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Reconciling Flourishing Egoism with Common Morality

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Departmental Honors Thesis

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Introduction

It is a common critique of moral theories focused on the agent that they are selfish and immoral. Selfish here typically carries a negative connotation. Morality is supposed to show how we ought to treat people outside of ourselves; and this is true to a degree. But so often it seems, at least to me, that the more “selfless” moral theories seem to forget that the agent is as deserving of the good as those that the agent interacts with are.

Egoism, broadly, reverses this and places the agent at the forefront of ethical decision-making. Unfortunately, this has historically led to theories that are perceived as harmful, immoral, and sentimentally repugnant. These reactions to concepts such as hedonistic egoism, psychological egoism, etc are understandable, and I agree with them much of the time. Nonetheless, I maintain that there is a version of Egoism that gets past these personal objections and triumphs as a positive ethical theory.

Flourishing Egoism, Naturalist Egoism, Gregarious Egoism. These are different fitting names which have been thrown around in past decades to describe this conception of a self-interested ethics. It is an ethical theory intended to go beyond the typically materialist definitions Egoism has held. These being ones concerned with one’s interest in resources, wealth, social advantage, etc. Flourishing Egoism, the name I am going to go with, is about pursuing one’s self-interest as a full, successful human being. It relies somewhat on conceptions of human nature, and what it means to be a successful human.

The goal I hope to accomplish here is to introduce Flourishing Egoism to the arbiter of moral sentiments, and the instinctual barrier to any ethical theory, common-sense morality. It is

also referred to as considered moral judgements, or just common morality. These are the difficult to articulate, but often automatically referenced, moral judgements that most people naturally subscribe to. It is also a major antagonist to previous egoistic theories, thus why it is worthwhile to try to bridge the gap between the two positions.

I will be looking at a few objections to egoistic theories concerning topics such as Friendship, Love, Justice, Interpersonal Liberty, etc. The objections I will look at seem to arise out of a self-evident disdain of the consequences of those egoistic theories. By confronting these objections, I will hopefully be able to relieve Flourishing Egoism from the bad press its cousins have acquired.

Flourishing Egoism

Lester Hunt begins his discussion of Flourishing Egoism with a quick story meant to show what self-interest means under our conception. The story is about an architect presenting his design for a building. It is told shortly in this way:

“He announced to the directors that the design was made - in his head - proceeded to draw a rapid sketch before them, and announced an estimate of the cost. One of the directors was somewhat disturbed by the unfamiliarity of the style, and suggested that he had rather fancied some classic columns and pilasters for the facade. Sullican very brusquely rolled up his sketch and started to depart, saying that the directors could get a thousand architects to design a classic bank but only one to design them this kind of bank, and that as far as he was concerned,

it was either the one thing or the other. After some conference, the directors accepted the sketch design and the bank was forthwith built with not a single essential change in the design” (Hunt 181).

The key here is that the self-interested thing to do, according to Flourishing Egoism, was not to take the material gain of the commission, but to do what was in the interest of one’s values. The values that make an agent who he is, are greater values than the value of money in this situation. Granted, in this particular iteration, as opposed to other versions of the story, the agent comes out with a win anyways. But, the point stands when the agent is financially disadvantaged in the example as well.

One should not sacrifice a lesser value for a greater value according to Flourishing Egoism. Most values are shared by most individuals, and to the same degree most of the time. However, those values are still necessarily values to the individual agent, and it is the agent’s values that he should act in the interest of. Hunt quotes Ayn Rand, once-popular novelist and patron-saint of edgy college students (like myself), to describe what sacrifice looks like to a flourishing egoist.

He quotes a passage where Rand claims it is absurd to say that a man who has spent a fortune to cure his wife of an illness has made a sacrifice. To say it is a sacrifice is to say that he is losing something when otherwise the situation would have made no difference to him. What the man has done is secure something that he values, a value far above material wealth. Namely, the love of his wife. What would be a sacrifice is if instead of using that fortune to save his wife, he used it to save ten strangers he knew nothing about and who didn’t mean anything to him (182).

I anticipate that this example can look bad on the surface. It may come across as saying that the ten strangers don't have value, or at least aren't as valuable as the wife. But, all this is saying is that the ten strangers are not as much of a value as the wife *to the husband*. This particular situation should not be thought objectionable to any kind of common morality, because I would argue that this *is* the common morality. Anyone who disagrees with this would have to say that they genuinely grieve for the abstract lives lost in far away disasters in the same way that they would grieve for their mother or wife. I find it supremely unlikely that most people would actually agree to let their closest loved one die for ten abstract strangers.

Hunt sees examples like this as defending Egoism against an objection he sees concerning the "ground floor" of action. The objection he is responding to is the claim that common morality holds the idea that *something* being good for *someone* is a ground floor for action. There is no further reason needed to motivate one to act as long as this ground floor is present (182). Setting aside whether one accepts this claim or not, it is supposedly incompatible with typical Egoism. This incompatibility arises from the notion that an egoist can never be motivated by the good of others. However, as Hunt has tried to show, this does not have to be the case.

As Tibor Machan notes in his paper on what he calls "Gregarious Egoism", it is hardly deniable that in day-to-day life we take care of our own priorities before expanding out to concern ourselves with the priorities of others (Machan 8). He calls this daily human habit Benign Selfishness. Now, why can this unobjectionable human pattern not be migrated to a moral context?

In order to do good for the others one values, one has to take care of oneself in order to be able to value things at all. Flourishing Egoism gives values the prerequisite of life. That is,

one's own life, which is necessary for one to have any values at all. One's own life and prosperity is the primary objective for moral action. One's flourishing directly affects one's ability to sincerely hold values.

Obviously, this is all well and good, but terribly abstract. This is where the definition of self-interest comes into play and, I think, causes the most trouble for Flourishing Egoism. Firstly, when I refer to prosperity in the previous paragraph, I am not speaking of material prosperity. Flourishing Egoism falls much closer to an Aristotelian *eudaimonia* concept of self-interest.

To start, Flourishing Egoism is, as I understand it, focused on two sides of self-interest; those being one's rational and authentic values and one's nature as a human being. Values are technically relative, since all values are specifically *someone's* values. Values are individual, but that does not mean they are not relatable. Most people value similar things, only in different degrees and forms. I value mothers, but specifically I value *my mother*, not someone else's; that is, not in the same way.

On the other side of the coin, there is one's nature as a human being. Obviously, this is a topic that is and always will be up for debate, but the conception I understand as being most analogous to Flourishing Egoism is derivative of the Aristotelian "function argument", but with perhaps a bit of sentimentalism sprinkled in. The critical passage for the function argument is shared here:

"For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the "well" is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function.... What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking

what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle.... Now if the function of man is an activity of soul in accordance with, or not without, rational principle, and if we say a so-and-so and a good so-and-so have a function which is the same in kind, e.g. a lyre-player and a good lyre-player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of excellence being added to the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well): if this is the case, ... human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete” (1097 b 25 – 1098 a 17).

