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Defining Altruism

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M.Sc. in Epistemology, Ethics and Mind

### **Abstract**

The meaning of altruism has changed over time and varies across academic disciplines. I review the history of its meaning and report the results of a structured review that identifies the current controversies, specifically the need for cost or risk to a potential altruist and the need for benefits to the recipient to be realized or just intended. I propose a meaning of altruism that addresses the controversies: *an intentional decision, by an individual, to act based on what is best from a social, rather than personal, perspective*. I defend it from both a decision-analytics perspective and a philosophical perspective. I argue that the decision of a potential altruist to act for the benefit of others instead of self is to act as if the decision maker is just one of many in a society rather than a privileged person. I argue that the decision is best judged as altruistic or not by an independent arbiter representing the largest community of those affected directly and indirectly, rather than by the potential altruist. Even judged by others, altruism is achievable, under this meaning, by everyone.

*Keywords:* altruism, decision making, utility theory

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## **Defining Altruism**

Altruism did not exist until Auguste Comte, the French philosopher and founder of sociology, introduced the word in 1851 (Comte, 1851/1875).<sup>1</sup> As documented by Dixon, the meaning of the English word “altruism” has changed over time from Comte’s original meaning of instincts and feelings for others more than self (Dixon, 2008, p. 4).

As with many words, altruism has come to have somewhat different meanings for different people. Consequently, questions have been raised about whether this socially desirable behavior is possible for everyone, possible for only a few, or impossible. I will review the evolution of the meaning of the word “altruism,” as used to describe human behavior (see Footnote 1). I will review the many ways altruism is currently defined by those who have examined the concept. I will propose a synthetic definition that captures the salient components of altruism among other prosocial behaviors and then defend it.

Why should we care about defining altruism? Because we care about promoting altruism. Altruism is recognized as a prosocial behavior that gives a social group a competitive advantage, whether compared to other social groups or to itself without prosocial behavior. As noted by the evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson (2015, p. 23), “Altruistic groups beat selfish groups.”

Definitions that imply altruism is unattainable may discourage potentially altruistic behavior. Definitions that interpret altruism as an aspiration could foster potentially altruistic behavior. The definition of altruism should align with the behavior desired.

### **The Origin of Altruism and Changes in Its Meaning in English During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

My review of the introduction and early evolution of the meaning of altruism relies heavily on the comprehensive work of the historian Thomas Dixon, described in his book *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (2008), with all referenced page numbers in this section referring to this work, unless otherwise noted.

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<sup>1</sup> The word “altruism” has evolved to mean regard for others both in human societies and in animals. The latter is called biological altruism and is of interest to evolutionary biologists because of its apparent lack of fitness for reproduction, a paradox that has been resolved by the concepts of kin selection, reciprocal altruism, costly signaling, and group selection. Altruistic human behavior is sometimes referred to under the general term “psychological altruism” to distinguish it from biological altruism. Others further differentiate human altruism into psychological, based on empathy, and ethical, based on a moral code, and behavioral, based on outcomes rather than motivations. All forms of altruistic human behavior will be included in this discussion. Biological altruism will not.

Comte coined the word “altruism” (*altruisme* in French) in 1851 as a secular alternative to the existing, religiously motivated virtue of charity and its manifestations as generosity, benevolence, and munificence and as an antithesis to egoism, which was already present in the lexicon and an observable human behavior (Comte, 1851/1875). Although he introduced the word, he did not formally define it. However, he did use it as a reference for his famous summary of his moral code: *Vivre pour autrui* – Live for others (Comte, 1851/1875, pp. 560-566). Dixon claims that Comte’s initial meaning was “...selfless or other-regarding instincts, emotions, or motives” (p. 4). Dixon also reports (p. 13) that the Englishman E. H. Marshall documented an early French definition in Littré’s *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*, (1863): “*altruisme*: ...*Ensemble des penchants bienveillants*” – Set of benevolent inclinations.

According to Dixon (p. 1), the British philosopher G. H. Lewes was the first to use altruism in an English publication, in 1852, reviewing Comte’s recent tome. He went on to dichotomize altruism as good and egoism as bad in a book-length exposition of Comte’s work (Lewes, 1853, p. 224).

Dixon attributes the philosopher Herbert Spencer as being “by far the most influential theorist of altruism in nineteenth-century Britain” (p. 183). Spencer was a proponent of Darwin’s theory of evolution, wrote about social evolution, and coined the term “survival of the fittest” (Weinstein, 2019). As noted by Dixon, Spencer wrote three books in the 1870s that discussed altruism (p. 195), most importantly *The Data of Ethics* in 1879, where he changed his definition of altruism from a focus on feelings about other people, in his earlier two books, to a focus on actions that benefit other people rather than the actor (Dixon, pp. 4, 199-202). This shift created confusion about whether altruism was a feeling or an action, which fed into persistent differing opinions about the meaning of altruism (pp. 194, 202).

In 1884, the first English dictionary definition of altruism appeared, in the first edition of James A. H. Murray’s *A New English Dictionary* (subsequently named the *Oxford English Dictionary*): “Devotion to the welfare of others, regard for others, as a principle of action,” with illustrative quotations from Lewes, John Stuart Mill, the novelist George Eliot, and the Anglican cleric Frederic Farrar (p. 19-22). Definition slips discarded by the editor indicated a deliberation by him between “professing” or “practicing” altruism and *discarded* quotation slips included quotations from Spencer’s *The Data of Ethics* (p. 25).

Dixon describes a debate about altruism, published in the periodical *The Nineteenth Century*. The debate, between philosophers and theologians, focused on why anyone would be altruistic without the motivation of “divine rewards and punishments” (p. 89). Dixon claims that in the 1870s, altruism was still identified with Comte’s secularism, rejecting the need for God and an afterlife (p. 90) – as if one could be good for the benefit of others or for a divine afterlife, but not both. Consequently, the concept of altruism was discussed by its opponents in the pulpits throughout Britain as much as by its proponents in salons (p. 121).

As the British Empire flourished in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of altruism expanded to a “paternalistic” concern by a growing body of budding socialists, such as Robert Blanchford (p. 241) and Beatrice Potter Webb (one of the founders of the London School of Economics) for a *class* of “others” – the disadvantaged (p. 244) – aligning altruism closer to the original virtue of charity.

In 1894, the sociologist Benjamin Kidd wrote a popular book that critiqued altruism (as described in Comte’s *Philosophie Positive*), arguing that religion was a necessary component of the successful social evolution resulting from cooperative behavior among members of a group across generations (Kidd, 1894, Chapter V, pp. 97-117), which Dixon describes as “religiously inspired counter-rational altruism” (Dixon, p. 310).

The same year, the evangelist Henry Drummond wrote a popular book in which he defined altruism using the now-common descriptors of “unselfishness, sympathy, and self-sacrifice for Others” (Drummond, 1894, pp. 21-22). He then declared that “Religion has done more for the development of Altruism in a few centuries than all the millenniums of geological time” (Drummond, 1894, p. 33).

In 1895, Farrar, then Dean of Canterbury, wrote an essay in which he said, “... lay it down as an unalterable law that God never does for man, what man can and ought to do for himself. ... But when once we rouse ourselves to genuine Altruism, there is no knowing what even the humblest may not accomplish” (Farrar, 1895, p. 420).

As Dixon dryly notes, by 1900 the concept of altruism had changed from an alternative to religious virtue to the quintessence of religious virtue (pp. 371-372), complete with the self-sacrifice at the heart of Christianity.

Writing “*Kein Atruismus!*” – No altruism! (Dixon, p. 343), the nihilist Friedrich Nietzsche tried to kill the concept of altruism (along with almost everything else), but the

altruists could retort, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” What Nietzsche did not foresee was the interest of not only another generation of philosophers, sociologists, and theologians, but also economists, political scientists, and especially a large number of psychologists intent on analyzing not Nietzsche but altruism itself.

### **Contemporary Meanings Among Scholars of Altruism**

To loosely paraphrase Sally Haslanger (2020), the interesting question is not what Comte’s concept of altruism came to mean in Victorian Britain as much as what it could mean in the future. To see how scholars of different disciplines came to perceive altruism is to appreciate the evolution of such changes as Spencer’s shift from feelings to actions, questions about motives, the implied moral superiority of altruism, and the introduction of self-sacrifice.

To comprehend the contemporary controversies in the concept of altruism, I methodologically undertook what is formally called a structured review of the definitions of altruism in academic disciplines, establishing a search strategy and a method of classification. Specifically, I reviewed the precise definitions of altruism in full-length books by scholars of altruism.

To make the search manageable, I chose the following search strategy:

Printed books – published in the English language on the subject of altruism with the word “altruism,” “altruist,” or “altruistic” in the title or subtitle

Included: Books translated into English

Excluded: Books about biological altruism

Self-published books

Biographies

Books in which psychological altruism was not a primary subject of the book, such as books about organ donation or neurobiology

Authors, or coauthors, responsible for the contents of the book – at least one having a terminal academic degree and at least one having held an academic position

Included: Published theses, on the premise that the successful doctoral student was supervised by a qualified academic supervisor in an academic setting

Excluded: Book-length compilations of works by many authors with different viewpoints, such as edited books, encyclopedias, compendiums, and symposium and conference proceedings or transactions

(Excluded post facto was one author with an academic position, because his institution disavowed his work after many of his publications were retracted by their publishers.)

The search for books was done using the most comprehensive database of library holdings, WorldCat (<https://www.worldcat.org>), with listings from tens of thousands of libraries worldwide (Oswald, 2017). The initial search, January 1, 2022, was updated for new additions on June 1, 2023, using the same selection criteria. Books were excluded if they were unavailable commercially and inaccessible in public or university libraries despite being included in the search listings.

In evaluating the definitions of altruism, the unit of analysis was the lead author. If the author had multiple books and the definitions changed over time, resulting in conflict with a prior version of the author's definition, the most recent definition was used. All authors were described by academic discipline and national base.

