



Mains Practice Question

Q. What do you understand by ethical egoism and how does it impact ethics? (150 words)

15 Feb, 2019 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach:

- Introduce by writing by what you mean by the term Ethical egoism.
- Then, elaborate its positive and negative impacts on ethics.
- In conclusion write how ethical egoism can be pursued only by not being unethical to others.

Introduction

- Ethical egoism is the view that people should in fact act according to their self interest. Ethical egoists argue that people do not often pursue their self interest, but that they should in fact do so. Acting in self interest means that we should do what maximizes our happiness and minimizes our unhappiness.
- This is a form of hedonism (derived from Greek word “hedon” which means happiness or pleasure); a doctrine which proposes that one should maximize one’s happiness and minimize one’s unhappiness.

Body

Ethical egoism impacts ethics in both ways – Negative and positive.

Negative Impacts:

- **Universalisation of selfishness:** Ethical egoism is often equated with selfishness, the disregard of others’ interests in favor of one’s own interests. If everyone adopts ethical egoism, it will result in universalisation of selfishness and self centredness.
- **Contradictions with altruism:** Although ethical egoism has some appeal, the theory has been almost universally rejected as an acceptable ethical theory. One of the most basic criticisms is that ethical egoists typically misrepresent altruism, the doctrine that opposes ethical egoism and basis morality on a concern for others’ interests.
- **Doesn’t resolve conflicts of interest:** If ethical egoism were more widely followed, sooner or later, someone’s interests would conflict with another’s interests. In such a circumstance, it would be impossible for both to pursue their own interests simultaneously.
- **Against public service principle:** Ethical egoism put self interest before the public interests can lead to decline in the accountability, transparency and ethical standards of the organization.
- **Ignore interests of future generations:** For example, it is necessary to reduce GHG emission to guard against climate change. Ethical egoism will imply that, there is no need to worry about them.

Positive impacts:

- Ethical egoism cannot be coherently equated with selfishness because it is often in one’s self-interest to help others or to refrain from harming them. For example, Ayn Rand (advocate of

ethical egoism) contends that it would be absurd to claim that a husband who spends a fortune to cure his wife of an illness does so entirely on her behalf. For an ethical egoist, the motivation to help family members and friends is one's personal connection to them and the distress that would be caused by their misfortune or suffering.

- Mandeville put forth the view that self interest is the sole criterion of rightness. Self preservation is first law of existence. Individuals in pursuing their self interest also promote the society's general interests.
- All of our commonly accepted moral duties, from doing no harm unto others to speaking always the truth to keeping promises, are rooted in the one fundamental principle of self-interest. Following ethical values makes one happy and thus, ethical egoism promotes ethics values.

Conclusion

Even while pursuing selfish ends, people have to ensure that they can pursue such ends over the long term. If people are too brazen or aggressive in pursuing their selfish ends to the extent of riding roughshod over others, they will meet resistance, people will be wary of them and will avoid them. Then they cannot pursue their ends. Therefore, even while pursuing selfish ends, one has to be prudent and ensure that they do not lead to backlash from others.

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