

Understanding the “Unitary Nature” and Resolving the “Adam Smith Problem”

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Abstract

Adam Smith, the father of classical economics, in *The Wealth of Nations*, regarded “self-interest” as human nature and the basis of all behavior; subsequent economists refined this into the concept of “economic man” and established it as the theoretical foundation of all economics. However, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith also proposed the existence of a purely altruistic “moral man” who seeks no reward. The contradiction between the self-interested-by-nature “economic man” and the altruistic-by-nature “moral man” is known as the “Smith Paradox”. Smith himself remained mired in this contradictory quagmire throughout his life, unable to extricate himself; for over two centuries, scholars have offered diverse opinions without reaching a solution, leading to the collapse of the theoretical foundation of economics. This paper comprehensively demonstrates through theory and facts that humans possess only a unitary nature rather than a dual nature, that there exists only the self-interested-by-nature “economic man” and no altruistic-by-nature “moral man”, and that the “Smith Paradox” naturally dissolves into nothingness.

Full Text

Understanding the Monism of Human Nature to Solve the Smith Paradox

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Abstract

Adam Smith, the father of classical economics, viewed “self-interest” as the basis of human nature and all human behavior in *The Wealth of Nations*. Later economists refined Smith’s idea into the concept of “economic man,” which

has become the theoretical foundation of economics. However, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith proposed that there exists a purely altruistic “moral man” who asks nothing in return. The contradiction between the “economic man,” who is self-interested by nature, and the “moral man,” who is altruistic by nature, is called the “Smith Paradox” or “Adam Smith Problem.” Smith himself remained stuck in the mire of this conflict throughout his life, and economists have offered different opinions for over 200 years. Nevertheless, the problem remains unsolved, resulting in the collapse of the theoretical foundation of economics. This article comprehensively argues, with adequate theories and facts, that human beings have only one nature (the monism of human nature) rather than dual natures (the dualism of human nature). In other words, the “economic man” represents the only human nature, while the “moral man” does not exist. Consequently, the Smith Paradox naturally dissolves.

Keywords: Smith Paradox, economic man, moral man, human nature
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Adam Smith (1723-1790), the father of classical economics, stated in his 1776 masterpiece *The Wealth of Nations* that “self-interest” constitutes human nature and the basis of all human behavior. Everyone needs help from others but cannot rely on others’ goodwill; they can only utilize others’ self-interest to demonstrate that providing help benefits themselves. “Anyone who wishes to trade with others can say: If you give me what I want, you can get what you want. This is the meaning of every transaction. ... The butcher, the brewer, and the baker provide us daily with the food and drink we need not from benevolence or kindness, but from self-interested motives. We appeal to their self-interest, not their altruism. It is not our needs, but theirs.”[1] All investors consider only their own interests from beginning to end, which has nothing to do with morality or altruism. However, under the guidance of the “invisible hand,” self-interest aligns with social interest, making seemingly immoral, self-interested behavior more efficient at promoting social welfare than moral, altruistic behavior. “Although he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”[2] Smith’s argument became the theoretical basis for opposing government intervention in markets. Subsequent economists developed the concept of “economic man” and the “economic man hypothesis” based on Smith’s exposition of the “self-interested person” in *The Wealth of Nations*. Economic man refers to a person who maximizes their own economic interests as the ultimate motive for all behavior. When multiple choices exist, economic man inevitably chooses the one that yields the greatest economic benefit. The economic man hypothesis assumes that all human individuals are economic men. To maximize economic benefits, “economic man” must satisfy three basic conditions: complete self-interest, complete rationality, and complete information. Complete self-interest means that economic man’s nature is entirely self-interested, and the purpose of all behavior is to obtain the most wealth with the least cost. Complete ratio-

nality means that economic man possesses all the professional knowledge and ability needed to make decisions that maximize their own economic interests; any deviation from profit maximization is irrational. Complete information means that economic man can obtain all the information needed to make profit-maximizing decisions. The “economic man” with these three characteristics is called “rational economic man,” that is, a person with sufficient knowledge and ability to maximize their own economic interests under conditions of complete information. For a long time, “rational economic man” has become the most standard and classic definition of “economic man,” serving as the cornerstone of economic theory and developing into a mathematical, quantitative logical analysis and deductive system. Herbert Alexander Simon, the 1978 Nobel laureate in economics, opposed the assumptions of complete rationality and complete information, advocating the theory of “bounded rationality.” He argued that the abilities, knowledge, and information obtained from the environment by human individuals and even social organizations are limited, making it unrealistic to select the optimal solution from all possible alternatives; one can only choose a satisfactory solution from limited alternatives. Based on this research, the concept of “economic man” evolved from “rational economic man” to “bounded rational economic man,” with the three characteristics becoming “complete self-interest,” “bounded rationality,” and “bounded information.” Compared with the original, the first characteristic remained unchanged while the latter two changed.

Smith published only two works in his lifetime. Besides the economic masterpiece *The Wealth of Nations*, the other was the ethical masterpiece *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, first published in 1759. In this work, Smith argued that humans possess an “altruistic” nature that serves as the basis for behavior. Smith wrote: “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others.”[3] Smith believed that this pity or compassion requires no proof by examples; it is an innate, original emotion in human nature shared by all people. Although people of noble character may be more sensitive and intense in this regard, “the greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it.”[4] “It is this principle which, in the social passions, constitutes the bond of sympathy between individuals, and, by a natural progression, leads to the formation of society. It is this principle which, in the selfish passions, restrains the excesses of self-love, and teaches us to regard the interests of others as well as our own.”[5] Scholars refer to the “altruistic person” described by Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as “moral man.” According to Adam Smith and economists’ formulations, “moral man” refers to a person who engages in altruistic behavior under the influence of altruistic natures such as sympathy and compassion, and expects no return whatsoever.

Obviously, a sharp contradiction emerges between the self-interested “economic

man” in *The Wealth of Nations* and the altruistic “moral man” in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*! Smith clearly saw this contradiction himself. Did he abandon one viewpoint to eliminate the conflict? *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was first published in 1759, with its sixth edition published just months before Smith’s death in 1790. *The Wealth of Nations* was first published in 1776, 17 years later than the first edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*; its fifth edition was published in 1789, about one year earlier than the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Thus, Smith never abandoned either viewpoint until his death, but continuously attempted to reconcile the contradiction between them. He repeatedly revised both works but never found a way out. To avoid misleading future generations, he instructed his friends in his will to burn his manuscripts. In the late nineteenth century, Brentano, a representative of the German Historical School, called the conflict between the self-interested nature of “economic man” in economics and the altruistic nature of “moral man” in ethics the “Smith Paradox.”[6] Scholars have debated this paradox ever since, which can be divided into four schools: the paradox school, the non-paradox school, the separation school, and the substitution school.

