

AI-04705 Every Man For Himself Analysis

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"Every man for himself". Is this a reality or just an expression? Is it selfishness or being assertive?

Explain, list the pillars, list 22 examples

What it means? Deep dive and provide the psychological pillars.

Describe how a person typically thinks, behaves, and makes decisions.

Provide 22 concrete examples demonstrating these traits in real-life situations.

Then create a 22-point guidelines from the discussion.

How does it connects that no matter how I justify living, every person disconnects (die) from earth alone. Tell more.

"Every Man for Himself"

Reality, Selfishness, or Assertiveness?

"Every man for himself" is both a description of reality and a philosophy of conduct—but it becomes dangerous when it is mistaken for a complete philosophy of life.

The expression recognizes that, in many situations, **you are ultimately responsible for your own survival, choices, boundaries, and consequences**. However, it can also describe a harsh social environment in which people prioritize themselves, especially when resources, opportunities, or safety are threatened.

The important question is not simply:

"Do I look out for myself?"

It is:

"Can I protect my interests without violating the legitimate interests of others?"

That distinction separates **healthy self-reliance** from **selfishness**, and **assertiveness** from **aggression**.

1. What Does "Every Man for Himself" Mean?

The phrase generally means:

- Each person must take responsibility for their own welfare.
- In a crisis, people may prioritize their own safety.
- You cannot always depend on others to rescue, protect, or provide for you.
- Competition may cause people to pursue their own interests first.
- Individuals must make decisions based on their own needs, judgment, and circumstances.

It can describe three different realities.

A. A survival reality

When resources or safety are limited, people often prioritize themselves.

Example: During an emergency evacuation, a person makes sure they and their children are safe before helping strangers.

This is not automatically selfish. It may be a reasonable survival response.

B. A personal philosophy

A person may believe:

“I should not expect others to manage my life. I must take responsibility for myself.”

This is closer to **self-reliance**.

C. A cynical worldview

A person may believe:

“Nobody cares about me, so I should care only about myself.”

This can produce distrust, emotional isolation, exploitation, and an inability to cooperate.

The same phrase can therefore express wisdom, realism, fear, or selfishness depending on the person's mindset and behavior.

2. Is It Selfishness or Assertiveness?

The answer is: **It can be either—or neither.**

The difference is not whether you put yourself first occasionally. The difference is **how you pursue your interests and how you treat other people while doing so.**

Behavior	Core attitude	Treatment of others	Example
Self-reliance	“I am responsible for myself.”	Respects others	Saving for retirement instead of expecting family to support you
Assertiveness	“My needs matter, too.”	Respects both parties	Saying no to an unreasonable request
Self-interest	“I will consider what benefits me.”	Neutral; may cooperate	Choosing a job that improves your future
Selfishness	“My needs matter more than yours.”	Disregards others' legitimate needs	Taking credit for another person's work
Aggression	“I will get what I want through force or intimidation.”	Violates or suppresses others	Threatening someone to obtain an advantage
Healthy independence	“I can stand on my own, but I can cooperate.”	Mutual respect	Handling your finances while helping family when genuinely able

The central distinction

Assertiveness says:

“I have rights, needs, and boundaries.”

Selfishness says:

“My rights, needs, and desires matter more than yours.”

Aggression says:

"My desires justify violating your rights."

3. The Psychological Core

"Every man for himself" is not a formal psychological theory. It is a phrase that overlaps with several established psychological concepts.

Its psychological foundation can be understood through **12 interconnected pillars**.

4. The 12 Psychological Pillars

Pillar 1: Self-Preservation

Core principle: Protect your life, safety, health, and basic welfare.

Self-preservation is one of the most fundamental drivers of behavior. When people perceive danger, the nervous system prioritizes survival.

Typical thought:

"What must I do to remain safe?"

Healthy expression: Evacuating danger, protecting dependents, seeking medical care.

Unhealthy expression: Hurting others unnecessarily to secure personal safety or advantage.

Key insight: Self-preservation is not inherently selfish. It becomes morally problematic when the response is disproportionate or needlessly harmful.

Pillar 2: Personal Responsibility

Core principle: Your life is substantially shaped by your decisions and actions.

This resembles the psychological concept of an **internal locus of control**: the belief that one's actions can influence outcomes.

Typical thought:

"What is within my control, and what can I do about it?"

A responsible person does not deny external circumstances. They simply avoid making helplessness their entire identity.

