

Are our actions motivated by anything other than our own self-interest?

Egoism, especially a psychological egoism,¹ in a direct opposition to altruism,² will never manage to push the other out. The most important argument in this case seems to be a lack of ability to verify the point of view from both sides. Both sides would have their own form of perception and will most likely defend it. At the same time, given the current moral-technological methods, it would be impossible to look inside a person's soul to see whether they are truly altruistic or egoistic.

Egoism is divided into multiple specific categories, but predominantly, it states that everything a person does is in some way influenced by their need. It may be psychological egoism, where the subject openly says that they want to do something because of the benefits it may bring them. Egoism does not have to be so precisely defined. The most simple of examples here would be a subject that performs a potentially altruistic action, yet internally thinks that they do it because they wish to do something good, therefore they also do it for themselves.³

Egoists use their views to completely suppress altruism, saying that every person will always be influenced by their desire to achieve something, therefore all of their actions will be egoistical.

Despite that, true altruism exists, even if it does not happen often among people. A personal example of how hard it is to judge whether an action is altruistic or egoistic, from an outsider's perspective, would be this writer looking at both the altruism and egoism and referring to a few situations from his own life. The first example would be an honest wish to help people fight against the hurtful practices of the insurance companies.⁴ For example, a flat happened to be flooded. To receive the necessary payout from the insurance company, a precise document on headed paper was needed to be issued, called a professional quote. This specific document was different from others because it required a precise list of damaged materials and the prices of the available replacements, as well as an exact calculation of the labour for each meter of damaged surface. Such a document would not guarantee that the amount stated on it, or any amount at all, would be paid out, but a lack of it guaranteed that no amount of money would be released to the victim. It is hard to say how many such documents were issued by this writer, without any expectation of gratification for using his own time to prepare them. At this point, an outsider could say that it was just a way the company wanted to procure clients, as it made sure they had the money to complete the much-needed work, after all, it was a renovation business. But that was not the case. The author never expected to be chosen or to influence the victims in any way to choose his company to complete the work on the damaged area, in fact, such a thing never took place. But despite that, an outsider, without looking at the writer's inner thoughts and desires, could potentially define an altruistic action spoken of above as egoistical. They would be wrong, but it would be their perspective, as they would have no other insight. What mattered were the people and the opportunity to help, which very few people could give. There was no place for any egoism, it was pure altruism.

Another example, from even older times, would be a proposition given to a certain Polish Veterinarian. Years before the writer moved to the United Kingdom, this doctor did her very best, going above and beyond, to save the writer's pet, doing much more than she had to. Her honest desire to do everything she could to help made this writer, later on, after his move, suggest she move to England, and continue her practice here, helping the animals the way she has so far. As a

1 Alexander Moseley, 'Egoism', *Internet Encyclopedia Of Philosophy, A Peer-reviewed Academic Resource*, <<https://iep.utm.edu/egoism/#:~:text=In%20philosophy%2C%20egoism%20is%20the,factual%20description%20of%20human%20affairs>> [Accessed: 1st of August 2025].

2 Alexander Moseley, 'Egoism', *Internet Encyclopedia Of Philosophy, A Peer-reviewed Academic Resource*.

3 Ibid.

4 Robert Pawlikowski, *About Us*, IMPU, website, <<http://impu.co.uk/about-us-2/>> [Accessed 1st of August 2025]

gesture of gratitude and goodwill, the writer, back then, suggested that he would build a house for her. Most likely, the egoism appeared in the veterinarian for a little while, as a house, even if not lived in, is a serious piece of real estate, which can generate profits by either renting it or selling it in the future. But altruism resonates. There was no Egoism there, only a pure offer for that woman to move countries and continue her good work. Most likely, egoism and altruism fought inside her, but ultimately her response was negative. Altruism won, an honesty for an honesty. She would never be able to continue her work as well as she had if she moved. A completely different system, completely different rules.

In contrast to individual cases, which may seem ambiguous or open to interpretation, some forms of altruism, such as the selfless provision for one's children, demonstrate a far more undeniable purity. Parents gathering possessions to leave their children after their death is a common occurrence. They stand to gain nothing from them, as they will no longer be alive, they are driven by a pure desire to provide for someone else, without any expectation of return, often even at their own expense, whether it is their time, their hard work or even money that they keep putting aside, choosing not to use, just so their children can inherit it and improve their lives.

A song comes to mind: *Eurythmics, Annie Lennox, Dave Stewart - 'Sweet Dreams'*, potentially openly egoistic, but is it really? After all the first verse says: 'Sweet dreams are made of this'⁵ - almost as if wishing that Egoism is so common that 'Everybody's looking for something',⁶ and then 'Some of them want to use you, Some of them want to get used by you, Some of them want to abuse you, Some of them want to be abused'⁷

David Hume in his work *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* stated in point 3, that 'Third, it is evident that animals act benevolently towards one another, and, if it is admitted that animals can act altruistically, then how can it be denied in humans?'⁸

One should never forget that animals love unconditionally...

Another broad example would be genocide. The most fitting would be the Holocaust.