The “paradox school,” also called the opposition school, believes that a contradiction exists between the two but cannot propose a solution. The “non-paradox school,” also called the unity school, believes that no contradiction exists between them; they form a unity of opposites. The basic basis is “dualism of human nature,” which holds that humans simultaneously possess two natures: “self-interest” and “altruism.” “Economic man” reflects the self-interested nature, while “moral man” reflects the altruistic nature. The two represent a perfect unity combining self-interest and altruism, profit pursuit and moral constraint, complementing each other. The dualism of human nature appears to be the most comprehensive, reasonable, and correct viewpoint, capable of explaining both self-interested and altruistic behavior. However, it cannot actually explain any behavior of organisms or humans; trying to have it both ways results in having it neither way. Economic theory judges human individuals’ behavior and formulates corresponding countermeasures based on certain criteria. If human individuals are purely self-interested economic men, their behavior can be easily judged and countermeasures formulated. If human individuals are purely altruistic moral men, their behavior can also be easily judged and countermeasures formulated. If human individuals are a combination of economic man and moral man, then what basis should be used to predict their behavior? From Smith’s classical economics to modern economics, all theories predict human behavior and propose theories and countermeasures based on the “economic man” hypothesis and “complete self-interest.” No economic theory is based on the combination of self-interested and altruistic natures, or the combination of economic man and moral man. If the “non-paradox” position holds, then the entire theoretical edifice of economics would completely collapse! Similarly, the entire theoretical edifice of ethics would also collapse! The “separation school” is a concept I propose to summarize relevant scholars’ views, arguing that “economic man” only functions in the economic domain, manifesting as

“self-interest” in market transactions, while “moral man” only functions in the social domain, manifesting as “altruism” in ethical behavior. The two operate separately, independently, and without interference. For example, Bill Gates works hard to make money in the market but works hard at charity in society, trying to persuade more wealthy people to do charity together. A housewife bargains with a vegetable vendor over five cents in the morning market, but in the afternoon donates a thousand yuan to earthquake victims without batting an eye[7] This view is equally absurd. How can the economic domain and social domain be distinguished? How can transactional behavior and ethical behavior be distinguished? Can definitions be provided? Can economic behavior be separated from society? Can market transactions be separated from ethics? Does “society” not encompass all human behavior? Does “ethics” not permeate all human behavior? Are all motivations in the social domain “altruistic”? Why can’t Bill Gates’s “altruistic heart” be applied to users—why not directly give Microsoft systems to the people of the world for free? Why can’t that housewife’s “altruistic heart” be applied to the vegetable vendor? Did the fascists’ horrific acts occur in the economic domain or the social domain? Essentially, all human behavior is economic behavior, transactional behavior, social behavior, and ethical behavior. The “substitution school” is also a concept I propose to summarize relevant scholars’ views, representing a branch of the “separation school.” It holds that “economic man” and “moral man” are separate, applied respectively in the economic and social domains, and that self-interested and altruistic natures can substitute for each other in these two domains. “As Karl Polanyi repeatedly warned: prevent the ‘market’ from eroding ‘society’! Do not substitute the ‘self-interest’ law applied in economic transactions for the moral norms that should be centered on ‘compassion’ in the social domain. Otherwise, it will not only lead to social collapse, but the market will also be destroyed by the ‘society’s’ backlash, leading to the rise of fascism.”[8] Since preventing mutual substitution between the two is necessary, it explicitly acknowledges that “economic man” and “moral man,” “market” and “society” cannot be completely separated, thus negating the “separation school” viewpoint.

Obviously, the existence of the “Smith Paradox” is beyond doubt. So how can it be solved? The contradiction between “economic man” and “moral man” cannot be reconciled! If both exist, the paradox can never be solved! The only way to eliminate the paradox is that only one of them can exist. Which one does not exist? It can only be “moral man.” According to the definition, “moral man” has two basic characteristics: first, the existence of altruistic nature, and second, the existence of purely altruistic behavior without expecting return. If these two characteristics do not exist, then moral man does not exist.

1. Organisms and Humans Do Not Possess Altruistic Nature

1.1 The “Altruistic Nature Existence Theory” Cannot Hold

According to my proposed cosmic hierarchy theory, the attributes and laws of higher-level entities are built upon those of lower-level entities, and the attributes and laws of lower-level entities are inevitably reflected in higher-level entities. Humans originated from organisms; human nature is built upon biological nature, and biological nature is inevitably reflected in human nature. Exploring human nature must start with biological nature. The biological nature hypothesis is the theoretical cornerstone and central issue of biological evolution theory. To date, the biological community has successively produced various theories including individual selection theory, group selection theory, kin selection theory, gene selection theory, and multi-level selection theory. Except for individual selection theory, all other selection theories believe that “altruistic nature” exists in organisms, which can be collectively called the “altruistic nature existence theory.” I divide the “altruistic nature existence theory” into three branches: intra-group altruistic nature theory, intra-group nature difference theory, and dual nature theory.

Intra-group altruistic nature theory refers to the theory that biological individuals are “altruistic within groups and self-interested between groups.” That is, it holds that biological individuals have an altruistic nature within groups and engage purely in altruistic behavior, while having a self-interested nature between groups and engage purely in self-interested behavior. Darwin’s natural selection theory was originally individual selection theory, based on the fundamental assumption that biological nature is self-interested. However, it could not explain the “altruistic behavior” of social insects such as bees and ants that are sterile themselves but diligently serve the group, leading to the fatal “altruism puzzle,” also known as the “Darwinism puzzle.” To solve this puzzle, Darwin proposed the idea of “group selection theory,” arguing that the behavior of bees and ants is not beneficial to themselves but beneficial to the group, reducing their own fitness while increasing group fitness. Subsequent scholars believed that altruistic behavior only occurs among individuals in kin groups or gene groups, proposing kin selection theory and gene selection theory. Group, kin, and gene selection theories define “group” differently, but all believe that biological individuals are “altruistic within groups and self-interested between groups,” representing different forms of “intra-group altruistic nature theory.”