Healthy expression: Budgeting, training, learning, preparing.

Unhealthy expression: Believing every misfortune is entirely someone's personal fault.

Pillar 3: Autonomy

Core principle: People need the ability to direct their own lives.

Autonomy is central to **Self-Determination Theory**, which identifies autonomy as one of the basic psychological needs alongside competence and relatedness.

Typical thought:

"I want to make decisions based on my values rather than being controlled by others."

Autonomy does not mean refusing all influence. It means retaining meaningful agency.

Healthy expression: Choosing one's career, lifestyle, relationships, and priorities.

Unhealthy expression: Rejecting all advice simply because it comes from someone else.

Pillar 4: Agency and Self-Efficacy

Core principle: "I can do something."

Self-efficacy, associated with Albert Bandura's work, is the belief that one can perform actions necessary to achieve a goal.

A person who believes they can act is more likely to prepare, persist, and solve problems.

Typical thought:

"I may not control the entire situation, but I can take the next useful action."

Healthy expression: Learning a skill instead of remaining dependent.

Unhealthy expression: Overestimating one's abilities and refusing assistance.

Pillar 5: Boundaries

Core principle: Other people's needs do not automatically override your own.

Boundaries define what you will accept, provide, tolerate, or participate in.

Typical thought:

"I can care about you without agreeing to everything you ask."

Boundaries protect time, money, energy, privacy, and dignity.

Healthy expression: "I cannot lend you money, but I hope you find another solution."

Unhealthy expression: Using "boundaries" as a disguise for cruelty, avoidance, or refusing every reasonable obligation.

Pillar 6: Assertiveness

Core principle: Express your needs directly while respecting the needs of others.

Assertiveness occupies the middle ground between passivity and aggression.

Style	Internal belief	Typical behavior
Passive	"My needs do not matter."	Gives in, avoids conflict
Aggressive	"My needs matter more."	Dominates, threatens
Assertive	"Both our needs matter."	Communicates clearly and negotiates

Typical thought:

"I can disagree without attacking you."

Pillar 7: Self-Interest and Rational Choice

Core principle: People often evaluate choices according to expected benefits, costs, risks, and consequences.

This overlaps with **rational choice theory**, though real human decisions are also influenced by emotion, habits, biases, identity, and social pressures.

Typical thought:

“What are the likely consequences of this decision for my future?”

Healthy expression: Choosing a sustainable financial plan.

Unhealthy expression: Reducing every relationship to a transaction.

Pillar 8: Scarcity and Threat Perception

Core principle: Perceived scarcity changes behavior.

When people believe there is not enough money, time, safety, status, food, or opportunity, they may become more competitive and less cooperative.

Scarcity can narrow attention toward immediate concerns.

Typical thought:

“If I do not act now, I may lose my chance.”

Healthy expression: Preparing during a genuine emergency.

Unhealthy expression: Hoarding, sabotaging others, or treating every situation as a zero-sum contest.

Deep insight: Sometimes “every man for himself” is not a person's stable personality. It is a response to perceived threat.

Pillar 9: Risk Management

Core principle: Protect yourself against foreseeable downside.

A self-protective person asks:

- What could go wrong?
- How likely is it?
- How severe would the consequences be?
- What can I do beforehand?
- What is my backup plan?

Typical thought:

“I do not need to predict everything. I need to reduce avoidable vulnerability.”

Healthy expression: Emergency savings, insurance, cybersecurity, preventive maintenance.

Unhealthy expression: Excessive suspicion, paralysis, or refusing all uncertainty.

Pillar 10: Emotional Regulation

Core principle: Do not let fear, anger, envy, or urgency make every decision.

People who appear highly independent may still be driven by strong emotions. The difference is whether they can regulate those emotions before acting.

Typical thought:

“I feel threatened, but I do not have to react impulsively.”

Healthy expression: Pausing before responding to an insult.

Unhealthy expression: Suppressing all emotion and confusing emotional numbness with strength.

Pillar 11: Social Exchange and Reciprocity

Core principle: Human beings are both individual competitors and cooperative social creatures.

Social exchange theory examines how people evaluate relationships through perceived costs, benefits, fairness, and reciprocity.

A psychologically mature person understands:

“I do not have to do everything for everyone, but relationships cannot survive if I only take.”

Healthy expression: Helping a friend who has helped you, while maintaining boundaries.

