As it happens, while the use of egoistic moral concepts may not be continuous with that of traditional altruistic ones, it may still be continuous with even more ancient uses. So even though we do not need complete continuity of use, there is in the end more continuity than critics of egoism might suspect.

[29] Here I don't mean to endorse a "conceptual role semantics," the idea that the meaning of a concept is *exhausted* by its use. But I would certainly agree that for a concept X to be the same as concept A, it is at least a *necessary condition* that concept X have the same *paradigmatic* uses of concept A. I think it is only a necessary condition, because the differences and similarities that one cognizes in order to form a concept are also crucial conditions of its identity, and I think these two conditions are not unrelated. I think concepts, like beliefs, admit of a kind of justification, and one only forms concepts justifiably if one conceptualizes a similarity that is cognitively important, that highlights facts that have causal significance. This is what makes concepts useful or not: we make inferences about the instances of a concept on the basis of the causal characteristics of those concepts. For more, see Salmieri (2007).

Joyce makes his objection to the egoistic justification of deserved punishment in a way that is at first hard to separate from his point about the emotional function of moral concepts. So we will need to say something preliminary about motivation before delving into the question of epistemic justification:

> The emotion of *retributive anger* makes little sense within the framework of prudential normativity, for what sense is there in the idea that someone who has harmed himself *deserves* the infliction of further harm (or, moreover, that the severity of the harm we inflict should be proportional to the degree of self-harm)? . . .
>
> Consider also the reparations that on many occasions we would insist that the moral criminal make to his victims. On the morality-qua-prudence view, the primary victim of any crime is always the criminal himself. Perhaps compensating the other victims (or simply apologizing to them) will be a means for the criminal to benefit himself, to undo the self-injury that he has inflicted, but there is no reason to assume that this is the only or the best way for him to accomplish this end, and thus if he finds some other way of compensating for the harm he did himself (taking a relaxing holiday? treating himself to a special gift? forgiving himself?) then this act of direct self-profit may well be the preferable course for him) (63).

First, it is important to note that the feeling of *retributive* anger is distinct from the kind of anger we feel towards a friend who disappoints us. Friendly anger motivates us, perhaps, to castigate our friend, even to make a harsh ultimatum about how he must reform if he is to retain our friendship. Retributive anger, by contrast, motivates us to punish a wrongdoer. It does indeed make little sense to inflict harm on a friend who has harmed himself—it might only make things worse. But retributive anger is a different matter.

There is a distinction between forms of self-harm that are exclusively self-regarding, and those which *also* involve harming others. Indeed part of the reason the sophisticated egoist seeks to show how self-interest can be defined in enriched terms is to show how the interests of others can be *included* in our own interests (as in the interests of friends and loved ones), or at least *conducive* to our own interests (as in the interests of strangers whose rights we should respect). It follows that one way to harm one's interests is by harming the interests of others. The distinction between friendly and retributive anger seems to map approximately onto the distinction between the two forms of self-harm, those which are completely self-regarding, and those which harm others. True, inflicting further harm on a friend who harms himself in a completely self-regarding way makes no sense. But punishing an enemy does make sense to the egoist. It may no longer help the enemy's self-interest to punish him, but he deserves punishment for his self-harm because a) his self-harm has been brought about through the harming of others, and b) his harming of others needs to be stopped, by reason of the self-interest of the punisher and the victims.[30]

[30] First and foremost, an egoist could be motivated to protect *himself* against this harm, and retributive anger motivates one to exact punishment that enables such protection. Second, the same kind of anger can motivate protecting others in our inner circle against an offender. Finally, the same respect we have towards the rights of others—our desire to leave them free to prosper as we would desire for ourselves—can lead the egoist at minimum to *empathize* with others' plights when their rights are violated by offenders. The egoist imagines himself in their position, and for this reason, feels the same retributive anger towards the offender against a stranger's rights as he might feel towards an offender against his own. This is not necessarily the reason for which egoists would want to establish a system of criminal justice to protect society at large from criminals (for mere empathy could also motivate helping complete strangers at the cost of self-sacrifice). Here the reason would be less about feelings of sympathy than objective facts about the efficiency with which a centralized body could protect *everyone's* rights—by stopping criminals early in their tracks, before they harm too many other innocents, by placing power of retributive coercion under objective, social control to ensure the protection of the innocent against vigilante justice, etc. An egoist might consent to and pay for the establishment of such a system for the same reason he might be persuaded to pay for insurance against other

