



Altruism

Rooted in the Latin word *alter* – meaning other. Altruism – means “living for others”. The key component of this behavior is selflessness – an unselfish regard for the welfare of others.

Altruism refers to an individual acting in a way that will decrease its own survival chances, but improve the survival chances of another individual. The Darwinian perspective emphasising ‘survival of the fittest’ gave the impression that selfishness was the norm. Pioneering work involving the study of animals living in social groups in fact revealed that co-operation and altruism are just as ‘natural’ as selfishness.

History of Altruism

The French philosopher named **August Comte** coined the word **altruism** in 1851 and it was added to the English dictionary two years later. However, all human kind has been demonstrating altruism since the world’s beginning. Altruism is studied today by psychologists, biologists, theologians, anthropologists, political scientists, economists, sociologists, mathematicians and more. Most societies acknowledge the importance of altruism in that it benefits a community as a whole. Societies also understand that it is imperative to cooperate with one another rather than strive on conflict. Thus, it helps avoid war and instead, instills peace.

Examples of Animal Altruism

Vampire bats will regurgitate and feed blood that they have collected from their prey to a hungry conspecific.

Ground squirrels will warn others of the presence of a predator, even though making such a call may draw the attention of the predator to itself

Three Characteristics of Altruistic Behavior

1. Perceiving the need of another person
2. Being motivated by empathy to help the other person
3. Addressing the need by taking action without expecting a reward or recognition in return

1. Perceiving the Needs of another Person

Altruistic behavior begins with a heightened awareness of the feelings and circumstances of others. This sensitivity allows individuals to recognize when someone is struggling or in need. Often, this perception requires keen observation. People may notice verbal cues (like someone expressing distress) or non-verbal cues (such as body language or facial expressions).

The ability to perceive needs can be influenced by the social context, cultural norms, and personal experiences. Some individuals may be more attuned to certain situations based on their background. Engaging with diverse groups and fostering emotional intelligence can enhance one's ability to perceive others' needs.

2. Being Motivated by Empathy to Help the Other Person

Empathy involves not only understanding another person's feelings but also sharing in their emotional experience. This emotional connection often drives altruistic actions. The motivation to help can stem from a genuine desire to alleviate another's suffering or from a sense of moral obligation. It often transcends self-interest.

Individuals may respond to perceived needs with actions that reflect their emotional understanding, such as offering support, comfort, or practical help. Engaging in empathetic behavior can also lead to a sense of fulfillment or satisfaction, further reinforcing the cycle of altruism.

3. Addressing the Need by Taking Action without Expecting a Reward or Recognition in Return

A hallmark of altruistic behavior is the intention behind the action. Altruists often act without any expectation of reward, recognition, or reciprocity.

This behavior is driven by intrinsic values, such as compassion and a sense of social responsibility, rather than external incentives. Individuals find motivation in the act itself rather than in potential benefits. Altruistic actions can have a ripple effect, fostering a culture of generosity and support within communities.

When people help others without expectation, it can encourage a similar response from those who witness or experience such acts. While altruists do not seek rewards, studies suggest that helping others can enhance personal well-being and happiness, creating a positive feedback loop.

Altruistic behavior is characterized by the perception of others' needs, an empathetic motivation to assist, and selfless action that seeks no reward. Understanding these characteristics helps to foster a more compassionate and supportive society.

Theories of Altruism

Psychologists believe there are two types of altruism:

1. Biological altruism (with its roots in evolutionary psychology)
2. Psychological altruism (based more on cognitive psychology)

1. Biological Altruism

It based on Instinct and Genes. Evolutionary Psychology is the attempt to explain social behavior in terms of genetic factors that evolved over time, according to the principles of natural selection. Darwin recognized that altruistic behavior posed a problem for his theory: if an organism acts altruistically, it may decrease its own reproductive fitness.