So, Flourishing Egoism is working with the idea that, like other beings, there is a way to judge whether one is “doing well” at being a human. There are some traits or common dispositions that we commonly conceive as being part of human nature. And it is these traits, to varying degrees, that constitute a flourishing human being.

Probably one of the most common labels used whenever someone tries to describe human beings is that we are *social creatures*. Or animals, I can never decide which noun is more fitting. The disposition to forge connections with others of our ilk is tightly wound into our psychology. There is a reason one of the highest punishments for criminals is isolation. Hunt even uses this subject to discuss how the good of others becomes the good for oneself in a nonconsequentialist

way (Hunt 188). Thus, doing well as a human would involve sustaining this natural value some others become for you.

Hunt also discusses one of Rand's ideas about human values. There are three core values which are the means to realizing one's ultimate value. Those cardinal values are reason, purpose, and self-esteem (181).

Reason seems a clear enough trait to ascribe to a flourishing human. Humans are all but defined by our powers of reason. Valuing reason is imperative to realizing the best ways to one's goals. Anyone who lives without reason is human in form only.

Purpose seems to be something that follows naturally from reason. If one values the use of reason, then that reason must be directed at something. I do not see how one can have successful reason without a purpose guiding that reason.

Self-esteem causes more hesitation in accepting it as a core human value, but on reflection of what a flourishing human looks like, self-esteem does seem to be strong. This is especially the case for an egoistically directed flourishing. It would be difficult to flourish as the individual one is if he has ill confidence in that individual.

These three cardinal human values are posited to correspond to three virtues. Virtues are those traits and actions that lead to attaining one's cardinal values. Those three virtues are rationality, productiveness, and pride. Rationality and productiveness seem intuitively true as actions toward reason and purpose. Pride causes me a moment's hesitation, like its corresponding value. Pride is not intended to carry the negative tone it does in common use, but is more akin to confidence. If I were developing this list of values and virtues I would rather place pride in the column of human values, and confidence as its corresponding virtue.

So, returning to Rand's earlier scenario of the husband and the dying damsels in distress, it would probably be agreed that part of human nature is in forming connections with particular others. Those others, because of that successful connection, then become a value to oneself above other things. The dying wife is at the top of the husband's individual values, far above the ten strangers. It would be wrong (It might sound harsh), for a Flourishing Egoist to sacrifice one of his highest personal values for something that is simply of less value *to him*.

Hunt puts this aspect into perspective by discussing the common-sense notion of the good of others being a value worth acting on. His discussion is defending against the claim that egoism makes the only reason the good of others is a value to be because they will have greater utility to the agent. This objection rests on the claim that common-sense says the good of others is a "ground floor" for action. That something is good for someone is reason enough to act, and there is no further reason for why this is so (182).

But, as Hunt notes, this does not seem to be common-sense at all. In fact, common-sense seems more on the side of saying the good of people one knows and is close to is a reason for action. It does not seem reasonable to think most people would agree that the good of someone they don't know is always a reason for action. In common-sense, we are concerned with those close to us, and *they* are our ground floor.

A stronger version of this objection, Hunt claims, would be to say that common-sense denies the conception that the only reason the good of others is a reason for action is that they will further one's self-interest later on (183). Hunt agrees that this conception clashes with common sense. However, Flourishing Egoism does not imply this conception. It does not clash with common-sense notions of the good of others.

This is so because self-interest for Flourishing Egoism is in the attainment of values. One of the highest values we typically have as humans is the good of *certain* other people. This specificity is important because it is obvious that we do not care about all people equally. There are a relatively small number of people in our lives that are a great value to us, and it is *their* good that gives us reason to act. It is not common-sense to say that the good of any stranger is of equal value *to us* as the good of our closest loved one.

Common Morality

The common morality is that set of moral judgments which *most* people agree with *most* of the time. The primary disadvantage is that the common morality is not an articulated moral position, but is closer to a “natural” moral development. Common morality is a product of the desire for morality among most people. It is molded and adapted by the social disposition of any given time. Thus, the precepts considered as common sense today, were not necessarily common sense for previous societies. At least, not in the capacity that we understand them. However, despite the somewhat ephemeral nature of these moral principles, some theorists have applied it to their own ethics.

What makes common morality is some mysterious, defining characteristic. The moral majority implicitly understand and agree on this characteristic, but it does not seem to be deduced from the individual principles themselves. Perhaps that majority agreement is, in fact, the defining trait. This, however, would imply that the common morality is not constituted by actions that are right or wrong, but simply popular. Any standard or trans-social measure becomes moot.

What takes priority in everyday, ethical decision making? Does reason direct our moral behavior or does experience? That is, do we mentally calculate what actions are better, or do we maintain those behaviors that are received positively. The reliance of the moral majority on common morality would suggest the latter. If most people acted based on a reasoned moral theory, then there would be no “common morality”, or it would at least be in actuality the most popular fleshed out theory.

Perhaps the most well fleshed out use of the concept of common morality comes from the work of Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress. Their influential and continually updated *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* is a system based on their understanding of the common morality and the ‘considered moral judgments’ which arise from it. This system draws on four ethical principles, inspired by W. D. Ross, which Beauchamp and Childress claim to be derived from, but not exhaustive of, the common morality. These principles are Autonomy, Nonmaleficence, Benevolence, and Justice.

However, W. D. Ross does seem to propose an exhaustive list of human circumstances that apply to all moral decision making. Ross is the originator of this idea of ethical obligation that takes into account the limits and dispositions of human decision making. I will briefly summarize his theory as a way of supporting the universal applicability of the considered moral judgments that Beauchamp and Childress are dealing with in our own decade. These two theories should show the evidence for and influence of common morality.

I will first list the actual principles that Ross argues to be self-evident, before going into how these principles work in moral decision making and thus are common morality. First, there are the duties resting on my own previous acts. “Those resting on a promise” and “those resting on a previous wrongful act” may be called the duties of fidelity and reparation respectively.

Some duties rest on “previous acts of other men.” These are the duties of gratitude. Some rest on the “distribution of pleasure or happiness which is not in accordance with the merit of the persons concerned.” These are the duties of justice. Some rest on the fact that there are “other beings in the world whose condition we can make better...” These are the duties of beneficence. Some rest on the fact that “we can improve our own condition.” This is the duty of self-improvement. Finally, the duties to “not injure others” are the duties of non-maleficence (Ross 21). In summation, the duties of any moral scenario are the duties of: Fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and non-maleficence.

Something noteworthy about these principles is that they are not specific to concrete situations. That is, they do not say it is wrong to lie, or that it is necessarily wrong to kill. Rather they say what direction ethical conduct should be directed. This allows the principles to hold, even if cultural differences make the execution of those principles look different.

Ross recognizes that in any moral decision, there are countless factors that affect what our duty in that particular circumstance is. Factors both explicit and minute are weighed, consciously and subconsciously, to lead us to what our moral reasoning determines to be right. It is an obvious fact of life, and should be accounted for in moral dictates, that an individual can't know all influences on a particular circumstance, and so can't reasonably be expected to make the absolute right decision in any given scenario (Ross 30).

