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Altruism and its Significance

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Abstract

Altruistic activities are motivated by the interests of others. Altruistic behavior is something we might assume takes place in our society everyday life. Altruism involves own. Altruistic people do not practice seemingly altruistic acts for others rather than own. There are no inclinations or motivations behind their altruistic actions, such as reward, any recognition or make themselves feel happy. For example, helping the homeless, is an example of altruistic act, anyone who can help someone who is in distress, it does not necessarily follow that that person has any kind of inclination of doing so or doing for any recognition or reward without altruism a community cannot survive or established. The lack of altruistic efforts towards a better community will result in a selfish society spiraling into disaster. We had better to bring altruistic efforts again in our society though some believe that humans are fundamentally selfish, selfless acts or undertaking that put the welfare of others before one's.

Key Words: *Moral sainthood, sociability, morality, Peter Singer.*

1. Introduction:

Altruism or selfishness is the principle of concern for the welfare of others. It is a traditional virtue in many cultures. Altruism is a motivation to provide value to an individual who must be anyone but one's self, while duty focuses on a moral obligation towards a specific individual or collective.

But the question is why do some people risk their own life to help others? Where rest of us see a stranger, an altruist sees him a fellow human being. This world view is such a part of altruist's basic identity which makes them different or separate from the rest of human being. Because these altruists have intuitive belief, moral intuition, reasoning. It presents that altruists have special cognitive structure. But it does not follow

that rest of human beings don't have any ethical value, or they lack morality. They also have this morality, but they are not always aware of that. But why do some of us build this moral foundation more than others? For example if you walk on a street and see a child is drowning in a pond, the child is screaming any crying. There are many people who seeing this scene, but none of them trying to rescue that child. Suddenly a man jumps into the water and rescue that child. That man who doesn't think about his own life, or no matter he does not swimming but he jumped. He also could die, but he did it. In this case, rescuer has self-image which is inclusive and broadly based with a strong sense of agency, but that bystanders see themselves as people who are weak on agency, with little control over their lives, and little they can do that affect outside. They are seeing themselves as members of exclusive group, while the rescuer seeing himself as a member of common humanity. Everyone does have an ethical perspective, but this aspect is guided by immediate factors such as family background, education, life situation etc.

2. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this proposed study are found out the answers of these fundamental questions:

- a) How does morality related to altruistic behavior?
- b) Are human beings basically selfish or are they basically altruistic but corrupted by unjust societies?
- c) Can happiness is the right term to define the concept of altruism?

3. Altruism and morality:

Such an altruist can be termed as "hero" or "saint". But here the term "saint" is used absolutely a different meaning of the term "saint" actually be used. A "saint" is someone who performs supererogatory action. Urmson refers "sanity" and "supererogatory" are apparently synonyms. But he is not a religious person or non-moral performer. He is not someone who has not any desire, feelings, inclinations, self-interest or drive to self-preservation to do his duty. Indeed, he is such a person who distinguishes himself by outperforming his peers. A person is a hero or a saint in this strong sense when he (1) "does actions that are far beyond the limits of his duty," (2) either against inclination (saint) or despite fear (hero), (3) either by self-controller without effort. The paradigm case of this sort of moral saint is the soldier who jumps on a stray grenade to protect his comrades, where we cannot say of the other soldiers who stayed put that they failed in some duty and we cannot say that a superior officer could have "decently order (the soldier) to do it" (203). And although it might be the case that the deed presented itself (to the soldier) as a duty, "it was not a duty (203). A moral saint is someone who has the traits like empathy, compassion, honesty etc., that are in some sense "essentially moral" which contribute to our moral assessment of an agent. A saint is who has the control over his self-interest. There is a necessary condition of moral sainthood that one's life would be dominated by commitment to improving the welfare of the society or others. common men are very

much selfish, they help others to whom they are attached or they do for themselves only who are their loved one, they respect someone or companionship of whom they love. But moral saint is someone whose whole life would lie in the happiness of others, who devoted his/her whole life for others with open heart without any interest.ⁱ He will be one, who considerate even-tempered, hospitable, charitable and so on. A moral saint should have those qualities which are apt to allow him to help other people or which qualities are separated from rest of the people who have not those qualities. He must be careful not to bias or favor to someone over others. He will be reluctant to adopt any negative judgment about others. He will have the moral standard. For example we can say that a single self-employed woman devotes her time to feeding the hungry, taking care of them, give them proper treatment when necessary, that children live a prosperous life, they get food, shelter, clothing, education, health and so on. That woman devotes her life to serve those children. She has no self-interests and has moral standard rather than rest of us. That woman can be called a saint. She sacrifices her own interests for those children.