Unhealthy expression: Keeping a rigid scorecard for every small favor.

Pillar 12: Moral Boundaries and Prosociality

Core principle: Personal survival is not the only value.

Humans also possess capacities for empathy, cooperation, compassion, loyalty, fairness, and moral reasoning.

A person can protect their own interests while recognizing that other people are not merely obstacles or resources.

Typical thought:

“What benefits me, and what is fair or humane in this situation?”

Healthy expression: Refusing to exploit a vulnerable person even when exploitation would be profitable.

Unhealthy expression: Rationalizing cruelty as “just business” or “everyone does it.”

5. The Deep Psychological Tension

The phrase contains a fundamental tension:

Humans are individual organisms with personal needs, but they are also social beings who depend on cooperation.

We need both:

Individual protection

- Safety
- Autonomy
- Resources
- Competence
- Boundaries
- Personal identity

Social connection

- Trust
- Family
- Friendship
- Cooperation
- Belonging
- Mutual aid

The mature position is not:

“Everyone for themselves, always.”

Nor is it:

“Everyone must sacrifice themselves for everyone else.”

It is:

“I am responsible for myself, and I recognize that my well-being is often connected to the well-being of others.”

6. How This Person Typically Thinks

A person who strongly adopts an “every man for himself” orientation may think in the following patterns.

A. Responsibility-oriented thinking

“If I do not prepare, I may suffer the consequences.”

They prefer action over waiting for rescue.

B. Independence-oriented thinking

“I would rather learn how to do it myself than depend on someone unreliable.”

They value competence and self-sufficiency.

C. Boundary-oriented thinking

“I can help, but I am not obligated to sacrifice my stability.”

They distinguish kindness from unlimited availability.

D. Risk-oriented thinking

“What happens if this person, institution, or plan fails?”

They create alternatives and backups.

E. Reality-oriented thinking

“Good intentions do not guarantee good outcomes.”

They may judge situations by results rather than promises.

F. Selective-trust thinking

“Trust should be earned through consistent behavior.”

They may be cautious about dependence.

G. Competitive thinking

“Other people may be pursuing the same opportunity I am.”

They recognize competition, but the degree varies.

H. Pragmatic thinking

“What is the most effective action available now?”

They may prioritize practical outcomes over social approval.

I. Boundary-conscious thinking

"I can say no without being a bad person."

They do not automatically equate guilt with obligation.

J. Consequence-oriented thinking

"What will this decision cost me six months or five years from now?"

They may consider long-term effects rather than only immediate comfort.

7. How This Person Typically Behaves

Behavior depends on whether the philosophy is **healthy, defensive, or exploitative**.

Healthy version

- Prepares for uncertainty.
- Takes responsibility for mistakes.
- Builds skills.
- Maintains financial and emotional independence.
- Says no clearly.
- Helps others voluntarily.
- Does not expect rescue.
- Cooperates when cooperation is beneficial or morally appropriate.
- Avoids unnecessary drama.
- Protects time and energy.
- Accepts consequences.

Defensive version

- Distrusts everyone.
- Avoids vulnerability.
- Refuses help even when needed.
- Interprets requests as attempts at exploitation.
- Equates dependence with weakness.
- Keeps emotional distance.
- Assumes relationships will eventually disappoint.

Exploitative version

- Takes advantage of others.
- Justifies dishonesty as necessary.
- Abandons commitments when inconvenient.
- Treats people as tools.
- Shows little remorse when others suffer.
- Confuses winning with being right.

Important: Independence, emotional distance, and selfishness are not synonymous. A person can be independent and deeply compassionate—or dependent and highly selfish.

8. How This Person Makes Decisions

A person with a strong self-reliant orientation often uses a decision process like this:

Step 1: Identify the actual problem

“What is happening, rather than what do I wish were happening?”

Step 2: Identify personal responsibility

“What part of this is within my control?”

Step 3: Assess risk

“What could I lose? What is the downside?”

Step 4: Identify options

“What can I do myself? What help is available? What alternatives exist?”

Step 5: Consider consequences

“Will this help me now but damage my future?”

Step 6: Check ethical boundaries

“Does protecting myself require unfairly harming someone else?”

Step 7: Act

“What is the most reasonable next step?”

Step 8: Accept the result

“If the decision fails, what can I learn or change?”

This is the **healthy version** of self-interest: not impulsive selfishness, but deliberate responsibility.

