

The Preeminence of Self

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Mankind's natural condition with regards to issues of the *self* is conflicted. As with any living organism, self-preservation is a priority of the greatest magnitude. Personal survival must be maintained or else all else is meaningless. Yet mankind is also one of the most altruistic of the myriad species roaming the earth. On many occasions, out of nowhere, one person can make a tremendous sacrifice to the benefit of another person. It is this conflicted state that allows families to exist; and it is what tears them apart.

In proper balance, the parents in the family sacrifice just enough to care for the children and not so much that the children develop an imbalance, putting self over family. Well-raised children contribute to the family function while still relying on it for their own sustenance. In proper balance, these children increase their contributions and decrease their dependencies as they reach maturity, eventually to begin families of their own. In the same manner, families bond together to form communities. Communities bond together into towns, and so on.

When the balance is improper, the self-centered child places more value on self-interest than on the interests of the family as a unit, and become a disruption. This child fails to contribute to the family function, expecting the family to function primarily for his benefit and not the benefit of the unit. Should the balance shift the other direction, the child can take on more and more family responsibility, sacrificing all self-interest in the process. These *martyrs* are often found in the same family unit as the selfish child, restoring the overall balance of the family while destroying the individuals involved. Neither the selfish nor the martyr will reach balance in maturity and shall exit the family unit greatly impaired. Each of these must then find their counterpart in creating their own family in order to find the balance again.

And so it is with society as a whole, for those bonded communities, neighborhoods, towns, cities, and states are the contributors to our national character. There is one pivotal consideration to be made in understanding this dynamic: balance.

When the altruistic are also well ensconced in their own preservation, the balance is attained at a personal level. When the self-interests only slightly outweigh empathy for others, or when the tendency to self-martyrdom is only slight, the balance in the community serves to provide people to fill community roles in which each small bias actually contributed to the success of that role.

Today, however, there are indications that the balance is becoming imbalanced. The most clearly evident of the observations leading to this concern can be found on the highway. On one hand, there are people who will zip through traffic, ignoring speed limits, cutting people off, leap-frogging into exit lanes, and tailgating, ostensibly because their progress down the highway is more important than anyone else's. Other people will stop in the travel lane to let someone cut into traffic from a side street or parking lot, just to be nice. The most dangerous of these situations is when the person being let in is of the selfish ilk and forces his way across three lanes of traffic instead of accepting the one lane that

was offered and working his way over within the safe flow of traffic. The safety of the family of drivers is put at risk by the actions of the few who are out of balance.

The scenario described is in contrast to the driving habits common only a few decades ago. People went around the block instead of turning left from the right hand lane. People still exceeded the speed limit from time to time, but seldom would tailgate, honk, and flip off people in front of them who were also speeding but not speeding fast enough to suit the second in line. The distance between the selfish driver and the self-sacrificing driver is larger than it has ever been.

The evidence on the roads is most clear, but the tendency towards a greater distance between the altruistic and the selfish can be seen to be growing in almost every aspect of our communities and our nation. The least evident of the occurrence is perhaps the most dangerous. In our politics, our political choices, our selection of candidates, our support of, or opposition to, new laws or policies, the most vocal have demonstrated a preeminence of self in taking their position. Choices made appear to be made most often on the direct benefit that the choice will have to the individual without thought to the benefit or damage to the nation. Both the altruist and the selfish exhibit the tendency: the only difference being the personal bias. The altruist will demand that the nation become more globally generous while the selfish will demand that the nation stop wasting resources on others, but both have developed a preeminence of self-interest by imposing or attempting to impose their personal bias on the character of the nation. Votes, then are cast based on what is good for individuals and not on what is good for the nation.

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