All definitions were evaluated for positions in concept areas, based on six concept areas identified as needing clarification by Flescher and Worthen (2007, pp. 24-52). Because one of the concepts they identified has multiple interpretations, I decomposed it into three concepts, resulting in eight concept areas total (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Classifications of Concepts Embedded in the Authors' Meanings of Altruism*

Concept:	Classification Values:
Intentional (Motivated)*	Yes or No
Action or Sentiment (Feeling)*	Action or Sentiment or Either
Prioritize Other over Self	Yes or Not necessary
Cost or Risk to Actor	Cost or Risk or "Cost or Risk" or No benefit or Not necessary
Benefit to Recipient*	Yes or Intention or Not necessary
Existing Relationship or Stranger	Existing relationship or Stranger (only) or Either
Supererogatory or Duty	Supererogatory or Duty or Either
Common or Trait	Common or Trait or Both (a common trait) or Either

\*Addresses the components of the concept that Flescher and Worthen (2007) called "intentions versus consequences"

Authors were excluded from further consideration if they did not explicitly or implicitly state what they meant by “altruism” in any of its forms.

The search identified 49 books that met both the book and author criteria. These books were reviewed for the authors’ explicit and/or implicit meanings of “altruism” and/or “altruist” and/or “altruistically” and/or “altruistic,” as in describing acts, actions, activities, behaviors, feelings, motives, motivations, or personalities. Meanings were sought in the text using the indexes, word searches when possible, and reading the entire texts when appropriate. The authors of 14 of the books provided no meaning (7) or only fragments of meanings of the terms, which would not support valid inferences of any concepts (5), or multiple definitions by others, without committing to one (2).

Of the remaining 35 books, two were authored by Garrett Hardin (1977, 1999); three were authored by C. Daniel Batson (1991/2014, 2011, 2019); and Samuel P. Oliner was the lead author of three (1988, 2003, 2008), resulting in 30 meanings of altruism in its various forms by 27 single authors, one lead author with two coauthors, and two other coauthor teams of two authors each (34 authors total). Their works were published between 1939 and 2021.

The authors represented 12 academic disciplines, mostly philosophy (9) and psychology (8), but also political science (4), religion/theology (3), economics (2), sociology (2), anthropology, biology, cultural studies, ecology, education, and medical humanities (1 each). They also represented 6 countries, most commonly the United States of America (23), but also the United Kingdom (6), Germany (2), India, Italy, and Poland (1 each).

A complete listing of the authors’ meaning of altruism, in its various forms, is presented in the Appendix, with direct quotes whenever possible, rather than paraphrasing. The classifications of the eight concepts for each of the listings are also presented, based on explicit statements or implications from the authors’ statements. A summary follows:

Nearly all the authors agreed that altruism should be an intentional action that prioritizes others over self and that altruism can be directed toward anyone rather than be restricted to those without a personal connection (see Table 2).

The authors had differing opinions about whether the actor had to incur a cost or risk or just no benefit or whether any such requirements were not necessary. Likewise, they had differing opinions about whether the recipient had to receive a benefit or whether it was sufficient that the intention of the action was to benefit the recipient, even if it ultimately did not.

**Table 2***Classifications of Concepts Embedded in the Authors' Meanings of Altruism*

Concept:	Classification Values:
1. Intentional (Motivated)*	<b>Yes = 21</b> ; No = 0
2. Action or Sentiment (Feeling)*	<b>Action = 27</b> ; Sentiment = 0; Either = 2
3. Prioritize Other over Self	<b>Yes = 29</b> ; Not necessary = 1
4. Cost or Risk to Actor	Cost = 10; Risk = 1; "Cost or Risk" = 1; No benefit = 3; Not necessary = 9
5. Benefit to Recipient*	Yes = 14; Intention = 12; Not necessary = 1
6. Existing Relationship or Stranger	Existing relationship = 0; Stranger = 0; <b>Either = 24</b>
7. Supererogatory or Duty	Supererogatory = 0; Duty = 1; Either = 2
8. Common or Trait	Common = 1; Trait = 0; Both = 1; Either = 2

Dichotomizing between actors' costs and/or risks versus no benefits or not necessary and between recipients' benefits versus intention, there was a statistically significant relationship between authors proposing cost and/or risks and proposing benefits and a relationship between authors proposing no cost and/or risk and proposing only intentions to benefit (see Table 3).

**Table 3***Comparison of Cost or Risk to Actor vs. Benefit to Recipient*

	Benefit to recipient	Intention of benefit to recipient
Cost and/or risk to actor	<b>10</b>	1
No benefit to actor or not necessary	3	<b>8</b>

( $p < 0.01$  by Chi-squared test)

The numbers of philosophers and psychologists were large enough to try comparisons between these two groups (excluding mixed coauthor teams). There are suggestions of differences of opinions between the two disciplines (see Table 4), but the sample sizes are too small to determine whether the impressions are valid.

Few authors included comments about whether altruism was supererogatory or a duty and few included comments about whether altruism was common (i.e., something everyone was capable of) or a trait (i.e., an attribute possessed by only some individuals).

**Table 4***Comparison of Philosophers' Concepts to Psychologists' Concepts*Philosophers (n=8)

Cost or Risk to Actor	Cost and/or Risk = 4; No benefit or Not necessary = 2
Benefit to Recipient	Yes = 5; Intention = 2

Psychologists (n=6)

Cost or Risk to Actor	Cost and/or Risk = 1; No benefit or Not necessary = 5
Benefit to Recipient	Yes = 2; Intention = 4

Caveats about settling on a meaning of altruism from a structured review of printed books available in English with altruism terms in the titles or subtitles include the sample population of books and authors, the sample size, the classification of concepts, and mistaking popularity for validity.

With specific reference to the constraints on the search strategy for books and authors, the structured review of the definitions of altruism was not intended to be comprehensive or complete, but representative. The undistilled list of books with altruism terms in the titles or subtitles included 35% of all the books with altruism as the subject, albeit perhaps a higher percentage of those meeting the other criteria. There are obvious and unavoidable explicit and implicit biases in examining only publications in English, although one was a translation of a book written in German. Other possible biases include:

- Religious authors more commonly failed to meet the academic qualifications stipulated by the structured review.
- Books by religious authors in India were the ones most commonly inaccessible.
- Economists appeared to prefer publishing working papers, discussion papers, reports, and articles in journals, rather than books.
- Old books were presumably no longer held by libraries. Only two books were published more than 50 years ago: one in 1956 and one in 1939.

On the other hand, both the book-length discussions of altruism by a single author or team of authors and the academic qualifications stipulated by the structured review were intended to bias the review toward more specific and precise definitions of altruism.

While recognizing these qualifications, some conclusions seem warranted:

The losses that potential altruists need to incur, compared to their maximum personal benefits, remain debated, as they were in Victorian Britain.

The realization of benefits to the recipients remains debated.

Spencer's shift from feelings to actions (Dixon, 2008, pp. 4, 199-202), or at least attempts to act, appears accepted.

There seems to be consistency by those studying altruism across academic disciplines that altruism requires intentional action that prioritizes others, known or unknown – not just “benevolent inclinations.”

### **Defending the Concepts of Altruism Currently Found Uniformly Among Scholars of Different Disciplines**

Before discussing contemporary controversies in the concept of altruism, I will briefly address *the concepts of altruism that appear uncontroversial* – that *altruism is an intentional action that prioritizes others, known or unknown* – to show that their acceptance is supported by rational arguments, as well as being explicitly stated or implied in 14 of the 30 meanings of altruism evaluated:<sup>2</sup>

I support the position that altruism must be intentional, evidenced by reasoning that no one would call accidentally leaving a billfold on a park bench altruistic.

I support the position that altruism must involve an action or, at least, evidence of an attempt to act. Without evidence, any claims to benevolent inclinations, altruistic feelings, or altruistic sentiments are unsupported.

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<sup>2</sup> Like most of the authors in the structured review, I will not address the debate about whether altruism is supererogatory versus a duty or common versus a trait of only some. I have addressed these issues elsewhere (not referenced to preserve anonymity). My *conclusion that altruistic actions are supererogatory* was based on the premise that self-sacrifice cannot be required as a duty either by Mill's utilitarianism (Mill, 1879/2009, pp. 89–90) or Kant's humanity formulation of his categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/2011, p. 87). My *conclusion that altruism can be assessed within the context of actions done by anyone* was based on the argument that assessing an action as altruistic is a necessary first step in defining an altruistic trait and is sufficient to identify altruism without identifying the other characteristics of a trait, such as frequency and consistency of acting when opportunities arise. A solitary act of heroism can qualify as an act of altruism and many people demonstrate altruism through community service and charitable donations in times of need. An altruistic trait needs such an altruistic action to express its altruistic nature, but such an altruistic action does not need an altruist trait to express its altruistic nature.

I support the position that altruism prioritizes others, rather than self. The concept of others, rather than self, goes back to the origin of the word “altruism” (Dixon, 2008, p. 4) and has been a consistent component of the definition of the word “altruism.” Prioritizing self over others meets the definition of “egoism” and can therefore not be its intended opposite, “altruism” (Mangone, 2020, p. xii).

I support the position that psychological altruism can benefit people with whom the actor has an existing relationship, such as friends, neighbors, colleagues, associates, and acquaintances, as well as strangers – for reasons that are both practical and hypothesis-based. Certainly, altruistic actions that benefit strangers – others, unknown to the altruist – are regarded more purely altruistic than equivalent actions that benefit people known to the altruist. And benefiting kin is not considered psychological altruism at all but a form of biological altruism known as kin selection (Scott & Seglow, 2007, pp. 46-47).

However, at a practical level, people are in the best position to identify a need and help others they already know. So, direct personal altruism usually entails some knowledge about the intended beneficiary.

And at a hypothetical level, altruism has been shown to be mediated, produced, and motivated by empathy, according to numerous researchers (Hoffman, 1981; Batson, 2011; Oliner, 2003) – what Batson calls the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson, 2011, p. 89). Grant (2009, pp 140-141) and Post (2003, p. 65) invoke the Oliners, Batson, and others in stating that empathy requires seeing things from another person’s perspective. This position was foreshadowed by Popper (1945/2013, p. 444): “... by the use of thought and imagination, we may become ready to help all who need our help,” and echoed by Nagel in *The Possibility of Altruism* (1970/1978, p. 83): “Recognition of the other person’s reality, and the possibility of putting yourself in his place, is essential.”

