

Human Nature and Egoism: Its Path to Self-Destruction

Lucy Hicks

Department of Political Science, Diablo Valley College

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Adjunct Professor: John Kropf

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Abstract

Everyone wants something, whether it be power, wealth, a person, or an item, but how far would we go to get what we want? All humans wish for self-promotion and success, this is a temptation no one can resist, not even at the cost of other's misfortunes or self-destruction. It's natural behavior for humans, the biological factors that make up humans and other species, as well as the dynamics between different species, the philosophical ideals that make up the thoughts/ideas contained in our minds, and the religious views that's responsible for our beliefs. These aspects of our physical and mental structure make up everything in our life, so it's only logical for egoism to be at the core of our human nature but ultimately be the thing that leads to the betrayal amongst one another and to our conclusive demise.

Human Nature and Egoism: Its Path to Permanent Self-Destruction

As humans, we do whatever we can to achieve our goals and get what we want, even if at the expense of another person, a group of people, or the environment around us. This has been our natural instinct for centuries, all to have the fulfillment in life we all strive for. Famous philosophers like Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes believed in this pessimistic perspective, stating that our drive behind every action and decision is made purely for our self-interest. It is true that some decisions and actions can help others, but its objective is for the interest of making one feel good or better about themselves for doing these actions or making such decisions. In Christianity, one of the ideologies is that self-interest, or others would call selfishness, is what sin is and how sin is ultimately unavoidable. People will always be making decisions, not caring whether it's good or bad, for their own goals. Egoism or, "a philosophical term that refers to the belief that one's own self-interest should be the primary motivation in all ethical decisions." (Leontis, n.d.). It's linked to our natural instinct of survival, which changes our behaviors and has evolved from our ancestors in adapting to new environments, situations, and circumstances. It plays a part in processing emotions, which affect our actions and the choices we make for the goal of survival and self-gain; we must take into account the psychological and biological background of our choices to reach our personalized objectives. Human nature will unintentionally lead to our destruction as a result of egoism; we don't care enough to change our behavior or actions if it promotes our self-interest.

Philosophers Perspectives

Thomas Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes was an English philosopher and political theorist active in the seventeenth century who believed that the state of nature is a state of war. Because he believed

that human nature was cynical, with it he also believed a social and political order was required to keep society civil and organized.

With the masses, there will always be some who are at risk for not getting what they want or think they deserve and act on the defensive, but to what extent will humans follow when it comes to their actions?

The right of each to all things invites serious conflict, especially if there is competition for resources, as there will surely be over at least scarce goods such as the most desirable lands, spouses, etc. People will quite naturally fear that others may (citing the right of nature) invade them and may rationally plan to strike first as an anticipatory defense. (Stanford University, 2022).

Humans conflict not only because of our untrusting nature or for the greediness of how much can be claimed, but also over what can be influenced by our perspectives and beliefs. Everyone having this mentality leaves no room for a proper resolution, only for a heightened confrontation.

Hobbes imagines a state of nature in which each person is free to decide for herself what she needs, what she's owed, what's respectful, right, pious, prudent, and also free to decide all of these questions for the behavior of everyone else as well, and to act on her judgments as she thinks best, enforcing her views where she can. In this situation where there is no common authority to resolve these many and serious disputes, we can easily imagine with Hobbes that the state of nature would become a "state of war", even worse, a war of "all against all". (Stanford University, 2022).

Hobbes is the author of *Leviathan*, a book concerning political philosophy, arguing for a social contract for a sovereign to hold the responsibility for the well-being of everyone. This theoretical agreement was born from Hobbes' idea of how human nature is naturally disorderly,

attempting to justify the necessity of political authority. "...during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war is of every man against every man." There is a drive for more and more steamed in mankind that doesn't seem to stop until death, and according to Hobbes, "...I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death." This aspiration of something can get excessive enough for humans to kill one another, it doesn't matter what it's for. "Competition of riches, honor, command, or other power inclineth to contention, enmity, and war, because the way of one competitor to the attaining of his desire is to kill, subdue, supplant, or repel the other."(Levithan, 1651).

Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the author of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and the founder of psychoanalysis, which is a method of treating mental disorders. Freud believed that our human nature is a result of early childhood experiences and is connected to the unconscious mind, tying psychological factors into his theory.

