



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-X, Issue-I, October 2021, Page No.84-93

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

Altruism and Egoism: An Ethical Study

Asmita Bhattacharya

SACT(State Aided College Teacher)

Netaji Nagar College for Women (Under C.U.)

Abstract

This article deals with the theoretical analysis of the ratio between the two notions: egoism and altruism. Altruism's fundamental principle is that the highest good for each people is to his or her own happiness. Everyone seeks own happiness. This theory answers all questions about what a person ought to do by prescribing an action by which he can promote his own highest good happiness. While on the other hand, egoism, its fundamental principle is to promote one's highest good which is necessary for that person, but it does not prescribe the pursuit of that good without regard to the interests of others or concern for their well-being. Whenever, one's own happiness depends on other people doing well, then it would be a foolish not to promote their interests. Thus, egoism far from being selfishness it encourages behavior, attitudes, its belief in the basic standards of justice, equality, kindness, charity, it helps to cultivate friendship, help one's neighbors, shows kindness to strangers, when one comes to see that a person's happiness depends on this following qualities.

Key words: altruism, egoism,, morality, happiness, sacrifice

Introduction: The concept of "altruism" as opposed to "egoism" is the subject of research and discussion in the philosophical, sociological and psychological science, altruism is considered as one of the social representation in everyday consciousness the understanding of its essence corresponds to the realities of today. Most people understand altruism as selfless helping behavior towards other people and society as a whole, sometimes contrary to their own interests. But in today's changing society, social ideas about altruism and egoism are undergoing changes, so it is important to study the concept of altruism, the concept of egoism and altruistic manifestations, to prosocial behavior, the correlation between altruism and egoism, and understanding altruism as the opposite of egoism, but they are complementary phenomena.

The notions of egoism and altruism are usually treated as the opposites. First of all broadly egoism as the theory that one's self is, or should be, the motivation and the goal of one's own action. while altruism is associated with the unselfish help to other people,

person's ability to disregard his/her own interests and desires. An altruistic self-sacrifice for the common good is always treated as heroic action and is highly appreciated. The term altruism was coined by Auguste Comte and it defines as 'living for others'. Egoism and altruism are unequal contenders in the explanation of human behavior. While egoism tends to be viewed as natural and unproblematic, altruism has always been treated with suspicion. Egoism fits into our usual theoretical views of human behavior in a way that altruism does not.

Methods: The aim of this study is to identify the features of the idea about altruism and egoism, and show the positive correlation between the notions 'altruism' and 'egoism' scales in a person's everyday life.

Egoism: Egoism is an ethical theory and its program is to find the basic standards of justice, honesty, charity, kindness and helps to cultivate thrift, self-control, frugality level headedness. One of the most essential concept of egoism is 'happiness'. The word 'happiness' is very ambiguous. The word can be used in two different senses. On the one hand, the word is sometimes used to denote a 'mood', which is very momentary, like elation or joy. On the other hand, the word is sometimes used to denote as condition of a person's life as a whole. If one takes the first sense which opposite is sadness, it is temporary. When the word 'happiness' used in a second sense means something permanent state of wellbeing and satisfaction with one's situation. This opposite is misery. And, indeed, this second sense and not the first, is the sense when speak of pursuit of happiness. The pursuit of happiness is not the pursuit of joy, but, the pursuit of imperishable state of wellbeing and satisfaction with one's life. This pursuit is what egoism takes to be the context of right action and it is the second sense of happiness that the word is used to formulate the core principle of egoism.

From this above discussion it is very evident that two elements namely well-being and satisfaction with one's life is identical. But, that is mistaken. Happiness is a part of psychology whereas, well-being is not a part of psychology. To say someone is happy is to attribute to him a certain attitude towards himself. But no such attitude is attributed to someone in saying that he is living well. Concepts of well-being and satisfaction with one's life is not truly identical but, in a philosophical discussion of happiness necessarily doesn't go wrong if it focuses on well-being. One must keep in mind that the main question in such a discussion is what happiness consists in and also consideration of what well-being consists in.

In western ethics, there are two theories, which are deal with this two concepts. According to hedonism, human well being consists in pleasure and absence of pain. If a person's life is filled with pleasure and is free of pain then his life will be better. According to perfectionism, human well-being consists in activities which is both worth-doing and excellently done. If a person's life is filled with such activities and is free of insignificant actions and failures, then his life will be better. Hedonism measures a person's well-being by the quality of his subjective states, but perfectionism measures it by the worth of the

activities in which he engages. Hedonism takes well-being as consisting in pleasant and agreeable experiences absence of painful and disagreeable ones. Whereas, perfectionism takes well-being consisting in engaging in worth-while activities.