There is something odd about the idea of morality serving as the object of a dominant passion which is more concrete or concrete moral goal. The ideal of a moral sainthood in which morality unduly dominates. Because morality itself does not seem to a suitable object of passion. While the normal person's specific desires for objects, activities, events that conflict with the attainment of moral perfection are not sacrifice but suppressed, removed or subsumed.

Moral sainthood claims that as a rational human being we have to considerate, self-controlled though there are such things present to create dilemma in human mind such desires for certain objects, things, events etc. so, one should constrain oneself to get rid of that attachments. Moral evaluation is primarily, focused on the features of a person's life over which that person who has control, it is restricted to aspects of his life which are likely to have considerable effect on other people. Morality plays the role in the development of over character.ⁱⁱ So, moral value which helps us to in evaluating and improving ourselves. In this context, one can talk about the notion of virtue, according to Aristotle, virtue is of two kinds, namely – intellectual virtue and moral virtue. Intellectual virtue requires experience and time, while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit. None of virtues arises in us by nature; we are adapted by nature to receive them and made perfect by habit. Every virtue is both produced and destroyed.

Men can be distinguished from other animals by consciousness, by religion or by anything else. Because human beings are able to produce their mode of subsistence. By producing their means of subsistence they actually producing their actual material life. When men produce the means of subsistence which depends on the nature of the actual means of subsistence. The mode of production does not simply considered as a

physical existence of an individual, but, it is in a definite form of activity of these individuals, definite form of expressing their life. The production of ideas, of consciousness, of conceptions is directly interlinked with material activity, material intercourse and language of life of men. Thinking, judging, conceiving, mental bondage, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. Human beings are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, and so on; they are conditioned by the definite development of their productive forces.

If we want to cultivate the region of the moral sense, then we have consider first that there is a difference between man and animal. Human beings are impelled by the deep feeling of right or duty, to sacrifice in some great cause. If one investigates to see how far the study of lower animals throws light on one of the highest physical facilities of man.

4. The concept of sociability in the context of altruism:

Any animal endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well as in man. The social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel certain amount of sympathy with them and to perform various acts for them. These services may be of definite and evidently instinctive nature, as with most of the higher social animals, to aid their fellow in certain general ways. But these services and feelings are no means extended to all the individuals of the same species, but only to those of the some association. At the next stage while mental faculties had been developed, images of all the past events and motives would be ceaselessly pass through the brain of each individuals and the outcome is feeling of dissatisfaction from unsatisfied instinct would arise. It is evidently clear that many instinctive desire, like hunger which are in their nature of short duration after being satisfied they are not vividly recalled. In the next stage when the power of language has been introduced, so that the wishes, desires of community could be expressed, the next question comes in this stage that how each member ought to act for the common good, which is guide to action. It should be keep in our mind that our regard for approbation and disapprobation of our fellows depends on sympathy which forms an essential part of the social instinct. There is an another essential part exist with sympathy that is habit. Habit in the individual plays an important role in guiding the conduct of each member for the social instinct.

Here a very important key point will be discussed in this context which is sociability. Animals are social. As we often see that distinct species live together. Man makes a strong bonding with his dog and dog also returns it. It is often noticed that animals feel miserable when they separated from their companions, they have mutual affection and feel happy when they reunion. Social animals perform services for each other.

But we are confined with the higher social animal and we just neglect the social instinct of the lower animal. Many animals certainly sympathize with each others distress. Whenever we buy meat from any meat shop, we find that the animals are taken as a commodity and they are murdered so brutally. But no one can protest against this. We forget the thought that they are also social animals, they also are the members of our society, they are conscious about the fact that they will be die in anytime. They have the strong bonding with each other. They have a feeling for each other. They feel bad when one of them die. Besides love and sympathy animals have some other qualities to exhibit, connected with social instincts, which in us called moral. For example, dogs possess some power of self-command; they will refrain from stealing food in the absence of their master. They are obedient.ⁱⁱⁱ

As man is a social animal, it is obviously certain that he would inherit a tendency to be faithful to his superior, he has to be obedient to the leader of his tribe. These qualities are common with other social animals. He would possess the quality of self-command, and also he would inherit the tendency to love and sympathy for his fellow-being. He will defend them and in concert with others, and would be ready to aid them in any way. The social animals which stand at the bottom of the scale are guided exclusively, but the social animals which stand higher in the scale highly guided by the special instincts in the aid which they give to the members of the same community. They are impelled by love and sympathy and assisted by some amount of reason. He has impulse but he has the intellectual abilities which guided by reason and experience. This instinct and sympathy would cause him to give value highly approbation of his fellows. Social instinct which have been acquired by man still give him impulse to some of his best actions, his actions are in higher degree determined by judgment of his fellow men but many times his actions are determined by selfish manner. But love, sympathy, self-command become strengthened by habit, the power of reasoning become vivid, so that man can value the judgment of fellow-men. He will feel impelled to certain lines of conduct apart from the transitory pleasure and pain. He will be the supreme judge of his own conduct.