"Desert," of course, is a moral concept, and on anybody's theory is closely related to the moral virtue of justice. In what sense could an egoistic morality support the moral offender's *deserving* punishment? It may make sense to say that the egoist has moral reasons to punish the moral offender who threatens others, and it may even make sense to say that the egoist is himself obligated to exact this punishment (or to delegate the right to do so to some higher authority). But is this the same as saying that the offender *deserves* to be punished? Though this is the subject for a paper on its own, I think it is the same. On anybody's ethical theory, the concept of desert and the virtue of justice are concepts denoting *moral relationships* between people. On a non-egoistic code, the concept of justice refers to the obligations we owe other people, particularly as regards how we are to set up the structure of a society, and desert refers to what is owed. So it's not the case that what one deserves is definable independently of relations to others. The concepts of desert and justice are not importantly different to the egoist. To practice the egoistic virtue of justice is to reward those who benefit one's life, and punish those who threaten it in the appropriate ways. To understand who is to be rewarded and punished on such a code makes reference to *their* moral virtues or vices: we reward the virtuous because, on a sophisticated egoist code, we see others' pursuit of self-interest as complementary or conducive to our own, and we punish or refrain from rewarding the vicious because their pursuits are not complementary or conducive to our interests (Smith 2006, pp. 135-175). And just as in non-egoistic moralities, in egoistic codes justice refers to *obligations* we owe others, and desert refers to *what* is owed. If a just egoist owes rewards to moral friends and punishment to immoral enemies (stated loosely and roughly), the rewards and punishment are what are *deserved* by the friends or enemies.[31] A criminal who deserves punishment deserves it, not because of its effects on his own interest, but because of the interests of the punisher (or those on whose behalf the punisher is acting).[32] To assume that desert is primarily a function of the interests of the punished, rather than the interests of the dispenser of desert, is already to assume a non-egoistic code, and beg the question. Most fundamentally, what one deserves denotes the effects that one should properly expect to result from one's action: if someone harms himself by harming his relations with others, further harm is what one should properly expect.

Related to his objection about the justification of retributive anger, Joyce contends that egoism does not fit the broader "emotional profile" of a genuine code of morality. He mentions, for example, that

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adversities. In identifying this we are now dealing with a question apart from that concerning the egoistic source of retributive anger, and there are complicated questions here concerning whether such an egoistic decision would be fully rational. But it is at least plausible that some might *see* this arrangement as falling within their self-interest, and the main question at the moment is simply whether it is possible for egoists to be *motivated* to inflict punishment on moral offenders deserving of it.

[31] This is stated extremely loosely and roughly, only for the sake of illustrating the point that it is a view about desert from the perspective of the punisher. It is not meant to endorse the idea that justice is *simply* rewarding friends and punishing enemies, or that it is just to pick friends and enemies on any basis. A sophisticated egoist account of justice is much broader than this and consists of recognizing the importance of objective moral judgment of any other people who affect one's life, and acting in whatever way is needed to encourage the morality of others and discourage their immorality, on the grounds that other's self-interest is conducive to one's own. See Smith (2006, 135-175).

