

Dena Bussa

Philosophical Ethics: Paper 2

The Argument for Selfishness in the Long-Term

All humans are selfish; people naturally act in ways that benefit themselves. They buy cheap products regardless of origins, fail to recycle, and lie to people they care about. Yet people also help their friends, give blood, and donate to charity. These seem to be the actions of two different types of people, as selfishness and altruism are assumed to be mutually exclusive. However, these seemingly polar actions are both selfish. The real difference between the two is how they look at the results of their actions. The apparently altruistic acts are found to be selfish when seen with a further scope; people help friends because they benefit from friendships, give blood because they may need some, and donate to charity with the intent of making a difference in the world. After all, if the world is better, it would also be better for them. How can this idea of selfish altruism – or long-term selfishness – be applied to benefit society? With the knowledge that the selfish person has the ability to inflict good, they have more of an ability use selfishness to motivate actions that benefit themselves in addition to others. Many economic, social, and political institutions are built on foundations of prejudice, and this discrimination can only be broken down by those who benefit from it. This paper will make it clear that while humans are selfish creatures that have the ability to profit from these institutions, the positives of promoting equality in social, economic, and political spheres are greater.

When looking for personal benefit, wealth is always a factor. Money does not buy happiness, but it undeniably means having less to worry about. In a larger scope, this is reflected in the health of the economy and, the economy most universally beneficial, is one that is efficient

and effective. A better economy results in more jobs, higher salaries, and more innovation and growth for everyone. For this to happen, the most effective and fitting person must be matched to necessary positions, maximizing business performance and wealth. This idealized economy is one considered in the Efficient Market Hypothesis, an economic idea of an efficient economy that maximizes wealth (Investopedia). However, it has unfortunately been disproven because it has a premise of logical decisions made without human biases. It is these biases that people profit from in the short term that prevent this economic utopia. When people do not consider and evaluate others fairly, they may make mistakes and decrease potential profit and efficiency. Additionally, many inaccurate assumptions are based on prejudice. People are less likely to invest in companies or people that have foreign-sounding names, and are affected by prejudice they may not be aware of (Tahmincioglu). These examples of ingrained prejudices promoted by America's intolerant society show how short-term selfishness negatively impact even those who benefit from a system that awards them with opportunities they may not deserve.

In addition to economic benefits, a society that treats others with tolerance benefits the individual as there is more personal freedom and an overarching acceptance of their lifestyle, culture, and overall demographics. The discrimination people face varies and is often times beyond just race-based prejudices. Women are held to unrealistic beauty standards, men are oppressed through the strictures of toxic masculinity, people who identify as LGBTQ+ are oppressed for their 'sinful' actions, and people of different religions are condemned for their personal beliefs. These larger prejudices cause real emotional, mental, and often physical damage to those who face intolerance. Many people who commit suicide or struggle with depression do so out of the inability to express themselves within the structures of their society. Even if someone does not feel the pressures of larger discrimination, the presence of them

creates a culture that allows and encourages smaller oppressions that have the ability to genuinely hurt people. They exist unchecked because 'things could be worse'. If more people embraced their selfish altruism, then moving forward tolerance can be taught, just as prejudice currently is, and even those who do not face larger discrimination can benefit from the freedom of opportunity and expression.

A diversity of backgrounds and ideas allows for better solutions to complicated problems. People who come from different places have different experiences which, in turn, gives them different perspectives on problems. Clearly, it would be beneficial to have a diverse and varied group of people working to answer and constructively solve the complicated and multifaceted questions that face society. The problems governments deal with are intrinsically linked with the social and economic state of the country, and can greatly affect the freedoms necessary for this altruistically selfish society. Their progressive policies could have the power to push fair business practices and outlaw hate crimes that are built on social prejudices. With the government's ability to direct the future of economic and social policies, people should be selfish in the long term by making sure the right people are representing them. Diversity of leadership is a necessity that must be actively pursued to improve life for everyone. Unfortunately, government is even more heavily affected by biases than other institutions. The most recent iteration of Congress in the United States is eighty percent male, eighty percent white, and ninety-two percent Christian (Bump). Over half of the representatives have an average net worth of over one million dollars (Katz). The Presidency is even more obviously homogenous in background. When evaluating the makeup of the governing powers of America, one sees a blatant lack of reflection of the country's population and diversity of backgrounds. Can the majority demographic in these power positions be trusted to create a diversity of opinion or work

to eliminate the unfair power structures that they themselves have benefited from? Rather than trusting them to understand the benefits of long-term selfishness, citizens can harness their selfishness to directly affect the socioeconomic makeup through voting for diverse candidates.

When people are evaluated fairly on their own merits and not unfairly oppressed by societal restrictions, society and the economy function better. Misplaced prejudice often leads to unnecessary tension, mismanagement, and emotional stress, which ultimately makes all involved worse off. A better world benefits you, so promote political diversity, judge people fairly, and – in the long term – be selfish.

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