The Nazi party openly presented their slogan: „The final solution to the Jewish issue". Bypassing all of the gruesome details of the subject, let us focus on the most important one. The so-called 'Final Solution' was, of course, the Holocaust, meaning an absolute extermination of the Jewish nation. It was used by the Gettos, including the famous Warsaw Ghetto,⁹ as well as by the extermination camps such as Treblinka¹⁰ or Auschwitz.¹¹

The number of Jewish victims is impossible to count, but it exceeded 6 million people. This brings up two important subjects, the first one being how many of the Wehrmacht soldiers refused to open fire on unarmed Jews, which often ended tragically for them. They did not want to shoot innocent people. Similar to this, the second subject would be the Polish people providing shelter to stripped of everything Jews so they would not end up in the Extermination Camp or Ghetto. We could try to look for egoistical reasons here, a few of those Poles probably helped the Jews to feel like heroes, similarly, the Wehrmacht Soldiers refused public executions to make a statement. What then about a situation when everything ends? There is no life, there is no family, and no material possession. Can we say that Egoism still exists? At that point, rather than Egoism, Altruism

5 Eurythmics, *Eurythmics, Annie Lennox, Dave Stewart - Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This) (Official Video)*, YouTube Recording, 2009, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeMFqkcPYcg&list=RDqeMFqkcPYcg>> [Accessed 1st of August 2025].

6 Eurythmics, *Eurythmics, Annie Lennox, Dave Stewart - Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This) (Official Video)*.

7 Ibid.

8 Alexander Moseley, 'Egoism', *Internet Encyclopedia Of Philosophy, A Peer-reviewed Academic Resource*.

9 August Grabski, *History Of The Warsaw Ghetto*, Warsaw Ghetto Museum, website, <<https://1943.pl/en/warsaw-ghetto-2/>> [Accessed 1st of August 2025].

10 Muzeum Treblinka, *Homepage*, website, <<https://muzeumtreblinka.eu/en/>> [Accessed 1st of August 2025].

11 Auschwitz.org, *AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU*, website, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/?_gl=1*1dabod9*_ga*NDI3NzY2NDMwLjE3NTMwMDc5Nzk.*_ga_ES4EZDDBMD*cze3NTM1NDYzODgkbzkkZzAkDDE3NTM1NDYzODgkajYwJGwwJGgw> [Accessed 1st of August 2025].

remains.

Does Egoism and Altruism exclude one another or do they, in some way, go hand in hand?

'And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'¹²

It is clear that a person, racing through life, follows Maslow's hierarchy of needs,¹³ even though the top of it is taken by things such as entertainment, the base is made of issues such as providing safety for oneself, by having a roof over one's head or having food. Even the most altruistic person has to follow their needs to some degree to be able to survive. But what happens when someone interrupts this hierarchy, if, instead of continually reaching for new goals in a self-driven chase of fulfilment, a person consciously stops and says, "Enough"? Is egoism, then, not something forced by the world, a response to external pressures, while altruism becomes a conscious mode of being chosen by the person?

Can love for yourself go hand in hand with love for someone else?

As mentioned above, both Egoism and Altruism end with death.

When a person has what they need to live, the world doesn't control them as much, and they can make their own choices more easily.

One aspect remains, that not only Egoism or Altruism, but also the influence of the World: a god, nature, Higher Power, forces people to make choices that are sometimes hard, which eat on their conscience until the very end. How big of an influence does Altruism or Egoism have over a person, and how much influence does life itself or destiny led by a higher power have?

Kantian approach, initially somewhat shy as it separates philosophy from theology, has a very strong influence on a growing number of his supporters or students. By separating philosophy and theology, Kant introduced the aspect of conscience as existing within every human. So if we take into account the conscience, Egoism and Altruism look completely different.

After all, we are being chased by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we are also being chased by the popular statement that everything we do is egoistical, but there is also a light in the darkness – the conscience. Marx's philosophy, as changed by Lenin, pointed to a lack of need for religion as such and, in its place, introduced satisfaction of basic needs as dictated by the conscience. Therefore, it might not be the dream job or a dream house, but there will be work as such and a place to live with a roof over your head. Of course it has been and still is a Of course, it was (and still is) a big piece of totalitarian propaganda trying to take over Europe. But still, it's hard not to see at least a little bit of altruism in it.¹⁴ Looking at things from an economic or business perspective, egoism seems stronger than altruism, especially when the altruism isn't religious. It leads to the development of the country, the person and the world, giving greater power to the human mind whilst taking the control away from religion, which prioritises the conscience, sin and fight for a place in the future heaven as deeply important.

It is very hard to give a clear answer to the question asked in the title of this essay, but what can be said is that our actions can be motivated by anything other than our own self-interest.

12 Joseph Butler, *Sermons - Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, part of Project Canterbury, website, 2005 <<https://anglicanhistory.org/butler/rolls/11.html>> [Accessed 1st of August 2025].

13 The Editors Of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Abraham Maslow*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abraham-H-Maslow>> [Accessed 1st of August 2025].

14 Bogdan Szlachta, 'Assessing Lenin and "Moral Democratisation"'. Two Polemics of Zdzisław Stahl with Father Innocent Maria Bocheński OP', *Political Thought nr 1(12)/2022*, <[https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/MP.nsf/0/F5E9454C8FBD67B0C12588BC005E9A1C/\\$file/04_Bogdan%20Szlachta_MP%201\(12\)2022_internetA.pdf](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/MP.nsf/0/F5E9454C8FBD67B0C12588BC005E9A1C/$file/04_Bogdan%20Szlachta_MP%201(12)2022_internetA.pdf)> [Accessed 1st of August 2025]. pp. 71-98

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