[32] Even so, it is plausible that for those offenders open to the possibility of redemption, punishment might actually be in their self-interest. There is, after all, a longstanding tradition that regards one justification of punishment to be rehabilitation.

self-harm doesn't provoke guilt; at best it induces self-castigation and thinking "I'm so stupid" (63). To begin to address this, it is important to mention that all of the examples involving emotions, whether of guilt or anger, must be handled with care. This is because we should expect a great deal of variance in people's "emotional profiles," in proportion with the variation in their moral *beliefs*. To give an uncontroversial example, a person who is raised to *believe* in the immorality of premarital sex will feel guilty having premarital sex. Someone who is not raised in this way might not feel this same guilt. Emotions are affective responses to aspects of our environment according to our conscious or subconscious *evaluative* cognition. (This approach to emotion, long the hallmark of cognitive therapy, is receiving increased attention by philosophers, and has a long tradition in the history of Aristotelian thought.[33])

Yet, says Joyce, harming one's own self-interest doesn't make one feel guilty; at best it only prompts self-castigation. But whose guilt are we talking about? It's true, we would expect people who are convinced of the immorality of self-interest to feel nothing like guilt when their self-interest is frustrated, and feel guilt instead from "excessive" pursuit of self-interest. When and if people do not feel guilt about failing to pursue some self-interested concern, I submit that it begs the question to take this as evidence for the claim that egoism cannot count as a moral code—because most people do not believe (explicitly) in the code of egoism, and we would expect them to think that acting on such a code is the wrong thing to do. To see whether egoism induces guilt about failing to pursue self-interest, the appropriate subjects to test are believers in egoism, but most people in our culture are raised to find egoism abhorrent and we should expect them to have negative feelings about it, as well. This is a further reason, incidentally, why uncritical reliance on philosophical intuitions about morality is a perilous venture.

At the same time, no one can function without some attention to his or her self-interest, and by the same token no one can motivate such attention without emotions that react favorably towards it. So we will still expect most people to feel some happiness or pride when they achieve their self-interest (even when it is partially undercut by guilt induced by their partial acceptance of non-egoistic moral codes), and we will also expect most people to feel some guilt when they *knowingly* fail to achieve aspects of their self-interest. I can think of one especially clear example in which egoistic concerns clearly motivate a feeling of guilt upon failure to achieve self-interest. We have a test to study for, but instead we go out to party. Even a semi-conscientious student feels *guilt* about not doing what he or she should be doing in order to succeed on the test.[34] The same goes for any number of other examples concerning commitments one has made to central values in one's life. One might feel guilty for not devoting enough time to getting published for tenure, or for not devoting enough time to teaching. Anyone who tries to balance work with family also faces similar challenges. Too much time devoted to work, and not enough to family can induce guilt, and on the sophisticated egoist's account, love and relationships are central constituents of a flourishing human

[33] See, again, Solomon (2006) and Nussbaum (2003). It is not surprising that Nussbaum thinks that emotions themselves are *fundamentally* "eudaemonistic," related to the agent's well-being (Nussbaum 2003, pp. 31-32).
[34] Conceivably, of course, such feelings of guilt could be traceable to concern that one might upset obligations to one's family, or even to one's teachers. But at least in my own experience—and I've never been pressured by parents or felt special obligations towards teachers save those connected to my own goal of learning—I've felt serious pangs of guilt simply because I knew I could be studying harder or more.

life. We don't necessarily expect someone living a sophisticated egoistic code to feel guilty when giving to charity, because one can properly see the goals of helping certain other people to undertake certain projects as worthy and consistent with one's own goals in life. At the same time, it is surely possible to feel guilt for having helped someone inappropriately, where by the egoist's standards "inappropriate" means involving sacrifice of a greater to a lesser concern. It would be completely natural to expect an egoistic parent to feel guilty about paying for a surgery to save a stranger's life, if he could have used the same money to save his own child's life. And we would also expect an egoist to feel guilty for paying for such a surgery when he could have used the money to pay for his own college education.