Hedonism, in other words can hold that how satisfied one is with one's life contributes as much to one's well-being as it does to one's happiness. So, in the way this two elements fall together. Like hedonist's account can encompass that satisfaction with one's life is itself a kind of pleasure, and dissatisfaction with one's life is kind of pain. By contrast, perfectionism holds that faction of one's life is not factor of one's well-being because, one could dissatisfied with one's life but even though it consisted of activities there were worth doing. A person is never satisfied with his accomplishments how extraordinary they are may be very well in life yet not have achieved happiness.

In this context, one can bring the concept of happiness of Aristotle. In his famous book *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle claims that all human activity is teleological; all activity is in pursuit of some goal. "Every art and every art and every inquiry and similarly every action and pursuit is thought to aim at some good and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim." There is a hierarchy of these goods at which various activities aim. Lesser goods are instrumental in the pursuit of greater goods. "But where such arts fall under a single capacity ... in all these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends, for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued." He is claiming that the top of this hierarchy will be the highest goal of human activity. This final goal Aristotle calls it 'eudemonia' which translated as 'happiness', since 'happiness' is a state of mind and Aristotle is quite clear that eudemonia is to be understood as an activity "living well and faring well." Also, William James sagely put it, a person's self-esteem is equal to ratio of his pretensions to his successes and if his pretensions are too high then his self-esteem will drop a notwithstanding his success.

According to Aristotle, happiness is a central purpose of human life and a goal in itself. Happiness depends on the cultivation of virtue. For him, a genuinely happy life required the fulfillment of a huge range of conditions, including physical as well as mental well-being. Aristotle claimed that almost everyone would agree that happiness is the end which meets all these requirements. It is very clear that a person desires money, pleasure; honour because that person believes these goods will makes him happy. Therefore, happiness is always an end in itself. Happiness is a final goal that encompass the totality of one's life. It is not something that can be gained in a few hours, it is the ultimate value of one's life. Thus Aristotle gives his definition of happiness: "... the function of man is to live certain kind of life, and this activity implies a rational principle, and the function of a good man is the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed it is performed in accord with the appropriate excellence; if this is the case, then happiness turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue." There is a link between happiness and virtue. The most important factor to achieve happiness is to have a good moral character.

In foundation of Metaphysics of Morals, Immanuel Kant holds that the moral value of an action is weighed in that the action is performed from duty. All our actions can be judged from two principles which Kant called Categorical Imperative. Principle 1 states that we act only on a maxim that we can at the same time make universal law. Principle 2 holds that we act in such a way as not to use others as mere means for our own ends. Kant's rules are absolute and unbendable. In this context one can rightly hold Hobbes theory of Social Justice. According to Hobbes, the central aim or goal of all men is self-preservation. Basically no one can like the things pain, death etc., so it was decided that to create a peaceful and states society we make an agreement to cooperate with one another. We are motivated to do what actions best to preserve our own interests.

An egoist is not one who is exclusively motivated by unbridled greeds; an egoist is someone who merely evaluates his moral choices according to how they coincide with his rational self-interest. An egoist is not so centered on his own interests that he neglects the needs of others. He may be to do for others before satisfies his own physical needs – if he sees that by serving other people he ultimately serves himself. An egoist knows that is the pursuits of his own interests he may be encounter situations that may be very unpleasant.

Arguments for and against egoism: The primary argument for egoism is that the fundamental principle of this ethical theory which is happiness identifies as the highest good for an individual. Egoism takes happiness as the ultimate end of right action. An individual is mainly concerned with his or her own happiness; it is pursued for its own sake, not for any other end. Any other end one pursues is pursued for the sake of happiness, who are the defender of this argument that happiness is the uniquely ultimate end of anyone's life, they would agree that any other end of right action, is an intermediate rather than an ultimate end. It corresponds to an instrumental good. For example, a college scholarship is helpful to gaining the knowledge and understanding that higher education imparts. One seeks it for the sake of attaining the knowledge and understanding, not for the sake of own self. Because such a college scholarship can have no value apart from the good one can use it to attain. On the hedonistic interpretation of happiness, knowledge and understanding count as instrumental goods. On the perfectionistic interpretation, they count as constituents of the highest good. People generally regard their own happiness as something good in itself and not something that they pursue for the sake of some other end. Some people would disagree. They think that what makes an action right in some cases, in its being done for the sake of another's happiness, rather than owns happiness. They agree with the proposition that happiness is the ultimate end, but they would disagree with the proposition that it is uniquely ultimate end of right action.

