Locus of Control and Prosocial Behavior

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We investigate how locus of control beliefs – the extent to which individuals attribute control over events in their life to themselves as opposed to outside factors – affect prosocial behavior and the private provision of public goods. We begin by developing a conceptual framework showing how locus of control beliefs serve as a weight placed on the returns from one’s own contributions (impure altruism) and others contributions (pure altruism). Using multiple data sets from Germany and the U.S., we show that individuals who relate consequences to their own behavior are more likely to contribute to climate change mitigation, to donate money and in-kind gifts to charitable causes, to share money with others, to cast a vote in parliamentary elections, and to donate blood. Our results provide comprehensive evidence that locus of control beliefs affect prosocial behavior.