Freud classified human behavior under three categories: the id, ego, and superego. The id is the urge for pleasure and survival, like wanting to satisfy hunger, sexual desires, or even hostile impulses.

The id represents the instinctual and impulsive part of the psyche, governed by the pleasure principle – seeking immediate gratification without regard for others or societal norms. It is the oldest part of the psyche, present from birth, and entirely unconscious. Freud described it as a reservoir of raw psychic energy – chaotic, amoral, and impatient. It knows only want, and it wants satisfaction now.

The id part of human behavior is the most related to self-interest and promotion of our own success, as well as being envious of others, to give in to what we want, no matter the risk or cost to others. "It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement — that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others," (Freud, 1930).

The ego takes into account more realistic factors and is built from the id, acting as the balance between desires and what is rational in a given situation. The superego is our conscience, often representing our morality, ideals, and what we personally see as right and wrong. With ego also comes repression, "...the unconscious process of blocking out distressing thoughts or memories." (Pass, 2026). Regression and a series of coping mechanisms are used to manage experiencing harsh realities. These mechanisms consist of denial or refusing acknowledgment, projecting negative feelings onto others, trying to explain unacceptable behavior with reason, or displacing feelings into something else. The ego and superego work together to restrict the id, bringing the moral and realistic factors into the equation of whether to give in to temptation or not. If the ego and superego didn't exist and mankind only had the id, giving in to their desires and doing whatever it takes for their own progression, there would only be the question of how much would be destroyed and how little time it would take. "It only too often yields to the temptation to become sycophantic, opportunist and lying, like a politician who sees the truth but wants to keep his place in popular favour." (Freud, 1923).

To simplify Freud's theory, human behavior is driven by impulses and feelings of distress that aren't necessarily conscious. Applying this theory to self-interest and related feelings like envy and aggression makes humans dangerous to each other, the environment, and to ourselves.

The contents of Freud's other book, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, include his other major theory that mankind is driven by two forces of nature, which he called Eros and Thanatos. Eros is the force that "seeks to force together and hold together the portions of living substance." (Freud, 1920). "Eros becomes the great life-binding force: the pressure toward union rather than fragmentation, toward organisation rather than collapse." (Pass, 2026). In contrast, Thanatos is the force that drives death, destruction, and unraveling until collapse. Freud believed the drive of death is connected to feelings and acts of aggression, not just as an outward effect on others, but also on oneself. This concept brings to light the self-destruction that aggression brings, leading to a constant cycle of natural hostility and violent tendencies among one another. "They are built into the structure of conflict itself. The same mind that loves, attaches, and creates also contains pressures toward rupture, domination, destruction, and return." (Pass, 2026)

Niccolò Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli was an Italian political philosopher from the Renaissance era who viewed human nature pessimistically, the only drive for humans was the selfish reasons and personal gains they aimed to satisfy, as it's only natural for them to take and take.

The desire to acquire things is truly very natural and ordinary, and when men who can do so are successful, they will always be praised and not blamed, but when they cannot and want to do so at all costs, here there is error and blame. (Machiavelli, 1532)

This is how the human behavior of selfishness, egoism, and taking any necessary measures to get what is desired is promoted. Because it's a common thing for most people to do, others follow this lead in thinking it's natural to do anything required to achieve these goals, whether it was moral or not, and there would be no type of consequence. And if people don't follow the lead of others, it's looked down upon in society or seen as there's something wrong with that person.

Machiavelli wrote a book called *The Prince*, a guide for new rulers on how to keep power, and how to manipulate everyday people, as well as learning about what motivates them. Because humans are so interested in themselves and what they want, it's easy to control how they feel or what to think if the primary motivator is fueling their greed and/or lust for more.

People are by nature fickle, and it is easy to persuade them of something, but difficult to keep them persuaded. And therefore, it is necessary to arrange things so that when they no longer believe, they can be made to believe by force. (Machiavelli, 1532)

Self-interest, or egoism, is one of the most successful and typical feelings a person can feel that paves the path for getting someone to do what you please, based on the knowledge that the behavior in most humans is consistent. Even if the egoism of someone doesn't destroy on its own, the manipulation of another trying to take advantage of this egoism will allow for persistent chaos. It seems as though no matter the involvement egoism has in humanity and its nature, what follows may possibly be progression, but also disastrous consequences for everyone and everything.

