

Question: **Is it true that all our virtuous actions are driven by a concern for our own self-interest?**

1. **Question:**

= about what *is* the case, not what *ought* to be the case  
therefore it is concerned with psychological egoism

2. **Psychological egoism:**

a) **definition:**

- (i) Human beings = **incapable** of doing anything that doesn't promote their own self-interest.  
e.g. only reason we're honest, kind or generous with people = to promote our own interests.
- (ii) **empirical account** of human nature – psychological theory of human behaviour and human motivation

3. **Problems:**

a) **untenable:**

- (i) Claim = no evidence of altruistic acts; no evidence of an act not done out of self-interest, but just to help others

But (ii) How can we possibly know this to be the case?

-- we can never know enough about people's motivation to exclude the possibility of altruism

b) **pseudo-scientific theory:**

- (i) doesn't allow itself even the possibility of being falsified
- (ii) No evidence is allowed to count against it  
– if the theory doesn't conform to the evidence, then the evidence is made to conform to the theory.  
e.g. lake
- (iii) definition of 'human' precludes any falsification of the theory

#### 4. Altruism argument:

##### a) Difference between **self interest and selfishness**:

(i) Acting in a way that has some benefit to yourself does not mean this is a selfish act

e.g. Brave man saving lives  
= self-interested – gives his interest (personal pride) preference over other people's (e.g. wife and family who could have lost him).

(ii) Even if an act gives us some benefit it may still be to the benefit of someone else

(iii) Even if benefit follows a virtuous action this doesn't mean that our *motivation* was selfish  
– the satisfaction that accompanies good acts is not necessarily itself the motivation for the act

##### b) **Desire and interests**:

(i) what you desire is not necessarily what's in your interests  
e.g. the fix for the addict = what she desires though not in her interests

(ii) desire is what motivates you to do something and there are many types of desire, some selfish, some unselfish

(iii) what makes one desire, or motivation, selfish and another unselfish is the *object* of desire not merely that it was acted upon  
– all actions are in some sense based on desires and some of these serve someone else's interests

(iv) there are actions that are not based on self-interest.

(v) of those that are – some can be described as altruistic  
– some can be described as selfish

self-interest does not necessarily imply selfishness