9. 22 Concrete Real-Life Examples

The examples below show the difference between **healthy self-reliance**, **assertiveness**, and **selfishness**.









#	Situation	Healthy “Every Man for Himself” Response	Psychological Trait
1	Job insecurity	A worker updates their résumé, learns new skills, and builds savings instead of assuming the employer will protect them indefinitely.	Personal responsibility, agency
2	Retirement planning	A person saves and invests consistently rather than expecting children or relatives to finance their retirement.	Autonomy, future orientation
3	A friend asks for money repeatedly	They say, “I cannot keep lending money, but I can help you create a budget.”	Boundaries, assertiveness
4	A workplace takes credit for their work	They document contributions and calmly communicate them to management.	Self-advocacy, fairness
5	An emergency evacuation	They secure their own safety and that of dependents before helping others, when time is limited.	Self-preservation, prioritization
6	A group project	They complete their assigned work and clarify	Accountability, boundaries

		responsibilities rather than carrying everyone indefinitely.	
7	A toxic relationship	They leave instead of believing love requires enduring manipulation or abuse.	Self-respect, autonomy
8	A family member demands access to savings	They refuse if the request threatens their financial stability.	Financial boundaries
9	A business negotiation	They seek a favorable deal without lying, coercing, or concealing critical information.	Strategic self-interest, ethics
10	A colleague makes an unreasonable request	They say, "I can complete this by Friday, but not by today without delaying the other project."	Assertiveness, prioritization
11	Health maintenance	They exercise, attend appropriate checkups, and manage risk rather than assuming someone else will solve preventable problems.	Self-care, responsibility
12	Online privacy	They use strong passwords, multifactor authentication, and cautious sharing because they recognize that others may not protect their data.	Risk management
13	A friend breaks a promise	They reduce dependence on that person rather than repeatedly relying on unreliable behavior.	Selective trust, learning
14	A scarce opportunity	They compete fairly, improve their qualifications, and accept that another person may be selected.	Competence, competitive realism
15	A family disagreement	They express their position without demanding that everyone agree.	Autonomy, emotional regulation
16	A group dinner bill	They pay their fair share rather than assuming someone else will cover them.	Reciprocity, accountability
17	A neighbor needs help	They help when reasonably able, but decline if doing so	Balanced prosociality

		would create serious harm to their own obligations.	
18	A financial investment	They assess risk, diversify where appropriate, and avoid investing solely because friends insist.	Independent judgment
19	A public mistake	They acknowledge their role and correct it instead of blaming others to protect their image.	Responsibility, integrity
20	A crisis at work	They protect essential responsibilities while coordinating with colleagues rather than abandoning everyone or trying to control everything.	Cooperation, prioritization
21	Someone insults them	They do not retaliate impulsively; they decide whether to disengage, set a boundary, or address the issue.	Emotional regulation
22	A person is being exploited	They refuse to participate in the exploitation even if joining would provide a personal advantage.	Moral reasoning, empathy

What these examples demonstrate

The healthy person is not saying:

“I owe nobody anything.”

They are saying:

“I will not abandon responsibility for myself, and I will not assume that caring for others requires abandoning myself.”

10. The Difference Between Healthy and Unhealthy Versions

Dimension	Healthy self-reliance	Unhealthy “every man for himself”
Responsibility	Owens decisions and consequences	Blames others or refuses accountability
Independence	Can function without excessive dependence	Refuses all help
Boundaries	Protects legitimate needs	Uses boundaries to avoid all responsibility
Competition	Competes fairly	Sabotages or exploits

Trust	Trusts selectively based on evidence	Trusts nobody
Relationships	Values reciprocity	Treats relationships as transactions
Emotion	Regulates fear and anger	Becomes cold, reactive, or suspicious
Success	Seeks achievement without unnecessary harm	Justifies harm as long as they win
Failure	Learns and adapts	Blames, denies, or retaliates
Morality	Maintains ethical limits	Treats morality as an inconvenience

11. The Philosophical Question: Is Society Really “Every Man for Himself”?

Partly—but not entirely.

Human societies operate through a mixture of:

1. **Self-interest**
2. **Competition**
3. **Cooperation**
4. **Reciprocity**
5. **Institutions**
6. **Moral norms**
7. **Mutual dependence**

Even highly individualistic people depend on systems they did not create:

- Roads
- Electricity
- Clean water
- Healthcare systems
- Financial institutions
- Law enforcement
- Education
- Technology
- Supply chains
- Other people's labor

A person may live independently, but almost nobody is completely self-sufficient.