This fact of life leads to a distinction between *right* acts and *morally good* acts. Ross contends that for any given situation, there is an answer that, were one omniscient, would obviously be correct. The decisions we make are not themselves self-evident in their rightness or wrongness. We are never really certain that the moral decisions we make are the best and objectively right ones. This does not, however, make “the doing of our duty a mere matter of

chance” (31). We make the morally good decision in virtue of the characteristics we are able to perceive. These characteristics being the authority the set of self-evident principles have on the scenario.

The duties that are our prima facie duties are not so for one and the same reason. It does not make sense to Ross that different acts in different circumstances should be right for the same reason (24). Different acts can be right prima facie by virtue of their characteristics and the consideration of the general moral principles. So, for one situation, assuming the reasons for one action are not stronger than those of another, there can be multiple prima facie duties. Of course, most of the time our reflection will lead us to see one option as being overriding of the others, thus making it prima facie right.

Ross articulates this ability for a self-evident principle to be overridden by finding a distinction between the characteristics of *being* one’s duty and *tending to be* one’s duty. Breaking a promise tends to be wrong in virtue of it breaking the principle of fidelity. Killing tends to be wrong in virtue of it breaking the principle of non-maleficence. But there are obviously circumstances in which some other of the principles outweigh the one being broken. For example, breaking a promise to meet a friend for lunch in order to help save the victim of a car crash. In the circumstance, the intuitive duty to act beneficently has much more gravity than the promise, which is trivial in comparison. Reasons for action in different actions are not reducible to one or the other.

Just like our tendency to see our duty in a situation be to actually counter the common morality, our duty in a given circumstance may be to break one of Ross’ principles. For example, it is not unusual for one to think it his duty to lie or break a promise in favor of a more morally significant reason. In practical life, we do not cease to accept the idea that lying is wrong, nor

should the self-evident principle of fidelity be rendered moot when we are obliged to break it. These principles continue to be prima facie right in the common morality, even when they are overridden by other principles.

Ross goes into detail on each of his principles as to how they arise in practical life. He seems to be backing up the idea that his principles cover the whole range of types of moral interactions that we can have. In that regard, if there is another variety of encounter that he did not account for, I am not smart enough to see what it is. I will not here summarize each of his explanations, because I am only trying to convey what the common morality is more fully than just claiming it to be obvious. At first glance though, what Ross has said so far feels quite close to the way normal people make moral decisions in everyday life.

Our common moral judgements are based on the factors known to us and our ability to reasonably anticipate the consequences of our choice. We do not make moral judgements with full, objective knowledge of the circumstances, and it is absurd to expect that we can. This prima facie morality that Ross is describing can, therefore, be seen in a relativistic light. It is true that the execution of common morality is a calculation made by the agent at the time, but the reasons composing that calculation would be pretty much universally shared.

Now, to briefly show how Ross' theory has affected the way we discuss common morality today, I would like to look at the applied ethics of Beauchamp and Childress. B&C first describe common morality as the "core tenets of every acceptable morality that are not relative..." (PBE 3). So, right away we see that feature of self-evidence in the common morality. B&C detour slightly from Ross though, in that they assert specific actions and norms as self-evident. This is in comparison to the principles of interaction set forth by Ross, which ideally led to these same conclusions but without the strong assertion of objective truth.

They also list character traits that are intended to be universally admired by the common morality. These are traits like integrity, trustworthiness, honesty, etc. Most people who fall within the scope of common morality should find these traits praiseworthy in others, and for no other reason than they are good traits. Some of the character traits they list share a name with the principles listed by Ross. For example, B&C list fidelity, gratitude, and non-malevolence as character traits. Ross, on the other hand, gives these titles to his principles of how prima facie duties arise. No doubt this is only a difference of semantics, but I find it worth noting that the moral terms Ross expressed as self-evident are still present in modern uses of common morality.

Since B&C are writing primarily for their application to biomedical ethics, they list four main principles of common morality but assert that this list is not exhaustive. Those four principles are Respect for Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-Maleficence, and Justice. So, there is some overlap with Ross' principles. These principles are drawn from considered moral judgements for the specific field of biomedical ethics.

The principle of autonomy encompasses, at minimum, "self-rule that is free from both controlling interference by others and limitations that prevent meaningful choice..." (B&C 101). Beauchamp and Childress are here concerned with the inherent liberty that common morality attributes to all human beings. They interpret it as applying to both one's external autonomy and internal. This means that one who is mentally impaired or imprisoned has a diminished autonomy from one with full mental faculties and freedom of movement.

Nonmaleficence is contained in the positive norm of not *doing* harm or injustice to another. Harm, in the context of biomedical ethics, is "a thwarting, defeating, or setting back of some party's interests..." (153). It is not applied necessarily to any kind of physical harm or pain. For example, amputating a limb to save a patient's life is technically causing harm, but it is

only helping the patient's interests. As with any principle pulled from common morality, there are degrees to which justification is possible or not.

Beneficence involves both *doing* good for others and *preventing* harm. In Beauchamp and Childress' words, the "principle of beneficence refers to a statement of moral obligation to act for the benefit of others" (203). Because of the context in which they are writing, I take others here to refer to patients and those in need of medical aid.

Justice is treated somewhat differently than preceding principles in that Beauchamp and Childress investigate a collection of existing theories of justice. They note that a single static understanding of justice will never really be adequate, and so the institution of justice will need to draw on aspects of all these conceptions. They do specify some of the areas in which justice is necessary in biomedical ethics. Availability of health care, equal distribution of care, fair treatment in research and the results of that research, etc. are all areas where the principle of justice is applied (249).

The problem referred to by Beauchamp and Childress in the explications of all these principles is the problem of basing professional ethics on a particular moral theory. Any moral theory will have its merits when applied to biomedical ethics, but with that will also come major pitfalls. There will eventually come conclusions demanded by a theory that do not sit well with those using it. Problematic outcomes or conflicting dispositions would erode the integrity of medical ethics.

The answer to this problem is to instead use the standard which Beauchamp and Childress claim any acceptable morality has to be consistent with, the common morality (411). Since they take common morality to be something that anyone committed to morality implicitly subscribes to, it should be the least controversial and most applicable tool for professional ethics.

Anyone who disagrees with these principles would hypothetically not believe in morality. Regardless of the type of justification one uses to derive principles of common morality, common morality will serve as the ground floor for any further ethics.

Beauchamp and Childress define the common morality as, “the set of universal norms shared by all persons committed to morality” (B&C 3). The broadness and vivacity of this claim is a result of the nature of common morality as a concept. The common morality cannot adequately be articulated in its entirety. It has to be something that is understood to the point that if one was to ask a general group of varied individuals whether a basic ethical query was right or wrong, the large majority would immediately agree on an answer. In this way, I consider it acceptable to propose principles of the common morality without the need to “prove” they are a part of it. The nature of common morality is such that either most people will accept the principles I discuss, or most people will automatically reject them. In the latter case, my argument will be rendered so unquestionably irrelevant as to not even warrant critique, so the assumption of these principles is of no harm.

