Do conflicts of interest exist?

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cr: Do you think there are no cases in which self-interest and benefiting others come apart? It would be a miracle if that was true.

c: i don't think conflicts of interest exist in any cases. so if you want me to replace this hypothetical with a different one where i agree there's a conflict, i can't do it.
this is a standard (classical) liberal position which is also held by Objectivism

M: The point I think the KritRAT was making was that Donating your money in this hypothetical scenario does not further your selfish interests but it does help others. What do?

c: i also don't think it's necessarily sacrificial to donate to benefit others. if you value life and want to promote life, and combat mosquitos, i don't see anything wrong with that. i think it's a variety of shaping the world more to your liking.

M: That sounds like a rejection of egoism. Value life = value other's lives.

c: the lab scenario is an emergency situation which is generally a bad way to understand how to live a good life in general in normal situations. i don't have strong opinions about it. i think an egoist can pick either room. you have to choose values to pursue in life. saving millions of people is a good accomplishment for a whole career. one can be happy with that.

M: That sounds like another tango my friend.

cr: If you define egoism so broadly so as to include living in accordance with the values you hold, then it becomes empty. Choosing literally any set of values and acting upon them would count as egoistic so long as you hold the values. By empty, I mean it is not an alternative to other ethical systems. It doesn't add new content or help you decide in moral dilemmas.

c: i don't accept all values, but i do accept valuing human life – it's a wonderful thing.

cr: It's not clear to me then in what sense you're an egoist

c: i'm describing Rand's position

cr: I'm in a lab that is burning down. I'm dying of a disease x (I'm the only person who has it), and millions of people are dying from disease y. The lab has one room with the cure for disease x (last of its kind). The lab has another room with has the cure for disease y. I only have time to go into one room before the building burns down. Which room should I enter?

M: To be clear, you would not take the self cure right?

c: so for example, a common alleged counter-example is two men apply for the same job, and there's just one spot. do you think that's a conflict of interest?

cr: I'll grant that there isn't

c: why isn't there?

cr: I could concoct different explanations. eg I would rather live in a society where employers evaluate on merits
I agree, it is easier to give an account of why self interest and benefiting others converge in those cases

c: yes, employers evaluating on merits is important. many benefits. and part of the mindset here is wanting good general policies rather than insisting on short term personal benefit in the immediate situation, regardless of overall consequences. right?

c: in the lab scenario, i don't see a clear principle (like evaluating job candidates on merit) that would be violated by either choice. yeah dying sucks but we don't have immortality yet anyway and it's a major accomplishment to pursue and helps shape reality more to my (non-arbitrary, i claim) preferences. on the other hand, nothing was specified in the example about me having any obligation to those people. like it isn't my job to save their cure. i don't have a contract my job duties in this scenario. i don't know why all these people have allowed their lives to be dependent on this one lab without any backup copies of the info, but it seems unreasonable.

cr: You say that your preferences for human life are non-arbitrary. Say a bit more about why they are non-arbitrary

c: i think promoting and contributing to a beginning of infinity and the growth of knowledge is good. also e.g. i value the kind of society which allows men to live peacefully, cooperate voluntarily, and control nature. is that enough or did you want a different type of info?

cr: Very good. So, you think all of those ends are good and worth pursuing. Furthermore, you think there are good and worth pursuing in a case when they conflict with self-interest. That's not a problem! I just don't think you're really an egoist (but I don't care much about the terms). You think it is empirically the case that in most cases self-interest and benefiting others converge on the same answer, but in the case where they don't, you go for benefitting others

c: i didn't say what room i'd pick. and i think by your standards Rand isn't an egoist either. John Galt said he'd kill himself if they threatened Dagny's life. he didn't put his own life first no matter what.

c: I guess you'd also think an egoist in the military must betray his country and comrades if he gets into a very dangerous situation where he thinks that'll (significantly? or even 1%?) improve his odds of personally living? whereas i think you can sign up for the military. it's risky but it's an option. and if you do, you should follow general policies like your contract with your employer and your duties to your fellow soldiers to follow military strategy instead of getting them killed. If you don't want to risk your life, don't sign up. but if you do sign up and follow the basic rules you agreed to, it's possible to succeed and have a good life. it's not hopeless. it's a way to make a try for it. so it's ok if you don't have a better option.