

Is there a Difference between Selfish and Self-Centred?

World events that gravely hurt innocent people never anger you. You anger yourself and use them as the trigger. Thus we are not truly selfless beings. We are selfish or self-centred.

Would you prefer to be with a selfish person or a self-centred one? Some answer that self-centred might mean aloof, centred on her or his own objectives, weak and eccentric. The self-centred person can be kind and generous but perhaps because he or she thinks he or she is more interesting than anybody else. He or she does good because he or she thinks it shows how fabulous he or she is. People think that selfish means evil - wishing to harm others for one's own gain. So people think they would prefer a self-centred person to a selfish one.

There is a difference. We conclude that the self-centred person does good because it reminds him of how fabulous he is and she does good because she feels like it and likes doing it. The selfish person is simply out to harm for his or her own gain.

You know you exist but you only suppose that others exist. Thus it would be selfish to love others. It would be evil for it violates what you know. It is violence against knowledge. Is this a paradox? What is the solution if it is?

You cannot say, "You must do good for others and love them for they need it." That is ignoring the problem. I am still left wondering why I should help others when I am less sure they exist than that I exist.

There is no paradox. There is only a paradox if loving yourself in the knowledge you alone have knowledge that you exist is as knowable as the duty to help others.

Unselfishness then is selfishness under a different guise. It is sweetened but it is no less. It is not self-centredness but selfishness.

Suppose selfishness and unselfishness exist. Selfishness or unselfishness is never seen by anything we do. It depends on what you intend. A person who pursues money and has no quality of life and who knows he never will is seen as selfish. But what he is doing is doing him no good. Thus selfishness is not necessarily about having fun. And the man cannot really be said to be thinking of himself only. This tells us that you can sacrifice yourself for others and still be selfish.

It tells us that even if unselfishness is possible, it is more reasonable to assume that everybody is selfish.

Every time you satisfy your own desire you are saying, "I am thinking of me not others." Just because an act is intended to help another, it does not mean that part of it at least is not all about you.

If you are selfish, does that mean you want the biggest benefits for yourself in the shortest time even at the cost of hurting everybody else? Some argue that people who are keen on money are not really selfish but self-sufficient for they can be reluctant to seek help if they are in the middle of some financial muddle that could cost them money. Self-sufficient is self-centred for you are refusing to recognise that you cannot know what is best all the time. It refuses to honour what others can do for you.

Today people advocate something called mindfulness. Mindfulness is an attempt to change how you feel about situations that you cannot change so that you become a happier person. It puts all the responsibility for your mental wellbeing on yourself and not on society or the community you are part of. It says that if an event that you cannot change brings on mental turmoil and other psychological difficulties that it is because of how you interpret the event. It is how you interpret your own ability to handle the problems and not just the event. When you say another made you feel better or helped you what you really mean is that you responded. They did not really help you at all for you helped yourself. Also, while it is true that nobody can change your feelings but you, a more collective and social approach must be taken. You must attract those around you towards better attitudes for that helps you. It is too hard to try and do it like an island. While it is true that your psychological wellbeing really is only your responsibility, it is not true that you can do it like an island and not as part of a community.

Ayn Rand wanted you to put yourself and your own thinking first. Adler said that thinking too independently of society and your community can lead you very far astray. But Rand would have said that considering society is a way of putting yourself first. It depends.