

Test 1: Understanding Altruism – The Science Behind Selfless Behavior

Passage

Altruism, defined as the selfless concern for the well-being of others, has long fascinated philosophers, psychologists, and biologists alike. It appears in many forms—from a person donating anonymously to charity, to a soldier sacrificing their life to save comrades, to a stranger stopping to help someone in distress. While such acts seem to contradict evolutionary principles that emphasize survival of the fittest, scientists have sought to understand why altruism persists across cultures and species.

From an evolutionary perspective, altruistic behavior poses a paradox. According to Darwinian theory, organisms that prioritize their survival and reproduction should be more likely to pass on their genes. However, some researchers argue that altruism can still be explained through evolution if it benefits close relatives who share genetic material. This concept is known as kin selection, where helping family members increases the chances of shared genes being passed down through future generations.

Another theory that explains altruism is reciprocal altruism, proposed by biologist Robert Trivers. This idea suggests that individuals may act generously toward others with the expectation that the favor will be returned in the future. For example, in animal societies like those of vampire bats, individuals often regurgitate blood to feed hungry roostmates. Those who fail to return the favor are eventually excluded from future assistance.

In human societies, altruism often goes beyond kinship and reciprocity. People regularly help strangers without any direct benefit or guarantee of repayment. Psychologists refer to this as pure altruism —behavior motivated solely by empathy and the desire to

reduce another's suffering. Neuroscientific studies have shown that when people engage in altruistic acts, areas of the brain associated with reward and pleasure become active, suggesting that humans may derive internal satisfaction from helping others.

Cultural and social norms also play a significant role in promoting altruism. Many religions and moral systems encourage charitable giving and compassionate behavior. In addition, societies often reinforce altruistic actions through praise, awards, or legal protections for those who assist others in emergencies. These cultural influences can shape individual behavior and foster a sense of collective responsibility.

Despite its positive aspects, altruism can sometimes lead to unintended consequences. Overextending oneself in service to others—sometimes called pathological altruism—can result in burnout, personal neglect, or even harm to the intended beneficiaries. For instance, overly protective parenting might hinder a child's development rather than support it.

Moreover, what appears to be altruistic behavior may not always be entirely selfless. Some critics argue that even seemingly pure acts of kindness may be driven by subconscious motives such as gaining social approval, reducing personal discomfort, or enhancing one's self-image. These mixed motivations make it difficult to determine whether true altruism exists in its purest form.

Nonetheless, research continues to explore how altruism can be encouraged in society. Studies suggest that early childhood experiences, exposure to prosocial models, and education about global issues can all increase altruistic tendencies. Furthermore, communities that emphasize cooperation over competition tend to produce more altruistically inclined individuals.

In conclusion, while the origins and nature of altruism remain complex and debated, it is clear that selfless behavior plays a crucial role in human relationships, societal cohesion, and even biological evolution. Whether driven by genetics, culture, or genuine compassion, altruism remains a powerful force shaping the world we live in.

? Questions – Test 1

1. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - A. Altruism only occurs in humans.
 - B. Altruism contradicts all scientific theories.
 - C. Altruism is complex and influenced by biology, psychology, and culture.
 - D. Altruism is harmful to society.
2. According to paragraph 2, which theory explains altruism among family members?
 - A. Reciprocal altruism
 - B. Kin selection
 - C. Pure altruism
 - D. Social altruism
3. The word “paradox” in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to:
 - A. Logical explanation
 - B. Contradiction
 - C. Scientific law
 - D. Benefit
4. How do vampire bats demonstrate reciprocal altruism?
 - A. They protect their young.
 - B. They feed other bats and expect to be fed in return.

- C. They migrate together.
- D. They avoid sharing food.

5. According to paragraph 4, what happens in the brain during altruistic acts?

- A. The brain becomes inactive.
- B. Areas linked to pain are activated.
- C. Reward-related brain regions become active.
- D. The brain releases toxins.

6. Look at the four squares [■] in paragraph 5. Where would the following sentence best fit?

"Such behaviors are often rewarded by the community."

- A. First square
- B. Second square
- C. Third square
- D. Fourth square

7. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a potential drawback of altruism?

- A. Burnout
- B. Personal neglect
- C. Harm to the beneficiary
- D. Increased wealth

8. What can be inferred about "pathological altruism"?

- A. It is always beneficial.
- B. It refers to excessive or harmful altruism.
- C. It promotes healthy relationships.
- D. It is praised by society.

9. According to paragraph 7, what might motivate some altruistic behavior?

- A. Fear of punishment
- B. Desire for social approval
- C. Lack of empathy
- D. Dislike of others

10. Based on the passage, which THREE of the following factors can promote altruism?

Choose three answers:

- A. Religious teachings
- B. Childhood experiences
- C. Competitive environments
- D. Prosocial role models
- E. Global awareness
- F. Genetic isolation

Answers & Explanations – Test 1

1. C. Altruism is complex and influenced by biology, psychology, and culture.

 The passage discusses multiple perspectives on altruism.


2. B. Kin selection

 Paragraph 2 says kin selection helps relatives, preserving shared genes.

3. B. Contradiction

 A paradox is something that seems contradictory but may still be true.

4. B. They feed other bats and expect to be fed in return.

 Paragraph 3 describes this as reciprocal altruism.

5. C. Reward-related brain regions become active.

✓ Paragraph 4 states that these brain areas light up during altruistic acts.

6. A. First square

✓ The inserted sentence fits after discussing how society reinforces altruism.

7. D. Increased wealth

✓ This is not listed as a drawback; others are.

8. B. It refers to excessive or harmful altruism.

✓ Paragraph 5 defines it as overextending help with negative outcomes.

