

# Introduction to Philosophy

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## The Nature of Morality: Ethical Egoism

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

### Readings

- Ayn Rand, "Value Yourself".
- James Rachels, "Ethical Egoism".

### Background

One major concern of ethics is how much weight a person is morally required to give to the interests of others. One answer, proposed by Ayn Rand, is that the interests of others have no independent weight whatever. Her view is a version of ethical egoism, which claims that one is obligated to assist others if and only if doing so promotes one's own interests. James Rachels finds the difficulties in ethical egoism to be more impressive than its advantages. He calls it a "challenging" theory, worth taking seriously even though in the end he rejects it.

### Questions

1. Ayn Rand claims that you must "accept the fact that the achievement of your happiness is the only moral purpose of your life". What is her argument justifying this claim?
2. What arguments does James Rachels give in favor of ethical egoism? Why is he not satisfied with them? What is the ultimately problem with ethical egoism that Rachels identifies as providing "an outright refutation" of the theory?
3. Given that they reach different conclusions, Rand, and Rachels cannot both be right. Where exactly in their respective arguments do they disagree? Which position is supported by the strongest and most compelling argument?