

## Self Interest, Selfishness, and Greed

To survive and to thrive is often a balance of opposing forces. Humanity has a tendency to be selfish as well as selfless. We are by nature self interested and we want the best for ourselves individually. We have both individual needs and community needs. Sometimes they work together, sometimes they don't. How do we balance the needs of the individual against the needs of the community?

If we were a hive of bees, then only the community would matter. For bees work only for the common good and the individual is disposable. Worker bees work themselves to death, literally in about 6 weeks. Fortunately, we humans aren't like that. Much of our strength is collective, but much of it is also individual. And it is in our collective best interest to protect and defend our individuality.

We distinguish the term self-interest from greed and selfishness which mean about the same thing. Self-interest is the interest in the well-being of the self. Selfishness and greed involve the taking of more than one's "fair share". Three kids have 12 cookies to share. Each kid has a self-interest in getting 4 cookies. But if one kid eats 6 cookies, he's selfish.

Some people say that everything everyone does is selfish and therefore humanity is either evil by nature, as believers express it, or that humanity is naturally greedy as Objectivists like to believe. But there is a difference between looking out for your self-interest and wanting more than your fair share. And one can easily make an argument that everything has a self-interest component.

For example, I am generous because I gain from my generosity. Even if I don't gain directly, I believe it helps humanity in general, so I gain in the long run. It make me feel good. Believers can be viewed as totally self-interested. They aren't generous, they are just afraid of going to Hell. It's like an investment in a retirement program where it costs you a little in this life for a huge return in the next life. And there's no way to argue the point because any act no matter how selfless it might seem, can always be deemed to have a self-interest component, if nothing more than a desire to prove to someone that you can be totally selfless.

But it's no surprise that it's human nature to look after one's own hide and it's natural to do so. Children start out very selfish because they haven't learned anything about community. Selfishness often comes from short-term thinking. It's about what's good for me now, not what's good for me in the long-run. So since children haven't learned about community and long-term thinking, they often act more self-interested than their wiser adults.

Too much selflessness can also be a problem where the individual sacrifices themselves too much for what they see as the common good. Sometimes these people don't look at the long-term view that their own personal interests are important to keep themselves in good condition to be a strong healthy member of society. They don't realize that their goal of long term selflessness is actually impeded by their short term selflessness.

Sometimes people surrender their individualism thinking that merging into a group mind will be of community benefit, but it is often our individualism that creates the intellectual diversity that keeps the group on track. One's self-interest is sometimes in the community interest in the long run, and the community interest is often the best way to take care of yourself. Sometime a little capitalistic greed is a good motivator to get people to invent great things so that they get a personal reward. Selfishness isn't all bad and altruism isn't all good. Selfish Altruism might be the best way to describe the position of the Church of Reality as a religion. Our generosity serves our self interest.

The Church of Reality doesn't accept the false dichotomy that self interest and altruism are opposites. Our position is to apply wisdom to the situation and try to determine the best solution. The issues of fairness and what is the right way to live varies widely from situation to situation and from person to person. It is not a problem that is solved with a few simple rules. Sometimes conflicting interests can be resolved by coming up with a new solution. We in the Church of Reality

have the {In:Principle of Wisdom} to express our expectation that we use our logic and reason and taking reality into account to come up with a solution that works. We are an innovative religion and if there's a solution to a problem we are going to figure it out.