9. B. Desire for social approval

✓ Paragraph 7 mentions possible subconscious motives like gaining approval.

10. B. Childhood experiences

D. Prosocial role models

E. Global awareness

✓ These are all mentioned as factors that promote altruism.

Test 2: Altruism in Everyday Life – Why Do We Help Others?

Passage

Altruism is not limited to grand gestures or heroic actions—it often manifests in everyday behaviors that reflect a concern for others. From holding the door open for a stranger to volunteering time for a local cause, small acts of kindness contribute to stronger communities and improved mental health for both givers and receivers.

One reason people engage in altruistic behavior is empathy . When individuals witness someone in distress, they often feel a strong emotional response that motivates them to help. This empathetic response is believed to be rooted in mirror neurons—specialized brain cells that activate both when we perform an action and when we observe someone else doing the same. These neurons allow us to experience a sense of shared emotion, making us more likely to offer assistance.

Another factor influencing altruism is social identity . People are more likely to help others whom they perceive as part of their group—whether based on nationality, religion, profession, or shared interests. This tendency, known as in-group favoritism , can strengthen bonds within communities but may also limit altruistic behavior toward outsiders.

Interestingly, studies show that altruistic behavior can improve mental health . Research indicates that individuals who volunteer regularly report higher levels of happiness and

life satisfaction. Helping others releases endorphins—chemicals in the brain associated with feelings of pleasure and reduced stress. This phenomenon has been dubbed the “helper’s high.”

The environment also plays a role in encouraging altruism. People are more likely to help in situations where they are not rushed and believe they are the only ones who can assist. Known as the bystander effect, this psychological phenomenon suggests that individuals are less likely to intervene in emergencies when others are present, assuming someone else will take action.

Education and upbringing significantly influence a person’s willingness to help others. Children raised in households that value kindness and generosity are more likely to develop altruistic tendencies. Schools that incorporate character education and community service into their curriculum also foster a spirit of giving among students.

Technology has both expanded and complicated modern expressions of altruism. On one hand, crowdfunding platforms and online donation tools make it easier than ever to support causes worldwide. On the other hand, digital activism—such as liking or sharing posts—can create a false sense of contribution without meaningful action.

Organizations and governments increasingly recognize the importance of altruism in building resilient societies. Public campaigns encourage citizens to volunteer, donate, and participate in community improvement projects. In some countries, schools and workplaces incorporate structured opportunities for service learning and team-based charitable activities.

While altruism brings many benefits, it is important to balance giving with self-care. Experts recommend setting boundaries and practicing mindful altruism to ensure that helping others does not come at the cost of personal well-being.

Ultimately, whether driven by empathy, social connection, or personal values, altruism enriches lives and strengthens the fabric of society. As individuals continue to find ways to give back, the ripple effects of their actions can inspire others to do the same.

? Questions – Test 2

1. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - A. Altruism is rare in modern society.
 - B. Altruism only involves large-scale actions.
 - C. Altruism includes small daily actions and improves well-being.
 - D. Altruism is harmful to mental health.

2. According to paragraph 2, what are mirror neurons responsible for?
 - A. Physical movement
 - B. Learning languages
 - C. Feeling empathy
 - D. Controlling heart rate

3. The word “foster” in paragraph 6 is closest in meaning to:
 - A. Prevent
 - B. Encourage
 - C. Reduce
 - D. Ignore

4. Which term refers to helping people you identify with?
 - A. Reciprocal altruism
 - B. Empathetic altruism
 - C. In-group favoritism
 - D. Kin selection

5. According to paragraph 4, what chemical is released during altruistic acts?

- A. Insulin
- B. Dopamine
- C. Endorphins
- D. Adrenaline

6. Look at the four squares [■] in paragraph 5. Where would the following sentence best fit?

"This diffusion of responsibility reduces the chance of someone stepping in."

- A. First square
- B. Second square
- C. Third square
- D. Fourth square

7. What does the author imply about digital activism?

- A. It is always effective.
- B. It guarantees real change.
- C. It may not lead to real-world impact.
- D. It replaces traditional volunteering.

8. According to paragraph 7, what can parents do to encourage altruism in children?

- A. Limit access to technology
- B. Value kindness and generosity
- C. Focus only on academics
- D. Avoid community involvement

9. What is one way schools promote altruism?

- A. By increasing homework
- B. Through standardized testing

- C. By offering competitive sports
- D. With community service programs


10. Based on the passage, which THREE of the following are benefits of altruism?

Choose three answers:


- A. Improved mental health
- B. Increased stress
- C. Stronger communities
- D. Reduced empathy
- E. Higher life satisfaction
- F. Greater social isolation

Answers & Explanations – Test 2


1. C. Altruism includes small daily actions and improves well-being.

 The passage emphasizes everyday altruism and its positive effects.

2. C. Feeling empathy

 Paragraph 2 links mirror neurons to shared emotions and helping behavior.


3. B. Encourage

 “Foster” means to promote or encourage development.

4. C. In-group favoritism

 Paragraph 3 defines this as helping those seen as part of one’s group.

5. C. Endorphins

 Paragraph 4 states that endorphins are released during altruistic behavior.

6. B. Second square

✓ The sentence follows a discussion about the bystander effect and shared responsibility.

7. C. It may not lead to real-world impact.

✓ Paragraph 5 suggests digital activism can create a false sense of contribution.

8. B. Value kindness and generosity

✓ Paragraph 6 says children raised in such homes are more likely to be altruistic.

9. D. With community service programs

✓ Paragraph 6 mentions schools incorporating service learning into curricula.

10. A. Improved mental health

C. Stronger communities

E. Higher life satisfaction

✓ These are all supported by the passage.