

ROLE OF RELIGION AND CULTURE IN EVOLUTION OF ALTRUISM

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ABSTRACT

Sociobiology is another approach to account for altruistic behavior and human nature. As Pepitone (1976) as insisted, 'social psychology belongs in a large bio cultural context in close working relationships with other social sciences and biology'. Although the importance for our behavior of inter subjectively created symbolic and normative meanings must be constantly remembered, so must the causal influence of both our evolutionary history and our past and present physical environment.

Culture includes a set of values, norms, beliefs, traditions, and rituals etc., which are handed over to another by previous generations in various forms. The internalization of culture is an important learning for all individuals.

Besides religiosity and other personality traits attempt has been made to call out a few more problems in relation to altruism that have been subjected to systematic research for the present thesis.

KEYWORDS: *Altruism, Altruism & Sex-Differences, Psychological Theories*

INTRODUCTION

Sociobiology is another approach to account for altruistic behavior and human nature. As Pepitone (1976) as insisted, 'social psychology belongs in a large bio cultural context in close working relationships with other social sciences and biology'. Although the importance for our behavior of inter subjectively created symbolic and normative meanings must be constantly remembered, so must the causal influence of both our evolutionary history and our past and present physical environment. A psychology which ignores human biology cannot expect to explain all facets of our social natures and relationships, for we are not infinitely malleable, as the systematic study of biological basis of all social behavior in terms of genetic makeup of those species as it has been influenced by their evolution over the ages.

Psychoanalysis is a traditional psychological theory developed by Sigmund Freud and his associates. It is essentially a theory of personality that developed as a part of an approach to psychotherapy. In conceptualizing the structured of personality, Freud posited three sets of forces- id, ego and superego; that are constantly in conflict over the control of behavior. According to him, when the ego has control over the two other forces in the personality, the person is supposed to have made a rational adjustment to his or her environment. Even through unconscious, id forces such as aggressive and sexual urges continue to seek discharge these will be released in healthy, socially desirable and acceptable channels if the ego is in control.

In the point of view of sociological theories man is a social animal and he cannot exist alone. To live together one has to agree with another and contribute mutually. A high order of this cooperation might bring a better acceptance and

positions including leadership in the society. Altruism is one way to prove oneself as special in front of others (Simpson & Willer, 2015). Man is an animal with many emotional qualities compared to other animals. The qualities such as empathy and sympathy etc. make the man feel better himself by seeing another person's happiness. It has been explained by the behavioral economists that sympathy is behind many of the charity acts of the individuals (Khalil, 2001 & 2004; Ashraf et al, 2005). The changes in views about pro-social behaviors and social development may be better explained by social constructionist theories. The existing situation in the globe at time of birth can be considered as the stores reality or existing reality. These beliefs and knowledge will be handed over to the child by the family and significant others as a part of the initial moral education. While the child grows up he/she develops a subjective way of understanding about everything he/she intervenes including pro-social behaviors. He/she may agree, disagree or partially agree with what he/she thought about others. Later when he/she interacts with other members of the society he/she will come in to contact with many other individuals and in common situations they will share their ideas and views. Here there will be a process of mutual influence and one may influence others or get influenced by others. The altruistic behaviors may be recognized as highly acceptable behavior. When an individual of group of individuals influenced by another one or ideology positively it will bring favorable behaviors and vice versa. The social constructionist theory is very helpful in explaining the development of deviant behaviors by the influence of various factors (Liao-Troth & Dunn, 1999; Butt, 2001; Fairhurst & David, 2010).