- **Kin Selection Theory**

Kin selection theory predicts that the extent of altruism depends on genetic relatedness. By helping relatives to reproduce (even at the cost to your own reproductive success) then your shared genes can spread. Assisting a close relative thereby increases one's 'Inclusive Fitness'. Using mathematical modelling, Hamilton showed that an altruistic gene can spread through the population if it causes an individual to help a relative, whenever the cost to the individual is offset by the reproductive benefit gained by the receiver.

'Hamilton's Rule' = $r B > c$

Where r =coefficient of relatedness, B = benefit to the recipient, c = cost to the giver.

Example: In a house fire, who would you save first, your brother/sister or your neighbor?

Many mammal species exhibit altruistic behaviors toward their young or siblings, such as protecting them from predators or sharing food.

Kin Selection in Humans

Food sharing is more common amongst close relatives. Political alliances between kin are more stable than those formed between distantly related or unrelated individuals and involve less preconditions. The passing on of wealth to lineal descendants (excluding spouses) is far more common than giving to less closely related or unrelated individuals. Close relatives are preferentially sought out in times of need and such help is less likely to be reciprocal. Relatives typically receive more expensive presents. One reason we help people is that we assume it will make them more likely to help us in the future. This is so strong it may have become genetically based.

- **Reciprocal Altruism Theory**

It is proposed by Trivers (1971). Natural Selection may create psychological mechanisms designed to deliver benefits even to non-relatives, provided that such actions lead to reciprocal beneficial actions in the future.

Reciprocal altruism theory posits that individuals may act altruistically toward others with the expectation that those acts will be reciprocated in the future. This form of cooperation enhances survival and reproductive success by creating mutually beneficial relationships.

This is not necessarily limited to the same species e.g. cleaner fish. If the benefit received is larger than the cost incurred, then individuals who engage in such behaviour will out-reproduce those who do not. E.g., in vampire bats, an individual will share food with a conspecific (whether related or not) if the other has shared food with that individual in the past. In human societies, reciprocal altruism manifests in various ways, such as sharing food, providing assistance, and forming alliances. Social norms and cultural practices often encourage these behaviors.

a) Conditions under Which Reciprocation Flourishes

Individuals must associate for long-enough periods of time to develop reciprocal interactions. The likelihood of one individual performing some social exchange with another should be predicted on the basis of their past associations. Individuals need to be able to remember past interactions and recognize those who have helped them. Social structures that facilitate repeated interactions, such as small groups, increase the chances of reciprocal altruism developing. The roles of giver and receiver should reverse at least once. The short-term benefits to the recipient are greater than the costs to the donor. Givers should be able to recognise and expel cheaters from the system. Reciprocal altruism helps explain how cooperation can evolve among non-relatives. It suggests that altruistic behaviors can be adaptive when they lead to long-term benefits.

b) Reciprocal Altruism: Prisoner's Dilemma

The "Prisoner's Dilemma," illustrates how cooperation can emerge in competitive situations. For example:

Criminals A and B commit a crime together. They are caught by the police and are interviewed separately. They both know that without the testimony of the other, there is not enough evidence to imprison them for more than a year. However, they also know that if they collaborate with the police and blame the other one, the other would go to prison for 20 years, but they would go free.

		Prisoner B's Strategies	
		Do Not Confess	Confess
Prisoner A's Strategies	Do Not Confess	1 Year	Parole
	Confess	Life	20 Years
		Parole	20 Years