The most important argument was made by Thomas Hobbes. This argument relies on a theory of human motivation. This theory concerns the springs of intentional action. In this context Hobbes firstly distinguish between intentional actions and reflexive actions. Intentional actions are movement that you execute to achieve an end provided by some motive. On the other hand, reflexive actions are automatic; they are movements that the activity of your nervous system produces without the interposition of some motive. The

chief doctrine of Hobbes's theory is that the motive of every intentional action is at bottom the same. It is the desire to promote one's own interests. This is the theory of psychological egoism.

Psychological egoism - It is the theory that we are deep down motivated by our own self-interests. Psychological egoism is merely an empirical claim about what kinds of motives we have not what they ought to be. Psychological egoism is a descriptive form which claims that all human actions have an ultimate end; that end is an individual's own interests. This doctrine claims to be description of psychological facts, not prescription of ethical ideals. This theory is to be distinguished from another doctrine called 'ethical egoism'. According to this theory, people ought to pursue or desire their own wellbeing. This theory being a prescription of what ought to be the case makes no claim to psychological theory of human motives.

According to Jeremy Bentham all persons have one ultimate motive in all their voluntary behavior and that motive is selfish one – namely desire for one's own pleasure. "... the only kind of ultimate desire is the desire to get or to prolong pleasant experiences and to avoid or to cut short unpleasant experiences for oneself."

Psychological egoism is contrasted to psychological altruism. Where psychological egoism allows to promote self-desire, well-being, one's own self-interests without regard anyone else's interests, on the other hand psychological altruism successfully aims at the motivation by which people can do any action from selflessness, people can motivated by will without regard his or her own interests. The central aim of such motivated people are to help others in their distress without any expectation of gaining anything. But in the case of psychological egoism, it allows a man to help other person if there is a benefit for him, doing act of that person's well-being.

From an evolutionary perspective, Herbert Spencer, a psychological egoist argues that humans and animals primarily seek to survive and protect their lineage. The need for the individual and for the individual's family to live supersedes the others' need to live. All species attempt to maximize the chance of their survival and welfare. Herbert Spencer asserted that best adapted creature will have pleasure levels. Thus pleasure means an animal or human's egoist goal of self-survival; and pleasure would always be pursued because species always strive for survival.

Sigmund Freud was not a psychological egoist, but his concept of the pleasure principle borrowed from psychological egoism and psychological hedonism in particular.

But psychological egoism is controversial. Reflection on one's own actions may reveal their motives and intended results to be based on self-interest. Opponents have stated that proponents of psychological egoism often confuse the satisfaction of their own desires with the satisfaction of their own self-regarding desires. It is true that every human being seeks his own satisfaction, but this sometimes may only be achieved through the well-being of his neighbor.

Psychological egoism asserts that all such desires for wellbeing of others are ultimately derived from self-interests. Friedrich Nietzsche was a psychological egoist for some of his career, though he is said to have repudiated that later in his campaign morality.

In this case psychological egoist respond that helping others in such a way is ultimately motivated by self-interested desires, such as expectation or reciprocation the desire to gain respect or reputation. The helpful action is merely instrumental to these ultimately selfish goals.

On the other side ethical egoism is the normative ethical doctrine moral agents ought to do what is in their self-interest. It differs from psychological egoism which claims that people can act only in their self-interest. Ethical egoism contrasts with ethical altruism which holds that moral agents have an obligation to help others. Hume, David, *An Enquiry concerning the principles of morals*. Public domain.

Ethical egoism does not require moral agents to harm the well-being of others when making moral deliberation, nor does ethical egoism necessarily entail that in pursuing self-interest, one ought always to do what one wants to do. Ethical altruism is the opposite, it holds the thought that one should look after the interests of others more than of one's own interest. In ethical altruism, everyone does the greatest good for the greatest number, but in ethical egoism, people do for their own benefit and interest. Altruism is not about making the society better off but about making people better off.