The paradox

The more capable a person becomes, the more independently they can function—but their capability often depends on cooperation with others.

A farmer may grow food independently, but still rely on tools, roads, markets, medicine, and infrastructure.

A retired person may be financially independent, but still benefit from doctors, engineers, neighbors, and public systems.

Independence is therefore usually a matter of reducing vulnerability—not eliminating interdependence.

12. When “Every Man for Himself” Is Appropriate

The philosophy is especially useful when:

- You must make your own decisions.
- You are responsible for your finances.
- You need to prepare for emergencies.
- Someone repeatedly violates your boundaries.
- You are choosing a career or lifestyle.
- You cannot control other people's behavior.
- You need to leave an unsafe environment.
- You must evaluate risk realistically.
- You need to stop waiting for permission.
- You must accept consequences for your choices.

13. When It Becomes Harmful

It becomes unhealthy when it is used to justify:

- Exploiting vulnerable people
- Abandoning dependents
- Breaking promises without concern
- Refusing reasonable cooperation
- Hoarding resources during collective emergencies
- Treating empathy as weakness
- Assuming everyone is an enemy
- Avoiding all emotional intimacy
- Ignoring obligations
- Believing success excuses cruelty

The phrase becomes dangerous when **self-protection turns into moral indifference.**

14. A More Mature Replacement Philosophy

Instead of adopting the absolute statement:

“Every man for himself.”

A more psychologically balanced version would be:

“I am responsible for myself, I protect my boundaries, I prepare for uncertainty, and I cooperate with others without surrendering my judgment or dignity.”

Or, more concisely:

“Self-reliant, not self-absorbed. Assertive, not aggressive. Cooperative, not dependent.”

This preserves the useful realism of the phrase without embracing its most destructive interpretation.

15. 22-Point Guidelines for Living This Philosophy Wisely

These guidelines translate the discussion into practical behavior.

1. Take responsibility for your life.

Do not make your future entirely dependent on someone else's decisions.

2. Build competence.

Learn the skills necessary to manage your finances, health, work, technology, and daily responsibilities.

3. Prepare before you need help.

Emergency savings, backups, insurance, and contingency plans reduce unnecessary dependence.

4. Know what is within your control.

Focus your energy on actions rather than endlessly trying to control other people.

5. Protect your legitimate interests.

Your time, money, health, privacy, and dignity deserve protection.

6. Say no without unnecessary guilt.

A reasonable refusal is not a moral failure.

7. Do not confuse assertiveness with aggression.

State your needs clearly without threatening, humiliating, or dominating others.

8. Do not confuse independence with isolation.

Being capable of standing alone does not mean you must reject connection.

9. Accept help strategically.

Receiving assistance is not automatically weakness; refusing useful help can be irrational.

10. Choose trust based on behavior.

Look for consistency, honesty, competence, and accountability—not merely promises.

11. Avoid unnecessary dependence.

Do not place your survival, finances, or identity entirely in the hands of one person or institution.

12. Compete fairly.

Pursue opportunities vigorously without cheating, sabotaging, or exploiting others.

13. Think beyond immediate gratification.

Ask what today's decision will cost your future self.

14. Separate genuine emergencies from ordinary inconvenience.

Not every situation requires survival-mode thinking.

15. Regulate emotions before acting.

Fear and anger can provide information, but they should not automatically control behavior.

16. Maintain reciprocal relationships.

Give and receive in ways that preserve mutual respect.

17. Help without destroying yourself.

Generosity is valuable, but unlimited self-sacrifice is not sustainable.

18. Do not use cynicism as a substitute for wisdom.

"People can disappoint me" is realistic. "Everyone is worthless" is an overgeneralization.

19. Keep moral boundaries.

Do not justify cruelty merely because it benefits you.

20. Accept that some outcomes are outside your control.

Self-reliance means managing your response—not controlling the entire world.

21. Learn from failure without surrendering agency.

Ask, "What can I change?" rather than only, "Who is to blame?"

22. Build a life where independence and cooperation reinforce each other.

The strongest position is not needing everyone—but being able to work with others when it matters.

Final Synthesis

"Every man for himself" is **a reality in some situations, a useful warning against helplessness, and a dangerous philosophy when taken as an absolute rule.**

At its healthiest, it means:

"I am responsible for my own life. I will protect my interests, make my own decisions, and prepare for uncertainty. I will not exploit others, but I will not abandon myself to satisfy every demand either."