Prisoner's Dilemma

2. Psychological Altruism

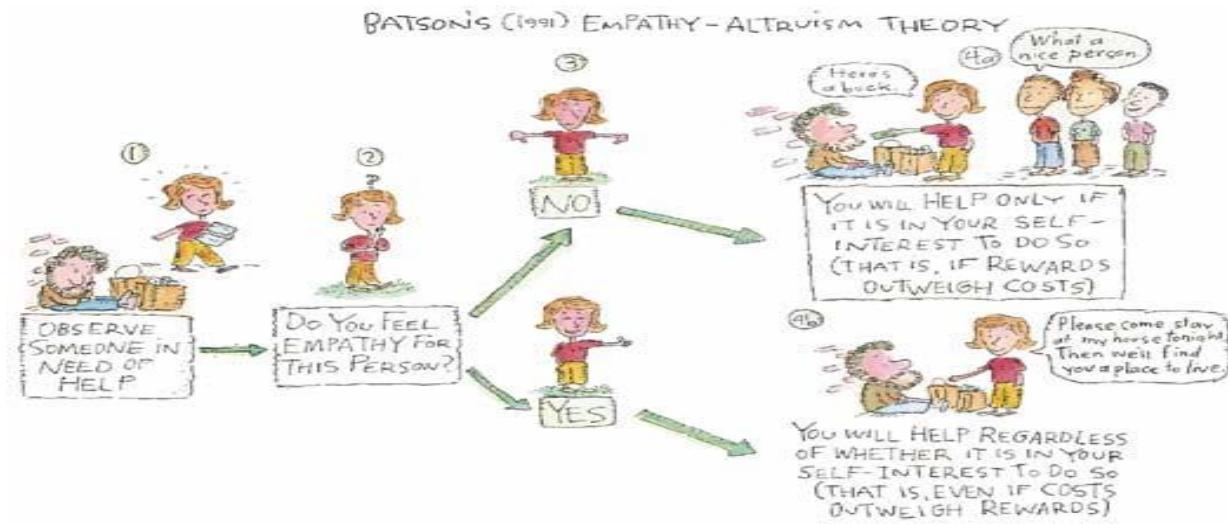
Where biological explanations of altruism can be seen in many animals, psychological explanations of altruism are witnessed only in higher-level mammals. While biological explanations of altruism occur almost automatically, psychological explanations of altruism arise as a result of cognition. That is, this type of altruism relies on the ‘helper’ understanding the situation. This kind of altruism is not innate.

- **Negative-state relief model**

When encountering a homeless person asking for money, we can either give them some money or walk away. Schaller and Cialdini (1988) proposed the **negative-state relief model**. Pro-social behavior results from egoism rather than altruism. We help others in order to relieve the stress we feel when encountering a bad situation. This model also explains why people walk away. Walking away also alleviates distress.