Intra-group nature difference theory refers to the theory that there exist two types of individuals within biological groups: those with self-interested nature and those with altruistic nature. The “internal subversion theory” in the biological community holds that even if a group initially consists entirely of altruistic individuals, it will inevitably mix in “a few selfish speculators” through inter-group intermarriage. Self-interested individuals freely occupy the dedication of altruistic individuals without dedicating themselves, leading to decreased fit-

ness of altruistic individuals and increased fitness of self-interested individuals. The offspring of self-interested individuals gradually increase and will eventually completely replace altruistic individuals to become the entire group, that is, self-interested individuals completely subvert the group composed of altruistic individuals. Biologists Sober and Wilson proposed “multi-level selection theory,” with the core being the “Sober-Wilson model,” which holds that natural selection occurs simultaneously within and between groups. Under the premise of having only one group, group selection is not supported because there is only intra-group competition without inter-group competition; the unit of natural selection is the individual, and the fitness of intra-group self-interested individuals will increase while their offspring increase, whereas the fitness of altruistic individuals decreases and their offspring decrease. Under the premise of having multiple groups, group selection theory is supported. In inter-group competition, the unit of natural selection is the group, and groups with more altruistic individuals will occupy an advantage. Although the “internal subversion theory” and the “Sober-Wilson model” reach different conclusions, both are premised on the existence of two types of individuals—self-interested and altruistic—within biological groups. Self-interested individuals only have a self-interested nature and engage in self-interested behavior; altruistic individuals only have an altruistic nature and engage in altruistic behavior. Both “internal subversion theory” and “multi-level selection theory” can be subsumed under “intra-group nature difference theory.”

“Dual nature theory,” also called binary nature theory, refers to the theory that assumes individuals possess both self-interested and altruistic natures within groups and between groups. Scholars often refer to “dual nature theory” as pluralistic nature theory, pluralistic motivation theory, motivational pluralism, etc. I believe that based on the criterion of “who benefits,” there can be at most a “dualism” in biological and human nature. Dual nature theory, pluralistic nature theory, binary motivation theory, motivational pluralism, etc., can be regarded as the same concept to avoid confusion from too many concepts.

The three branches of the “altruistic nature existence theory” are interrelated. If one theory does not hold, the others cannot hold either. In my series of papers “Analysis of Intra-Group Altruistic Nature Theory,” “Analysis of Intra-Group Nature Difference Theory,” and “Analysis of Dual Nature Theory,” I comprehensively and deeply analyze various biological behaviors used as evidence for the “altruistic nature existence theory” using higher-level subject selection theory, new fitness theory, and basic biological principles. I demonstrate that organisms and humans have only one nature, namely self-interest, which can be called “self-interested nature theory,” “altruistic nature non-existence theory,” “monism of nature,” or “nature monism,” while “intra-group altruistic nature theory,” “intra-group nature difference theory,” and “dual nature theory” cannot hold. This article will not repeat these arguments.

1.2 Culture Cannot Change Human Self-Interested Nature

A common theory in biology and sociology holds that genes are biological factors that can only explain the altruistic nature and altruism of organisms, but cannot fully explain human altruistic nature and altruism. Humans possess advanced culture, which becomes another factor in the emergence of altruism and is the dominant factor. In 1981, Charles Lumsden and Edward Osborne Wilson published *Genes, Mind, and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process*, proposing “gene-culture coevolution theory.” They later published *Promethean Fire: Reflections on the Origin of the Human Mind*, further elaborating this theory. They argued that the human evolutionary system is completed through the coevolution of genes and culture, that human culture is inherited, formed, and developed under the influence of biological instructions, and that human biological characteristics are also changed by genetic evolution in response to cultural evolution.[9] The form and intensity of human altruistic behavior are largely determined by culture.[10] Many scholars regard “gene-culture coevolution” as the theoretical basis for “human nature altruism theory,” believing that with more advanced culture than animals, humans can break away from the self-interested nature of animals and transform into an altruistic nature. Biologist Sober linked the evolution of human altruistic behavior with cultural evolution.[11] The core viewpoints of this theory are twofold: first, genes and culture coevolve; second, cultural evolution can change human self-interested nature.

In my papers “Analysis of Gene-Culture Coevolution Theory” and “Culture Cannot Change Human Self-Interested Nature,” I point out that “cultural evolution” refers to the change in culture between species at different evolutionary levels or within the same species at different evolutionary stages, from simple to complex and from rough to refined, and the change in the ability to adapt to and transform nature from low to high. This is a process of increased brain capacity and information processing ability leading to enhanced environmental adaptation, a process of improved self-interested ability, and a process of more fully satisfying self-interested nature. The constituent elements of culture, such as behavioral norms, social institutions, laws and regulations, and spiritual concepts, all reflect the interests of social dominants and are products of their self-interested nature. Fantasizing that cultural evolution can change human self-interested nature is like trying to lift oneself off the ground by pulling one’s own hair.

2. Organisms and Humans Do Not Engage in Purely Altruistic Behavior Without Expecting Return

Adam Smith and subsequent scholars believe that “moral man” is someone who engages in altruistic behavior based on sympathy and compassion and expects no return. I argue that all behaviors based on sympathy and compassion, like any other behavior, expect to receive returns. “Purely altruistic behavior without expecting return” does not exist. “Moral man” is a type of “economic man,” a

manifestation of “economic man” in different contexts; there is no contradiction between them.

Mencius said: “The heart of compassion is possessed by all people” (*Mencius • Gaozi Shang*). People with this heart of compassion are what Smith called “moral man.” Mencius regarded the heart of compassion as the beginning of “benevolence” and proof of innate goodness. Mencius gave an example: “If people suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will all have a heart of alarm and compassion. This is not because they want to befriend the child’s parents, nor because they want to gain a reputation among neighbors and friends, nor because they dislike the child’s cries.” If someone suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well, they will inevitably feel alarmed and compassionate. This is not because they want to befriend the child’s parents, nor because they want to gain reputation among neighbors and friends, nor because they fear being accused of indifference. From this perspective, those without a heart of compassion are not human... Mencius believed that people’s heart of compassion exists simultaneously with their physical body. “The four beginnings are in our body as our four limbs are” (*Mencius • Gongsun Chou Shang*). Mencius’s statement actually analyzes four possible motives for “moral man” to engage in “purely altruistic” behavior. Although Mencius only identified one motive—the heart of compassion—other motives can indeed exist. This demonstrates that the behavioral motives of “moral man” can be complex, and the possible returns can be diverse. All “purely altruistic” behaviors stem from self-interested motives and inevitably expect self-interested returns. In terms of timing, there are immediate returns and delayed returns. In terms of source, there are direct returns, indirect returns, self-returns, and empathy returns. “Moral man” may not obtain all types of returns, but at least obtains one of them.

