

Unit 11

Unit 11 Extension

1 Read the essay and answer the questions.

1 What is the writer's main argument?

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2 What evidence does the writer give to support this argument?

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3 How does the writer conclude his/her argument?

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4 Do you agree with the writer's argument? Why? / Why not?

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Is there a degree of altruism in everyone?

Altruism can be simply defined as 'unselfishness' or as a 'selfless concern for the well-being of others'. The extent to which anyone ever does anything for purely altruistic reasons has become fascinating to psychologists and, more recently, economists.

Many free-market economists argue that people will always act in their own self-interest, however altruistic their motives may appear. Others think that there is a degree of altruism within us all, and that it may be connected to a basic and ancient need to co-exist and survive. My belief is that the level of altruism people display is dependent on their circumstances and situation.

In recent psychological studies, games like 'Ultimatum' have tried to demonstrate altruism in the laboratory. Two anonymous participants, who never meet, are asked to divide a sum of money (say \$20) between them. Participant A can offer any amount to participant B, who then decides to accept or reject the offer. If the offer is accepted, the money is divided, but if B rejects the offer, both participants leave empty-handed. Economically speaking, since \$1 is better than nothing, participant A should offer participant B \$1 and B should accept. But this is not what happens. Low offers are usually rejected. Mostly, As will offer enough to avoid a 'No' (e.g. \$6), which seems very generous and possibly altruistic. In another version of the game, participant A has a simple, anonymous choice: split the money in half or keep \$18 and give participant B \$2. Economists expected the vast majority of As to take the \$18 but in fact, around 75 per cent decided to give \$10 to B. Apparently, this proves that altruism exists – but there are further considerations. Crucially, in 'real-world' experiments with different groups and cultures, the results were different.

Perhaps what we learn from this is that human behaviour is strongly influenced by a wide variety of factors. Possibly, in the lab, people want to seem co-operative or gain the favour of their professor. Maybe the idea that the money comes for nothing means people care less than if they had worked for the money. In the end, it is possible to say that altruism does exist – however, it is dependent on so many variable factors.

2 Read the text again. Choose the best option (a–c).

1 Altruistic people are interested in:

- a themselves.
- b everyone.
- c everyone but themselves.

2 Many free-market economists think that people:

- a sometimes worry about others.
- b always worry about themselves.
- c never consider others.

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- 3 Games like 'Ultimatum':
 - a work in the laboratory but do not represent real-life experience.
 - b work the same in the laboratory and in real-life.
 - c produce identical results with different experimental groups.
- 4 There are no simple answers to questions about human behaviour because:
 - a scientists have not done enough tests.
 - b complex environmental and social factors have a large influence.
 - c we do not understand the way people think.

3 Read the writing task and answer the questions.

Has the growth of the Internet brought us all closer together?

1 What three steps are you going to use when structuring your essay?

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2 What is your position on the essay question and what is your main argument going to be?

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3 What ideas and evidence could you use in your main body paragraph?

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4 Which of these might you use for the concluding paragraph? Tick (✓) the boxes.

- an overview of why you like the Internet
- a summary of the ideas in the main body paragraph
- a final opinion on the subject

4 Write the task presented in Exercise 3.

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