It is interesting to see that in spite of belonging to same family and social situations each individual develop differences in altruistic behaviors. Also most of the times altruism itself may be defined differently in different culture and societies and it vary from time to time. For that reason many behaviors considered as altruistic in the past may not be altruistic now. The idea of altruism itself may change according to time. For example helping a person to write a letter may be an example of simple altruistic behavior in the past but now it may be helping someone to draft an email letter. The social constructionist theories may be able to explain such changes. According to social constructionism the reality is socially constructed and it is an ongoing process. All the facts which we are aware of are the part of stored reality or the existing reality. An individual gaining this knowledge from the family, elders, education, reading books, movies etc. Later individual develops a subjective point of view about the truth which he/she is related based on their own understanding and what they learned. It is subjective reality which will manifest in their day to day social situation. In the social situation individuals share their ideas with other individuals which lead to the creation of shared reality. Through shared reality there will be reciprocal influence on the others which will subsequently lead to the change in the stored reality. In this way the altruistic behavior are originally parts of the stored reality or the existing reality which will be handed over from one generation to another by its members. Later the individual develops a subjective understanding about the altruistic behavior. All individuals try to influence others through their attitude and behaviors and the most acceptable one will get more followers. As an end product the individual will come up with a set of pro-social behaviors appreciated by contemporary society and in the same process the values and views will change progressively. A progressive development in this way also may be necessary to be a part of social development in the societal point of view (Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). According to sociological theories man is a social animal and who cannot exist without his/her co-partners. Many sociologists consider society as an organism which exists collectively. Living together with other members demands a set of rules, morals and reciprocal helping behaviors to maintain social equilibrium. Evolution of altruism in social context may also happen in this way. Sociological theories considering collectivism and altruism are part of moral principal. According to Durkheim society has many important transactions and purposes than just to have social relations

and existences at present. Society exists in certain organized way which brings the need of participation from everyone including selfless behaviors. Devoting for the benefit or development of the society is also considered as a societal need (Durkheim 1973; Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Dubeski, 2001; Feigin et al, 2014).

The altruistic behaviors of the individuals attracted the attention of the economists very long ago. The classical economic theory believes that all the monetary activity of an individual is for maximizing profit and personal satisfaction. But they got confused while seeing individuals doing charity activities and social services to others. Adam Smith tried to explain this in his theory of moral sentiments. He argued that all the human behaviors are determined by the struggle between passions and impartial spectator. The passions are the original drives such as hunger, sex, fear, pain etc. He believes all the behaviors of human beings are under the direct control of passion. But when individuals try to look their own behaviors on the perspectives of an outsider, the impartial spectator originate.

Guilt has been a painful emotion, so painful, in fact, that cultures have institutionalized a variety of ways to relieve as such; Sacrifices both animal and human, offering of grain and money, penitent behavior confession, denial etc. In ancient Israel, the sins of the people were periodically laid on a "Scapegoat" animal that was then led into the Wilderness, thus arraying away the people's guilt (de Vaus, 1965).

Our eagerness to do good after doing bad seems to reflect both our need to reduce private guilt and restore our shaken self-image, and our desire to reclaim a positive public-image (Darlington & Macker, 1966; Konechi, 1972; Regan, 1971).

Negative emotional states have been even less straight forward relationship with altruism. Findings appear so inconsistent that they indicate that such emotions inhibit altruistic act, facilitate such acts, or have no effect at all (Barden et. al., 1981; Shelton and Rogers, 1981). Success on a task increases helping (Isan and Levine).

One can understand the role of religion in the evolution of altruism better with the help of other social and psychological theories. According to the social theories, altruism is a part of moral behavior which is necessary to maintain social equilibrium and survival. The mutual support and helping behaviors are essential to maintain the social system (Dubeski, 2001). According to psychoanalysis morality is a part of super ego and a strong super ego is necessary for the successful development of individuals. Weak superego may cause for development of inappropriate personality traits or personality disorders. Super ego incorporates all the cultural and social norms and values in the society. The children used to develop the morality and values from the teachings of parents and teachers. Such teachings are always in the forms of religious and cultural stories for pleasing God. The religious teachings are always explaining the way of salvation through pleasing God. Again in the childhood, children are often taught about religious rituals as well as, by respecting and practicing all moral behaviors. The religious teachings include preaches by the religious leaders, holy books, religious stories, history, and methods of prayers and rituals. All the above are emphasized on morals and values and highly appreciate the altruistic behaviors. Freud considers that religion help individual to control the natural destructiveness of humans caused by their narcissism and sexual impulses. He considers God as a projection of the superego tic instance of the imaginary father.