Therefore, there is evidence that seeing things from another person’s perspective is important for empathy, which is important to motivate altruism. Frequently, seeing things from another person’s perspective requires knowing, or at least imagining you know, the other person.

### **A Proposed Definition of Altruism Addressing Its Controversial Concepts**

I propose a synthetic definition of altruism that should provide solutions to the controversies in the concepts of altruism: possible costs or risks to the person initiating a potential altruistic action and the need for the intended beneficiary to realize a benefit. I propose

a definition of *altruism as an intentional decision, by an individual, to act based on what is best from a social, rather than personal, perspective*. Although I define altruism as a decision, rather than an action, it will be more correct to say that it is a decision to act, thereby capturing both the rationale and the act itself.<sup>3</sup> Defining it as a decision to act, rather than an action, co-opts the elements of the decision-making process, including risks, costs, and benefits to both the individual and the beneficiary or beneficiaries. Adopting a social, rather than a personal, perspective<sup>4</sup> prioritizes others over self and equates both known and unknown others. Table 5 (below) provides a synopsis of the controversies about altruism over time and the proposed resolutions. I will subsequently show that the altruistic decision maker is not surrendering to a utilitarian position, but is embracing a position equally consistent with a deontological position.

### **Altruism as a Decision to Act**

Altruism leads to an intentional act to benefit another rather than oneself. To establish benefit, I maintain the action must be rational, as understood by economists (Smith, 1776), whether made after deliberation, such as donating a kidney to a stranger, or only considered deliberately after a spontaneous, instinctive, or intuitive act, such as rushing into a burning building to rescue a neighbor. Running into a burning building to rescue a neighbor would be foolhardy, not altruistic, if the fire chief told you that your chances of saving a life and surviving were virtually nil. Penner (1995, p. 3) shares my position: “The [altruistic] act must be cognitively deliberate.”

Assessing a rational decision is usually more complex than judging the resulting outcome, because it must factor in the probability of success, and possibly the risk of harm. The decision to act, therefore, is typically a decision under uncertainty, which can be represented by a decision tree and then evaluated by decision analysis (Raiffa, 1968). The components of a rational decision are: (1) the options; (2) the plausible outcomes for each option, if that option is chosen; (3) the probabilities of each outcome occurring, if that option is chosen (with the total probability for all the possible outcomes for each option being 1.0); and (4) the subjective value

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<sup>3</sup> In stipulating a decision to act, I intend to include options to *not act* if those options could be judged most beneficial.

<sup>4</sup> By “social perspective” I mean the perspective of a community, an organized group, a society, not that associated with pleasant leisure activities.

**Table 5***Meanings of the Concept of Altruism*Original Meanings of French Philosopher Comte (1851-1863):*Vivre pour autrui* (Live for others)*Ensemble des penchants bienveillants* (Set of benevolent inclinations)Shifts of the Meanings in Victorian Britain (1852-1895):

Change from feelings to actions

Motivation

Moral position of altruists

Self-sacrifice

Components of Contemporary Meanings (1939-2021):

Intentional/motivated – general agreement for intentional/motivated

Action vs. sentiment or feelings – general agreement for actions

Others vs. self – general agreement for others

Extent of cost or risk – mixed opinions

Benefit (realized) vs. intention – mixed opinions

Social distance from recipient – general agreement for any (beyond kin)

Supererogatory vs. duty

Common vs. trait

Proposed Clarifications:

Action converted into decision to act

Prioritization of others

Cost to self

Benefit to others

Social distance

→ covered by the use of a social perspective

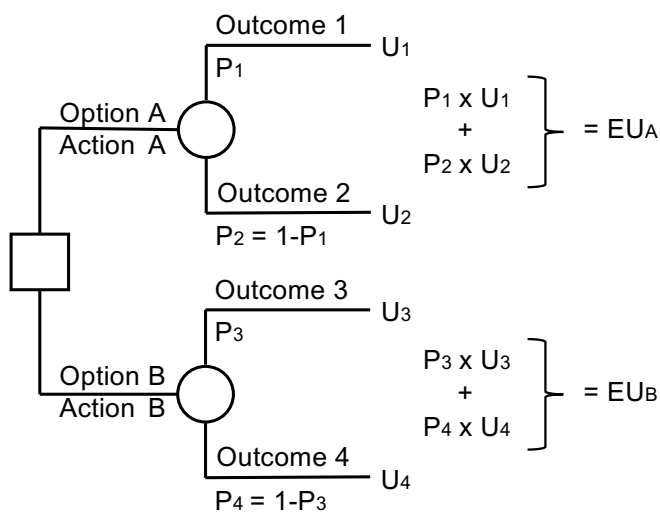
of each outcome, should it occur, typically referred to, technically, as a “utility.”<sup>5</sup> (I will discuss utilities in more detail in the next section.) The normative rational decision is to choose the option with the best expected utility (Briggs, 2019), calculated by multiplying the utility for each possible outcome by the probability of its occurrence, should that option be chosen, and then summing the calculations for all the possible outcomes for that option (see Figure 1, below).

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<sup>5</sup> The contemporary concept of utilities used by decision analysts should not be confused with the original concept of utilities introduced by Bentham (1789) when proposing utilitarianism.

**Figure 1.**

*Generic Decision Tree*

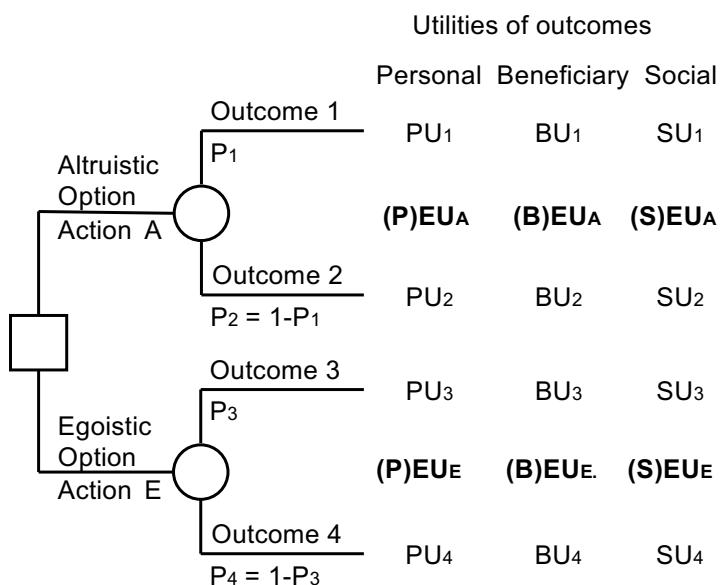


Note. P = Probability; U = Utility; EU = Expected Utility;

Box = choice node (think ballot box); Circle = chance node (think wheel of fortune)

**Figure 2.**

*Decision Tree With Alternative Utility Options*



Note. P = Probability; PU = Personal Utility; BU = Beneficiary Utility; SU = Social Utility;

(P)EU = Personal Expected Utility; (B)EU = Beneficiary Expected Utility;

(S)EU = Social Expected Utility

Maximizing personal utilities – even if by obtaining the personal rewards of benefiting someone else – is egoistic, not altruistic. Therefore, one must conclude that the utilities of others are utilized in making an altruistic decision. Figure 2 (above) shows the possible alternatives to maximizing personal utilities: maximizing the beneficiary’s utilities or maximizing the social utilities.

Decision analysis of a decision to act altruistically (or not) captures the risks and costs and benefits of a decision made under conditions of uncertainty in the outcome. It captures the risks (probabilities) of failure versus success. It captures the costs in terms of decreased expected utility for the actor. It covers the benefits in terms of increased expected utilities for others. In summary, it addresses all the concepts of altruism that have been identified as controversial among scholars in multiple disciplines.

In the next section, I will discuss assessing the subjective values of outcomes as utilities and defend my proposal that an individual’s decision to be altruistic is consistent with using social utilities rather than personal utilities, or even the beneficiary’s utilities, in the decision analysis.

### **Altruism as a Decision Based on a Social Perspective**

#### **Assessing the Subjective Values of Outcomes**

The possible outcomes from a decision are measured subjectively when analyzing the decision. They are measured subjectively because: (a) in many instances they are not already numerically quantified (e.g., the value of a donated kidney) and (b) in many instances, the subjective value is not linearly related to the numerical value (e.g., \$1,000 may not have a thousand times the value of \$1 to someone, or \$1,000,000 a thousand times the value of \$1,000), a phenomenon known as diminishing marginal utility (Kauder, 1965).

These subjective values of the possible outcomes are called “utilities.” “Utilities” were introduced by Jeremy Bentham (1789) to measure the happiness and pain in his utilitarian theory, but modern utility theory is much more sophisticated, and bears little relationship to Bentham’s original concept (Fleurbaey & Hammond, 2004).

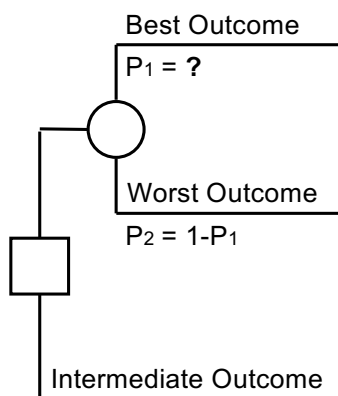
Typically, utility values are relative, with the best of all the outcomes in a decision tree set at 1 and the worst set at 0. An individual decision-maker’s utilities for the outcomes between the best and worst are given values between 1 and 0. Subjective values for one individual may differ from those of another, just as many of their other preferences might.

The numerical values for the subjective utilities can be estimated by a variety of methods (e.g., Stalmeier et al., 2001), including:

- (a) Visual analog scale (on a scale from 0.00 to 1.00);
- (b) Time tradeoff (the minimum amount of time the individual is willing to spend in the best outcome state in order to avoid the intermediate outcome state, usually used to elicit quality of life with medical conditions);
- (c) Willingness to pay (how much would the individual be willing to pay, frequently as a fraction of their income, in order to go from an intermediate outcome state to the best outcome state);
- (d) Standard gamble (at what probability of obtaining the best outcome in a lottery, rather than the worst, would the individual be indifferent between a guarantee of the intermediate outcome and playing the lottery – see Figure 3).