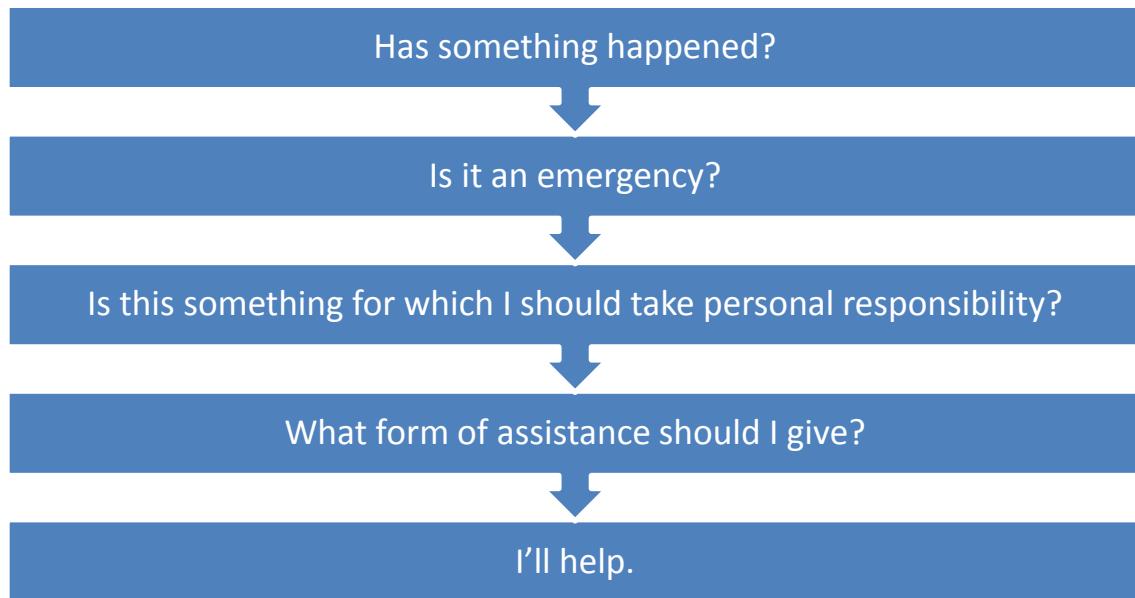
- **Empathy-altruism model**

Batson disagrees with the notion that we only help to relieve negative feelings. Batson et al (1981) suggests that people experience two kinds of emotion when they see suffering. According to Batson, if you feel empathy towards a person, you will help, regardless of what you may gain from it. Relieving suffering becomes the most important thing. If a person feels no empathy, then they would consider the costs and benefits before making the decision to help. The empathy-altruism hypothesis has been tested empirically many times, in order to distinguish it from egoist hypotheses (e.g. Schaller and Cialdini’s ‘negative-state relief’ model). It is, however, very difficult to determine from observed behavior, whether someone is acting out of empathy or to relieve distress.



Empathy- altruism Model

Process of Helping



Factors that Influence Helping

The factors that influence helping behavior:

a) Number of Bystanders

- Influence on Noticing an Emergency:**

In a large crowd, individuals may be less likely to notice an emergency. This

phenomenon, known as "in-attentional blindness," occurs because people often assume that others are paying attention or that someone else will take action.

- **Interpreting an Emergency:**

The presence of many bystanders can lead to ambiguity in interpreting situations. When people see others not reacting to an emergency, they may conclude that the situation is not serious, leading to collective inaction. This is often called "pluralistic ignorance," where individuals rely on the reactions of others to determine how to respond.

- **Assuming Responsibility:**

With many people around, responsibility gets diffused. Each bystander may feel less personal accountability, thinking, "Someone else will help." This diffusion of responsibility can lead to inaction during critical moments.

Reducing the Bystander Effect:

- **Clear Emergencies vs. Ambiguous Situations:** When an emergency is clear-cut (e.g., someone collapses), bystanders are more likely to help. Ambiguous situations make it harder for individuals to interpret the need for help, decreasing the likelihood of intervention.
- **Cohesive Groups vs. Strangers:** People are more likely to help if they are in a cohesive group (e.g., friends or colleagues) rather than with strangers. Familiarity and social bonds can increase the sense of responsibility and the likelihood of helping.

b) Presence of Pro-social Models

The influence of pro-social models is powerful in shaping behavior. Observing someone engage in helping behavior can trigger a similar response in others. For example, when individuals see someone donating to a charity, such as the Salvation Army, they may feel inspired to contribute themselves. This effect demonstrates how social norms and behaviors can spread through observation, reinforcing the idea that helping is valued and encouraged in society.

c) Time Pressure

- **Impact of Time Pressure on Helping Behavior:**

When individuals are in a hurry, their capacity to notice emergencies diminishes significantly. They may overlook cues that signal someone in need. Time pressure can also affect how they interpret situations; feeling rushed can lead to quick judgments that may dismiss the need for help.

- **Less Likelihood of Helping:**

Research shows that individuals who are hurried are less likely to stop and assist others. They prioritize their immediate goals over potential emergencies, leading to reduced

helping behaviors. This highlights the importance of situational context in influencing altruism.

d) Emotions

- **Guilt:**

Guilt can serve as a strong motivator for helping behavior. Studies have shown that individuals who feel guilty about a wrongdoing are more likely to offer assistance to others as a means of alleviating their guilt. For example, participants who lied in a study volunteered significantly more time to help afterward than those who did not lie. Public acknowledgment of guilt can further increase the urge to help.

- **Negative Mood:**

For adults, experiencing a negative mood can actually increase the likelihood of helping behavior. Adults often learn that helping others can lead to a sense of satisfaction or relief from their own distress. However, feelings like anger and grief may counteract this tendency, leading to reduced helping.