Culture includes a set of values, norms, beliefs, traditions, and rituals etc., which are handed over to another by previous generations in various forms. The internalization of culture is an important learning for all individuals. Culture usually includes a set of values and norms which appreciate individuals to be altruistic. One can see that culture broadened the concepts associated with altruism. The altruistic behaviors performed beyond the kinship and group level can be

explained on the basis of culture influences. Just being a biological kin may not always produce emotional attachments. More important is the bonding between individuals. Biological perspectives failed to explain the high level of affection and altruism between adopted children and parents, step parents, children and step siblings and also between close friends. Again the altruistic behaviors motivated by patriotism and humanity can be explained in a better way with cultural influences. Culture may broaden the biological meaning of kinship to a larger perspective by seeing all the members in the community or the country or religion as brothers and sisters. It teaches individuals to respect and help others like our own relatives. It also promotes the reciprocal altruism expecting that such attitude among the members are essentially pro-social and important to maintain the stability and peace in the community. All the pro-social behaviors promoted by different culture are essential for all the members of the community. For example maintaining respect of the rules and norms (Hills, 1984; Alison, 1992; Madsen et al, 2007).

In the beginning of an individual's life one can see two individuals in the extremes in terms of altruism. One is a child who is totally selfish and another is a mother who is totally selfless. If we pursue Erickson's theory, in the first stage of psychosexual development the child comes in contact with a kind of altruism first time in life from mother, later father and others. Here altruism helps the individual to develop trust which is the first development task to be achieved. Further how the altruism evolves in an individual's life is an interesting investigation.

Evolution of Altruism in the History of Human Civilization

It will be interesting to evaluate the evolution of various altruistic behaviors in human being. Many of the altruistic behaviors other than related to the survival were not present or very minimal during the barbarian age. But along with civilization the level of altruistic behavior also increased. In the later stages of civilization the scarcity of resources might bring the humans in a face to face situation where they have to fight or share.

Altruism and Sex-Difference

Besides religiosity and other personality traits attempt has been made to call out a few more problems in relation to altruism that have been subjected to systematic research for the present thesis. Altruism as a function of sex difference is one such problem.

Before coming to influence of gender on human behavior, it is pertinent to distinguish two key terms—Sex and gender. Sex is used to refer to those characteristics of males and females that are attributable exclusively to biology. Men and Women also have different hormones, which regulate certain physiological and psychological functions.

Table 1: Displaying Statistics for Males and Females on Altruism Scale

| Group | Mean | Altruism Scores | |
|--------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| | | SD | t |
| Male | 14.84 | 2.32 | 5.02* |
| Female | 16.56 | 2.59 | |

Sources: Sex-difference in empathy and related capacities, Psychological Bulletin, 94, 100-131.

* P <.01, N = 100

CONCLUSIONS

The altruism is an unconditional kindness without expectation of return, and providing help and achieving a sense of satisfaction from the regardless action by helping other. It is an important quality of animals especially for human being. There are various factors which are playing significant role in the evolution of altruistic behaviors in humans. As it is a complex mechanism a single approach is not sufficient to explain it. It will be possible only with the help of various theories.

The investigator is fully aware that the study was conducted on college students of low SES group representing rural and semi-urban population. As such the findings could be generalized for the subjects of other SES groups and non-student groups. In order to measure different variables; like religiosity and other personality characteristic Hindi Version of the concerned scales in Questionnaires from were used. As it is evident that the questionnaires had its own limitations. It seems that extraneous effects of the response set should have been eliminated or at least minimized. Further researches should take care to eliminate one of the important sources of bias. However, utmost vigilance was adopted in data collection and analysis, even then the possibility of human error cannot be ruled out. For this the investigator has only way to be forgiven.

Such type of study can also be conducted in different geographical areas to see the effect of difference in the cultural background as also the effects of modernization and industrialization, so that the validity of the findings of the present price of research can be determined.

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