

There are at least three major flaws with psychological egoism. First, it makes a categorical statement about human motivation—that we always act in a selfish manner. In ethics and the social sciences, such categorical statements are usually suspect. People are enormously complex and it is impossible to say what has and continues to motivate every person since the beginning of mankind. Also, the theory does not adequately address the fact that people are often enormously conflicted about the choices they make.

A second problem with the theory is that it treats selfishness and self-interest as synonyms. These terms are not one and the same. Getting a college education is surely in one's self-interest, but it is not selfish. In fact, one could argue that getting an education is the antithesis of being selfish. Statistically we know that people with more education are likely to be more self-sufficient at least in economic terms. Therefore, an individual with more education is less likely to be a burden on his or her family or society, and this is the opposite of being selfish.

Finally, psychological egoism equates motives with feelings. For example, suppose that Smith helps Jones make some repairs to his home because she cannot afford to hire someone. Smith may feel good about having helped Jones, but that's not necessarily her motivation.

Now that we have addressed three of the most serious challenges to ethical reasoning, let us now turn to the major ethical theories. Each of these theories has its advantages and disadvantages. We will conclude this section with what we believe is an acceptable "moral minimum."

UTILITARIAN THEORY (TELEOLOGICAL ETHICS)

This theory was largely developed by late 18th and early 19th century thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. This theory holds that acts are judged to be morally right or wrong not in and of themselves, but rather by the *results* that follow from the acts. Therefore, no act is in and of itself right or wrong.

For example, according to this theory, lying is not always morally reprehensible. If good results follow from lying, then the lie is justified. On the other hand, if a lie leads to bad results, then it is morally wrong. In his *Utilitarianism*, Mill stated:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, utility, or the greatest happiness principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all

desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

Let us examine how this theory works in a modern bureaucracy. The example we will employ will be a police department. We will use an example from what economists call game theory, and the "prisoner's dilemma" specifically.

Suppose that two individuals commit a crime together and subsequently get caught. After arresting them the police will want to question these individuals; however, they will not do so with them present in each other's company. The officers will place the individuals in two separate interrogation rooms. Now further suppose that the police do not have enough evidence to convict either of the individuals of the crime for which they are accused unless one or both of them makes a confession. If neither individual talks they can get a conviction on a lesser offense. If one individual talks and his or her fellow prisoner does not, the one that talks will receive a lighter sentence. However, if both prisoners talk, they will receive the maximum sentence under the law. Now, further suppose that both prisoners are aware of all the choices and consequences, but neither is aware of what the other inmate is doing. This is called a game of complete but imperfect knowledge. The game is complete because each prisoner knows all the possible choices and outcomes, but it is imperfect because he or she does not know how the other prisoner will behave or is behaving.

The police in this case will exploit the imperfect knowledge aspect of the situation by engaging in lying. An interrogating officer may say to one of the prisoners, "Your fellow prisoner is about to break. So, you might as well tell us the truth, and things will go a lot easier on you." In all likelihood another officer is saying the same thing to the second prisoner. The end result is that in most cases as a result of the deception by the police both prisoners end up talking, and each is worse off than he or she would have been had he or she maintained his or her constitutional right to remain silent.

		P_1	
		Talk	Remain Silent
P_2	Talk	10, 10	10, 7
	Remain Silent	7, 10	3, 3

(Payoffs P_1, P_2)

EXHIBIT 1.1

Prisoners Dilemma