A principle that is not explicitly present in Ross is respect for autonomy. Since Ross seems focused on principles that arise once contact with another has already been made, there is not much I saw concerning contactless principles. This respect for autonomy is similar to James Rachels’ rule of non-interference, which I will discuss later on.

Another point of departure in B&C, which they discuss while referring to Ross, has to do with the hierarchy of prima facie principles. They claim that when rights come into conflict, the need arises to develop a “structured moral system” in which some rights have a fixed priority over others. This is in disagreement to Ross’ stance that each case can place different weight on different principles, and no one supersedes the others objectively (16).

Whether some prima facie principles take priority over others is a separate discussion, but that the prima facie principles in common morality have a prevalent application should be clear. B&C's biomedical ethics is more structured, but it is still coming from the understood moral principles that we use every day. These moral givens are the gut reaction judgement we give to some actions. They are the unarticulated calculation we do when making a moral decision.

Egoism and Friendship/Love

It is a common criticism of Egoism in general, that the sole motivation for action being oneself renders true friendship or love of another person untenable. Love is something selfless in the common understanding. Egoism is something selfish, and negatively so, in that same understanding. I take issue with this strong idea that to be a genuine comrade and care for someone requires something beyond the reach of the egoist.

The version of Egoism referred to by the two writers I am going to look at, William Wilcox and Michael Stocker, is Hedonistic Egoism. This is not the version I am defending, but it is a fair claim to say that this is what people, on average, conceive when they think of Egoism. The typical interpretation I see is the Egoism that allows one to do whatever they want to get pleasure or happiness for oneself, which is essentially hedonism. Therefore, I will look at these objections with my conception of Flourishing Egoism to cut ties with that negatively considered version.

Wilcox argues an egoist cannot love someone or be a committed friend without being forced into self-defeat or self-deception (Wilcox 74). Because an egoist holds his own happiness or interest as overriding all others, extending his care to a friend or lover is impossible for a

consistent egoist. Wilcox stands on a soft version of the classic claim that an egoist cannot value something else for its own sake, by allowing that an egoist may value something, but only so far as it does not interfere with achieving his self-interest. An egoist's valuing something is always conditional.

It is commonly accepted that love, friendship, etc. are some of the highest goods and pleasures we can have as humans. That pleasure is not intended to be for its own sake, however, but a bonus to our intrinsically valuing another person. As Wilcox correctly asserts, an egoist who pursues their happiness and self-interest should pursue the pleasure of love and friendship. As one of the greatest pleasures, it should be a priority for the committed egoist.

Here enters the self-defeating angle of egoism that Wilcox claims. If the egoist is consistent in his overriding self-interest, then he will not be able to maintain and enter into friendship. Since friendship is a two-way street, the egoist cannot expect others to give him all the benefits of friendship without his own giving in return. The egoist who always places himself before his 'friend' will quickly see that he has no friends. As a result, according to Wilcox, the egoist has to either forfeit the goods of friendship, or act counter to egoism in order to maintain them. Both options are self-defeating to the End of Egoism (Wilcox 74).

The other eventuality Wilcox proposes for the egoist to have friendships is self-deception. Much like the preceding case of self-defeat, the egoist should pursue friendship as one of the best pleasures he can have. If the egoist wishes to be consistent and not act contrary to his self-interest, he must deceive himself into forgetting he is an egoist. In order to enjoy the fruits of friendship, the egoist must temporarily forget his project. Obviously, this is not a feasible task, psychologically speaking. Wilcox states as much, but maintains these are the only potentials for the egoist who pursues friendship (82).

It is important to look at the conception of friendship that Wilcox is using as the pivotal basis of his argument. It seems to me to be an arbitrary distinction which has no meaningful effect other than to be used in this argument. The key component that he ascribes to friendship, separating it from other relationships, is “commitment” (75). He separates commitment from caring about someone for their own sake by an example of caring about strangers: “I care about the welfare of (probably) any stranger for its own sake....But I am not *committed* to the well-being of any stranger(76).” Friendship requires a seemingly unconquerable obligation to the friend’s welfare.

I assume this means an obligation above even to oneself. If it does not supercede one’s obligation to himself, then where lies the problem for the egoist? Is it the degree of privilege one gives to himself that makes egoism objectionable? If so, it seems the egoist can say that the balance of obligation to his friend is such that whatever he loses in acting for his friend’s interest is outweighed by what he gains in having that friendship. After all, aren’t most relationships a give-and-take dynamic?

Joe Mintoff also looks at this objection in a paper investigating the possibility of egoists being friends. The general assumption which supports the objections is that which says an egoist will have reason to terminate a relationship as soon as it calls for something that is not to his benefit (Mintoff 11). In order for an egoist to remain consistent all paths which knowingly don’t benefit the egoist are to be avoided. This assumption appears to be one of unnecessary extremity, and I will try to answer it in the next section.

The next objection to the consistency of Egoism and friendship comes from Michael Stocker’s argument for the schizophrenic nature of ethical theories. Stocker’s general idea is that modern ethical theories fail to consider harmony between reasons and motives. Reasons from

one's accepted ethical theory seem not uncommonly to be at odds with the individual motives of a person. This manifests in hesitation at doing what reason tells you to do, but you do not wish to do. Or, in guilt, shame, frustration, etc. at acting from one's motives and not the reason of one's ethical doctrine. This is Stocker's explication of moral schizophrenia:

“Not to be moved by what one values-what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful, and so on- bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Not to value what moves one also bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Such a malady, or such maladies, can properly be called *moral schizophrenia*” (Stocker 454).

This malady is given an example through the supposed discord between the egoist and friendship. Stocker uses Egoism in the same sense as Wilcox. He voices a similar objection when he claims that the egoist lacks the necessary component, love. Love here being articulated as “...that person's sake as a final goal....” (456).

For the egoist, this disjunction would presumably arise in the case where he is internally moved by affection or the desire for love, but does not value that intrinsic compulsion as being in line with his ethical reasoning. The doctrine he follows demands that he disregard his psychologically automatic motivations.

To love, in its general sense, is to hold the other person as an end in themselves for Stocker. But, an egoist will necessarily hold only himself as an end, thus rendering the other person irrelevant. The other person could be replaced by anything else which produces the same benefit for the egoist and it would make no difference. Relationships are treated as a resource for the egoist, and this is not love (456).

For Stocker, Egoism is essentially lonely. No action can be for another's sake, only one's own, and the egoist is left with no considerations but his own. As Stocker rightly points out, "Just what sort of life would people have who never 'cared' for anyone else, except as a means to their own interests?" This is ultimately a serious problem for the egoist who falls under Wilcox and Stocker's definition. An Egoism directed toward a traditional conception of pleasure and gain will be hard-pressed to maintain genuine relationships and be consistent.