**Figure 3.**

*Standard Gamble for Eliciting Utilities of Intermediate Outcomes*



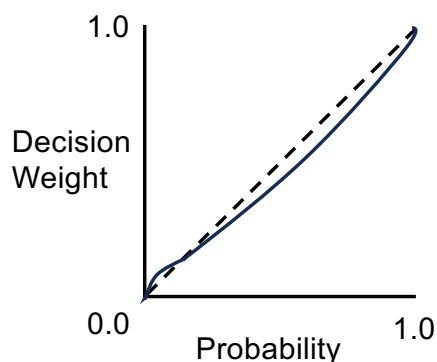
A standard gamble also captures another important factor in indicating subjective preferences under conditions of uncertainty: risk aversion. Risk aversion is a willingness to accept a lower-valued certain outcome to avoid uncertainty in the outcome, depending on the situation. For instance, many people would accept a certain \$9,000 payout rather than take a 50-50 coin-flip chance of \$20,000 or nothing (even if they would accept a risk-seeking 50-50 chance of \$2 or nothing over a \$1 payout). Risk aversion is an extension of the concept of diminishing marginal utility. Subjectively, the first \$1,000, available in the payout, has more marginal utility than the 20<sup>th</sup> \$1,000, available only with the coin flip. The phenomenon of risk aversion was

predicted and explained by Daniel Bernoulli (1738/1954), one of the renowned Bernoulli mathematicians.

Theorems proposed by Ramsey (1926/1931), von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944/2004), and Savage (1954) support expected utility as a normative representation of rational decisions under uncertainty – how people should decide. However, prospect theory, proposed by Kahneman and Tversky (1979), has supplanted it as a descriptive model – how people do decide. Prospect theory replaces probabilities with subjective decision weights (see Figure 4) and utilities with value functions of preferences, framed as losses or gains relative to a reference point (see Figure 5).

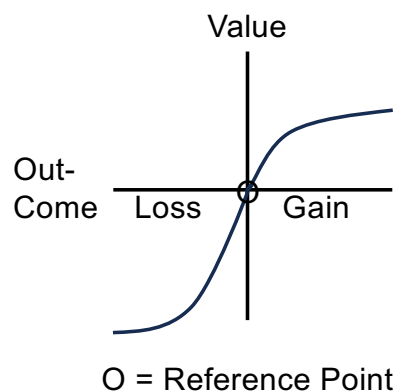
**Figure 4.**

*Representation of Decision Weights Compared to Probabilities According to Prospect Theory*



**Figure 5.**

*Representation of the Values of Losses and Gains According to Prospect Theory*



Whether preferences are assessed normatively as utilities or descriptively as value functions, they can be estimated and then combined with probabilities – or decision weights – to guide choices.

### **Assessing the Subjective Values of Outcomes From the Social Perspective**

I have discussed the basic technical aspects of utility assessments of subjective preferences from the standpoint of assessing an individual's personal subjective preferences, be it the altruistically inclined decision maker or the beneficiary. I will now discuss utility assessment from the social perspective, assessing society's preferences. By "society" I mean the community of all the individuals who might be impacted directly or indirectly by the decision.

By “indirectly,” I include “What if anyone or everyone acted in a way that would increase the opportunity for such an outcome?” By “preference,” I do not assume an unfeasible coalescence around a preference value based on an election, market, prediction market, or any other aggregation of individual preferences. Rather, I assume an informed choice by an independent arbiter knowledgeable about the entire domain, who is charged with representing the perspective of the most generic individuals in the impacted community in an unbiased way. Individuals such as policy makers, public health officials, and judges are given similar responsibilities to make assessments based on what is best for a community, as noted by Harsanyi (1977, p. 48). The independent arbiter role is similar to that of the ideal observer in ethics (Firth, 1952).

The reasons for stipulating an *arbiter*, rather than aggregation, are two-fold:

1. Judgments may be about outcomes that do not affect generic members of the social group directly but only indirectly, such as stopping to help an individual replace a flat tire.
2. Arrow’s Impossibility Theorem stipulates that individual preferences cannot be rationally aggregated: “If consumers’ values can be represented by a wide range of individual ordering, the doctrine of voters’ sovereignty is incompatible with that of collective rationality” (Arrow, 1951/2012, p. 60).

One possible difference between an individual’s subjective preferences for outcome states and communal preferences is exemplified by risk aversion. For example, an individual may prefer to become a free rider in a pandemic, depending on others to provide herd immunity, keeping the individual disease-free without the small risk of side-effects from a vaccine. A public health official will prefer that all individuals incur the small risks of side-effects from a vaccine to maximize the community’s benefit from herd immunity.

The reason for stipulating an *independent* arbiter is that studies have shown that individual decision-maker’s estimates of social preferences are biased by motive, gender, and wealth (Gauriot et al., 2018), all of which may be operative in altruistically inclined decision makers or in intended beneficiaries.

Why stipulate the perspective of the community, rather than the direct beneficiary, when assessing preferences for outcomes from an act intended to benefit a specific beneficiary? A former neighbor once knocked on my door and asked for a bottle of whisky. Giving him our only bottle would not have been appreciated by anyone in our community, because he was a known alcoholic. In 1972, a group of Olympic athletes helped some others over the fence around the

Olympic Village in the wee morning hours, not knowing they were terrorists rather than fellow athletes (Kelly, 2012).

By definition, an altruist cannot use personal preferences when assessing outcomes. If personal preferences for acting altruistically are part of the decision, rather than afterglow, the decision is egoistic.

An outcome might be preferred by the beneficiary of an altruistic act. However, if it is perceived as not being a preferred outcome by others in the community, specifically others who would be affected directly, then the net benefit to all affected might be negative rather than positive, violating the utilitarian principle of “the greatest amount of good for the greatest number” (Driver, 2022). If perceived by others in the community who would only be affected indirectly, it might be considered undesirable, under the premise: “What if everyone chose that action when faced with that choice?” For instance, compare helping someone replace a flat tire versus helping someone cheat on a test. The latter action would violate Kant’s universal-law formulation of his categorical imperative: “act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (Kant, 1785/2011, p. 71). Additionally, the social perspective frames a decision with a generic reference rather than a specific reference, making an act more generalizable as altruism.

To defend the proposal that altruism, as an intentional decision by an individual to act, should be based on what is best from a social rather than personal perspective, I present a series of decisions. For each decision, I considered the potential altruist’s personal cost, represented by the difference between (P)EUA and (P)EUE in Figure 2 above; the targeted beneficiary’s benefit, represented by the difference between (B)EUA and (B)EUE, and the community’s assessment of the social benefits, directly – represented by the difference between (S)EUA and (S)EUE – and indirectly, by extending the social benefits, based on the universal-law formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/2011, p. 71). For simplicity, I estimated probabilities subjectively and estimated scalar values for utilities. The estimates were plausible approximations for illustration; they were not intended to be empirically based on evidence. Therefore, results are expressed qualitatively.

Table 6 (below) presents eight theoretical decisions, covering all permutations of high and low costs/risks to the potential altruist, large and small benefits to the targeted beneficiary,

and large and small benefits as perceived by arbiters representing generic members of the broadest social group that might be impacted directly or indirectly.

Note that where the benefit to the target beneficiary was large and the direct benefit to society was small (Decisions B and F), I judged the indirect social benefit, if it were considered a universal law, to be large. Using my proposed definition of altruism, I judged Decisions C and G to be altruistic because of high social benefit despite little local benefit. In contrast, Decisions D and H had little local or social benefit; considering them altruistic was questionable.

## Table 6

### *Theoretical Decisions Between Altruistic and Egoistic Actions*

- A. Self-sacrifice to blow up a bridge and delay an invading army (see Dada, 2022):  
**High** cost to altruist – **Large** benefit to immediate beneficiaries – **Large** benefit to society
- B. Living organ donation to a stranger (see Marsh, 2017):  
**High** cost to altruist – **Large** benefit to recipient – *Small* direct benefit to society  
 (based on number of donors)  
**Large** indirect benefit to society
- C. Retrieval of an encryption device from the sinking submarine of an aggressor country by sailors of the defending country (see Sebag-Montefiore, 2017):  
**High** cost to altruists – *Small* benefit to captain – **Large** benefit to society
- D. Donation of his only shoes to someone who didn't care (see Jolliffe, 2015 & Harman, 2010):  
**High** cost to troubled altruist George Price – *Small* benefit to recipient – *Negligible* benefit to society
- E. Diplomat issues certificates of protection to Jews during the Holocaust:  
 (see United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.b)  
*Relatively low* cost/risk to diplomat – **Large** benefit to recipients – **Large** benefit to civilization
- F. Anonymous college scholarship to a deserving high-school student with financial needs:  
*Relatively low* cost to donor – **Large** benefit to recipient – *Small* direct benefit to society  
**Large** indirect benefit to society
- G. Young person gets a COVID-19 vaccine to increase herd immunity:  
*Low* cost/risk to altruist – *Modest* benefit to immediate contacts – **Large** benefit to society
- H. Person puts coins in a stranger's expiring parking meter to avoid a possible parking ticket:  
*Low* cost to potential altruist – *Small* benefit to recipient – *Trivial* benefit to society

I have discussed the basic technical aspects of utility assessments of subjective preferences not to marry altruism to the utilities in expected utility theory, or prospect theory, but to show that:

- Subjective preferences can be measured.
- Subjective preferences can be combined with estimated probabilities of outcomes to produce expected costs and/or expected benefits.

I have discussed the assessment of the subjective preferences of others to show that:

- Our assessments of the subjective preferences of other individuals are biased by our own standpoint (Gauriot et al., 2018).
- The subjective preferences of individuals cannot be aggregated rationally (Arrow, 1951/2012).

The result is a conclusion that although altruistically inclined decision makers initiate acts based on *their* assessments of the intended beneficiaries' preferences, it is the social perspectives, rather than those of the altruistically inclined decision makers or the intended beneficiaries, that best arbitrate whether acts are altruistic or not (see Table 7; also see the section on objections and responses, below, for further discussion).

