

## Nature of Selfishness: A Primer

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**ABSTRACT:** Selfishness is regarded as seeking one's own interest or happiness to the disregard of the well-being of others. It is a pre-requisite for survival for any living being on earth. To be selfish is to be motivated by concern for one's self-interest. Yet, we all need to have some self-interest. There are many reasons not to be selfish. Research suggests that compassionate, generous people are happier, healthier, more popular, and more successful. This paper introduces the reader to the nature of selfishness.

**KEYWORD:** selfishness, altruism, selflessness, nature of selfishness, egoism.

### INTRODUCTION

Philosophical arguments on whether humans are naturally selfish or unselfish have flared for centuries and continue today. The selfish person is interested only in himself, wants everything for himself, feels no pleasure in giving, but only in taking. Selfishness makes human beings individualistic rather than a social being. Selfishness is one of the principal fruits of the corruption of human nature; and it is obvious that selfishness disposes us to over-rate our good qualities, and to overlook our defects. The driving force behind selfish behavior is human root motivation to be number one among acquaintances. This view of human nature has been justified by biological theories like the "selfish gene." Emotions such as love, loyalty, and fairness have little or no place in most of today's utility functions; a narrow selfishness is pervasive.

Investigating the behavior and selfish tendencies of babies should theoretically reflect our true human nature. Intuitively speaking, babies should represent humankind in our most primal state. In general, children learn the Golden Rule in kindergarten to repress their innermost selfish desires in order to think about others. In families they learn the role of the conscience and are introduced to many forms of cooperation, including frequent self-sacrifice in the interest of the group. In schools they learn to be members of cliques. In the church, religious traditions introduce them to the absolute prohibitions of the Ten Commandments [1]. As children grow, they develop abilities to, care about social norms, and learn to be selfless.

## WHAT IS SEFISHNESS?

Human beings are predisposed to be self-centered, egocentric, and egoistic. Research shows evolution involves the process of natural selection by individuals who prioritized self-interest over others. Psychologists often draw on classical conceptions of selfishness from evolutionary biology (i.e., selfishness can be hereditary), economics (i.e., scale of preference in self-interest), and philosophy (i.e., psychological egoism). Selfishness is perceived in ourselves and others when we detect a situation-specific desire to benefit the self that disregards others' desires. Detecting and deterring selfishness in both oneself and others is crucial in social and marital life. Understanding selfish actions and deterring them facilitates the maintenance of social cohesion and marital relationships.

Selfishness is the trait that leads people to frequently act in their own interests without any regard for how their actions could affect others. It is being overly concerned for oneself or one's own advantage, pleasure, or welfare, regardless of others. It is the opposite of altruism or selflessness. Selfish or self-centered people are overly focused on themselves. They lack empathy for others. The selfish person is interested only in himself, wants everything for himself, feels no pleasure in giving, but only in taking.

Selfish people only care about themselves and their own needs, and they are not interested in the needs of others. They are self-centered, controlling, and manipulative. Selfishness is living by the flesh; living by sight, not by faith. For a selfish person, it is "Me, myself & I." Selfishness places you above God, spouse, and children. It is a sin against God and your spouse. God judges selfish people [2]. A typical demonstration of selfishness is shown in Figure 1 [3].

Selfishness is one type of human behavior. It is any behavior that brings any pleasure or benefit to the individual. It is often regarded as an undesirable trait, whereas altruism is typically considered universally desirable and virtuous. Many people believe that humans are hardwired to be selfish, but there's scientific evidence to back that up. They believe that we are apparently ruthless, with strong impulses to compete against each other for resources and to accumulate power and possessions. Because people's survival depended on access to resources, there was bound to be competition and conflict between rival groups, which led to the development of traits like racism, warfare, and male domination. Man in the state of nature seeks nothing but his own selfish pleasure, but such individualism naturally leads to a war in which every man's hand is against his neighbor.

## FORMS OF SELFISHNESS

Selfishness comes in many forms, from self-indulgence to self-pity to self-righteousness. The spectrum of human behavior from extreme selfishness to extreme selflessness is shown in Figure 2 [4]. Experts say that most humans fall somewhere on a spectrum between pathological selfishness and extreme altruism. As a lens into the social brain, the extremes of the selfish–selfless spectrum reveal the importance of both genetic and neuron-based heredity systems and reward processes in strongly influencing actions toward others and cooperative behavior in the spectrum of behavior ranging from extreme selfishness to extreme selflessness.