2.1 Timing of Returns

Immediate Returns. Immediate returns refer to the relevant benefits that altruistic actors obtain instantly. For example, receiving verbal thanks, friendship, gift money or presents from beneficiaries or their families, being offered job opportunities, gaining media coverage that enhances social reputation, etc.

Delayed Returns. Delayed returns, also called lagged returns, refer to relevant benefits that altruistic actors obtain after a period of time. Media often reports, and folklore often tells stories of: kind people who provide food, clothing, and money to those in distress, and after the recipients’ circumstances improve or they become wealthy, they return to express gratitude; friends who extend help when in difficulty, and after their friends’ situations improve, they also give returns. Most beneficiaries have the idea of “returning a favor with great generosity.” Most benefactors firmly believe that good deeds will be rewarded, holding concepts such as “people are watching what you do,” “just do good deeds without asking about the future,” and “helping others is helping yourself.” How long is “later”? It can be several years, more than ten years, several decades, or even “the afterlife.” Religious believers firmly believe that

good deeds in this life can increase blessings in this life or the afterlife, which can explain the behavior of many “moral men.”

2.2 Sources of Returns

Direct Returns. Direct returns refer to returns that altruistic actors obtain directly from the objects of their behavior, divided into beneficial direct returns and harmful direct returns. The motive of altruistic actors is to obtain beneficial direct returns and avoid harmful direct returns. Beneficial direct returns refer to benefits that altruistic actors directly obtain from beneficiaries, including material benefits and spiritual benefits. Material benefits include money, materials, etc. Spiritual benefits include friendship, social connections, gratitude, etc. Most beneficiaries will express gratitude to altruistic actors and become long-term friends. Mencius’s statement about altruistic actors befriending the parents of the child who fell into the well represents beneficial direct returns. Although not every altruistic actor has this motive, such a motive can exist. Smith said: “The gratitude of the benefited person makes us willing to perform various charitable acts, which we regard as ideal and perfect duties. Friendship, generosity, and tolerance prompt us to do things that receive universal approval.”[12] “Those who make great efforts to practice that virtue should receive the greatest reward. By doing the greatest good deeds, they become the natural and most strongly approved objects of gratitude. ... We believe that benevolent and generous actions should be bestowed upon benevolent and generous people. We believe that those whose minds can never accommodate benevolent feelings cannot obtain their compatriots’ sympathy, but can only live in a society where no one cares or greets them, like living in a vast desert.”[13] This clearly shows that one of the important motives of moral man is to obtain the gratitude of the helped and the resulting material and spiritual returns, to receive universal social approval, and to avoid being rejected and abandoned by society. Why should benevolence and generosity be bestowed upon benevolent and generous people? Because benevolent and generous people will give returns, whereas others will not. Harmful direct returns refer to retaliation that would be suffered if altruistic behavior did not occur. For example, seeing a child fall into a well without rescuing them may result in condemnation and even attacks from the child’s parents and the general public. During famine years, wealthy landowners distribute porridge to famine victims, seemingly without expecting returns, but actually seeking returns—namely, establishing a reputation as a good person to prevent famine victims from robbing their granaries. The motive of “moral man” is to obtain beneficial direct returns and avoid harmful direct returns.

Indirect Returns. Indirect returns refer to returns that altruistic actors obtain from third parties other than the objects of their behavior, divided into beneficial indirect returns and harmful indirect returns. The motive of altruistic actors is to obtain beneficial indirect returns and avoid harmful indirect returns. Beneficial indirect returns refer to corresponding benefits that altruistic actors obtain from third parties other than the objects of their behavior. Bene-

fits are divided into material and spiritual aspects, including money, materials, honor, fame, status, job opportunities, social connections, etc. For example, a righteous person who rescues someone may have their behavior photographed or videotaped by bystanders and reported to the media, gaining social reputation, social donations, and righteous action bonuses, with well-known enterprises offering better job positions, etc. It was reported that when a bus accidentally fell into the water, a passerby smashed the window and rescued dozens of passengers. Years later, when this rescuer fell seriously ill and could not afford treatment, he received considerable donations after media coverage. Mencius's statement about gaining reputation among neighbors and friends by rescuing the child who fell into the well represents possible beneficial indirect returns. Harmful indirect returns refer to condemnation and attacks from third parties if altruistic behavior does not occur. For example, a pedestrian who ignores an elderly person who has fallen on the ground, recorded and released by roadside cameras, will be condemned by public opinion, suffer reputational damage, and may even be dismissed by their employer. Some pedestrians look around and only step forward to help the elderly person after discovering a camera. When disasters such as earthquakes and floods occur, well-known individuals and enterprises that do not donate or donate too little will be condemned and even reviled by the public, harming their image and corporate stock prices. Mencius's statement about fearing condemnation for not rescuing someone and damaging one's reputation represents possible harmful indirect returns. This "altruistic behavior" that occurs to avoid social condemnation is self-interested and seeks returns.

Self>Returns. Self-returns refer to returns that actors give themselves through psychological suggestion, divided into beneficial self-returns and harmful self-returns. The former is called "self-benefit returns," and the latter is called "self-harm avoidance returns."

Self-Benefit Returns. This refers to the psychological suggestion of obtaining some benefit that actors experience after engaging in altruistic behavior. Many "purely altruistic behaviors without returns" exist in reality. For example, a righteous person who rescues someone and then quietly leaves, never to intersect with the rescued person again, with no media coverage, with no one knowing—is this "purely altruistic" behavior without any returns? No! For example, under conditions where no outsiders know, if the righteous person feels they have done something meaningful, they obtain satisfaction or returns at the value level; if they feel they are a kind person, they obtain satisfaction or returns at the emotional level; if they feel they are a brave person, they obtain satisfaction or returns at the identity level. If they believe in religion, believing that "good deeds will be rewarded" and "saving one life is better than building a seven-story pagoda," believing they will receive blessings in this life or the afterlife, they have obtained self-benefit returns.

