More generous behavior

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Adjectives such as generous and selfish belong to a class of evaluative adjectives that have long puzzled those working on the distinction between so-called individual-level (IL) and stage-level (SL) predicates. On the one hand, such adjectives seem to have an IL-interpretation in sentences such as Rebeka is generous/selfish, but on the other hand, they also appear to be compatible with an SL-interpretation, for example, in sentences such as Rebeka was generous to donate 300€ to the museum and Thomas was selfish to not donate anything to the museum. For most approaches to the IL/SL distinction, it has been difficult to account for these two uses without invoking some kind of ambiguity. In my talk, I attempt to take a fresh look at this question, setting aside biases of old, and propose that adjectives such as generous and selfish are essentially second-order predicates applied to types of behavior, which may be viewed as types of events with an agent. This proposal allows me to distinguish the semantic core of generous and selfish from their SL- and IL-uses, which are derived from the core. I then argue that this approach is more successful than previous ones in accounting for the basic data.