### **Table 7**

#### *Self-Assessment of Subjective Preferences vs. Assessment of Subjective Preferences of Others*

	Assessing: Potential altruist – Beneficiary – Society		
Assessor:			
Potential altruist	Uniquely valid	Biased	Biased
Beneficiary	Biased	Uniquely valid	Biased
Social arbiter	Biased	Biased	Valid if representative, not aggregated

### **The Ethical Framework for Altruistic Decision Making as a Community Benefit**

Because I propose that altruistic actions normatively maximize the expected utilities of outcomes from the perspective of the community, rather than the altruists or beneficiaries, it seems consistent with utilitarianism, “the greatest amount of good for the greatest number” (Driver, 2022). I will now argue that such an altruistic action is also consistent with Kant’s categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/2011).

I have already stated a conclusion (see Footnote 2) that altruism, in the form of self-sacrifice, cannot be required as a duty according to Kant's humanity formulation of his categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/2011, p. 87). But it can be assessed as morally permissible, even desirable (see Table 6), using the universal-law formulation of his categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/2011, p. 71). I have argued that the universal-law formulation allows extrapolation of individual altruistic acts with small benefits to society, beyond those to the direct beneficiaries, into large indirect benefits, using the axiom: "What if everyone chose that action when faced with that choice?" Collard (1978, p. 67) expressed a similar view, from the perspective of the altruist, who might ask "what the consequences of his own action would be if generalized." My position is akin to positing that a true altruist (as judged by an independent arbiter) does what is best from a social perspective, as if it were a universal law, even when knowing that others will not follow that maxim. The idea that an altruist does what is best from a social perspective also implies that altruism is a unilateral commitment to cooperation.

I have argued that the judgments about outcomes from a social perspective should be made by an independent arbiter, rather than by an altruistically inclined decision maker whose judgments are likely biased by various factors (see Gauriot et al., 2018). Nevertheless, it is the altruistically inclined decision maker who decides the action to take. The independent arbiter only judges whether the action is altruistic from a social perspective.

Let's consider the decision from the potential altruist's perspective. They are trying to decide between what they perceive as a selfless option and a selfish option, choose an altruistic action or an egoistic action. Although they may have different assessments of the costs and benefits than the independent arbiter, they will decide based on their assessments – and the arbiter will make an after-the-fact judgment as to whether the potential altruist's decision is altruistic or egoistic (see Table 6).

I propose that if the potential altruist chooses what they consider the altruistic option, they are essentially saying, "I am choosing to assess my utilities to be the same as any other, generic individual in my community. I am positioning myself as no different from anyone else, no better than anyone else." And no worse, for that would violate Kant's humanity formulation of his categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/2011, p. 87), essentially that we should always treat ourselves and others respectfully and equally.

In other words, I propose that the difference between selflessness and selfishness is not the difference between acting based on the best interest of another person versus acting based on your own best interest. It is the difference between acting based on your best interest as one of many members of your community, specifically the largest community affected, rather than acting based on your best interest as an individual. It is *acting as one of many*, affirming the equality of all people and the humanity formulation of Kant's categorical imperative. This view is similar to that of Grant (2009, p. 117): "The Kantian version of altruism is about recognizing the self as an other, rather than treating others as ourselves, ..."

This interpretation of the moral stance of proposing altruism as an intentional decision to act based on what is best from a social perspective addresses some of the questions raised by the interpretations of altruism in Victorian Britain (see Table 5). The question of motive can be answered with the proposal that the potential altruist merely sees themselves as one of many, rather than unique. Likewise, the implication of moral superiority or paternalism in the altruism espoused by social reformers in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain (Dixon, 2008, pp. 241 & 244) is countered by the concept of equality. And the idea that self-sacrifice is necessary is replaced by the idea that any cost to the altruist is the by-product of deciding to act based on a social perspective rather than a personal perspective.

I maintain that acting as one of many – rather than a heroic, self-sacrificing individual – makes a statement that humanity is inherently cooperative rather than competitive. This attitude returns altruism to Comte's original intent – to live for others (Comte, 1851/1875, pp. 560-566) – and the concept of thinking of others, inherent in all moral theories. It is part of Nagel's argument for the possibility of altruism: "By altruism I mean not abject self-sacrifice, but merely a willingness to act in consideration of the interests of other persons ..." and "The impersonal standpoint plays a role in the explication of the idea that one is just a person among others ..." (Nagel, 1970/1978, p. 79 & p. 101).

I affirm that altruism is a prosocial act, distinguished from other prosocial acts by its investment in both establishing a reputation for future prosocial behavior (Roseman, 2008; Post, 2003, p. 81) and trusting others to behave prosocially (Pope, 1994, pp. 86-87 & Salvati, 2008, p. 44), i.e., in the basic decency of people.

## **Objections and Responses**

Presumably, concerns about my definition of altruism – as an intentional decision, by an individual, to act based on what is best from a social, rather than personal, perspective – would focus on the features that differ from other definitions, most notably:

- the use of social preferences, rather than those of the direct beneficiary, and
- the assessment of social preferences by an independent arbiter, rather than the potential altruist; essentially, whose preferences and whose assessments of those preferences.

### **Whose Preferences?**

I have already outlined my reasons for using social preferences, rather than those of the direct beneficiary, in the section above on assessing the subjective values of outcomes from the social perspective (see especially Table 6). But an objection can be raised: What about a situation in which the decision would be considered altruistic if based on the preferences of the direct beneficiary, but not if based on social preferences? In other words, what if the independent arbiter would judge the benefits to society to be negative or to be negligible or small, even indirectly – even if everyone chose that action when faced with that choice?

I will concede to the theoretical possibility, but argue that it would need to: (a) be morally correct and yet (b) not be net positive if extended to the largest group of those affected, even if viewed over a long time, such as a lifetime or century. I have not been able to conjure an example that would meet both criteria. For instance, risking yourself to help another by violating accepted democratic laws is generally not morally correct. If it is, such as an American in the 1850s violating the Fugitive Slave Act (National Constitution Center, n.d.) or a German in the late 1930s violating the Nuremberg Laws (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.a), then it is invariably a net positive when expanded to include all those potentially affected. I remain open to successful examples.

### **Whose Assessment?**

I have proposed that the assessment of the social preferences be done by an independent arbiter. Others propose that the assessment of the social preferences be done by the potential altruist deciding to act, rather than the independent arbiter making a judgment about the act. A review of others who have discussed assessments of social preferences or utilities, or advocated assessments of social preferences or utilities for evaluating altruism, shows various opinions (see Table 8).

**Table 8***Concepts of the Assessment of Utilities from a Social Perspective*

Collard (1978)	Agent assessment, factoring in the utilities of others
Margolis (1982)	Agent perceived assessment of group utility
Nagel (1970/1978)	Agent assessment, as a member of a group rather than as an individual
Roseman (2008)	Agent perceived assessment of another's utility
Salvati (2008)	Agent assessment, as a member of a group rather than as an individual
Scott and Seglow (2007)	Agent assessment from an impersonal perspective
Simon (1992)	Agent assessment, factoring in the satisfactions of others
Stirling (2005)	Agent assessment, factoring in their preference for actions of others
Harsanyi (1977)	Either agent assessment from an impersonal perspective or group assessment, acting as an agent
Loewenstein et al. (1989)	Two-agent assessment, factoring in the interpersonal relationship
Arrow (1951/2012)	Group assessment, acting as an agent
Hardin (1977)	Community assessment, acting as an agent
Iaonnidis (2021)	Assessment by those other than the agent
Levi (1990)	Group assessment, acting as an agent

Most propose the agent make the assessment, in this case the potentially altruistic decision maker. Some propose factoring the preferences of others into the agent's own preferences (e.g., Collard, 1978; Simon, 1992; Stirling, 2005). Some propose trying to estimate the preferences of others or the group, such as by regarding oneself as an impersonal member of a group (e.g., Margolis, 1982; Nagel, 1970/1978; Roseman, 2008; Salvati, 2008; Scott & Seglow, 2007), although Margolis (1982, p. 2) acknowledges that "... the group-utility the individual seeks to maximize is his own perception of group-interest, and by no means necessarily identical to someone else's perception, ..."

Some propose an independent assessment of the group's preferences, similar to my proposal (e.g., Arrow, 1951/2012; Hardin, 1977; Iaonnidis, 2021; Levi, 1990). Loewenstein et al. (1989) propose a multiple-agent assessment, factoring in the interpersonal relationships, and then satisficing, instead of optimizing, to avoid Arrow's Impossibility Theorem regarding aggregation (Arrow, 1951/2012, p. 60).

The conundrum is that no one agent can accurately assess both their own preferences and those of others (see Table 7). Mixing preference assessments is not feasible because, even if there is agreement on the end points (0.0 and 1.0), one person's midpoint (0.5) is not necessarily the same as another's in these subjective assessments of preferences. The potentially altruistic decision maker is the best judge of their personal preferences but potentially has biases about

social preferences and, especially, a paternalistic bias about the beneficiary (Gauriot et al., 2018, fn. p. 2). Following Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) descriptive model of decision making, they will also be subject to the framing effect for losses and gains. They might theoretically be further biased by such factors as having different preferences depending on whether someone or no one is watching. The independent arbiter, who admittedly is only judging whether the chosen preferences are altruistic, is the best normative judge of social preferences, if well-informed and representative of the entire community of those who would be impacted directly or indirectly, but is potentially biased about the decision-maker's personal preferences.

Of the two positions, I argue that the independent arbiter has less potential for bias than the potentially altruistic decision maker. Particularly, the independent arbiter can view potentially altruistic decision makers as assessing their preferences as if they were just one of many members of the community when acting altruistically, as argued in the section above on the ethical framework for altruistic decision making. As such, the arbiter can reasonably approximate the personal preferences of potentially altruistic decision makers based on generic surrogates within the community.