But the question is are human beings basically selfish or are they basically altruistic but corrupted by unjust societies? These age old questions are now discussed in David Sloan Wilson's Docs Altruism Exist and Michael Shermer's The Moral Arc.^{iv}

5. Differences between selfish desires and altruistic acts:

The behaviors that are altruistic in the evolutionary sense can be psychologically either selfish or altruistic. Consider a behavior defined as altruistic based on fitness effect, that is evolutionarily successful. Psychological definition of altruism and selfishness are based on the proximate mechanisms. Here Wilson argues altruism is inextricably linked to the functional organization of groups. Humans are one of the most groupish species on earth, they are comparable to social insect colonies and multi-cellular organisms. Altruism evolves in all social species. The quality of everyday life depends erratically on people who overtly care about the welfare of others. In our society it is very rare to find any truly altruistic behavior. There is an explanation available here to show how that behavior arises through natural causes. For example, mother bear risks her own life to save her cubs. It is purely genetic the cubs carry her genes which may be live on even if she perishes.

David Sloan Wilson is a pioneer of the principle of multi-level group selection. The fundamental thought is that culturally organized groups tend to act as organisms in their own right. Within a group a selfish individual's tend to come out ahead, but between a group those consisted of individuals who behave altruistically win. Now the question is what makes individuals behave altruistically against their selfish desires? The answer is that cultural evolution operates in favor of cultural traits that encourage internal cohesion. Within a group, this favors the evolution of features that benefit the collectivity, even though such acts may come at a cost to the individual. But when a group compete altruism win over selfish interests.

Wilson points to other species whose altruistic acts have furthered their survival over time. For example, bees and ants, worker bees or worker ants do not get reproduce, because they work to help their group overall. In the same way humans that act for the sake of their group will also tend to come out on top. On the other hand, selfishness is also alive and well in our human culture. According to Wilson selfishness survives because it can be adaptive for an individual within a group even if it is not adaptive between groups. If one acts selfishly, then that individual may gain some advantage in his / her survival. He or she puts his/her own interest over the group in which he /she lives. He/she might do things for own self without regarding others. But selfishness does not do well at the between group level, because it harms the group's chances of survival.^y

Internationally renowned philosopher Peter Singer presents a challenging movement in the search for an ethical life. Effective altruism requires a rigidly unsentimental view of charitable giving, if we give some money from our salary which is substantial portion or give time to some charitable trust or give donation to some organization who work for the people who are needy, in distress, miserable, that will do the most

good with those resources. We should be donating to the causes and organizations that do the most good. But the question is how does one evaluate 'the most good'? does it make sense to spend money to help a blind man or should we spend the money on operations that restore sight to the blind? Peter Singer begins by chronicling the life experiences of several "effective altruists" or people who think rationally about how they use their money or time and resources to help others. We should not be guided by personal opinion, we should strive to do the most good we can do. Many effective altruists do good by making donations. For example, a social worker and her husband donate 50% of their income to the most cost-effective causes. There are a wide variety of ways to do a huge amount of good in the world.

In the book *The Life you can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty*, Peter Singer tries to reconsider his readers the question of what their obligations are to those who are in extreme poverty. Singer begins the first chapter with the scenario that you are way to work, you see a child flailing about in a pond. That child is constantly shouting for help. But there is no one besides you around to help. You are the only one who can save that child. But you have your work, you might be late. And if you would save the child you are ruining your shoes, muddying your cloths, you will get wet, if you do not act to save the child, he will probably drown. Then the question is what should you do? You should save the child. Compare to value of his life, muddying your cloths, ruining your new shoes or late for work do not matter at all. Many of us are complete certain that we wouldn't hesitate to save a drowning child and we would do so at considerable cost to ourselves. In our daily life we spend lots of money, but we do not give that substantial money to any organization that help needy people. We are not considerate about what they want. We would hardly notice if they were not there. In rich nations people could give, without significant reduction in their standard of living. We won't reach that goal, unless many more contribute to the effort.

Ayn Rand was a believer of the value of selfishness. Believers of fact that altruistic acts are the highest degree of morality would label selfishness as a character sin. According to Rand a person may be selfish, but he or she can have self-esteem and self-empowerment to use his or her skill, intelligence and talent as best they can. In this way it will benefit others. Ayn Rand rejected an altruistic society where an individual can work for others but not himself. In a society individual needs can be fulfilled by serving others and a group as a whole, every person should work in cohesion to benefit others.

