


## Meditation: Ideal Self

How do you imagine your most  
ideal and ethical self to be?

## The Threat of Egoism

1. Egoism
2. Why Psychological Egoism is Wrong

## Egoism: Flashy Beginnings



Everyone always acts from selfish motives, whether they know it or not.

Ethics is "a sham" and people cannot act ethically since everyone *in fact* acts selfishly.

"I swear by my life, and my love of it, that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine."



~Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*.

## Kinds of Egoism

Psychological Egoism: People are in fact always selfish.

Philosophical Egoism: People *should* act selfishly. If they aren't acting selfishly, then they are stupidly letting others take advantage of them.

## Psychological Egoism is False Ex: Martyrs

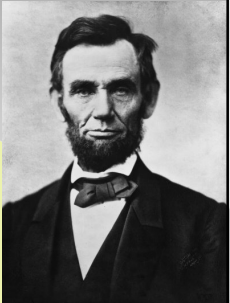
Saint Stephen, the First Christian Martyr, stoned to death.

Gandhi fasted to near death for the cause of peace between religious rivals in India.

## Egoism Redefined?

The Egoist's Response to Self-Sacrificing Behavior:

Getting pleasure from helping others is self-interested behavior even if it is to your own detriment.



A famous story claims that Lincoln said that the good he did was to alleviate his conscience.

## Egoism is a Bad Theory Any Way You Define It

1. It continually shifts what 'selfish' means.
2. If egoism claims that people always act in their own self-interest, this is false. Example: Martyrs and self-sacrificing actions.
3. If egoism claims that people do things in order to get pleasure out of them, this is false. Example: self-destructive behaviors such as cutting.
4. If egoism claims that people are still "getting something out of their self-destructive behaviors (or else why would they do them?)" then this is, as Blackburn notes, "a trick" since "it kidnaps the word 'self-interest' for whatever the agent is concerned about" (p. 36).
5. If egoism claims that everyone is selfish, then there must be a conception of what it is to be non-selfish, but the psychological egoist cannot come up with an example of what a non-selfish action is. Without this distinction, the theory fails to make a claim at all.

## Lessons from Egoism: Criteria for Any Good Theory

1. Consistent definitions used throughout.
2. Testable hypothesis.

Egoists are like paranoid conspiracy theorists: nothing will disprove their theory, but this does not make it true.

### Discussion Question: Your Own Counterexample

Come up with your own example against one of these threats to ethics we've covered so far (relativism or egoism). Make sure you identify what it is an example against and how or why it works against the theory.

A **Counterexample** is a special kind of objection that is an example or situation that the theory would say is right but intuitively seems very wrong.