

ALTRUISM

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What Is Altruism?

- **What causes people to jeopardize their own health and well-being to help other people?**
- **What is it that inspires individuals to give their time, energy, and money to aid in the betterment of others, even when they receive nothing tangible in return?**
- **Altruism** involves the unselfish concern for other people.
 - It involves doing things simply out of a desire to help, not because you feel obligated to out of duty, loyalty, or religious reasons.
- Everyday life is filled with small acts of altruism, from the person who offers his own seats in a Bus OLD/LADIES to the person who gives money to a Beggar or offering blanket to the shivering person on the street.
- News stories often focus on grander cases of altruism, such as a man who dives into an icy river to rescue a drowning stranger to a generous donor who gives thousands of Rs to a local charity.
 - Though we may be familiar with altruism, social psychologists are interested in understanding *why* it occurs.
 - What inspires these acts of kindness?
 - What motivates people to risk the Altruism is one aspect of what social psychologists refer to as prosocial behavior.

What Is Altruism?

- Prosocial behavior refers to any action that benefits other people, no matter what the motive or how the giver benefits from the action.
 - However, pure altruism involves true selflessness.
 - While all altruistic acts are prosocial, not all prosocial behaviors are completely altruistic.
 - For example, we might help others for a variety of reasons such as guilt, obligation, duty, or even for rewards.
- Psychologists have suggested a number of different explanations for why altruism exists.

Explanation for Altruism

- Psychologists have suggested a number of different explanations for why altruism exists, :
- **Biological Reasons:**
- Kin selection - We may be more altruistic towards those we are related to because it increases the odds that our blood relations will survive and transmit their genes to future generations.
- **Neurological Reasons:**
- Altruism activates reward centers in the brain.
- Neurobiologists have found that when engaged in an altruistic act, the pleasure centers of the brain become active.
- **Social Norms:**
- Society's rules, norms, and expectations can also influence whether or not people engage in altruistic behavior.
- Why should one risk one's own life to save a complete stranger?
- The norm of reciprocity- a social expectation in which we feel pressured to help others if they have already done something for us.
 - For example, if your friend loaned you money a few weeks ago, you will probably feel compelled to reciprocate when he asks for a loan of Rs 1000.
 - He did something for you, now you feel obligated to do something in

Explanation for Altruism

- **Cognitive Reasons:**

- While the definition of altruism involves doing for others without reward, there may still be cognitive incentives that are not obvious.

- For example, we might help others to relieve our own distress or because being kind to others upholds our view of ourselves as kind, empathetic people.

- Some of the cognitive explanations:

- **Empathy:** Researchers including Batson et al. (1981) suggest that people are more likely to engage in altruistic behavior when they feel empathy for the person who is in distress, a suggestion known as the *empathy-altruism hypothesis*.

- Batson suggests that both empathy and altruism are innate traits and other researchers have found that children tend to become more altruistic as their sense of empathy develops.

- **Helping Relieves Negative Feelings:** Other experts have proposed that altruistic acts help relieve the negative feelings created by observing someone else in distress, an idea referred to as the *negative-state relief model*.

- Essentially, seeing another person in trouble causes us to feel upset, distressed, or uncomfortable, so helping the person in trouble helps reduce these negative feelings.

Explanation for Altruism

- **Comparing the Theories**

- The underlying reasons behind altruism as well as the question of whether there is truly such a thing as "pure" altruism are two issues hotly contested by social psychologists.

 - Do we ever engage in helpful actions for truly altruistic reasons, or are there hidden benefits to the self that guide our altruistic behaviors?

- Batson suggests that while people do often behave altruistically for selfish reasons, he believes that true altruism is possible.

 - Cialdini and others have instead suggested that empathy for others is often guided by a desire to help one's self.

- In her text *Social Psychology*, author Catherine A. Sanderson notes:

- **"Although these models may seem to contradict one another, they do agree that at times people engage in helping for egoistic reasons. The main difference between these models is that the empathy-altruism model describes the self-benefits of helping as unintended consequences, yet the negative-state relief hypothesis describes these benefits as the primary motivation for helping. What are the benefits to the self? They can be grouped into three categories: reduction of aversive arousal, fear of punishment for not helping, and desire for reward."**