

## Learning Guide Unit 4

**Reading Assignment**

As you read the learning resources, consider the following:

1. Can ethical egoism provide a solid foundation for morality?
2. Is it possible to balance individual self-interest with the needs of society?
3. Are human beings motivated entirely by self-interest or are they capable of acting impartially for the good of all?

**Read:**

1. Matthews, G., & Hendricks, C. (2019). *Introduction to philosophy: Ethics*. Rebus Community.  
<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/introduction-to-philosophy-ethics> Licensed under CC 4.0

- View the Online Book
- Read Chapter 4 - [What's in it for me? On Egoism and Social Contract Theory](#)

This chapter explores the concept of egoism and its relationship with social contract theory. It introduces the idea of psychological egoism, which claims all actions are driven by self-interest, and ethical egoism, which argues that acting in one's self-interest is morally right. The reading also examines social contract theory, highlighting the perspectives of philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and John Rawls. It provides a detailed comparison of these theories and their views on justice, morality, and self-interest.

**Additional Reading:**

1. Amdur, R. (1977). Rawls' theory of justice: Domestic and international perspectives. *World Politics*, 29(3), 438–461.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2010005>

Although Rawls does not discuss international distributive justice, Robert Amdur argues here that there are good reasons for concluding that Rawls' distributive principles ought to apply globally.

2. Russell, B. (1982). On the relation between psychological and ethical egoism. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 42(1), 91–99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4319542>

This article argues that psychological egoism offers no support for ethical egoism and is even incompatible with it. If everyone is motivated all the time solely by self-interest, is it meaningful to even speak of ethics?

**NOTE:** To access these articles, visit the UoPeople Library and click on the link to JSTOR. Search for the complete name of the article.

**Watch:**

1. BBC Radio 4. (2015, April 8). *The veil of ignorance* [Video]. YouTube.

This short video provides a lucid introduction to John Rawls' insightful ideas regarding the "veil of ignorance" and the "original position." When discussing issues of fairness and justice within their own nations, individuals frequently hold divergent viewpoints. The wealthy hold one belief, while the poor hold another. Who is right? How can we settle conflicts over what is just or fair? We will look here at John Rawls' solution to this conundrum.

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## The Veil Of Ignorance