Though Joyce does not discuss morally-conditioned emotions apart from guilt, there are others we should mention which underscore how an egoistic code would undergird a moral "emotional profile." There is also an emotional equivalent of moral praise, corresponding to a feeling of *pride* that we often register towards others when they achieve their self-interest. Understanding this will serve as a further bridge towards understanding the egoist's concern or even *anger* towards others who fail to achieve their interest. What mother doesn't brim with pride when her child first learns to walk, first learns to speak, first learns to read, goes on a first date, graduates from high school or college, etc.? The proud mother is celebrating the child's achievement of self-interested values. By the same token, what good parent wouldn't feel angry toward children who failed to live up to their potential, by failing to study hard enough in school, by getting involved with the wrong crowd, by failing to "leave the nest" late into their twenties, etc.? Often it seems that our concern for the self-interest of another *buoys* our anger towards their failure to live up to this potential. We love our friends *because* we see value in them, because we recognize their potential to contribute to our happiness. And we find happiness in the person of another not because we think they'll do us favors or lend us money, but because we share values and interests with the other, because we find ourselves on a common journey, perhaps even because we are inspired by another's success to succeed for ourselves. We cannot enjoy a meaningful friendship from someone whose values and interests are the opposite of ours, who frustrates our journey in life, who has no inspiration to offer us. And when someone who *used* to share these values with us suddenly begins to forsake them, when we know they could do better but have needlessly given up the struggle, concern or even anger is a natural thing to feel.[35]

The last use of moral concepts that Joyce insists cannot be performed by an egoistic code is that it "couldn't act as a bulwark against a range of motivational infirmities." Much of what we have said above already helps to refute this, since we have shown how an egoistic code could motivation through such responses as justified guilt or anger.

[35] It's true that an egoist wouldn't feel anger towards *everyone* who fails to achieve a self-interested goal. In some cases, it is simply because we don't know the person well enough. Or perhaps we know them, but never thought they had much potential to offer in the first place. In such a case, we might agree with Joyce that we would be more inclined to feel pity, rather than anger. But is it also so unnatural to expect the feeling of pity towards immoral acts or people? Our culture often emphasizes pity towards criminals, often elevating pity above anger. Some would argue that this is an inappropriate inversion—of mercy over the moral virtue of justice—but it is clearly some kind of moral response (whether or not it expresses an appropriate theory of morality).

4. Conclusion

As I have reasserted from time to time throughout this paper, it is not my purpose here to defend ethical egoism outright. Rather my goal has been to use the dispute about whether egoism could count as an ethical viewpoint—which I see as something of a distraction—to refocus debate on the substantial questions concerning whether ethical egoism is the *right* ethical theory. The pattern of my argument above has been to suggest that *if* the most sophisticated versions of ethical egoism are correct—the ones that flesh out the conception of self-interest to include the full range of human flourishing, including its physical and psychological aspects, and including the relevant aspects of social relations—then there are ready answers to objections concerning the intuitive resonance and use of ethical egoistic concepts.

I have done very little to show that these most sophisticated versions of ethical egoism *are* correct. I have only sketched the most essential outlines of their content that is to often ignored by critics, in order to show that this content exists and should be evaluated. If it were to be evaluated, we should be able to settle not only a substantive debate in normative ethics, but in metaethics, as well. Essentially other-regarding morality usually falls prey to the error theorist's critique first. *Why* do we have moral obligations to others? Just because we have an intuition that it is so, just because there is a sense of categorical obligation surrounding the suggestion—but these are not claims that fit seamlessly into a naturalistic worldview, including the biology of human life or the psychology of human motivation.

Egoistic normativity does not fall prey to error theorist's critiques. That is part of the reason Joyce is interested in examining it. If he thought egoism had a chance of filling the criteria for morality, it would be a significant counterexample to error theory, insofar as it would count as a morality without any of the strange metaphysical properties associated with non-egoistic moralities. Given the error theorist's concerns that agent-neutral moralities might not have any genuine authority, and given our reasons for thinking (contra Joyce) that egoism can still count as a morality, we can confidently argue that *if any morality has real authority, egoism does.* Arguments for error theory about morality become arguments for error theory about *agent-neutral* morality, and arguments *for* ethical egoism.

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