Self-Harm Avoidance Returns. This refers to the psychological suggestion of avoiding some harm that actors experience after engaging in altruistic behavior.

In other words, if actors do not engage in altruistic behavior in certain situations, they may experience harmful psychological suggestions. If they have religious or ghost beliefs, they may also fear divine punishment. For example, if Wang evaluates himself as a moral, caring, and righteous person, but when seeing an elderly person fall does not help, when seeing someone drowning does not rescue, when finding others' property privately appropriates it, etc., causing his behavior to contradict his self-evaluation, he will experience self-condemnation, self-denial, psychological dissonance, anxiety, and unease. Smith said: "We love and admire some qualities and hope to become people with such qualities. We hate and despise other qualities and strongly fear having any similar qualities ourselves. ... Although people may assure him that no one will know about his violation of norms or even crimes, and he himself firmly believes that the Creator will not punish him, he still suffers lifelong torture from terror, remorse, and pain, disturbed in mind, unable to obtain peace and tranquility. Only the most despicable and vicious people in all classes can avoid this torture." [14] If actors engage in "altruistic behavior," they can avoid the harmful psychological suggestion of becoming someone they hate and despise. Both self-benefit returns and self-harm avoidance returns stem from self-interested motives.

It was reported that a woman fell into the water and called for help. A sixty-year-old man risked his life to rescue her back to shore. The woman gave the man 200 yuan as a reward, which the man declined. After returning home, the man discovered that his elderly mobile phone in his pocket was damaged by water and could not be used. Due to financial difficulties at home, he hoped the woman would give him 190 yuan to buy a new elderly mobile phone. The woman flatly refused, saying: "I didn't force you to save me; you saved me yourself to get applause and praise." Later, a reporter asked the man: Would you be willing to rescue people in similar situations in the future? The man said: "Saving one life is better than building a seven-story pagoda," and he would still rescue people. This example shows that regardless of the man's actual motives, obtaining gifts, "applause and praise" are possible motives and returns for "moral man," representing direct and immediate returns; obtaining the blessing of "saving one life is better than building a seven-story pagoda" is also a possible motive and return for "moral man," representing indirect, delayed, and self-benefit returns.

Empathy Returns. Empathy refers to actors transforming others' situations and feelings into their own situations and feelings. In other words, empathy is a psychological reaction produced by substituting oneself for others. Empathy returns refer to psychological returns that actors obtain by viewing helping others out of unfavorable situations as helping themselves out of unfavorable situations. Darwin said: "When we see others suffering from hunger, cold, or extreme fatigue, it awakens in our minds some recollections of these states we have previously experienced, and these states, even as ideas, are painful." [15] Smith said: "When we see a blow aimed at another person's leg or arm about to fall, we instinctively withdraw our own leg or arm; when the blow really falls, we also feel it to some extent and are hurt like the sufferer. ... When we see

a beggar's exposed sores on the street, our corresponding body parts will also produce an itching or discomfort. ... The strongest people, when seeing festering eyes, often have a very obvious pain in their own eyes for the same reason.”[16] Psychological research shows that children around one year old cannot distinguish themselves from others. When seeing others in grief, they also feel grief, triggering holistic empathy, unable to distinguish who is grieving. Idioms such as “the fox mourns the death of the hare,” “grief for one's kind,” “the orchid sighs for the burning of the iris,” and “do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself” are all reactions of empathy psychology. Smith's statement that “the worst people are not entirely without sympathy” and Mencius's statement about “the heart of compassion” are all empathy psychology. Empathy transfers others' difficulties and pain to oneself, becoming one's own difficulties and pain. Helping others relieve pain thus relieves one's own pain, which is empathy returns. The motives arising from this are self-interested motives, and the behaviors arising from this are self-interested behaviors. Under conditions not exceeding expected costs, providing help or alms to relieve or reduce others' hunger, cold, fatigue, sores, itching, pain, etc., equals relieving or reducing one's own discomfort. Some people's blood pressure rises and heartbeats become irregular when seeing dogs being killed, and they are willing to buy dogs to release them; some people faint when seeing others bleed and are willing to pay for their bandaging; some people see thieves stealing on buses and think they might also be stolen from, so they fight with thieves. Similar behaviors are self-interested and altruistic behaviors, objectively altruistic but subjectively self-interested, noble self-interest, moral self-interest. In the billions of years of evolutionary history, organisms are in life-and-death competition every day, in fear of being harmed by their kind and preyed upon by natural enemies. Seeing others being harmed or preyed upon leads to the association that they themselves may be in such situations, generating the psychology of escaping this situation. Smith believed that what triggers empathy is not limited to others' pain and sorrow but can also be others' happiness and joy. “A smiling face is pleasing to the eye; a sorrowful face is always saddening.”[17] Empathy psychology is an innate attribute formed in the billions of years of biological evolution.

Among direct returns, indirect returns, self-returns, and empathy returns, people usually regard the first two as self-interested returns. If they are not obtained, it is considered no return, “purely altruistic.” If recognizing that the latter two are also self-interested returns, then the principle that “all altruistic behaviors stem from self-interested motives, expect self-interested returns, and inevitably obtain self-interested returns” becomes easier to understand. Self-returns arise from self-satisfaction psychology, and empathy returns arise from empathy psychology. Due to differences in quality and environment, not everyone has these two types of psychology. For those without these two types of psychology, “altruistic behavior” will only occur when direct and indirect returns are certain; otherwise, it will not occur. If “altruistic behavior” has occurred but direct or indirect returns are not obtained, they will feel disappointed and regretful, and their motives are obviously self-interested.

3. Cost-Benefit Analysis of “Moral Man”

Since behaviors based on sympathy and compassion are self-interested behaviors expecting returns, they inevitably involve cost-benefit analysis.

The cost-benefit ratio of self-interested behavior = self-interested benefits / self-interested costs.

Self-interested benefits, referred to as benefits, refer to the interests that actors exchange through self-interested behavior (i.e., self-interested and altruistic behavior), including material factors and spiritual factors. Material factors include materials and currency. Spiritual factors include family affection, friendship, love, honor, identity enhancement, verbal encouragement, good psychological feelings, etc. Self-interested costs, referred to as costs, refer to the price that actors need to pay for self-interested behavior (self-interested and altruistic behavior), including material factors and spiritual factors. The larger the ratio of benefits to costs, the greater the possibility of behavior occurring, and vice versa. The two key factors in cost-benefit analysis are the cost ceiling and the benefit ceiling.