Reconciliation With Friendship

Flourishing Egoism maintains the egoistic metaphor that each man is an island, but it also strives to remember that each island shares the same ocean. What I am trying to say is that Flourishing Egoism recognizes each agent as an individual, necessarily separate from others in a way, but does not try to deny the importance others may have to that individual. I should note that I use the terms *love* and *friendship* interchangeably in this section as referring to highly valued and close relationships.

I am going to keep rolling with this awful island analogy by using Hawaii as an example. I may be a complete individual, self-defined, but have a sincere concern with the interest and value of my family. That family, or group of valued others, are what form my Hawaii. Each island is solitary, you could say solitary by nature, but is given to a larger definition alongside its other islands. You can move the islands and they will continue to be themselves, but they will no longer be Hawaii. They will no longer have the definition they had made for themselves.

This good of friendship and love of others is an important factor in the decisions of common morality. For some circumstances, common morality argues that the relationship of

someone to the agent is enough reason in itself to make an action prima facie right. To be completely void of motivations that resonate with this would be a major blow to Flourishing Egoism's receptive potential. To be seen as incapable of a core pillar of human existence would be seen as nothing less than alien.

I would now like to tackle Wilcox's objection outlined earlier. I believe the catalyst of his conclusion that the egoist must be self-defeating if he seeks friendship is his definition of love and friendship. The way he uses the word "commitment" to describe the prerequisites for friendship suggests that friendship requires the total erasure of any expectation of benefit. The context he seems to imply is more objectionable than the relationship supposed to be held by the egoist (75).

It is worth reemphasizing that Wilcox makes a distinction between "commitment" and "valuing another for its own sake." But, what more can reasonably be asked for beyond the latter? This distinction seems unnecessary, as valuing something for its own sake is typically the ideal standard of moral objectives. What is commitment apart from an arbitrary rule applied to a relationship, which would have gone into effect regardless? Essentially, I'm asking what commitment looks like as opposed to valuing something intrinsically?

Based on my own interpretation of the subtext present in Wilcox's discussion, commitment to a friendship is not simply the valuing of the other, but the devaluing of the self. He seems to imply that friendship requires denying or disregarding the benefits one can gain, else the relationship is somehow tainted. This idea, admittedly only my interpretation, seems undeniably absurd. If being a friend means doing what is good for them and forfeiting what is good for oneself, then one is not a friend but a slave. This conundrum is well encapsulated in a

quip that Tibor Machan attributed to the poet, W. H. Auden: “We are here on earth to do good for others. What the others are here for, I don’t know” (Machan 26).

Tara Smith comments that “love is discriminating” (Smith 264). I think this is a crucial point to keep in mind when looking at how the flourishing egoist loves his friends. We love someone because they possess traits that we prize. We do not simply love anyone we meet. Our method of entering into strong friendships is highly selective. It is partial to those whose characteristics are of particular value *to us*. If we did not choose who we love based on their value to us, then love would be meaningless. It would become involuntary worship of specific traits or it would cease altogether.

Now, what does friendship look like for Flourishing Egoism? As has been brought up earlier, Flourishing Egoism holds spiritual values as highly if not higher than material values. It is self-destructive for one to limit self-interest to the latter. Of those spiritual, or *human*, values, friendship is one of the defining goods in common morality. Human nature is social, and Flourishing Egoism directs one to the self-interest of his individual nature.

Consciously or not, we all develop traits that we value above others and seek those traits in the people around us. It is an automatic and natural part of our development as an individual in a world of individuals. When friendship arises, our valuing of those traits transmits to valuing the holder of those traits. This friendship becomes a kind of spiritual exchange for both people, a benefit for both people. It is a reflective benefit, where the good of one becomes a good for the other, and correspondingly the bad for one becomes a bad for the other. The friendship is a value both because of *what it is* and *what it offers*. Smith points out the prevalence of this conception by relating a quote of Aristotle: “in loving their friend they love what is good for themselves; for when a good person becomes a friend he becomes a good *for* his friend” (265).

This should also alleviate Stocker's qualms with egoism. The flourishing egoist need not be caught in a tug-of-war between moral demands and internal motivations. The internal motivation that Stocker mentions is one of the guides to successful humanity. The egoist will have no hesitation accepting another as a final end, and worth losses in other areas. The value of the relationship outweighs the value of the loss enough to make it egoistically worthwhile.

The flourishing egoist will readily agree that friendship involves some cost to oneself, but will not accept that this cost is a sacrifice or selfless. The friend is a higher value than that which the egoist loses. The value of the friend is simultaneously a value of oneself as a human being. To live a full, individual life as a human being, as it is commonly understood, means fostering rich relationships that enhance oneself. That hardly seems like it is not in one's self-interest. It does not mean fostering relationships that require the subjection of the self to the other. That is not friendship. The relationship is good not because it simply brings good to the agent. The flourishing egoist's first value is his life as a human being, part of which involves fostering relationships. They are not a good only because they support this value, but because they are partly constitutive of it.

Egoism and Justice

James Rachels posits heavy arguments against Egoism as a "wicked" doctrine. Primarily, this wickedness manifests in the allowance of injustices that Rachels claims are self-evidently wrong. I will be looking at an argument by example that Rachels uses regularly. I hope to convince that the Flourishing Egoism I am dealing with does not result in outcomes as clear-cut

and consistently objectionable as Rachels believes it does. The flavor of justice being used here is one of exchanging of goods according to merit. So, to be unjust would be to give oneself more or less than one merits.

Rachels begins his grievance against Egoism with the following claim: “The most obvious objection to ethical egoism is that it is a morally pernicious doctrine.” (Rachels 308). Right out of the gate, I sense the use of terminology that seems troubling. For instance, unless I am grossly misreading Rachels, saying that something is “morally pernicious” assumes an existing morality to which that thing is harmful. If Rachels has in mind the considered moral judgements of common morality, then this paper seeks to deter that notion. If he is saying that Ethical Egoism is pernicious to the project of morality, then he is making a metaethical claim about the direction of that project.

He then goes on to claim that Egoism says outright we should never be concerned with the interests of others, which encourages wickedness. So, not only does Egoism allow wickedness to slip through, but it actually promotes wickedness. Rachels does not explain what it means to be wicked, but it seems simple to imagine the sentiment he has in mind. I will summarize his defense of this soon. But, I would first note that I agree with his judgement of the individual in his example, and Flourishing Egoism would agree in most cases.

That said, let’s look at the scenario Rachels uses as an objection to Egoism. A doctor gives a short examination to a poor, uneducated black woman (I am unsure whether all these details were relevant to Rachels’ point, but I have included them to stay true to the original scenario.) with a variety of complaints. The doctor sees that she is suffering from malnutrition, which is due to her not having enough money to afford food for herself and her several children.

She works as a cleaning-woman for the wealthy people in town, but only makes a few dollars a month (Even for 1974, I am pretty sure a lot of labor laws are being broken here.).

