

Selfishness, Altruism, and “You’ve Got a Friend in Me”

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The Predominant View – We Are Selfish

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- ❑ **Psychology:** All major psychological theories of motivation assert that everything we do is ultimately for our own benefit. Consider theories such as self-presentation, self-deception, self-monitoring, and self-esteem. Helping others is motivated by avoiding guilt, enhancing our social standing, feeling joy.
- ❑ **Evolutionary Biology:** Individuals don't ensure their own welfare and survival, rather they ensure the welfare and survival of their genes. Therefore, the self often lies outside of us, and helping our kin or similar others is really helping ourselves. Social behavior is recognized, but only to the extent that it contributes to individual success (see Dawkins 1976).
- ❑ **Economics:** We are motivated by self interest.

- ❑ **Family Decision-Making** – spouses use power and influence to “get their way” (e.g., Corfman and Lehmann 1987).
- ❑ **Volunteering** – prestige and a sense of self-worth (Fisher And Ackerman 1998).
- ❑ **Gift Giving** – we give to others for to express ourselves, social exchange, economic exchange, and socialization (e.g., Bagozzi 1974, 1975).
- ❑ **Word of Mouth** – we establish our social position by providing useful information to others (Price and Feick 1987).
- ❑ **Commercial Friendships** – buyer-seller interactions are typically instrumental (Price and Arnould 1999).

An Alternate View

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- ❑ Although we must be selfish to survive, we can act in the interests of another person (i.e., behave altruistically) in some instances.
- ❑ Altruism occurs when the terminal reason someone helps is to alleviate another's suffering or give them assistance. Self-gratification may result as a secondary outcome of helping (Batson 1987).
- ❑ The critical consideration is **perspective taking**, which leads to **empathy** (defined as an emotional reaction characterized by feelings of compassion, sympathy, and tenderness).

The Altruism Question

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Outcomes

**Relief of other's
suffering**

**And as a result
receive self-benefits**

Selfish

**Instrumental
goal**

Terminal goal

Explanation

Altruistic

Terminal goal

**Unintended
consequence**

Aversive-Arousal & Empathy Predictions

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Selfish

Empathy

Escape

Low

High

Easy

Low

Low

Difficult

High

High/very high

Altruistic

Empathy

Escape

Low

High

Easy

Low

High

Difficult

High

High

Important Issues

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- ❑ **Social welfare** is maximized by altruism or more generally by considering the effects of what we do on others. Think about energy conservation, recycling, and socially responsible consumption as examples. Understanding altruism is part of recognizing the effect of our behaviors on others (today or future generations).
- ❑ **Public goods organizations** exist only if a significant proportion of members do not free ride. As a consequence, members of public television stations, alumni of educational institutions, and charitable organizations such as the Red Cross must depend on altruism to survive and provide societal benefits.
- ❑ **Consumer welfare** is not necessarily maximized by winning. Rather, it is maximized by cooperative outcomes. I do not (usually) compete with my spouse, children, friends, etc.

Research Topics?

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- ❑ How can we motivate people to *perspective take* and to feel *empathy*? Is it possible to perspective take and not feel empathy in some situations?
- ❑ What are the characteristics of the individual in need that lead to perspective taking, empathy, and helping?
- ❑ Perspective taking requires cognitive effort and a lack of impulsivity. Are there certain types of people and contexts within which empathetic helping is more likely?
- ❑ How do we motivate these “other directed” behaviors through advertising appeals and interpersonal influence? Why people help and what motivates them to help are likely to be different.