- **Positive Mood:**

Positive emotions significantly enhance helping behavior. For instance, individuals who feel happy or relieved are more inclined to assist others. Research, such as the parking ticket study, shows that a shift from fear to relief can lead to increased pro-social actions.

e) Personality Traits

- **Complex Nature of Altruism:**

No single personality trait universally predicts altruistic behavior; rather, a network of traits is involved. Traits like emotionality, empathy, and self-efficacy are linked to a higher likelihood of helping.

- **High Self-Monitors:**

Individuals who are high in self-monitoring may help others primarily when they believe such actions will yield social rewards. This interplay between personality traits and situational context affects their willingness to assist.

- **Gender Differences:**

Research indicates that men are often more likely to help in dangerous situations, while women may be more inclined to help in safer, caregiving contexts. These trends can reflect social norms and expectations around gender roles in helping behavior.

These factors illustrate the multifaceted nature of altruism and how both situational and individual differences can influence the likelihood of helping others.

How do we teach altruism?

Teaching altruism involves fostering attitudes and behaviors that promote helping others. Here are detailed notes on the methods you've mentioned:

1. Teach Moral Inclusion

a) Concept of Moral Inclusion:

Moral inclusion is the idea of expanding the circle of those we consider worthy of moral concern and assistance. It encourages individuals to view others, regardless of their background or differences, as part of their moral community.

b) Strategies to Promote Moral Inclusion:

- **Diverse Interactions:** Encourage children and individuals to engage with people from different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. This can foster empathy and a broader understanding of humanity.
- **Education on Inequality and Injustice:** Teaching about social issues, such as poverty, discrimination, and environmental challenges, can help individuals see the broader implications of their actions and develop a sense of responsibility toward those outside their immediate social circles.
- **Empathy Development:** Activities like storytelling or role-playing can help individuals understand the feelings and perspectives of others, making it easier to extend help to a wider group.

2. Model Altruism

a) Importance of Role Models:

People often learn through observation, so demonstrating altruistic behavior can inspire others to act similarly. This can be particularly effective in childhood development.

b) Effective Modeling Techniques:

- **Visible Acts of Kindness:** Parents, teachers, and community leaders should actively engage in altruistic behaviors, such as volunteering, helping neighbors, or donating to charity. These visible actions serve as powerful examples.
- **Media Influence:** Television shows, movies, and literature that portray characters engaging in altruistic acts can have a positive impact. Programs that highlight community service, kindness, and cooperation can encourage viewers to emulate those behaviors.
- **Discussion and Reflection:** After witnessing acts of kindness, discussing the motivations and impacts of those actions can reinforce the value of altruism and inspire individuals to think about how they can contribute positively.

3. Attributing Behavior to Altruistic Motives

a) Understanding Motivations:

Helping behavior can be influenced by how we interpret the motives behind actions. If we frame behaviors as genuinely altruistic, it can encourage others to adopt similar behaviors.

b) Avoiding the Over justification Effect:

The over justification effect occurs when external rewards diminish intrinsic motivation. To teach altruism effectively, it's essential to avoid excessive rewards or coercion for helping behaviors.

c) Strategies to Encourage Genuine Altruism:

- **Intrinsic Motivation:** Emphasize the personal satisfaction and positive feelings that come from helping others rather than focusing solely on rewards or recognition. This can help foster a genuine desire to assist others.
- **Balanced Reinforcement:** While some positive reinforcement can be beneficial, it's important not to make rewards the primary reason for helping. Instead, praise the act of kindness itself and its impact on others.
- **Encourage Reflection:** Prompt individuals to reflect on their feelings and motivations when they help others. This can reinforce the internal benefits of altruism and help them understand their own altruistic motives.

By teaching moral inclusion, modeling altruism, and carefully framing motivations for helping, we can cultivate a culture of altruism that encourages individuals to act compassionately toward others. These strategies can help build a more empathetic and connected society.