All of these details are known to the doctor, who spent five minutes with the patient and did nothing besides tell her she was malnourished. The charge for his service is twenty-five dollars. The woman only has twelve dollars to her name. The Doctor agrees to take those twelve dollars as payment (309).

This is the 'correct' thing for the egoist to do according to Rachels. To defend against charges of implausibility against his scenario, Rachels adds that the doctor received no ill reputation, felt nothing toward the woman, and never gave the encounter another thought. Nothing happens in this exchange other than, the doctor received twelve dollars. If I am the traditional egoist across the table, responding to Rachels after being handed this scenario, I would concede that Egoism allows the doctor to be right, despite the implausibility of the scenario.

Rachels then puts this into an argument which he claims proves his point against egoism. That argument is as follows:

- (1) If Ethical Egoism is correct, then the doctor did the right thing.
- (2) The doctor did not do the right thing.
- (3) Therefore, Ethical Egoism is not correct. (309)

He confronts the accusation of begging the question in this argument, which he states is when the premises state the conclusion in some form. His response to this claim is that "neither of the premises of this argument does that" (310). Supposing an objection to this which might be made, Rachels entertains the counter-claim that premise (2) is not one which the egoist would

accept. It assumes a certain position, one not held by the subject of premise (1). I will quote Rachels' reply in its entirety:

“The problem with this, as it stands, is that it doesn't matter at all what some real or imaginary defender of egoism would *say* about premise (2). All that matters is whether premise (2) is true. Premise (2) happens to be true, so if someone denies it, he is saying something false” (310).

And in the following paragraph:

“And as for the claim that premise (2) presupposes the falsity of ethical egoism, clearly that is not so. Taken by itself, the simple statement that *The doctor did not do the right thing* does not presuppose the truth or falsity of any ethical theory whatever.”

The overall objection to Egoism, beyond just Rachels, is that it makes the unequal treatment of equal individuals morally permissible; and in some cases morally obligatory. If we take a basic Hedonistic Egoism, then situations that are intuitively counter to common morality arise regularly. From these objections, it becomes permissible for one to mislead another so they may steal the latter's goods. It would even be permissible to kill another who is in the way of some gain. Egoism makes murder morally permissible, or so it is perceived.

These unsophisticated Egoisms are seen as so reprehensible partly because there is no limitation on the imbalance of justice they approve. It is enough of a breach of common morality

that one can always act at the cost of others. It is even more radical of a transgression when one can act with such extremity that no justification is possible under common morality. It is understandable that when critics look at Egoism from this common viewpoint, their gaze will be drawn to these extreme scenarios. Those scenarios then become the defining traits of the concept as a whole.

Reconciliation With Justice

I would like to argue for Flourishing Egoism's ability to uphold the common morality conception of justice by looking at Paul Bloomfield's argument for justice as a self-regarding virtue. Bloomfield articulates a direct relationship between self-respect and just action. Self-respect then links back to the spiritual qualities that constitute an individual's self-interest.

Bloomfield first quotes Phillipa Foot's re-phrasing of Plato that I quite like: "if justice is not a good to the just man, moralists who recommend it as a virtue are perpetrating a fraud" (Bloomfield 47). On first reading, this seems like a most obvious conclusion. If it is not good for me to be a just person, then why is justice good?

Bloomfield brings up the point that it is not often recognized how justice demands that we treat not only others fairly but ourselves as well. Justice cannot be present in cases where people are unfair to themselves, "because of self-aggrandizing arrogance or self-abnegating servility" (48). A just man cannot be called such if he is not just to himself. Being just to oneself means allowing one to receive goods that are earned by merit. Denying things to oneself that one arguably deserves is not justice.

Imperative to this self-justice is the ability to have fair self-assessment. One has to sincerely and rationally consider what one deserves, what one has earned. To take all for oneself

that is possible is to make an unfair self-assessment. Yes, one now has *more* of something, but one has been unjust to the self. It is unreasonable to think that oneself is truly deserving of all the world's good. One is not the second coming of Bob Ross, and to pretend like one is is to be unjust.

Bloomfield asserts that making fair self-assessments requires seeing who one actually is, and not who one wishes to be (48). My gut reaction to this is to think that I should see myself as who I wish to be so that I can actually progress to become that person. But, that is a separate conversation. Otherwise, I find this to be a rational concept. Disguising who one actually is, is effectively lying to oneself. It does not seem like self-interest to make oneself the object of deception. This honesty to oneself is what Bloomfield calls self-respect. He claims, rightly so I believe, that self-respect is necessary for happiness, at least most of the time.

The starting point of his attempt to show why the relationship of justice and self-interest above is so, Bloomfield brings up one of the “central tenets of justice” (49). This is the feature that like cases be treated alike. According to Bloomfield, this formula for implementing justice is required for it to be a consistent principle, and is echoed in other thinkers such as John Rawls. Without this rule of thumb, any individual case would be judged arbitrarily and with bias. This is how justice seems to have been implemented in all practical circumstances I can think of, so this claim seems uncontroversial.

Now, following the thread of like cases being treated alike, Bloomfield states that judgements of others and judgements of self are directly related. Many immoral actions arise from a failure to assign respect to the other, where respect involves making these fair judgements of others, and therefore of the self as well. One cannot make arbitrary judgements in all cases

and hope to be consistent. Therefore, one has to treat like cases alike when assigning respect to others and self. This is required for justice in Bloomfield's conception.

Like being unfair to the self, making inconsistent judgements results in not only a failure to fairly respect others but a failure of self-respect as well. If respect is a resource, we are doing ourselves a disservice when we unfairly distribute it. It makes sense to assume that others are like us and start on equal footing in terms of what they merit. It is obviously the case in practical scenarios that merit can fluctuate in virtue of the circumstances, but ignoring the complexity of circumstance we are on equal footing with the other humans looking back at us.

If I take that resource of respect, and give myself substantially more than I distribute to others (again, in effectively default circumstances) I am not giving myself proper respect. I am placing myself on an existential pedestal which says I am a more worthy being than thou. An egoist ascribes ultimate concern to their own life, but they do not necessarily assert that their life is in some way transcendental to other lives.

If I go in the opposite direction and place more respect on the other than I do myself, then it is even more obvious that I am failing to be just. This distribution assumes that the self is on a lower level of being than others. If one accepts themselves as a human being just like those around them, and in whose eyes one is an *other*, how can one think it just to attribute less justice to oneself than to any of these default others?

Bloomfield calls this default state of equality fundamental respect. It is a baseline "leveler" of respect merited by individuals who are equal, all things considered (56). He states that this baseline respect is necessary for our self-respect. I understand Bloomfield as implying something along the lines of, if he set the respect due to other equals then we are lowering the

respect due to ourselves by others. By lowering the status of equal others, we lower the status of ourselves. This is obviously not conducive to a flourishing life.