3.1 Cost Ceiling

The cost ceiling refers to the maximum price that actors are willing to pay to obtain certain benefits. Material costs are uniformly converted into currency for measurement. Spiritual costs are measured by actors' psychological feelings. The cost ceiling is a variable determined by two factors: expected benefits and resources.

Expected Benefits. Actors' expected benefits depend on the importance of the behavior object. The greater the importance of the behavior object, the higher the expected benefits, the higher the cost ceiling, that is, the higher the cost they are willing to pay. Under given expected benefits, if costs exceed the ceiling, “altruistic behavior” will not occur.

The premise for engaging in altruistic behavior out of “sympathy” or “compassion” is: high expected benefits, relatively low cost ceiling, even negligible, that is, the input-output ratio is much greater than 1. In Mencius's example, when a child stands by a well about to fall in, helping them out of compassion is a simple effort costing almost nothing. The “moral man” suffers no loss of their own interests and may also obtain benefits such as gratitude from the child's parents and praise from neighbors—why not do it? Change the scenario: a child falls into a turbulent river, and going into the river to rescue them will most likely be life-threatening. The possibility of rescue is very small because the expected cost is high, possibly one's own life, far exceeding the cost ceiling; the expected benefits are low, even if the child is rescued, it has no major interest relationship with oneself, and even if feedback is obtained, it is not worth the life risk. The input-output ratio is low. When entering or exiting shopping malls, hotels, or building doors, if there are others behind, the person in front will hold

the door open to facilitate those behind to pass through. This is basic etiquette in public places. The cost of altruistic behavior approaches zero. The expected beneficial return is demonstrating one's grace and cultivation, obtaining others' thanks and praise. The expected harmful return to avoid is being accused of impoliteness or causing disputes if the door rebounds and injures those behind. Expected benefits exceed costs. Change the scenario: during an earthquake, fire, or terrorist attack, everyone rushes out the door to escape, and being one second late may mean death. Will those running ahead calmly and elegantly hold the door for those running behind? Obviously not! At this time, holding the door may cost one's own life, exceeding the cost ceiling; expected benefits approach zero, and the input-output ratio of "altruistic behavior" approaches zero. However, if the person running behind is one's own son, then one would risk their life to spend a little time holding the door because expected benefits are high, and the cost ceiling they are willing to pay also increases accordingly. If treating a sick only son, one would be willing to sell the house and go bankrupt to raise funds because the expected benefits of saving the son are higher. If treating an unrelated person, donating 100 yuan may exceed the cost ceiling. If giving alms to a beggar on the roadside, a few yuan may exceed the cost ceiling because expected benefits approach zero. Some people donate millions or tens of millions of yuan to temples, seemingly with high costs, but expected benefits are obtaining blessings in this life and the afterlife, making the input-output ratio approach infinity. If willing to pay huge costs for the realization of others' interests, this "other" must have a major interest relationship with oneself.

Resource Status. Resources refer to factors that actors possess and can use to engage in "altruistic behavior," including currency, materials, spirit, physical strength, knowledge, skills, time, etc. The more resources actors possess, the higher the costs they are willing to pay.

A famous TV host said that her grandmother was helpful throughout her life. When living in the countryside, when her fruit trees bore fruit or she bought fresh goods from the city, she would put them in baskets and deliver them door-to-door to fellow villagers. After moving to the capital with her granddaughter, when fellow villagers called to chat, the grandmother would call them back using her own phone to save them phone charges. When fellow villagers visited the capital for tourism or to see her, the grandmother would give them large packages of gifts, give each person red envelopes of thousands of yuan, and buy them return train sleeper tickets. However, the host also described another incident: many years ago, when the host and her brother were only a few years old and eating at their grandmother's house, the grandmother would close the door. When someone knocked on the door, the grandmother would become very nervous, immediately turn off the lights, hide in the house without responding, and in desperation even tell the knocker that no one was home, creating a big joke. The grandmother would rather lose face than open the door. Why? It was during a famine period, and the grandmother was worried that if visitors ate at her house, she, her grandson, and granddaughter would go hungry. Later, when life improved, the grandmother's door was never closed. If someone visited dur-

ing mealtime, the grandmother would bring them a stool and say, “Cross the threshold and have a bowl.”[18] What does this contrast before and after illustrate? It illustrates that when resources are abundant, large packages of gifts, train sleeper tickets, and thousands or tens of thousands of currency are below the cost ceiling. During famine years, a bowl of rice exceeds the cost ceiling. An ancient Chinese saying goes: “When granaries are full, people observe etiquette.” When there is sufficient food, etiquette is observed, and passing strangers can be invited home for food and drink. When there is no food, etiquette is not observed, and theft and robbery may occur, even exchanging children to eat. In real society, there are thousands of examples of compassion and countless deeds of righteous action. All altruistic behaviors have expected returns. Relative to resources, costs are minimal, and input-output ratios are all greater than 1.

From this, we can conclude: all “altruistic behaviors” that occur under the condition that the expected input-output ratio is greater than 1 are self-interested behaviors. Under the condition that the expected input-output ratio is less than 1, all “altruistic behaviors” will not occur.

3.2 Benefit Ceiling

The benefit ceiling refers to the maximum limit of benefits that actors set for a certain behavior. Benefits higher than the ceiling are regarded as harmful or losing money, and behavior pursuing such benefits will not occur. Aren't more benefits always better? Why is there a ceiling? The law of diminishing marginal utility in economics states that within a certain period, with other conditions unchanged, as consumption increases, total utility increases, but the marginal utility per unit of goods decreases; after reaching a critical point, continued consumption makes the marginal utility per unit of goods negative, and total utility decreases. The principle of the benefit ceiling is similar to this. The satisfaction factors of human physiological needs are material factors, and the benefit ceiling is determined by physiological structure. Eating, drinking, and alcohol consumption all have limits, and excess is harmful. The satisfaction factors of spiritual needs are spiritual factors, and the benefit ceiling is determined by two factors: inherent concepts and resources.

Inherent Concepts. Inherent concepts refer to deeply ingrained understandings formed by actors through postnatal environmental education. Postnatal environmental education refers to the role of social public opinion and social reality.

