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The Only Truly Selfless Organism, Ants, Bees, Superorganisms”?

Superorganism: A colony of interdependent organisms, as in the social insects, whose castes, individuals, etc. act as a unit

There is research that shows that shows examples of superorganisms which exhibit behaviour such that they put the best interest of the group ahead of their own. However Professors at the University of Oxford and Edinburgh have said that the term superorganism has been used too lightly on too many species. Particularly our own, the human race but also on herds of bison and large schools of fish. They warned that although it appears they appear to be working as an organism they are actually not and are working in a selfish manner trying to get to the centre of the herd or school for **their own** safety.



They did however also conclude that two organisms were superorganisms, that of leaf cutter ants and honey bees. Honey bees for example rarely get the opportunity to mate, yet they can still lay eggs which develop later into further males. These eggs however are eaten if come across by another male honey bee. This system facilitates working as a unit because there is no gain from working to reproduce on your own. The only way an individual worker bee can benefit is by helping the queen bee carry out her reproduction. Therefore the whole hive will work in a unit towards a greater goal and therefore be defined as a superorganism.



Have a look yourself at the article, and perhaps a smaller piece from the Yorkshire Post.

I personally don't think a human can be completely selfless. Think about it, when you ask a person who helps others why he/she does it and the normal response is "It makes me feel good" or something to the same meaning. Surely that means it isn't selfless if one does something because it makes oneself feel good? Are we all fundamentally selfish? It would make sense as it would be advantageous in respect to our hunter gatherer evolution.

What do you think? Are you selfish?

[Dr Andy Gardner](#)

Reference: Gardner A & Grafen A (2009) Capturing the superorganism: a formal theory of group adaptation. *Journal of Evolutionary Biology* 22, 659-671

[Yorkshire Post](#) – (minireview)

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