

Characterizing altruism

Different aspects of behaviors are sometimes thought to be relevant to whether an action is altruistic or not. These include at least motives and outcomes and include all kinds of variations on these.

Which of these combinations would you call altruistic? Which are selfish? – If you can't tell, what other pieces of information would you need to make a determination?

1) You do something which is the best possible outcome for you and also helps somebody else. You were motivated by both a desire for your own welfare and for that of others.

2) You do something which is the best possible outcome for you and also helps somebody else. You were motivated only by a desire for your own welfare.

3) You do something which is the best possible outcome for you and also helps somebody else. You were motivated only by a desire for the welfare of others.

1*) You do something which is not the best possible outcome for you, but it does help somebody else. You were motivated by both a desire for your own welfare and for that of others.

2*) You do something which is not the best possible outcome for you, but it does help somebody else. You were motivated only by a desire for your own welfare. (So why you did it is a bit of a mystery....)

3*) You do something which is not the best possible outcome for you, but it does help somebody else. You were motivated only by a desire for the welfare of others.

Do you think any of these descriptions don't apply to any real cases?

Can you tell just from the descriptions above if any of these actions are morally praiseworthy or blameworthy?