Book of the Later Han • Biographies of Liu Xuan and Liu Penzi, Volume 1 records: At the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the peasant rebel army Lulin Army overthrew Wang Mang's regime and supported Liu Xuan as emperor. Liu Xuan enfeoffed meritorious officials as kings. All recipients accepted their titles, except Zhu Wei, who was enfeoffed as King of Jiaodong and refused to accept it because Emperor Gaozu of Han, Liu Bang, had once sworn an oath by killing a white horse: “If not a Liu, whoever becomes king will be attacked by all under

heaven.” Zhu Wei believed Liu Bang’s oath was efficacious, and crossing this boundary would bring disaster. This was clearly a system established by Liu Bang to maintain the Liu family’s rule, but after being accepted by the public, it became an insurmountable ceiling for self-interested benefits. *New History of the Five Dynasties, Volume 13, Biographies of the Liang Family, Volume 1, Zhu Quanyu* records: During the Five Dynasties period, Zhu Wen forced Emperor Ai of Tang to abdicate and established the state of Liang. Zhu Wen enfeoffed his eldest brother Zhu Quanyu as Prince of Guang, but Zhu Quanyu not only refused to accept it but also cursed Zhu Wen for usurping the state. Under environmental education, he formed deeply ingrained loyalty to the monarch, believing that being enfeoffed as marquis for meritorious service was the ceiling for self-interested benefits, and exceeding this boundary would bring the disaster of extermination. In business, many merchants insist on low-price sales even when conditions allow for high-price sales, believing that high-price sales are instead disadvantageous.

Psychologists have conducted some experiments that can be borrowed to illustrate the formation of the benefit ceiling for organisms and humans.

Experiment 1: Experimenters placed five monkeys in a cage with a bunch of bananas hanging at the top and an automatic water spray device. Whenever a monkey tried to take the bananas, strong water jets would hit all the monkeys. After many attempts, the monkeys reached a consensus: bananas cannot be taken. Subsequently, the experimenters released one monkey and replaced it with a new monkey A. A immediately tried to take the bananas and was severely beaten by the other four monkeys. After many attempts, A also learned that bananas cannot be taken. Then, the experimenters released another old monkey and replaced it with a new monkey B. B also eagerly tried to take the bananas and was similarly severely beaten by the other four monkeys. Among them, monkey A beat B particularly hard. Although it didn’t know why bananas cannot be taken, it had formed the inherent concept that taking bananas results in being beaten. The experimenters replaced old monkeys with new monkeys one by one until all monkeys in the cage were new, none had been sprayed with water, but none dared to touch the bananas, although they didn’t know why.

Experiment 2: Experimenters placed fleas on a table. When they slapped the table, the frightened fleas jumped about 30 centimeters high, about 200 times their body height. The experimenters then placed a glass cover above the fleas. Each time the fleas jumped, they hit the glass and fell heavily. After many consecutive times, the fleas reduced their jumping height, never touching the glass each time. The experimenters gradually lowered the glass height, and the fleas gradually lowered their jumping height. Finally, when the glass cover was close to the table, the fleas stopped jumping and began to crawl. At this point, the experimenters removed the glass cover, slapped the table again, but the fleas still crawled, becoming “crawling fleas.”

After long-term training, animals form a ceiling for self-interested benefits in their minds. Wanting to obtain benefits beyond the ceiling is not self-interest

but self-harm. The formation of the human self-interested benefit ceiling follows the same principle, reasonably explaining why some people do not pursue greater benefits when they see them, and why some people actively give up greater benefits they have already obtained, phenomena that violate self-interested nature.

Resource Status. The self-interested benefit ceiling is determined by the resources invested. As the resource cost in the denominator increases, the expected benefit in the numerator also increases.

4. Analysis of “Self-Harm for Others’ Benefit”

The previous section pointed out that under the condition that the expected input-output ratio is less than 1, all “altruistic behaviors” will not occur. This easily raises objections because many behaviors with input-output ratios less than 1 do exist in real society, namely “self-harm for others’ benefit” behaviors. Analysis shows that all behaviors must stem from self-interested motives; it’s just that some behaviors’ self-interested motives are not easily discovered and are thus regarded as “self-harm for others’ benefit” or “purely altruistic.”

4.1 Beyond Expectation

The previous conclusion refers to the “expected input-output ratio,” while many “self-harm for others’ benefit” behaviors occur beyond actors’ “expectations,” not their original intention. In real society, some people catch falling children from high-rise buildings with their bare hands, suffering comminuted fractures in both arms; some cross from their own balcony to a neighbor’s balcony to help retrieve a key, falling to their death; some jump into rivers to rescue drowning children and drown themselves. Are these the costs that altruistic actors expected to pay? Obviously not. Two brothers heard a cry for help on the road, followed the sound, and saw a knife-wielding criminal raping a young woman. The brothers stepped forward to rescue and were seriously injured, while the young woman took the opportunity to slip away. The criminal instead accused the brothers of being the rapists and himself the righteous rescuer to the public security organs. The brothers not only lost their ability to care for themselves and could not obtain righteous action bonuses for treatment but also bore the stigma of rapists. Numerous local media outlets repeatedly called for the rescued young woman to come forward to testify, but she vanished without a trace like she had evaporated from the earth. She may have feared bearing moral responsibility for the two brothers and worried that the fact of her violation would be leaked, damaging her reputation. If the brothers had foreseen this result, the “self-harm for others’ benefit” behavior would not have occurred.

4.2 External Coercion

Many “self-harm for others’ benefit” behaviors occur under external coercion, with actors having no choice but to act. For example, merchants selling goods at huge losses when the market is depressed, celebrities donating to disaster

areas to avoid public condemnation, defeated nations signing treaties ceding territory and paying indemnities, etc. During the Spring and Autumn period, the famous military strategist Sun Wu beheaded the King of Wu's two favorite concubines for disobeying orders, thereby training the palace maids into soldiers who obeyed commands and risked their lives. Under such conditions, "self-harm for others' benefit" is actually "self-interest," choosing the lesser of two evils; otherwise, greater harm would be suffered.

4.3 Long-Term Self-Interest

The effects of immediate self-interest are easy to manifest and are easily regarded as self-interested behavior. The effects of long-term self-interest are not easily manifested and are easily regarded as "self-harm for others' benefit" or "purely altruistic." For example, business owners providing generous treatment to employees, ensuring employees and their families live decently, is altruistic behavior. However, it is easy to see that this is to motivate employees to work hard, stemming from self-interested motives. During economic depressions, when business operations are difficult but employees are not laid off, and owners bear losses themselves, this is easily regarded as "purely altruistic," but it is actually "short-term self-harm, long-term self-interest." The time frame for "long-term self-interest" can be a lifetime or generations. For example, wealthy landowners funding poor scholars to go to the capital for imperial examinations hope that after they become officials, they can take care of themselves and their descendants.