Altruism: A person who is altruistic cares about the interest or well-being of others rather than his own interest. Altruistic actions are selfless; they are done for the sake of other people not for any personal gains, if necessary they are always ready to sacrifice their own needs, desires for the well-being of others. Now one can argue that an action can only be moral if they are done for the sake of helping others rather than oneself. It is the fact that people have a natural inclination to be selfish, hence learning to think of others is a noble thought to do. Mother Teresa is an example of altruism. She was a catholic nun who dedicated her own life to helping poor in India. Now, a psychological egoist may say that she did it for her own benefit, to feel good about herself. An ethical egoist may say her care for others is genuine, but they may view her activity as foolish, because she should have been looking after her own interests or needs, not other people's needs.

It is very hard to believe, but there is a question, altruism may be understood as concern with others – but how much and which others?

Now there are different types of altruism, the first form of altruism is called nepotistic altruism and it is altruism based on family. If you have a child, so can you work every day to ensure that your child has shelter, food, clothing, all other emotional support and nurturing she needs to survive. Your self-sacrifice to care for well-being of your child would be seen as nepotistic altruism.

Another form of altruism is reciprocal altruism; it is a give and take relationship. This form of altruism is one of the key characteristics of long-term relationships or friendship it allows each person to lean on the other in a time of need and give back.

Third form of altruism is group based altruism, it involves self-sacrificing on account of supporting a group.

There are another forms of altruism, psychological altruism and biological altruism. Psychological altruism means acting out of concern for the well-being of others, without regard your own interests. Biological altruism refers to behavior that helps the survival of a species without benefiting the particular individual who is being altruistic.

Altruism and Morality: Morality depends on a subjective set of believers of each person, morality itself distinction between lead or right/wrong. Altruism, on the other hand is a belief or behavior of acting in a selfless way out of the concern for the well-being of others. What is moral code of altruism? The fundamental principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and the self-sacrifice is the highest moral duty, valu and virtue. Now it is already discussed that altruism means selfless action, which means self as a standard of evil and selfless as a standard of good. The issue whether the need of others is the first mortgage of man's life and the moral purpose of man's existence. There are two moral questions which altruism comes together – i) What are values? and ii) Who should be the beneficiary of values? Altruism declared that any action taken for the benefit of others is good and an action taken for one's own benefit is evil. So, the beneficiary of an action is the only criteria of moral value.

All those who preach the creed of sacrifices, whatever their motives are they want people to surrender. They play with the mind of people. According to those, it is selfish to uphold one's convictions, but one must sacrifice them to the conviction of others. There is an important question about the morality of altruism out of existence: Why? Why must man live for the sake of others? Why must he be a sacrificial animal? Why is moral to serve the happiness of other, but not your own? If enjoyment is a value, then why is it moral when experienced by others and it is immoral when experienced by you? Why is it immoral for you to desire and moral for others? Why is it immoral if you have a value and keep it and moral if you give it? If you are a selfless and virtuous when you give it, are they not selfish when they take it? Does virtue consist of serving vice?

May be the answer is no, it is not immoral for them perhaps they are unable to do, the takers are not evils. It is not immoral for them to enjoy it, provided they do not obtain it by right. Nature does not provide a man with an automatic form of survival, he has to support his life by his own effort, the theory which concern the interest of one's own life is called evil, means the man's desire to life is evil. The social system based on altruist morality – with the code of self-sacrifice which is called socialism, communism and so on. All of them treat man as a sacrificial animal to be immolate for the benefit of others, society, groups, community, state etc.

Darwin said that who have the altruistic trait are more evolutionarily successful than those who do not have it. So, those population that have more dominants for altruism are more evolutionarily successful than those population which do not have it.

Darwin held that morality evolved in humans because it was a beneficial trait for human social cohesiveness. Moral reasoning was a trait, if a trait is beneficial for a population, then it will be selected for that community.

Now, there is a two nations: - one is 'altruistic egoism' and other one is 'egoistic altruism'. It is shown that how this two moral theories are connected with each other. Humans have deep connection each other and people are greatly influenced and stimulated by others.

Conclusion: So, it might be possible that there is thing, such as 'altruistic egoism' and 'egoistic altruism'. Here, 'Altruistic Egoism' means that the thing which oneself did for others will become more benefit of oneself in the end. For example, a student helps hi classmate preparing note which is not very clear to that classmate. This action not only helps that classmate preparing the note for the upcoming exam, but it also promotes that student who helps him to understand the chapter more deeply and clear to him also. In this case everyone can take advantage and get promoted. 'Egoistic Altruism' means that it seems ego and selfish actions, but the consequences will become more benefit for everyone. For example, if one of the members of a drama practice very hard every day and has a strong ego to be a good performer, then others get stimulated and they also can get better ability to perform good and as a result, each good skill produces an excellent drama as a whole, and finally, everyone can achieve own goal.