Scientific

Evolution

Self-interest is not just a philosophical theory regarding humans and their habits, but a proven genetic and biological fact. Progression and maximizing capability are unconscious decisions made not just by the human mind, but also by what makes up the human body.

The foundation for understanding inherent self-interest lies in the gene-centered view of evolution, which posits that the unit of selection is the gene, not the organism or the species. From this perspective, organisms are "survival machines" built by genes whose directive is to maximize their own replication in the gene pool. This genetic imperative

translates into a fundamental, non-conscious self-interest at the deepest biological level. Behaviors that appear altruistic at the individual level are often explained as mechanisms for gene propagation. Kin selection, for example, describes the tendency to help close relatives who share a high proportion of the same genetic material. A self-sacrificing act that saves multiple siblings can be evolutionarily beneficial because the genes responsible for the act are more likely to survive and be passed on through the relatives' reproduction. This is not conscious selflessness but a hardwired genetic strategy ensuring the continuity of shared hereditary information. The evolutionary logic extends to non-relatives through reciprocal altruism, where an individual aids another with the expectation of a future beneficial return. Such behavior is only adaptive if the cost of the helping act is less than the benefit of the reciprocal favor. Furthermore, mechanisms must exist to detect and punish "cheaters" who accept help but do not return it. These strategies demonstrate that a gene for "altruism" can only spread if it ultimately confers a net benefit, either directly or indirectly, to the replication of the genes that code for it. (ScienceInsights, 2025)

Darwinism

For as long as humans have maintained their stance on this earth, which has been for hundreds of thousands of years, we have done everything and anything to survive; that is one thing that has not changed as we evolve. Charles Darwin, an English naturalist and biologist from the nineteenth century, was famous for his ideas about evolution. He believed in natural selection, "the process through which populations of living organisms adapt and change." (Natural selection, n.d.).

Individuals in a population are naturally variable, meaning that they are all different in some ways. This variation means that some individuals have traits better suited to the environment than others. Individuals with adaptive traits—traits that give them some advantage—are more likely to survive and reproduce. These individuals then pass the adaptive traits on to their offspring. Over time, these advantageous traits become more common in the population. Through this process of natural selection, favorable traits are transmitted through generations. (Natural selection, n.d.).

In the interest of their survival and continuation of their species, living organisms adapt to the environment or die either from failed adaptation or from the invasion of a different species. This process is without thought and repeated over again with new waves of organisms, changing what they need to match the situation and stay durable. Because natural selection is unconscious, more and more species become extinct with newer generations surfacing.

An invasive species, a disease organism, a catastrophic environmental change, or a highly successful predator can all contribute to the extinction of species. Today, human actions such as overhunting and the destruction of habitats are the main cause of extinctions.

Extinctions seem to be occurring at a much faster rate today than they did in the past, as shown in the fossil record. (Natural selection, n.d.).

Darwin goes introduces his ideas about evolution and survival instinct among other living organisms in his book, *On the Origin of Species*. He summarizes his theory by stating, “One general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die.”(On the Origin of Species, 1859). This way of thinking could lead to ideas of how this works to benefit organisms, but if reproduction ever falls short and more organisms are considered weak and die off, eventually with new generations there is a

higher risk of extinction. From a biological perspective, if organisms don't engage in actions for their self-interest, they will die; but if they do, they will thrive and endanger other species of life. Being selfish is a must in the world of survival of the fittest, promoting the survival instinct all organisms have no matter the stage of evolution.

Religious

Christianity

In every perspective, story, or idea in Christianity, self-interest is always displayed as a sin in the eyes of God. "The purpose of life is to love and serve God in order to help bring about God's glorious plan for creation." (Christianity - human nature and the purpose of existence. n.d.) Mankind is given the chance to reflect on their actions and make conscious decisions that will define their fate and put it in God's hands, either empowering them and sealing an afterlife of euphoria or destroying them with an afterlife of permanent misery. In every religion there is some sort of higher power or powers that is believed by people in the religion to be served and worshipped by all, but there will always be those who take part in sin by acting on selfish impulses, "The story illustrates the Christian belief in the inevitability and universality of sin. Throughout their lives, people will pursue their personal interests instead of seeking to serve God and follow God's will." (Christianity - human nature and the purpose of existence. n.d.).

