

In *The Solitary Self*, renowned philosopher Mary Midgley explores the nature of our moral constitution to challenge the view that reduces human motivation to self-interest. Midgley argues cogently and convincingly that simple, one-sided accounts of human motives, such as the "selfish gene" tendency in recent neo-Darwinian thought, may be illuminating but are always unrealistic. Such neatness, she shows, cannot be imposed on human psychology.

Midgley returns to the original writings of Charles Darwin to show how the reductive individualism that is now presented as Darwinism does not derive from Darwin but from a wider, Hobbesian tradition in Enlightenment thinking. She reveals the "selfish gene" hypothesis in evolutionary biology as a cultural accretion that is not seen in nature. Heroic independence, argues Midgley, is not a realistic aim for *Homo sapiens*. We are, as Darwin saw, earthly organisms framed to interact with one another and with the complex ecosystems of which we are a tiny part. For us, bonds are not just restraints but also lifelines.

The Solitary Self is a significant re-reading of Darwin and an important corrective to recent work in evolutionary science, which has wide implications for debates in science, religion, psychology and ethics.

MARY MIDGLEY is one of the most respected moral philosophers of her generation and the author of many books including *Beast and Man*, *Wickedness* and *The Myths we Live by*. Her memoir, *The Owl of Minerva*, was published in 2005.

Heretics series

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