### **Conclusions**

I have proposed defining altruism as *an intentional decision, by an individual, to act based on what is best from a social, rather than personal, perspective*. This definition addresses two areas of debate that have continued for well over a century across multiple academic disciplines: the extent of the cost or risk to the potential altruist and the realization of benefits to the intended recipient. By analyzing altruism as a *decision to act* altruistically versus egoistically, the component elements of risks, possible costs and benefits, and expected costs and benefits are clearly differentiated. Preferences for expected outcomes vary, depending on the perspectives of the potential altruist, the intended beneficiary, and the largest community of those affected either directly or indirectly. None of these three evaluators can accurately represent the preferences of the other two.

To judge whether a chosen action is altruistic or not, I have argued that an independent arbiter, knowledgeable representing all constituents of the community that might benefit directly or indirectly, is a better judge of the altruism of an act than a well-intended individual motivated to prioritize others over self.

However, when my definition is evaluated from a moral standpoint instead of a decision-analytical standpoint, the intention of the altruistically motivated individual can be appreciated as an intent to act based on their best interest as *one of many* members of their community, specifically the largest community affected, rather than to act based on their best interest as an individual or the best interest of another person. It is a perspective that affirms the equality of all people. It is a perspective that makes a unilateral commitment to cooperation, rather than competition. It is a perspective that should be accessible to almost everyone.

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## **Appendix**

Table A1

## Definitions of Altruism: Narratives

Table A1.1a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
1 Scott & Seglow (2007)	Philosophy & Political Science	<p>“Altruism, in its broadest sense, means promoting the interests of the other.” (p. 1)</p> <p>“Altruism is a general phenomenon that involves taking interest of the other as one’s own;” (p. 2)</p>
2 Flescher & Worthen (2007)	Religion/Theology & Psychology	<p>“Altruism occurs when one acts for the sake of another or others and their well-being and welfare become the ultimate object of one’s concern. Altruism will usually, but not always, entail a cost borne by the actor and a benefit to the recipient(s). It will also often be an activity in which the actor deliberately intends to bring about the good of his beneficiary, although it can sometimes occur at an instinctive or pre-reflexive level. The object of other-regard in altruistic activity can be the stranger or it can be a personal relation. Altruism is one’s moral duty or it is supererogatory, depending on the context and on who is performing the altruistic deed. Finally, altruism is an activity that is fundamental to the human experience, an activity in which the vast majority of us can and should participate, and, as such, more resembles a learnable skill than a God-given talent, even though there are a few extra ordinary persons for whom the aptitude for altruism comes much easier than for the rest of us.” (p. 53)</p>
3 Boehm (2012)	Anthropology	<p>“... sometimes it [altruism] means being generous to people lacking any blood ties to the generous party. I will be relying on the latter [this] meaning, using ‘altruism’ and ‘extrafamilial generosity’ as exact synonyms, ... The altruistic type of beneficence may refer either to acts of costly generosity towards specific unrelated individuals or to sacrifices of personal interest as the individual contributes to enterprises that benefit the community as a whole.” (p. 9)</p> <p>“Given my definitions, there is a semantic problem with calling ... balanced reciprocation ‘altruism,’ in that neither party is paying any special costs;” (p. 61)</p>
4 Wilson (2015)	Biology	<p>(Uses definition of William Scott Green) “Intentional action ultimately for the welfare of others that entails at least the possibility of either no benefit or a loss to the actor.” (p. 4)</p> <p>(Uses definition of William Scott Green) “Intentional action <i>intended</i> ultimately for the welfare of others that entails at least the possibility of either no benefit or a loss to the actor.” (p. 82, my italics)</p>
5 Klein (2014)	Cultural Studies	<p>“We call [people] altruists when we believe they only want the best for others and nothing at all for themselves.” (p. 7)</p> <p>“An altruist ... accepts costs in order to create benefits for others – by giving something away, for example, without expecting anything in return.” (p. 9)</p> <p>“To be sure, an act of altruism does not necessarily require a cost. It suffices to take a risk for another person.” (p. 9)</p> <p>“Nor does altruism demand that we sacrifice ourselves for a needy person. Even if we forgo some small advantage as a favor to others, we are acting altruistically, according to the scientific definition.” (p. 9)</p> <p>“The beneficiary does not need to be a specific person, either. We often act altruistically for the group or even some abstract principle – fairness for example. And even if beneficiaries [?] are members of the group they help and thus share in the benefit themselves ... they are acting selflessly to the extent their costs ... outweigh their own share of the benefit.” (pp. 9-10)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.1b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
1		Action, implied by "promoting"	Yes					
2	Yes	Action	Yes	Not necessary	Not necessary	Either	Either	Common
3		Action	Yes	Cost	Yes	Either (outside of family)		
4	Yes	Action	Yes	No benefit	Yes, at least in its intention			
5		Action	Yes	Cost or Risk	Yes	Either		

**Table A1***Definitions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.2a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
6 Hardin (1977)	Ecology (1st of 2)	<p>“pure altruism, the pure desire to help others.” (p. 1)</p> <p>“Pure altruism, by definition, does not benefit the actor;” (p. 5)</p> <p>Table 4: altruism – the unit of marginal utility is a gain to the community with no direct gain to the decision maker (p. 31)</p>
6 Hardin (1999)	Ecology (2nd of 2)	<p>“Pure altruism, by definition, does not benefit the actor;” (p. 12, duplicates p. 5 above)</p> <p>Table 4: altruism – the unit of marginal utility is a gain to the community with no direct gain to the decision maker (p. 40, duplicates p. 31 above)</p>
7 Collard (1978)	Economics	<p>Outcome preference bundles, measured as economic commodities or utilities, are positively associated with other people's bundles. [Paraphrased based on pp. 7-8]</p> <p>“If his preferences are associated only with his own bundle he is said to be selfish. If they are positively associated with other people’s bundles he is said to be in some degree altruistic.” (p. 7)</p> <p>Bundles are "commodity-related" or "utility-related" (p. 7)</p> <p>“people are altruistic when one or other of the above conditions [commodities or utilities] hold.” (p. 8)</p>
8 Field (2001)	Economics	<p>“defining altruistic action as behavior that benefits another conspecific at the expense of the actor” (p. 135)</p>
9 Post (2003)	Medical Humanities	<p>The author gives two pre-existing definitions of altruism. One is generic: “The social sciences define altruism as a form of helping behavior that provides no anticipated material benefits to the agent and may incur some loss.” (p. 59) The other is Batson’s: “C. Daniel Batson, the premiere contemporary social scientist concerned with altruism, defines the term as follows: ‘Altruism is a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare.’” (p. 63)</p> <p>However, the author then proceeds to modify those definitions, based on his personal perspective of the subject. The author adds the following commentary to the generic definition, “Therefore, ‘many social psychologists maintain simply that altruistic behavior need exclude only the receipt of material benefits by the actor.’ I almost agree with this position. I would prefer to assert that if an altruist ... has some sense of meaning and fulfillment as a result of ... helping behaviors, it seems counterintuitive to categorize him or her with the hedonic egoist of the world so long as he or she was not motivated by the sense of well-being that is retrospectively experienced. ... Reputational gains may or may not attach themselves to the altruist, who may be confronting social injustice or in other ways violating society’s prejudices against marginalized populations; the true altruist does not seek reputation, although this will usually accumulate and can be accepted as unavoidable. An altruist acts for the sake of others; the non-altruist acts for the sake of self, or for self and others in some combination. Altruism can be combined with risk for the agent but risk is not required. ... Altruism always requires a setting aside of the self as the center of the universe and a fundamental orientation toward others. Although altruism does sometimes demand significant risk, the agent barely needs merely to be open to it when it arrives.” (pp. 59-60)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.2b

Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
6	Yes	Yes, implied by helping others w/o benefit to self	No benefit	Yes, at least in its intention	Either, implied by "community"		
6							
7	Yes, implied by preferences	Action, implied by outcomes	Yes	Yes, at least expected utility or outcome (intention)			
8		Action	Yes	Cost, implied by "expense"	Yes	Either, implied by "consppecific"	
9	Yes, implied by "setting aside of the self" and "orientation toward others"	Action, based on "behavior"	Yes, based on "setting aside self" & "orientation toward others"	No benefit; Risk not necessary	Yes, implied by "for the sake of others"		

**Table A1***Defintions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.3a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
10 Arnold (2008)	Philosophy	<p>Post also adds commentary to Batson’s definition: “Batson adds that altruism does not necessarily involve self-sacrifice although it seems to me that it is inherently self-sacrificial to some degree, and that this should be acknowledged.” (p. 63)</p> <p>Therefore, I considered Post’s commentaries on pre-existing definitions of altruism to represent his own modification of the definition of altruism:</p> <p>Altruism [is] a form of helping behavior that provides no anticipated material benefits to the agent and may incur some loss. Some sense of meaning and fulfillment as a result of helping behavior is acceptable so long as the agent was not motivated by the sense of well-being experienced retrospectively. Reputational gains can be accepted as unavoidable if the agent did not seek them. Risk is not required, although the agent needs to be open to it. Altruism is inherently self-sacrificial to some degree.</p> <p>“A trait or a type of behavior of an individual is called altruistic if it benefits another individual at a cost for the individual itself without immediate or equal return. Some behavior is thus altruistic,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. if it is beneficial for another individual</li> <li>2. and if it is costly for oneself</li> <li>3. and if an equal return is not guaranteed</li> <li>4. and if the altruist chooses ... whether the transfer of benefits takes place” (pp. 21-22)</li> </ol>
11 Blum (1980/ 2010)	Philosophy	<p>“By 'altruism' I wiil mean a regard for the good of another person for his own sake, or conduct motivated by such a regard,” (p. 9-10)</p> <p>An altruistic act “involves and is motivated by a genuine regard for another’s welfare” (p. 10)</p> <p>Does not carrying the connotation of self-sacrifice or self-neglect.</p> <p>Does not require the agent to neglect his own interests and desires.</p> <p>Does not rule out the view that all emotions, including altruistic emotions, “are in some way fundamentally self-regarding, that acting from them is, ultimately, acting egoistically.” (p. 10)</p> <p>“... it is a necessary feature of the altruistic emotions that they involve a willingness to sacrifice some of our own interests, comfot, or convenience, for the sake of another’s good.” (p. 83)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.3b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
10	Yes, for sociological altruism, based on "chooses"	Action, based on "behavior"	Yes, based on "benefits another" and "cost for the individual"	Cost	Yes			Either
11	Yes, implied by "regard"	Either, implied by "regard" or "conduct"	Yes		Contra-dictory statements			