Sin originates from the story of Adam and Eve, where Eve gives in to her desire to take an apple from the tree of knowledge and facing the ultimate consequence by doing so. "Others believe that sin originates with Satan, who first tempted Eve and now preys on humankind, seeking souls to devour." (Christianity - human nature and the purpose of existence. n.d.). Even though Eve was told of the rules, what not to do and how action would be taken against her if she broke these rules, she still allowed herself to be tempted and then persuaded into taking what she

found to be in her self-interest. Although the theory of sin originating with Eve does not fall short, it originally stems from an initially wise and important creation from God, the first fallen angel, Lucifer. According to the bible, Lucifer who later transformed into Satan was ambitious, but grew power hungry and began a rebellion against God; it is not known how sin rooted in him but it began there and only spread. In the stories, sin began with self-interest/desire and only causes destruction for those who engage in it and in some cases for the people around them or involved.

The Christian concept of sin originates in the story of Adam and Eve found in chapters 2-3 of the Book of Genesis, a story that has central importance for Christians. The story relates the creation by God of the first humans, a man and woman. God placed them in a beautiful garden called Eden, which provided for all their physical needs, as well as companionship with each other and fellowship with God. For these first humans, God had but one rule. In the garden stood "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," whose fruit Adam and Eve should not eat. When Adam and Eve later broke the rule and ate the fruit, God banished them from the garden, condemning them and their descendants to a life of hard work, pain, disease, and eventual death, and submitting the earth itself to "bondage." Christians call this humanity's "fall" from innocence. (Christianity - human nature and the purpose of existence. n.d.).

An example of selfish acts occurring and causing chaos and even violent tendencies in Genesis includes, "Cain's selfishness is evident in his reaction to God's favor towards Abel's offering. Instead of seeking to improve his own offering, Cain's jealousy and self-centeredness led him to commit the first murder, killing his brother Abel." (Topical bible: Impact of selfishness, n.d.). Because of Cain's "selfishness" and emotional mind, it paved the way to his violent outburst

towards his own brother, killing him. Another example in the bible of self-destruction because of promotion of self-interest/selfishness is,

Jesus tells the parable of a rich man who hoarded his wealth, planning to "take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19). His selfishness blinded him to the needs of others and the reality of his own mortality, resulting in God's judgment. (Topical bible: Impact of selfishness, n.d.).

There are numerous different situations displayed in the bible with angels and other creations from God that allow themselves to give in to temptation, whether it be for corruption of power, wealth, knowledge, relationships and more. All in the end face Gods judgement and suffer from their past decisions. As natural as self-interest is in humans, there is a high chance that repercussions and consequences must be dealt with head on as this intent of egoism offends God.

A reflection on human nature is present in religion, specifically in Christianity, that raises the question on if there's the possibility in redemption for those who have or do sin, or rather sinners. Does God see some fit to rejoin his kingdom of light and goodness if they worship him or take the necessary steps to do so, or is it impossible to redeem your behavior and intentions?

Christianity teaches that everyone is equally prone to sin and so it focuses not only on human behavior, but also on human nature. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote that "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23). (Christianity - human nature and the purpose of existence. n.d.).

Conclusion

Egoism is not only rooted in human nature but also proven to be a cause of disorderly conduct and mayhem amongst mankind. People who are egoists engage in this kind of behavior

and, “believe that it is morally permissible to act in one's own interests, even if this means sacrificing the interests of others.” (Leontis, n.d.). This conduct goes back hundreds of years, possibly even thousands, according to the writings of famous philosophers from the fifteenth to the twentieth century and even in the bible, which was written over the course of approximately 1500 years, roughly from 1400 BC to 100AD. It's not just the amount of time, books written, or beliefs that proves the connection between selfishness, destruction, and human nature but also the fact that it is natural amongst all organisms and biologically engineered into our genes. Species or groups either die because they lack the necessary change of action according to the environment, or for our goals of survival and reproduction, we invade and permanently eliminate them. The concept of survival also applies to our genes; we unknowingly keep the kinds best suited for us and the others will naturally eliminate themselves for the best interest of ourselves and promote the ultimate objective of survival

The variety of examples and writings about self-interest being as natural as it is in humanity is overwhelming. From the perspectives of multiple kinds of philosophers, unconscious biological evidence in all species and genetics to different examples in the bible among different creations of God just proves that egoism is everywhere in humanity and could severely and negatively impact it.

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