➤ *Self-love*: This is considered as healthy selfishness. We are all a little self-serving. In order to help others, we must first take care of ourselves. Looking out for number one has been important for survival for as long as there have been human beings. This is commonly seen in the pursuit of financial independence, mental liberation, or survival. A behavior that tries to please others, excessive humility, but not to oneself can have a negative impact. All is self-love. Your children are loved only because they are yours: your friend for a like reason; and your country engages you only so far as it has a connection with yourself. Self-interest drives capitalism. The goal of someone driven by natural self-interest is his own care. Man by nature perceives a thing as being good or evil not in terms of how it may affect the interests of others, but in terms of how it affects his own self-interest [5]. The line between self-interest and other-interest is porous.

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➤ *Egoism*: This is a theory about the nature of human motives. It is the view that humans are always motivated by self-interest and selfishness. In other words, it suggests that every action or behavior or decision of every person is motivated by self-interest. It claims that, when people choose to help others, they do so ultimately because of the personal benefits that they themselves expect to obtain, directly or indirectly, from so doing. Immediate gratification can be sacrificed for a chance of greater, future pleasure. The motive of selfish people and intended results are based on self-interest. Selfish people only perform acts that give them personal enjoyment. Helping others is ultimately motivated by some form of self-interest, such as non-sensory satisfaction, the expectation of reciprocation, the desire to gain respect or reputation, or by the expectation of a reward in a putative afterlife [6].

➤ *Psychopaths*: As successful psychopaths can intelligently conceal their psychopathic traits, their number in the population is difficult to detect. Psychopathic behavioral features include lack of empathy and remorse, dishonesty, poor planning, and decision-making skills. For criminal psychopaths, it leads to clashing violently with others and taking risks that lead to incarceration, debilitating injuries or death [7].

➤ *Altruism*: This is placing the needs of others over one's self-interests. It is an extreme selflessness in undertaking actions benefiting others without evident self-benefit and incurring personal risk. Altruism and selfishness, like free will and determinism, seem to be polar opposites. Altruism is demonstrated in zealous altruists who anchor the benevolence end of the selfish–selfless spectrum. The study of altruism has mostly focused on the positive benefits of altruism, and how humans are wired to care for the welfare and suffering of others. Altruism does not mean you completely forget your own interests. We tend to think of altruism as unselfish and beneficial, with minimal tradeoffs, and selfishness as generally bad, negatively impacting on others. Psychologists point to a more complex picture: not all selfishness is necessarily bad, and not all altruism is necessarily good. Altruism is motivated by the promotion of the well-being of others by fostering their thriving and avoiding harm to them [8]. Altruism can be impulsive suggesting instinctive reactions as in the preceding cases, or premeditated by choosing to help others in ways that are knowingly risky. It goes beyond reciprocation by compassionately helping a stranger with no apparent self-benefit and at some risk to one's own being. For example, kin altruism is the mechanism by which individuals care for and protect individuals within their kin group (those with whom they share a blood relation). Altruism, like self-control, is a valuable temporally-extended pattern of behavior. Like self-control, altruism may be learned and maintained over an individual's lifetime. It needs no special inherited mechanism [9].

## CONCLUSION

Selfishness is the default mode of human nature. It is an important key to marriage, friendships, and relationships. It is also an essential key to happiness and fulfillment. From the biological viewpoint, altruistic acts differ from selfish acts by virtue of differing internal mediating mechanisms; altruism becomes a motive like any other. Like Jonathan Haidt said, “Human nature is a complex mix of preparations for extreme selfishness and extreme altruism. Which side of our nature we express depends on culture and context. When opponents of evolution object that human beings are not mere apes, they are correct. We are also part bee.” Figure 3 shows unhappy, selfish people [10]. More information about the nature of selfishness can be obtained from the books in [11-20].

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Figure 1 A typical demonstration of selfishness [3].

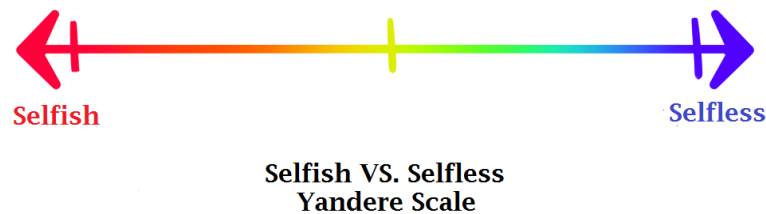


Figure 2 Selfish–selfless spectrum [4].



Figure 3 Unhappy, selfish people [10].