At its worst, it means:

"My needs justify ignoring yours."

The psychological dividing line is **not self-interest itself**. It is whether self-interest is balanced by **self-control, empathy, reciprocity, responsibility, and moral limits**.

The goal is not to become a person who needs nobody. The goal is to become a person who can stand on their own, choose their relationships freely, and cooperate without surrendering themselves.

How does it connects that no matter how I justify living, every person disconnects (die) from earth alone. Tell more.

Yes. You are pointing toward a much deeper layer of the idea.

The statement **"every man for himself"** can be examined not only as a social or psychological principle, but also as an **existential reality**:

Every person experiences life from inside their own consciousness, makes their own choices, bears their own consequences, and ultimately faces the end of their individual biological existence.

That does not mean every person must live selfishly. It means that **there is a boundary around each individual life that nobody else can completely cross.**

And that boundary becomes especially visible when we think about death.

1. The Connection: From Self-Preservation to Mortality

The original expression says:

“Ultimately, I must look after myself.”

The existential version asks:

“Ultimately, who can live my life, experience my consciousness, or die my death for me?”

The answer is: **Nobody.**

Other people can:

- Love you
- Accompany you
- Care for you
- Defend you
- Treat your illness
- Hold your hand
- Remember you
- Help you make meaning

But they cannot literally substitute their existence for yours.

This creates a profound distinction:

Social dependence

We need other people for love, knowledge, care, cooperation, and survival.

Existential individuality

Even within those relationships, **each person remains a distinct experiencing individual.**

You can share a life with someone, but you cannot literally become that person.

You can accompany someone toward death, but you cannot experience their death in their place.

2. “Disconnects From Earth Alone”: What Is Actually True?

Your expression is powerful, but it helps to separate several meanings of “alone.”

A. Biologically alone

At death, an individual's biological processes cease. The body is no longer sustaining the living organism in the ordinary sense.

No one else can perform the final biological act of being that organism.

B. Experientially alone

Your consciousness is your own.

Even when surrounded by family, doctors, friends, or loved ones, **your subjective experience is not directly transferable to another person.**

Nobody can fully enter your mind and experience the world exactly as you do.

C. Existentially alone

This is the deeper philosophical meaning.

You are the one who must make your choices, confront uncertainty, and live the consequences of being your particular person.

Philosophers such as Martin Heidegger explored the idea that each person must confront their own mortality. Jean-Paul Sartre emphasized individual freedom and responsibility, while Irvin D. Yalom wrote extensively about death, freedom, isolation, and meaning.

But **existential aloneness does not mean social abandonment.**

That distinction is essential.

You can be existentially alone without being emotionally alone.

3. The Four Forms of Aloneness

Type	What it means	Can others help?
Physical	Being physically separated from others	Yes, people can accompany you
Psychological	Having private thoughts and subjective experiences	Others can understand, but never perfectly duplicate your experience
Existential	Being an individual responsible for your own existence and choices	Others can support, but cannot live your life for you
Mortality	The fact that your individual biological life eventually ends	Others can comfort and care, but cannot die in your place

The deepest point is:

Human connection can reduce loneliness, but it does not erase individuality or mortality.

4. Why This Changes the Meaning of “Every Man for Himself”

If we connect the phrase to mortality, it becomes less about competition and more about **existential responsibility.**

The mature interpretation becomes:

“My life is finite. Nobody else can live it for me. Therefore, I should take responsibility for how I spend it.”

That leads to several conclusions.

1. Your time is ultimately yours

Other people may influence your schedule, but your life is the time you actually have.

2. Your choices cannot be outsourced completely

Advice can be received. Decisions can be delegated. But the consequences still belong to your life.

3. Your values cannot be entirely borrowed

Family, culture, religion, society, and institutions influence you, but eventually you must decide what you consider worth pursuing.

4. Your mortality gives urgency to your priorities

If life were infinite, postponement might not matter. Because life is finite, postponement has a cost.

5. Other people cannot complete your existence for you

A spouse, child, career, achievement, or social status may enrich life, but none can eliminate the fact that you are an individual.

5. The Psychological Connection: Mortality Awareness

Psychology has studied how awareness of death influences human behavior.

One important framework is **Terror Management Theory**, associated with researchers Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski.