I like Bloomfield's summary of this point when he says that by placing my self-respect above the respect due to others, I am no longer treating like cases alike and act logically inconsistent. I will admit that I see at least one trait of this that throws a wrench in this ongoing claim of like cases being treated alike. One might say that to the person making the judgement, and especially so for an egoist, the cases between the self and others are in fact not alike. *They* are not *me* so there is something inherently differentiating the two. We do not need to worry about properly treating like cases, because in regard to judgements of others and judgements to self, the two cases are not alike.

I concede that this is potentially a troubling point. Especially considering it from an egoist standpoint, it seems obvious that I should place things regarding myself in a separate tier than things concerning others.

However, let's apply this theory to the scenario laid out by Rachels. If we return to the doctor through the lens of Flourishing Egoism, is he acting correctly? Flourishing Egoism would say no. What the doctor is doing is making an irrational judgement and compromising his self-assessment.

Firstly, is there a circumstantial factor that would set the doctor's merit far above the patient's? An omniscient tally does not give the doctor the advantage of need. He is not in more need of those twelve dollars, so his merit does not increase that way. In fact, it seems that objectively the patient has a stronger circumstantial need and use of the twelve dollars, giving her more merit in a fair assessment.

This is not meant to come to the conclusion that compensation is dependant on the status of the provider and the recipient. This example is not about the money, but about the consequences that happen to be linked to the money. The consequence of losing the only money the woman has is threatening to her life and the lives of her dependants. The doctors misjudgement is in judging that his compensation is more meritous than the lives of this family. If the consequence were any different, and this was not the only money the woman had left, then perhaps the doctor's judgement would be less disparate. But it is the combination of his judging the value of his service too highly, and the consequence of his compensation too lowly.

I think part of the point of this scenario is also to make it clear that the doctor did not actually perform a service that justified the cost. Emphasis is placed on just how little the doctor actually did. It is almost as if the doctor is price gouging his own service. So the scenario isn't challenging the notion that service merits compensation, but that the *doctor's* service does not merit *this* compensation. The claim that I think is being implicitly made is that like cases of this level of service did not merit like demands of compensation.

Is the doctor in a position that deserves more respect than the woman in a fair assessment? He is more educated, and one might say higher on the "social totem pole", but that position is not relevant to the object of this judgement. His social and intellectual position is not affected by the gain or loss of twelve dollars.

Starting from a default state of fair assessment, a flourishing egoist would come to the conclusion that he does not merit taking the money, and would not effectively gain anything if he did. To take the money from the woman would be to misplace one's respect, and degrade his character in his own eyes. To place a negligible gain over one's own self-knowledge and character is a failure to flourish as a human being.

The problem with the egoism Rachels is thinking about, and which is commonly assumed, is one that seems predominantly concerned with self-interest in the material sense. Rachels thinks Egoism would have the doctor be correct because he gets money, which is simply “better” than not getting money. But this is not what Flourishing Egoism holds most important. Self-interest is concerned with the self, and the self is more than just the material gain it acquires.

Egoism and Non-Interference

The final issue stemming from common morality assumptions also comes from James Rachels, and it is the idea of moral interference. Rachels begins with this principle: “It is not permissible for one person to interfere with another person’s freedom of action unless there is a specific justification for doing so” (Rachels 299). Essentially, if someone is not doing something wrong, then it is usually immoral to interfere with them.

The important point of his principle is the requirement for specific justification for interference. What then does Rachels define justification as? According to him, interference can be justified if one can show that what the other person is doing is *wrong* or *objectionable*. Unless someone is being immoral, under the common morality I assume, it is wrong to interfere with them.

Rachels uses the example of a man about to board a train to demonstrate what he means. The example he uses is, if someone is about to board a train but someone stops them to tell them their child is in the hospital, then there was justification for interfering with the train-goer. So, what the other person is doing does not have to be a necessarily wrong act, but one needs to think there is something else the person should do in order to have justification for interfering.

This scenario seems susceptible to subjective justification. In Rachels' example, the one who interferes is justified because they must have believed it was important for the man to know about his child. Unless there is a hierarchy that shows one action to be inherently more important than the other, it seems the justification rests on one's sincere belief that the cause for interference is more important.

Rachels presents a second premise to accompany his first: "If a certain act is the right thing for someone to do, then there can be no justification for anyone to interfere with his doing it" (301). This leads Rachels to say that if there is justification for interfering with someone's action, then that is enough to show that their action was not right in the first place. The right thing to do is probably the thing they were interfered with so they could do. And if something is the right thing for someone to do, according to Rachels, it is also the *very best* thing for him to do (301).

I did not mention this in my discussion of Ross, but this topic of *right* being analogous to *optimific* comes up in his book. *Optimific* implies a total knowledge of an action's consequences, which seems unreasonable. Ross also raises the point of the weight of principles in certain circumstances being non-*optimific*. To use his example, if I promise to do something for my friend that will produce 1000 units of good for him, but notice that I could do something else along the way that will produce 1001 units of good for a stranger, what is the right action? Ross applies the quality of *optimific* to the action that produces the 1001 units. To Ross, and I as well, the answer is obviously that I should keep my promise (Ross 34). This, of course, argues against a more utilitarian theory, but it is something to keep in mind when Rachels assumes the equality of *right* and *optimific*.

The third premise in this argument is: “If a certain act is the right thing for someone to do, then it is permissible for him to do it” (303). This particular point is just a gateway to Rachels’ fourth premise in the argument. The final premise in Rachels’ objection to egoism is:

“There are situations in which it would best promote the interests of one person, X, to do a certain act A, while it would best promote the interests of another person, Y, to stop X from doing A” (303).

Basically, Rachels is pointing out that conflicts of interest exist. This is an important point for Rachels’ argument because when one applies egoism to it, one arrives at a contradiction. Egoism, as Rachels understands it, would demand that A is right for X to do, and at the same time say that Y is justified in interfering with A. If it is justified, then in Rachels view act A must also be wrong.

Rachels’ primary objective in this argument is to reject egoism on logical grounds, but his assumption of non-interference being drawn from common morality also implicates egoism’s antagonism to it. With the concepts put forward here, egoism would say it is permissible to interfere with the lives and actions of others in order to benefit oneself.

Reconciliation With Non-Interference

I plan on responding to Rachels’ objections by first taking issue with his claims on justification. I think there is a factor not being considered in his fourth premise concerning conflicts of interest. I will eventually reject the definition of justification Rachels presents.

Justification in his conception seems to require unfeasible knowledge of the agent. I take issue with the degree of objectivity required by it. I also interpret a conflict from his own definition in the example he uses to refute Ethical Egoism. I want to point out these grievances and then articulate a version of justification that I feel is more feasible and more human. Then, I want to use a discussion of justice by Paul Bloomfield to defend against the possibility of cheap interference. It is also intended to defend Flourishing Egoism if one favors Rachels' definition as correct.

The first counter I want to make is to Rachels' explanation of non-interference in general. It is the claim that there is no justification for interfering with a right or permissible act. I don't think this notion is derived from common morality, or considered moral judgements. Rachels does not explicitly say that he draws his premise from common morality, but the fact that he is comfortable asserting it as a self-evident principle of morality means that is the way I have to take.

