

## Egoism and Altruism

**Ethical Egoism** refers to position that people ought to do what is in their own self-interest. It differs from **Psychological Egoism**, which claims that people can only act in their self-interest. Ethical egoism also differs from **Rational Egoism**, which holds merely that it is rational to act in one's self-interest.

Egoist Ayn Rand argued that there is a positive harmony of interests among free, rational humans, such that no moral agent can rationally coerce another person consistently with his own actual, long-term self-interest. Rand argued that other people are an enormous value to an individual's well-being (through education, trade and affection).

- "Each of us is intimately familiar with our own individual wants and needs. Moreover, each of us is uniquely placed to pursue those wants and needs effectively. At the same time, we know the desires and needs of others only imperfectly, and we are not well situated to pursue them. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that if we set out to be 'our brother's keeper,' we would often bungle the job and end up doing more mischief than good.
- To pursue actively the interests of others is to be officious. We should mind our own business and allow others to mind theirs.
- To give charity to someone is to degrade him, implying as it does that he is quite unable to look out for himself. "That," reckons Rachels, "is why the recipients of 'charity' are so often resentful rather than appreciative."

Altruism, ultimately, denies an individual value and is therefore destructive both to society and its individual components, viewing life merely as a thing to be sacrificed. Rand is quoted as writing that, "[i]f a man accepts the ethics of altruism, his first concern is not how to live his life but how to sacrifice it." Moreover, "[t]he basic principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification for his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue or value." Rather, she writes, "The purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and live."

All of our commonly accepted moral duties, from doing no harm unto others to speaking always the truth to keeping promises, are rooted in the one fundamental principle of self-interest.

In contrast to egoism,

**Ethical Altruism** holds that moral agents have an obligation to help and serve others.

Altruism the doctrine is the view that one's actions ought to further the interests or good of other people, ideally to the exclusion of one's own interests.

Altruism, in practice, is the performance of duties to others with no view to any sort of personal gain for one's efforts. If one performs an act beneficial to others with a view to gaining affection, respect, reputation, or any form of gratitude or remuneration then it is not an altruistic act. It is in fact a selfish act because the principal motivation was to reap some benefit for oneself. The desire of this benefit exists equally whether

it is psychological, emotional, intellectual, or material – each form of desirable benefit is philosophically identical as a motivation.

**Consider the following:**

- ✓ The Golden Rule (Do unto to others as you would have them do unto you); is it Egoistic or Altruistic? Why?
- ✓ The American Dream – Altruistic or Egoistic?
- ✓ Are we nice to others out of fear of reprisal?
- ✓ How do Egoism and Altruism exist in our school institution?
- ✓ How do Egoism and Altruism factor in to your goals for your future?