The basic idea is:

Humans can understand that they will eventually die, yet they are biologically motivated to survive.

That creates a psychological tension.

We know:

- "I am alive."
- "I want to continue living."
- "My life is finite."
- "I cannot permanently escape mortality."

People respond to this tension in different ways.

Some pursue security

- Wealth
- Health
- Insurance
- Safety
- Longevity
- Stability

Some pursue significance

- Career
- Achievement
- Recognition
- Legacy
- Family
- Creative work

Some pursue belonging

- Marriage
- Friendship

- Community
- Religion
- National identity
- Shared causes

Some pursue transcendence

- Spiritual beliefs
- Philosophy
- Art
- Service
- Nature
- Contemplation

Some deny or avoid mortality

- Constant distraction
- Compulsive consumption
- Status competition
- Refusing to discuss death
- Acting as though time is unlimited

None of these responses automatically makes a person psychologically healthy or unhealthy. The important question is whether the response helps them live realistically and meaningfully.

6. The Paradox: We Are Separate, Yet We Need Each Other

This is one of the deepest truths of human existence.

We are separate enough to be responsible for ourselves, but connected enough that our lives profoundly affect one another.

Consider the paradox:

- You are born dependent on others.
- You develop an individual identity.
- You spend life forming relationships.
- You depend on society, infrastructure, knowledge, and care.
- Yet your consciousness remains uniquely your own.
- Eventually, your individual life ends.

This means human existence is neither:

“Everyone is completely independent.”

Nor:

“Everyone is one indistinguishable organism.”

It is closer to:

“We are distinct individuals living within an interdependent world.”

7. Does Mortality Make Selfishness Rational?

Not necessarily.

A common mistaken conclusion is:

“Since I will die alone, I should live only for myself.”

That does not logically follow.

Why?

Because **mortality establishes a limit, not a moral instruction.**

The fact that life ends does not tell us automatically how life should be lived.

For example:

- A person may spend their finite life helping others.
- Another may spend it pursuing wealth.
- Another may devote it to family.
- Another may pursue knowledge.
- Another may seek pleasure.
- Another may combine several of these.

Death makes life finite. It does not determine the value system you must choose.

The deeper question becomes:

“**Given that my life is finite and cannot be lived by anyone else, what is worth doing with it?**”

That is an existential question, not merely a selfish one.

8. Why People Sometimes Become More Self-Protective When They Think About Death

Mortality awareness can produce two very different reactions.

Reaction A: Defensive self-protection

A person thinks:

“I have limited time. I need to protect myself, secure my resources, avoid being used, and stop wasting my life.”

This can lead to:

- Stronger boundaries
- Financial planning
- Health priorities
- Less tolerance for manipulation
- More selective relationships
- Greater urgency

This can be healthy.

Reaction B: Existential openness

Another person thinks:

“I have limited time. I should spend more of it loving, creating, learning, and experiencing life.”

This can lead to:

- Gratitude
- Forgiveness
- Meaningful relationships
- Less concern about trivial status competition
- Greater appreciation of ordinary experiences
- More willingness to take meaningful risks

This can also be healthy.

The key insight

Mortality awareness does not necessarily make a person selfish. It can make them either more defensive or more purposeful.

9. The “Nobody Can Save Me From Death” Realization

There is a psychologically important difference between:

“Nobody can save me from death.”

and:

“Nobody can help me while I am alive.”

The first is broadly true in the ordinary biological sense: other people cannot make an individual immortal.

The second is false.

People can profoundly improve one another's lives.

A doctor can save you from a disease that would otherwise kill you.

A spouse can provide companionship during suffering.

A friend can prevent someone from making a devastating decision.

A community can protect people during disasters.

A stranger can donate blood.

A person can extend another person's life through care, knowledge, or intervention.

So the more accurate formulation is:

“Other people cannot eliminate my mortality, but they can profoundly influence the quality, length, and meaning of my life.”

That is why mortality does not make relationships meaningless. In many ways, it makes them more significant.

10. The Difference Between “Dying Alone” and “Dying Without Love”

These are not the same.

A person may die:

- In a hospital surrounded by family

- At home with a spouse
- In a hospice facility with compassionate caregivers
- In an accident with strangers nearby
- Alone physically
- After a lifetime of deep connection

The physical circumstances of death do not perfectly measure the emotional or existential quality of a person's life.