4.4 Indirect Self-Interest

Actors do not directly obtain benefits from beneficiaries, which is easily regarded as "purely altruistic." For example, enterprises donate to disaster areas without obtaining any benefits from disaster victims, but they establish a good image and significantly increase product sales, obtaining benefits from third-party consumers.

4.5 High-Level Subject Self-Interest

High-level subject self-interest is not easily identified and is easily regarded as "purely altruistic." The "need movement theory" points out that the human body contains six levels of subjects: survival, sensation, cognition, identity, emotion, and value, which generate needs at different levels.[19] From the perspective of any subject, other subjects are "others" rather than "self." The relationship between subjects is that higher levels dominate lower levels, and lower levels obey higher levels. When interests between high and low levels are consistent, lower levels actively obey higher levels; when interests are inconsistent, lower levels passively obey higher levels. Higher-level subjects will satisfy the needs of "self" at the expense of damaging or even abandoning the needs of lower-level subjects, which are "others." People only see the "self-harm for others' benefit" at the lower-level subject and do not see the "harm to others for

self-benefit” at the higher-level subject, easily viewing it as “purely altruistic” behavior. According to *Ming Xizong Shilu* and *Ming Shi Jishi Benmo*: In July 1402, Ming Chengzu Zhu Di captured Nanjing and seized the throne from his nephew Zhu Yunwen, offering high official positions and generous salaries to persuade Zhu Yunwen’s important minister Fang Xiaoru (1357-July 25, 1402) to surrender. Fang Xiaoru firmly refused and cursed Zhu Di. Zhu Di arrested Fang Xiaoru’s entire family, his father’s four clans, mother’s three clans, wife’s two clans, and even his students counted as one clan—a total of ten clans—and killed them one by one in front of Fang Xiaoru. After watching the ten clans being killed, Fang Xiaoru died under the most cruel lingchi punishment at age 46. A total of 873 people were killed due to involvement with Fang Xiaoru, and thousands were imprisoned, conscripted, or exiled. Is Fang Xiaoru’s behavior, praised for generations, altruistic or self-interested? If it is “altruistic,” then who is this “other”? What is the “benefit”? There is no benefit for the ten clans killed, those imprisoned, conscripted, or exiled, for the missing Emperor Jianwen Zhu Yunwen, or for the country and people. Fang Xiaoru’s behavior can only be self-interested. He sacrificed his own life and the lives of all his relatives—how can this be self-interested? Who is this “self”? It is Fang Xiaoru’s value subject, the deeply ingrained value concept of “a minister does not serve two masters” formed through education from childhood. What is this “benefit”? It is satisfying the value need of being a loyal minister who sacrifices his life for righteousness, leaving a reputation praised for thousands of years. Further analysis shows that Fang Xiaoru’s behavior is actually “self-interested and harmful to others.” Who is this harmed “other”? It is Fang Xiaoru’s own survival subject and sensation subject that endured cruel torture, the 873 relatives who lost their lives, and the thousands of people implicated, imprisoned, conscripted, or exiled. Another possibility is that Fang Xiaoru had religious or ghost beliefs and worried that if he surrendered to Zhu Di, he would have no face to meet Emperor Jianwen Zhu Yunwen after death. If so, it is even more undoubtedly self-interested. It is said that some wealthy people donate all their property naked—is this “purely altruistic”? The wealthy person’s naked donation is announced to the whole society, known to everyone, and exists in the form of a certain foundation, which can satisfy the needs of the donor’s high-level subjects such as social reputation and life value. Su Xun’s *Supplementary Genealogy, Volume 2* records: Su Dongpo’s great-grandfather Su Gao was good at management, had a comfortable family, and often helped others without leaving his name. During famine years, he sold his family’s land to relieve famine victims. When grain matured in autumn, those who received relief wanted to repay him, but he firmly refused, leading to his own bankruptcy and living in hunger and cold. When others asked him why he did this, he said: “I fear others will plot against me if I have much wealth but do not give; but if I give and let others know, people will think I seek a good reputation.” This shows that Su Gao’s charitable behavior is still self-interested, just at different levels and in different ways from others’ self-interest.

So far, people have regarded the actor’s whole as “self.” In behaviors of sac-

rificing life for righteousness and sacrificing oneself for others, “self” no longer exists and cannot obtain “benefits,” so it can only be explained as “altruistic,” “self-harm for others’ benefit,” or “purely altruistic.” If recognizing that the actor’s body contains many “selves” and many “others,” and that higher-level “self” can damage lower-level “others” for its own need satisfaction, then “all altruistic behaviors stem from self-interested motives” becomes easier to understand.

4.6 Hidden Motives

Humans possess wisdom higher than other animals and have the ability to design better schemes to cover up self-interested motives and manifest them as altruistic motives. For example, many corporate charitable donations and public welfare activities are marketing activities to establish corporate image and expand brand reputation, but they are all promoted as “purely altruistic behavior” out of great love. Landlords distribute porridge during famine years, with the purpose of preventing famine victims from robbing their granaries, but they all promote it as charitable behavior out of great love.

The root of the “Smith Paradox” is “dualism of human nature,” which holds that humans simultaneously possess self-interested and altruistic natures. The self-interested nature manifests as “economic man,” and the altruistic nature manifests as “moral man.” “Economic man” explains self-interested behavior, and “moral man” explains “altruistic behavior.” This theory appears most complete but actually negates the “complete self-interest” assumption of economic man, causing the theoretical foundation of economics to collapse and generating endless unsolvable contradictions or paradoxes. The study of human nature has existed since ancient times, and theories of human nature are numerous, but no theory has ever completely and thoroughly denied “dualism of human nature.” This article proposes “monism of human nature,” pointing out that organisms and humans have only a self-interested nature, no altruistic nature, no “purely altruistic behavior without expecting return,” “moral man” does not exist, the conflict between “economic man” and “moral man” does not exist, the “complete self-interest” assumption of economic man completely holds, the “Smith Paradox” naturally disappears, all human behaviors can be satisfactorily explained, and the theoretical edifice of economics has a solid foundation.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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