**Table A1***Defintions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.4a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
12 Ioannidis (2021)	Philosophy	<p>“With the word ‘altruism’ we usually mean an act or action, a behavior or patterns of behavior, or, generally, a way of living consisting in achieving the well-being of others. ... Let us start with the traditional definition of altruism. As the Oxford Dictionary <i>suggests</i> [italics added for emphasis], altruism is 'disinterested or selfless concern for the well-being of others, esp. as a principle of action.' [Gives reference] To achieve the well-being of others in altruism in such a disinterested or selfless way is to act for the sake of others unconditionally and without reserve. Doing something good for the other without wanting anything in return. Not wanting anything in return means not expecting anything in exchange for the good act. Properly speaking, it is a non-reciprocal acting at the expense of the one who engages in the altruistic act. This expenditure for the sake of others may sometimes lead to one’s death. In such cases, we say that such an act has as its denouement an unconditioned and unconditional giving in the form of sacrificing one’s life for the well-being of others. We tend to consider such acts as the epitome of altruism. The limit of altruism, the ultimate horizon of altruism, becomes the sacrifice of life. With respect to ‘well-being,’ the limit is an unconditioned and unconditional givenness represented as a sacrifice for the others.</p> <p>"The ‘others,’ the recipient of the well-being to whom the altruistic act aims and ends, could be a single person, a group of people or the totality of the world ...” (Preface p. IX)</p>
13 Kanal (1956)	Philosophy	<p>“A STUDENT. – Will you kindly place before us in fewest possible words a clear definition of altruism?” (p. 527)</p> <p>...</p> <p>"TEACHER. – The conduct of that person shows the presence of an altruistic feeling in him who is <b><i>affected by the pains, sorrows, sufferings</i></b> and <b><i>needs of others</i></b> and who <b><i>feels a spontaneous urge</i></b> to remove them, <b><i>takes a practical step</i></b> in that direction, <b><i>undergoes voluntary sacrifices</i></b> and <b><i>surrenders for it</i></b> and <b><i>expect no return in the form of happiness here and hereafter.</i></b>” (p. 527) [His italics, my bold]</p>
14 MacAskill (2015)	Philosophy	<p>"As I use the term, <i>altruism</i> simply means improving the lives of others. Many people believe that altruism should necessarily denote sacrifices, but if you can do good while maintaining a comfortable life for yourself, that's a bonus, and I'm very happy to call that altruism." (Introduction, p. 18, accessed via ebook version, author's italics)</p>
15 Nagel (1970/ 1978)	Philosophy	<p>"... by altruism I do not mean only the variety of noble self-sacrifice often associated with that epithet. I mean any behavior motivated merely by the belief that someone else will benefit or avoid harm by it." (p. 16, fn 1)</p> <p>“By altruism I mean not abject self-sacrifice, but merely a willingness to act in consideration of the interests of other persons, without the need of ulterior motives.” (p. 79)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.4b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
12		Action	Yes, based on "achieving the well-being of others" and selflessly "act for the sake of others"	Cost, implied by "at the expense of the one who engages in the altruistic act"	Yes, implied by "achieving the well-being of others"	Either, implied by "a single person"		Either, based on "action," "patterns of behavior," "way of living"
13	Yes, based on "feels a spontaneous urge"	Action, based on "takes a practical step"	Yes, implied relief to others with no expectations of return	Cost, based on "sacrifices"	Yes, implied	Either, implied by "others"		
14		Action, implied by "improving"	Not necessary, based on do good while maintaining a comfortable life"	Not necessary	Yes, based on "improving"	Either, implied by "others"		
15	Yes, based on "motivated"	Action, based on "behavior"	Yes, based on benefit to others w/o ulterior motives	Not necessary	Yes, at least a belief benefit will be the result (intention)	Either, implied by "other persons"		

**Table A1***Definitions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.5a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
16 Penner (1995)	Philosophy	<p>"I must first provide a definition of altruism. The overarching characteristic of altruism is a physical act (or action or activity). The act must be cognitively deliberate and carried out primarily for the benefit of a person or persons other than the actor." (p. 3)</p> <p>"The notion of a physical act must be taken broadly to include negative as well as positive acts. A negative act is one in which a deliberate decision is made to refrain from some physical act because refraining itself is beneficial to another person.</p> <p>"I introduce negative altruistic acts as the counterpart of positive altruistic acts to avoid a claim that a mental act is sufficient for altruism to be present. The common notion of altruism is that the feeling of sympathy alone, without any accompanying action that attempts to alleviate the problem, is not altruistic. My definition of altruism does not require that an act actually benefit the recipient in order to be altruistic. An act that is initiated or attempted primarily for the benefit of another is sufficient to identify it as altruistic by my definition. If it succeeds, so much the better." (p. 4)</p>
17 Roseman (2008)	Philosophy	<p>"An act is altruistic if it benefits others at a cost to the agent <i>and</i> the agent intended the act to benefit others." (p. 13, author's italics)</p> <p>"psychological ... altruistic actions will be defined as follows" an action that intends to advance the interests of others at the expense of the agent's interest" (pp. 24-25)</p> <p>"psychological altruism as the <i>disposition to perform psychologically altruistic acts</i>," (p. 132, author's italics)</p> <p>"Then [the act] is psychologically altruistic for [the agent] at [the time] just in case the following five propositions hold:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Normal conditions obtain</li> <li>2. [The agent] desire is to promote [the recipient's] interests, and [the agent] believes if it [acts], it will promote [the recipient's] interest and [the agent] [acts] because of this belief and desire.</li> <li>3. [The agent] believes that if it [acts], it will incur an expected cost.... .</li> <li>4. [The cost is greater than the threshold, which is greater than 0.]</li> <li>5. [The agent] [acts]." </li></ol>
18 Margolis (1982)	Political Science	<p>"What we mean by altruism in the technical sense used here is that the individual's allocation of resources is influenced not only by the bundle of good he obtains for himself but also by the effect of his choice on others or on his society, qualified only by the condition that the actor (not necessarily the recipients) regards this behavior as benign. An altruistic act need not have negative or zero value to the actor. What defines altruistic behavior is it is that the actor could have done better for himself had he chosen to ignore the effect of his choice on others." (p. 15)</p>
19 Monroe (1996)	Political Science	<p>"... altruism: action designed to benefit another, even at the risk of significant harm to the actor's own well-being." (p. 4)</p> <p>"... behavior intended to benefit another, even when this risks possible sacrifice to their welfare of the actor." (p. 6)</p>
20 Ozinga (1999)	Political Science	<p>"Altruism in its dictionary meaning simply refers to unselfishness. The positive way of expressing this is unselfish concern for the welfare of others. I have refined this just a bit, so the way the word is used here is as follows: Altruism is behavior benefiting someone else at some cost to oneself, while selfishness is behavior that benefits oneself at some cost to others. If there is no cost there is no altruism, no selfishness. ...</p> <p>" ... Altruism is simply doing for others at some cost to oneself, and selfishness is doing for oneself at some cost to others." (Introduction, pp. xv-xvi)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.5b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
16	Yes	Action	Yes		Yes, at least in its intention	Either, implied by "persons other than the actor"		
17	Yes	Action	Yes, implied by "cost to agent" and "benefit others"	Cost	Yes	Either, implied by "others"		
18	Yes, implied by "choice"	Action, implied by "behavior"	Yes, implied by "effect of his choice on others" and "could have done better for himself"	Cost, based on "could have done better"		Either, implied by "others" or "society"		
19	Yes	Action	Yes, implied by "benefit another" at risk to actor	Risk	Yes, at least in its intention	Either, implied by "another"		
20	Yes, implied by "concern for the welfare of others"	Action, based on "behavior"	Yes, implied by "benefiting someone else" and "cost to oneself"	Cost	Yes	Either, implied by "someone else"		

**Table A1***Defintions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.6a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
21 Barber (2004)	Psychology	<p>"Altruism is defined as actions that help another individual at some cost to the altruist." (p. 9)</p> <p>"it is possible for humans and other species to engage in altruistic actions that have no ulterior motive, except whatever pleasure comes from the action itself, and no delayed benefit of any kind." (pp. 9-10)</p>
22 Batson (1991/ 2014)	Psychology (1st of 3)	<p>p. 6 "Altruism is a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare." (p. 6)</p> <p>"altruistic motivation does not necessarily involve self-sacrifice. To pursue the ultimate goal of increasing the others welfare may involve cost to the self, but it also may not. Indeed, it can even involve self-benefit and the motive still be altruistic, as long as obtaining this self-benefit is not the ultimate goal." (pp. 6-7)</p>
22 Batson (2011)	Psychology (2nd of 3)	<p>"altruism – a desire to benefit someone else for his or her sake rather than one's own " (p. 3)</p> <p>"More formally, by <i>altruism</i> I mean a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare ." (definition, same as Batson, 1999, discussed in detail pp. 20-29, author's italics)</p> <p>"Both altruistic and egoistic motives may elicit a variety of behaviors, or no behavior at all. Motives are goal-directed forces. Whether a force leads to action will depend on the behavioral options available in the situation.," (p. 23)</p> <p>"altruistic motivation need not involve self-sacrifice. Pursuing the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare may involve cost to self, but it also may not. Indeed, it may even involve self-benefit and the motivation still be altruistic as long as obtaining this self-benefit is an unintended consequence of benefiting the other, not the ultimate goal." (p. 23)</p> <p>"Altruism refers to a particular form of motivation, motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare." (p. 87)</p> <p>"... <i>altruism</i> is a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare." (p. 145, author's italics)</p> <p>"... altruism refers to a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare." (p. 195)</p> <p>"<i>Altruism</i>. Motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare." (p. 210, author's italics)</p> <p>"Altruism is motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of one or more individuals other than oneself." (p. 215)</p> <p>p. 228 "... altruism refers to a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare;" (p. 228)</p>
22 Batson (2019)	Psychology (3rd of 3)	<p>Altruism as" a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare" (definition, same as Batson, 1999, discussed in detail pp. 22-24)</p> <p>"an altruistic motive need not involve self-sacrifice. To pursue the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare often involves a cost to self, but not always. It may even involve self-benefit (anticipated or unanticipated) and the motivation still be altruistic as long as the self-benefit is an unintended consequence of benefiting the other ..." (p. 24)</p>
23 Campbell (1998)	Psychology	<p>"An altruistic acts is defined as an act that benefits someone else when there is no expectation of reward to the actor." (p. 1)</p> <p>"Altruistic: acts which benefit someone else, undertaken with no expectation of reward to the actor." (Glossary, p. 56)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.6b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
21		Action	Yes, implied by "help another" and "cost to the altruist"	Cost	Yes, implied by "help"	Either, implied by "another"		
22	<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>	<i>[See Batson 2011 for detailed discussion]</i>		<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>	<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>	<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>		
22	<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>	Either, based on "no options are not available	Yes, based on self benefit as an unintended consequence of ultimate goal of benefiting another	<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>	<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>	<i>[Same as Batson 2019 below]</i>		
22	Yes, based on "motivational state"	<i>[See Batson 2011 for detailed discussion]</i>		Not necessary	Yes, at least its goal or intention	Either, implied by "another"		
23		Action	Yes, implied by "benefits someone else" and "no expectation of reward"	Not necessary, based on "no expectation of reward"	Yes	Either, implied by "someone else"		