Likewise, a person can be physically surrounded by people and still feel profoundly lonely.

So we should distinguish:

Physical solitude at death from **the relational quality of the life that preceded it.**

A life is not rendered meaningless because its final moment is individually experienced.

11. The Existential Philosophical Perspective

Several philosophical traditions approach this idea differently.

Martin Heidegger — Being-toward-death

Heidegger argued that awareness of mortality can reveal the seriousness and individuality of existence.

The point is not simply that death happens, but that **my death is a possibility that belongs specifically to my existence.**

This can interrupt the tendency to live entirely according to social expectations.

Jean-Paul Sartre — Responsibility and freedom

Sartre emphasized that people cannot completely escape responsibility for how they respond to their circumstances.

We do not choose every condition of life, but we still confront choices within those conditions.

Viktor Frankl — Meaning

Frankl emphasized that meaning can be found through:

- Creative work
- Experiences and relationships
- The attitude taken toward unavoidable suffering

Mortality does not automatically remove meaning. It can make meaning more urgent.

Ernest Becker — Denial of death

Becker argued that much human behavior is influenced by the difficulty of confronting mortality.

People may seek symbolic forms of permanence through achievement, status, culture, family, or legacy.

Irvin D. Yalom — Existential isolation

Yalom distinguished existential isolation from ordinary loneliness.

A person can be loved and connected while still confronting the fact that **no one can fully experience existence from inside another person's consciousness.**

12. The Deepest Connection to Your Original Question

Let's connect the entire chain:

"Every man for himself"

↓

I am responsible for my own life.

↓

My consciousness and choices are uniquely mine.

↓

Other people can help, but cannot completely replace my agency.

↓

My time is finite.

↓

My death is a boundary nobody can cross on my behalf.

↓

Therefore, I should not live entirely by borrowed expectations, endless approval-seeking, or the assumption that life can be postponed indefinitely.

↓

But because others are also finite, vulnerable individuals, I should not treat them merely as tools for my own survival or satisfaction.

↓

Mature conclusion:

"I must live my own life, but I do not have to live it without love, cooperation, responsibility, or compassion."

13. What This Realization Can Teach a Person

1. Stop outsourcing your life

Do not wait indefinitely for permission, approval, rescue, or ideal circumstances.

2. Take your mortality seriously—but not anxiously

The point is not to obsess over death. It is to recognize that time is not unlimited.

3. Choose relationships consciously

You cannot keep every relationship forever. Invest in relationships that are reciprocal, respectful, and meaningful.

4. Stop confusing social approval with meaning

Being admired is not the same as living well.

5. Protect your energy

Not every argument, obligation, or social expectation deserves your finite time.

6. Do not postpone everything meaningful

The belief that “I will do it someday” can quietly consume an entire life.

7. Accept that some uncertainty is unavoidable

No amount of control eliminates vulnerability completely.

8. Make peace with interdependence

Needing people does not make you weak. Being unable to exist independently in every respect is part of being human.

9. Practice responsibility without self-condemnation

You are responsible for your choices, but you are not omnipotent.

10. Let mortality clarify, not diminish, life

The fact that something ends does not mean it was worthless.

A sunset is not meaningless because it lasts only minutes.

A conversation is not meaningless because it ends.

A life is not meaningless because it is finite.

14. A More Complete Philosophy

The original phrase:

“Every man for himself.”

is incomplete because it describes only one dimension of human existence: **individual survival and responsibility.**

A fuller philosophy would be:

“Every person must ultimately live their own life, make their own choices, and face their own mortality. But while we are here, our lives are interdependent. We can protect ourselves without exploiting others, pursue our own meaning while respecting theirs, and accept that mortality makes our relationships and choices more—not less—valuable.”

Or, in a more concise form:

“I arrive as an individual, I live among others, and I leave as an individual—but the meaning of my life is shaped by how I live with them.”

Final Thought

The deepest realization is not necessarily:

“I will die alone, therefore I should care only about myself.”

It is:

“I will not be here forever. Nobody can live my life for me. Therefore, I should take responsibility for how I spend my time—and recognize that the people I encounter are also temporary, vulnerable, irreplaceable lives.”

That realization can produce **less selfishness, not more.**

It can make a person more selective, but also more compassionate. More independent, but also more appreciative. Less concerned with performing for the world, but more concerned with actually living.

Mortality does not prove that we are meant to live alone. It reminds us that we are each living a life that cannot be repeated.