Justification, for Rachels, demands that one show that what someone was doing was wrong or objectionable (300). There has to be some way in which the other person should not be doing what they are. A permissible action that has no objectively better alternative cannot be justifiably interfered with.

Firstly, what are the limits of the term interfere as it is used here? Am I technically interfering with someone's action if I pull into McDonald's before them and get the last ice-cream cone before the machine breaks? If I had not been present, nothing would have stopped the person behind me from doing what was permissible.

Perhaps it could be argued that the interference in that example was not an intentional action. I did not purposefully stop someone else from doing something. Therefore, it was not

truly interference. I can accept that definition of interference that requires intentionality, it seems proper to differentiate between the states of intent.

Also, how is one expected to correctly judge if another's action is not the right action? Just because one comes to a particular conclusion with the limited data available to him, does not mean that the person acting came to the same conclusion with their data. Using Rachels' example of stopping someone because their child is in the hospital, how do I know what they were doing before was actually wrong? What if another loved one was in a life-threatening situation and needed the person? Is one still justified in interfering because they *believed* the person was wrong? I just find it impractical to expect justification of this kind in real life circumstances.

Now, I also want to propose an example stemming from Rachels' fourth premise. The fourth premise, boiled down, being that two people want something and these wants are in conflict. In Rachels' example, the only thing Y wanted was to stop X because act A was to Y's disadvantage. Rachels' does not give the relation of Y to A, but it must be assumed that there is something in relation to which Y is disadvantaged. Maybe we can call this event B. So, let's put this into the example of X wants to build a house, this is act A. Y wants to continue enjoying the view that will be obstructed if X does A, this is event B. This assumes that both goals are permissible, and not wrong.

We can maintain that Y should not interfere with X if he is not doing anything wrong. Likewise, X should not interfere with Y. But one must interfere and cause the other to not do their act if an act is to be done at all. If B is permissible, then wouldn't act A be technically interfering with Y and B? There has to be something that A interferes with if it causes a

disadvantage for Y, doesn't there? So, Rachels' premise makes out X to be the one who should not be interfered with, but there is no place for how X might be interfering with Y. Is Y supposed to let X do A, which will interfere and cause disadvantage for Y? Which party, X or Y, needs justification in Rachels' view?

I use this example because in common, practical life it is accepted that we interfere with the objectives of others, if but usually in unseen ways. I do not think common morality would condemn trying to get ahead and attain a job promotion before someone else. Interference for the sake of our individual spheres of motivation is normal and not blameworthy. The flourishing egoist is going to put *his* flourishing and the flourishing of those he values before that of strangers. I daresay this type of reasoning is expected in modern society.

Now, obviously as the intensity of interference increases, one enters into territory that encroaches on other common morality expectations. If I steal the last spot on the train by physically incapacitating the other person, I am betraying my self-interest, but not because I interfered. It is the manner of my interference that is blameworthy (though someone like Conan might disagree). Simply, I reject the principle of justification that Rachels proposes.

I would instead posit a definition of justification that refers to the agent and not the one being interfered with. I think a more common definition is that interference is justified if it is reasonably important for the sake of one's values and flourishing. This is as long as the consequences are not unreasonably disadvantageous to the one being interfered with. For example, getting ahead of another for an interview for an important job seems justified. Slashing the other candidates tires seems unjustified, as it interferes with that person's livelihood. I recognize that this is not as concrete a definition as Rachels', but I think it is more feasible and practical for an agent. It also feels more human.

So, what about these instances of unjustified interference or *cheap* interference? Can the flourishing egoist still defend himself? I believe so, though I admit the defense may not be wholly satisfying to one who stands by Rachels' rule of non-interference. But there is an argument from self-integrity that I will try to make.

Though aspects of human nature and character are up for debate, if you accept strengthening one's character and self-respect as being part of flourishing, then there is a self-interested motive to refrain from unjustified interference. Just to reiterate, I am discussing those situations where interfering with another could endow some advantage or assistance on oneself. That is, an advantage or assistance that is not of reasonable importance.

Echoing Bloomfield's earlier argument for fair assessment and self-respect, there is a manner in which unjustified interference is like an unfair assessment. Life is not a game, but I think many would agree there is still a kind of *unsportsmanlike conduct*. Interfering with the right actions of those around you to gain something for yourself unjustifiably is the pass interference of life.

There is an Ayn Rand quote that I think does a better job of articulating this point than I can, so despite the source I would like to give that here:

“...neither love nor fame nor cash is a value if obtained by fraud - that an attempt to gain a value by deceiving the mind of others is an act of raising your victims to a position higher than reality, where you become a pawn of their blindness, a slave of their non-thinking...while...their perceptiveness become the enemies you have to dread and flee - that you do not care to live as a dependant, least of all a dependant on the stupidity of others, or a fool whose source of values

is the fools he succeeds in fooling - that honesty is not a social duty, not a sacrifice for the sake of others, but the most profoundly selfish virtue man can practice: his refusal to sacrifice the reality of his own existence to the deluded consciousness of others” (qtd. In Mozes 93).

We just need to replace the theme of honesty with the theme of integrity, self-sufficiency, or whatever other term one might want to use in reference to refraining from interfering unjustifiably with others. Success attained by the unjustified manipulation of one’s opposition is only partly success. I am taking something away from myself if I seize victory by the interference of another’s merit instead of the impetus of my own merit.

Again, this sort of defense is only needed when there is not a genuine justification for one’s interference. For example, war, athletics, matters of life and well-being, etc. This is to defend the flourishing egoist against accusations of *cheap* interference. Otherwise, I do not think one needs to defend oneself, because there is nothing that needs defending.

Conclusions

Flourishing Egoism should not be placed in the same column as the more material and opulent egoisms commonly criticized. It is agreed that such shallow conceptions of self-interest present conclusions that are instinctively objectionable to our considered moral judgements, but it is rejected that egoism must be limited to self-interest of that type.

The self is more than simply one’s environmental or physical position. The opulence of one’s circumstances is not directly proportional to one’s successful self-interest. There is a

measure of well-being that is uniquely human. For lack of a better term, there is a spiritual aspect to human nature that is not developed with wealth or social advantage, but is supremely important nonetheless. This is what I believe sets Flourishing Egoism apart; and makes it agreeable to common morality.

As I tried to show, friendship and love are integral to current human nature. A traditional egoist may be forced to reduce a friend to a tool for his own good, but the flourishing egoist will not. In line with common notions of true friendship, he will view his friend as worthy of being an end in themselves, because they are a value; they are both conducive to and constitutive of his own good.

As long as being a well-rounded and individually flourishing person is given approbation, Flourishing Egoist should have little to no conflict with the common morality. I would claim that in our current culture, one who prioritizes their own growth as the character they are is looked at with admiration. It is praiseworthy to allow yourself to flourish and not impeded by the flourishing of others. Living for oneself is common, and it need not be objectionable to common morality.

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