

# **Emotional Amoral Egoism: A Neurophilosophical Theory of Human Nature and its Universal Security Implications Reviewed By Norm Goldman Of Bookpleasures.com**

By Norm Goldman  
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Author: Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan

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For centuries there has been an ongoing debate as to how much of our human behavior, ideas and feelings are innate and how much are influenced by our environment. Are we born good or bad? Does reason or emotions drive us? Is our mind malleable or predisposed? In fact, these nature vs nurture debates have been one of the most enduring in the fields of philosophy, religion, psychology and many other disciplines.

According to Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan, author of *Emotional Amoral Egoism: A Neurophilosophical Theory of Human Nature and its Universal Security Implications*, how we answer these questions determine how we answer whether humans are capable of moral behavior (consistent with a system of rules of correct conduct).

Dr. Al-Rodhan believes that humankind is neither always moral nor always immoral, but is capable of being either at different times. As he states: “human nature is governed by general self-interest and affected by genetic predisposition, which implies that there are likely to be limits to our moral sensitivities.”

To advance his theory, he sets out to accomplish two tasks in his book. Firstly, he endeavours to reach a comprehension of human nature, which, as he states, offers us the promise of living a good life. Consequently, he poses the following questions: what is it that motivates humankind? What is humankind capable of under certain circumstances and moreover, does humankind possess an innate morality?

To answer these questions, Dr. Al-Rodhan looks to the different perceptions that he has gleaned from the fields of philosophy, psychology, sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, to present a broader explanation of human nature. In addition, he also calls upon the recent findings of his own field of neuroscience. As Dr. Al-Rodhan states, recent neuroscientific findings confirm that

we are primarily driven by our emotions rather than reason. Nonetheless, as pointed out, human psyche and behavior are also the product of our environment. Under the right circumstances and with deliberate effort, we are still capable of acting in a moral way, notwithstanding our genetic code.

The second objective of the book is to examine some of the global and security implications of human nature as Dr. Al-Rodhan conceives it.

Prior to advancing his own theory concerning human nature, which he terms *Emotional Amoral Egoism*, Dr. Al-Rodhan synthesizes the main approaches to human nature as advocated by different scholars in the fields of religion, spirituality, philosophy, psychology, evolution, and sociobiology.

After exploring these many diverse perceptions of human nature, Dr. Al-Rodhan presents his own theory of *emotional amoral egoism*. He contends that “humankind is conceived as primarily motivated by neurochemically mediated emotions resulting from genetic make-up and environmental influences, employing reason and engaging in conscious reflection only occasionally.”

Fundamentally, and this is the essence of Dr. Al-Rodhan's theory, human nature is a “predisposed tabula rasa (clean slate).” In other words, as pointed out, we don't have innate ideas, but we do possess predispositions that are coded by genetics and influenced by our environment. His general theory is broken down into eight elements. Humans are primarily motivated by *emotional self-interest* which initially is focused on survival. Once this is achieved, we have domination. The survival instincts are emotionally based and are predisposed through genetic make-up with heterogeneous variations and personality traits that are mediated through neurochemistry. In turn, these are affected by personal state of affairs, upbringing, education, and societal, cultural and global state of affairs. However, these may be modified by psychotherapy, medicines, molecular/genetic engineering, neurotechnology and other means. Finally, humans can occasionally be moral, although probably for self-interest reasons. According to Dr. Al-Rodhan, reason, reflection and conscious morality is rare.

Why is all of this important and relevant today? Dr. Al-Rodhan maintains: “ This insight has profound implications for the re-ordering of governance mechanisms at all levels with a strong emphasis on the role of society and the global system in maximising the benefits of what I term measured self-interest while minimising its excesses, because human beings cannot be left to their own devices to do the right thing.”

This is my second book authored by Dr. Al-Rodhan, my first being, [\*Sustainable History and the Dignity of Man\*](#), and I cannot come close in this review to covering everything this brilliant thinker and writer does within its 207 pages, which also includes a comprehensive reference section, helpful diagrams and an index. His superb overview and sharp analysis of the assorted schools of thought concerning human nature is wide and deep and presented in such a manner that readers can readily appreciate the role it plays in the understanding of *emotional amoral egoism*. In addition, Dr. Al-Rodhan has shown a remarkable understanding and insight into human nature, as he adopts a multidisciplinary approach in defence of his position. Readers will

without doubt be satisfied by his level of analysis and synthesis which all contribute to a better understanding of a subject matter that at times can be quite daunting. And given how much has already been written on the subject, it is difficult for any new approach to the topic to stand out. However, I believe this book has earned a place on the shortlist for those seeking a timely, balanced, and informed point of view.