In the book '*Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World*', Matthieu Ricard makes some great observations on happiness. This book deeply encourages us to examine ourselves, and helps us to understand the positive power of altruism. Ricard investigates the aspects of love, empathy, selfishness. He advocates that with practice through focusing and meditation, one can create new ways in their malleable minds that create new positive changes. We should develop love, compassion, sacrifice,

empathy we can bring change in ourselves as altruistic beings and create a new social in altruistic way for living.

Each and every individual has to decide whether he wants to live in the light of altruism or he wants to stay in the darkness of selfishness. Altruism is an integral part of our nature with the desire to help others. But it sometime it has to be cultivated. We are not aware or conscious about the fact. Ricard insists that we are born altruistic, we can learn altruism and reiterating how we can do it. Happiness is an enduring state of soul rooted in mindfulness and compassion for others. Altruism is a genuine concern for the well-being of others. But it's scope is not confined in personal area, it is actually global. Happiness is a way of being rather than an endless search for experience. Pleasure is good but it depends on things which are subject to change, people, places, things. Happiness is more durable state. It is the cluster of basic human qualities that nurture a state of fulfillment, flourishing, of appreciating your life. Happiness is inner freedom, it is inner strength, inner space. Those are the resources to deal with the struggles of life. The more you experience happiness; it becomes more deeper and stable. You can cultivate inner peace, inner freedom, inner strength; these are the qualities that create genuine happiness. Basically we are the slave of our impulses, but one thing can helps us to control that impulses. Meditation helps you cultivate the emotional balance and inner freedom. Altruism can positively change an individual and by the extension the world.^{vi}

6. Conclusion:

Altruism is either a belief or practice of selfless concern for the well-being of others. If we talk about our parents, we can see that they were diligently spending their time of feeding, changing, bathing each of us until we were grown up enough to do these things our own. Their sleep time was lost, their health might have changed due to this. We have elements of altruism which guide our life and our actions. All human beings are self-centered and work for their own interests; they have a predisposition to be selfless when the occasion call for it. The essence of altruism is sacrifice. Sacrifice is often used simply to mean giving something up. Sacrifice is the surrender of the greater value for a lesser one, the precious for the worthless. Often we donate money, food, cloth to the impoverished, but we do not do this permanently, we do it occasionally. It follows that, we do not sacrifice for the others. You do not sacrifice if you give up time and money to help someone or some cause more valuable to you than the time and money. Often we do sacrifice by giving up more that what we really want in order to someone, we have not achieved the moral ideal according to the altruistic morality. Because when we do sacrifice for someone he or she may be our close one. But if someone wants to do moral action, if he wants to be more virtuous, give to any stranger of whom knows nothing. If someone wants to attain the moral perfection, he or she must give to those he hates. To attain the true unselfishness one must take nothing in return, no pleasure, or happiness or no

gratitude, no self-esteem no pride in his virtue. If you wish to be unselfish you will have to ignore your wishes, obliterate and obscure the thought levels which give rise to motivations that are not acceptable. To sacrifice one's happiness and desires is to sacrifice that which one's values to sacrifice one's value is effective denying one's judgment and rationality. Altruism is destruction of rationality that leads directly to guilt, anxiety, fear, depression, psychotic behavior.

In our society rape, domestic abuse, school violence and elder abuse captured our attention. How has our species been able to survive? The answer is altruism is important part of what Darwin meant by "fitness". According to psychological perspective any genetic predisposition that may be present, nurturance, and courageous compassion are altruistic behaviors that can be taught and developed in our society. Education in school and at home must transcend the acquisition solely of facts, skills and proper behavior. Students must be taught in such a way of environment that filled with encouragement and justice in which each student is seen as a lovable human being, not only a vessel to be filled. When each student feels that he or she is important and worthwhile, while being helped to learn, the world will be the better place to live.

We can help in several ways:

- 1) Think of others before your own self, selfishness is not the answer.
- 2) Give to non-profit organizations like Girls and Boy Club, Habitat for Humanity.
- 3) Donate money and food to a local charity.
- 4) Volunteer in your own community in other struggling communities.
- 5) Find out different ways how to improve your community.

Endnotes

ⁱ Vanessa Carbonell, 'Moral saints Reconsidered' The University of Michigan, 2009.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter Singer, 'Practical Ethics', Cambridge University Press, 2011 (3rd ed.)

^{iv} Michael Shermer, 'The Moral Arc Henry Holt and CPeter Singer, 'Practical Ethics', Cambridge University Press, 2011 (3rd ed.)

^{iv} Michael Shermer, 'The Moral Arc Hompany, 2015.

^v David Sloan Wilson, 'Does Altruism Exist? Culture Genes and Welfare of others. Yale University Press, 2015.

^{vi} Matthieu Ricard, 'Altruism : The Power of Compassion to change yourself and the world', Back Bay Books, 2016.

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