**Table A1***Defintions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.7a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
24 Eisenberg (1986/ 2015)	Psychology	<p>“Altruistic behavior is often defined as voluntary behavior that is intended to benefit another and is not motivated by the expectation of external reward.” (p. 1)</p> <p>“Altruism ... will include behaviors motivated by sympathy, guilt, and other self-evaluative reactions associated with internalized values.” (p. 2)</p> <p>“... a behavior is altruistic if motivated by: (1) sympathy; (2) self-evaluative emotions (or anticipation of those emotions) associated with specific internalized moral values and norms or one’s responsibility to act in accordance with those values or norms with these values or norms; (3) cognitions concerning the values, norms, responsibilities, and duties unaccompanied by discernible self-evaluative emotions; or (4) cognitions and accompanying affect (e.g. feelings of discomfort due to inconsistencies in one’s self-image) related to self-evaluation vis a vis one’s moral self-image [Gives reference]. One could argue that some of these motivations (especially 2 and 4) are not altruistic because they involve regulation of one’s own negative affect; however, such motives are consistent with most definitions of altruism because there is no expectation of external reward for any of these motivations, and any negative affect is internally generated.” (p. 210)</p>
25 Marsh (2017)	Psychology	<p>“The generally accepted definition of altruism is ‘a voluntary behavior, aimed at benefiting the welfare of another person.’” (p. 105)</p> <p>“a voluntary behavior aimed at benefiting someone other than the self” (p. 107)</p> <p>Extraordinary altruism: beyond ordinary altruism in three ways: unrelated or unknown recipient, significant risk or cost, non-normative, i.e., not taught or expected to do (pp. 107-108)</p>
26 Staub (2015)	Psychology	<p>“unselfish helping motivated by the desire to benefit others” (p. 26)</p> <p>“The concept of altruism points to action motivated by caring and the unselfish desire to benefit others [references Batson]. Altruistic action can result in good feelings for the actor, but this is a byproduct, not the primary motivation for action.” (p. 133)</p>
27 Miron (1939)	Religion/ Theology	<p>“Many names have been ascribed to the act whereby one human being sacrifices his own interests for the good of another. But of all of them, altruism seems to be the most convenient for our discussion, and reasonably so.” (p. 20)</p> <p>"Beginning with the 18th century, there developed a wide-spread separation of philosophy and religion. As a consequence, philosophers once more began to investigate the natural basis of altruism. Society or humanity considered collectively became the sole rule of action superior to the individual - the reason for man's duty to man." (pp. 74-75)</p> <p>“Duty ... is a moral necessity of performing or omitting an action in favor of someone else. ... It entails the necessity of performing or omitting an action ... . The action is to be performed or omitted in favor of another." (pp. 84-85)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.7b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
24	Yes, implied by "voluntary"	Action, based on "behavior"	Yes, implied by "benefit another" and no expectation of reward	Not necessary	Yes, at least in its intention	Either, implied by "another"	Either, implied by motivations that include "duty"	
25	Yes, implied by "voluntary"	Action, based on "behavior"	Yes, implied by "benefiting someone other than the self"	Not necessary	Yes, at least in its intention	Either, implied by "another"		
26	Yes, based on "motivated"	Action	Yes, implied by "unselfish ... desire to benefit others"	Not necessary, implied by "can result in good feelings"	Yes, at least in its intention	Either, implied by "others"		
27		Action	Yes, based on sacrificing own interests for the good of another	Cost, implied by "sacrifices"	Yes, based on "the good of another"	Either, implied by "another"	Duty	

**Table A1***Definitions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.8a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
28 Pope (1994)	Religion/ Theology	<p>The author gives an “ordinary” definition of altruism, referencing a couple of sources, followed by a philosophical definition, referencing two “examples.” And then elaborates with what appears to be his own definition. He later adds a consistent (“always”) feature. Much later, in a chapter note, he also defines “moral altruism (as it is usually understood in ordinary discourse).”</p> <p>"Altruism ... is ordinarily used to refer to any behavior performed to benefit another person without the intention of receiving more rewards from external sources. [referenced] Altruism is typically defined by philosophers as action intended to benefit another person or persons, [a different reference] but it needs not entail valuing others' welfare more than one's own or valuing it so much that one is prepared to make heroic sacrifices for others. It is, more modestly, to value the welfare of others for their own sakes and to be willing to undergo some form of self-denial on this basis." (p. 5)</p> <p>"It [altruism] always involves a significant degree of other-regarding motives and intentions." (p. 5)</p> <p>"The distinction between moral altruism (as it is usually understood in ordinary discourse) and 'genetic altruism' is important to maintain in spite of its awkwardness. In ordinary language 'altruism' is action motivated by concern for another person for his or her own good, whereas 'egoism' is the doctrine that human actions are primarily motivated by self-interest." (p. 124, chapter note 47)</p>
29 Oliner & Oliner (1988)	Sociology & Education (1st of 3)	<p>"We characterize a behavior as altruistic when (1) it is directed toward helping another, (2) it involves a high risk or sacrifice to the actor, (3) it is accompanied by no external reward, and (4) it is voluntary." (p. 6)</p> <p>altruistic personality: "a relatively enduring predisposition to act selflessly on behalf of others" (p. 3)</p> <p>Authors quote Webster's Third New International Dictionary – altruism: "un Calculated consideration of, regard for, or devotion to other's interests..." Authors then add: "This suggests that the act needs to be performed entirely for its own sake apart from any considerations of self-satisfaction, pleasure, or utility." (pp. 4-5)</p> <p>"Most definitions center on selflessness and motivation as critical elements of altruism. However, the degree of selflessness necessary and the type of motivation required vary considerably." (p. 5)</p>
29 Oliner (2003)	Sociology (2nd of 3)	<p>"Behavior is heroically altruistic when (1) it is directed toward helping another; (2) it involves a high degree of risk or sacrifice to the actor; (3) it is accompanied by no external reward; and (4) it is voluntary. [Similar to 1988 definition of altruism above] It is conventionally altruistic when it does not involve a high degree of risk or sacrifice to the actor." (p. 21)</p>

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.8b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super-erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
28	Yes, based on "other-regarding ... Intentions"	Action	Yes, implied by "value the welfare of others for their own sakes" and "be willing to undergo some form of self-denial"	Ambiguous	Yes, implied by citing 2 ordinary definitions without refutation	Either, implied by "others" and "another person"		
29	<i>[Same as Oliner below]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner below]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner below]</i>	<i>[Cost or risk, with cost implied by "sacrifice." Superseded by revised Oliner definition below ]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner below]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner below]</i>		Both, implied by "altruistic personality"
29	Yes, implied by "voluntary"	Action, based on "behavior"	Yes, based on helping others with no reward	Revised to: Not necessary, at least to "high degree" for non-heroic altruism	Yes, at least its intention implied by "behavior ...directed toward helping another"	Either, implied by "another"		

**Table A1***Defintions of Altruism: Narratives*

Table A1.9a

Author(s) (Publ. Yr.)	Discipline	Definitions (with page number for quotes)
29 Oliner & Zylicz (2008)	Sociology & Psychology (3rd of 3)	"By altruism, we mean helping another person or group of people who are in need of help and welcome it, where help is voluntary and the helper expects no external reward." (p. 8) "Altruism is putting the needs of others first. An altruistic act is one that helps those in need when the actor is not seeking any gain. It is possible to distinguish two types of altruism: heroic altruism, which is voluntary and involves high risk to the helper; and conventional altruism, which also is voluntary ... but does not involve high risk to the helper. Heroic altruism risks the helpers life or well-being by performing the act. ... Conventional altruism involves little or no risk to one's life." (pp. 11-12)
30 Salvati (2008)	Sociology	"altruism ... a free and voluntary action, aimed at the welfare of another person" (p. 41) [altruism] "being the type of action carried out in order to benefit another person" (p. 44) "By definition, though, altruism is doing good to others, and not to oneself" (p. 45)

**Table A1 (cont.)**

*Defintions of Altruism: Classifications*

Table A1.9b

	Intentional (Motivated)	Action or Sentiment	Prioritize Other Over Self	Cost or Risk to Actor	Benefit to Recipient	Existing Relationship or Stranger	Super- erogatory or Duty	Common or Trait
29	<i>[Same as Oliner above]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner above, but implied by "helping"]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner above]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner above, at least "does not involve high risk" for conventional altruism]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner above, but implied by "helps those in need"]</i>	<i>[Same as Oliner above]</i>		
30	Yes, implied by "voluntary"	Action	Yes, implied by "good to others and not to oneself"		Yes, at least in its intention	Either, implied by "another person"		