

1 The question at hand is how to go about defining self-interest. One way
2 would be saying it has to do with doing whatever suits you best independent of
3 others. Another way to go is saying that what is in your self-interest is what makes
4 you happy while helping others and living in a society together. I'll present
5 arguments from both sides, but ultimately I believe the second of those two ways of
6 defining self-interest is correct.

7 Plato's Glaucon character argues that justice is not in itself good, though to
8 achieve stable society one must be just (Plato, 128). This highest class is a desire for
9 the sake of the result (Plato, 128). The unjust life is better since you can get more of
10 what you want (though those desires change over time) than when you're being just
11 (Plato, 129). This shows us how defining self-interest is really complex and looks at
12 the individual vs. society.

13 Hobbes posits that we're naturally in a state of war given our desire for
14 power (Hobbes, 134). He says we should seek peace, but if that is impossible then
15 we look out for our own interests (Hobbes, 135). Civil society is the ideal human
16 situation that is in our self-interest, but instincts pull us in other directions (Hobbes,
17 136). Though history has no record of a state of nature, this is a way for us to
18 understand where our instincts and social ability may take us regarding self-
19 interest. The state of nature shows our instinctual self-interest, but we turn from
20 Plato and Hobbes with the understanding that to define human self-interest, since
21 we're social creatures, we must look at self-interest as being our inclination to be in
22 society, so let's now explore that.

23 Aristotle provides us with the main views to this end which we must wrestle
24 with. He would define self-interest as living a virtuous life, with good acts, to be
25 happy (Aristotle, 486). He defines virtue as the root of happiness, which is the final
26 end (Aristotle, 481). We associate pleasure, honor, and wealth with what together
27 makes up a decent life. But Aristotle sees a contemplative life as the highest one for
28 us, and this is both a happy life as well as one of virtue (Aristotle, 483). Freedom
29 isn't a part of Aristotelian happiness, but rather human good being the activity of
30 our souls in conformity with virtue (Aristotle, 481). Virtuous people will do actions
31 with the appropriate attitude. Our intellectual reason guides the creation of virtues
32 that are a state of character concerned with choice in the face of truth that are
33 determined by principles of practical wisdom (Aristotle, 484). Thus virtue is making
34 good choices, so good choices equals happiness which equals self-interest.

35 What Aristotle teaches us about self-interest is that the full definition of self-
36 interest must include society at some level. I agree with this since how can one truly
37 be happy if they are doing work for themselves but not being an active part of
38 society. It simply has to be in our self-interest to advance our neighbors' lives, and
39 so self-interest is working for your good while helping others achieve theirs in
40 mutual society. But before I make my final statement I must look at one final view,
41 that of Kropotkin.

42 Kropotkin posits that peace and mutual aid are the rule in all nature
43 (Kropotkin, 154). Thus human progress happens because of cooperation. He points
44 out that this is ordinary enough for us to easily overlook (Kropotkin, 155). Self-
45 assertion (capitalism and liberal Democracy) is one thing that goes against his ideas,

46 but he responds saying that though individuals can contribute the overarching
47 systems only function due to cooperation (Kropotkin, 157). Self-interest here is
48 mutual aid at work in community. You need freedom to be a piece of the society
49 puzzle, but you can never cease to be a piece of a society puzzle.

50 Kropotkin reinforces my statements as he adds structural dimensions to
51 Aristotle's implied notion that human self-interest must be centered on society.
52 What is at the heart of society if not individuals coming together for the mutual aid
53 of one another? Thus I can amend my earlier statement by saying that self-interest is
54 working for your good through the mutual aid of your neighbors in a supportive
55 society.

56 To conclude let me recap the reasoning that has taken place in this essay.
57 Plato's argument only stood to show just how complex this question is. Hobbes we
58 dismiss when we realize that self-interest has to take into account our sociability.
59 Aristotle and Kropotkin lay the foundation for my final statement that human self-
60 interest is defined by our mutual aid for others in society.

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