Whatever we are doing in our life are for the sake of own self and also for the sake of others. it is possible to have the action 'altruistic egoism', and 'egoistic altruism'. Humans have own ego more or less. Sometimes the selfish behavior begins benefit for that person. But altruism and egoism do not exist as same thing.

Bibliography:

Books: -

1. Aristotle. 'Nicomachean Ethics', Translated and introduced by David Ross, revised by J.L. Aekrill and J.O. Urmson. Oxford University Press, 2011.
2. Bentham, Jeremy. 'An Introduction to Principles of Moral and Legislation', London : Athlone Press, 1970.
3. Broad, 'Critical Essays in Moral philosophy', New York : Humanities Press, 1971.
4. Broad, C.D. 'Ethics and The History of Philosophy', New York : Humanities Press, 1952.
5. Comte, Auguste. System of Positive Polity; or, treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity. Edward Spencer Beesly (trans.), Vol.4; London : Longmans, Green, 1875-1877.

6. Darwin, Charles. 'The Origin of Species : Means of Natural Selection', New York : D. Appleton and Company, 1884.
7. Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1976.
8. Deigh, John. 'An Introduction to Ethics', New York : University Press, 2010.
9. Green, T.H. *Prolegomena to Ethics*, new edition with introduction by David O. Brink, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1883.
10. Griffin, James. 'Well-Being : Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance', Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1986.
11. Hare, R.M. 'Moral Thinking : Its Levels, Methods and Point, Clarendon Press, 1981.
12. Hebasha, M.M. 'Separating Altruistic and egoistic Motives for Helping : An Individual Difference Approach', Purdue University,
13. Hume, David. 'Treatise of Human Nature',^{ed} L. A. Selby Bigge, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1975.
14. Kant, Immanuel, 'The Critique of Pure Reason', Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1929.
15. Kant, Immanuel, 'Critique of Practical Reason', L.W. Beck (trans.), Indianapolis : Bobbs – Merrill – 1788 Educational Publishing, 1956.
16. Kant, Immanuel, 'Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals', Arnulf Zweig (trans.), Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2002.
17. Mill, John Stuart. 'Utilitarianism', 2nd edition, Indianapolis : Hackett, 2002.
18. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Carol Diethe (trans.), ed. With an introduction by Keith Ansell-Pearson. Cambridge, U.K. : Cambridge University Press, 1994.
19. Rachels, James. *Ethical Egoism*, In *Reason and Responsibility : Readings in some basic problems of Philosophy*, ed. Joel Feinberg and Ross Shafer – Landau.
20. Ricard, Malthieu. *Altruism : The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the world*, New York : Little Brown & Co, 2015.
21. Sidgwick, Henry. 'The Methods of Ethics', 7th edition, Indianapolis : Hackett, 1981.
22. Singer, Peter. 'Practical Ethics', 2nd edition, Centre for Human Bioethics, Monash University : Cambridge University Press, 1993.
23. Singer, Peter. 'The Life You Can Save : Acting Now to End World Poverty', Random House : New York, 2009.
24. Singer, Peter. 'The most Good You can Do : How Effective Altruism is Changing Ideas About Living Effectively', New Haven : Yale University Press, 2015.
25. Spencer, Herbert. 'The Data of ethics'. London : Williams and Norgate, 1879.
26. Williams, C. George, 'Natural Selection : Domains, Levels and Challenges', Oxford University Press, 1992.
27. Wolf, Susan. 'Morality and Partiality, Philosophical Perspectives', 6 : 243-259; reprinted in Wolf 2015b : 31-46. Do : 10.2307/2214247

Online Source:

- Avery, Joseph J. and Muse, Eleanor. Altruism Found : David Sloan Wilson's Multilevel Explanation, A review of Does Altruism exist? Culture, Genes and the Welfare of Others by David Sloan Wilson. New Haven : Yale University Press, 2015. Retrieved from akademai.com/doi/abs. Accessed on 8 August 2017
- More, Max. the Importance of selfishness, The Dangers of Altruism. For Life, Liberty and Property, 1986, retrieved from www.libertarian.co.uk/phin > Accessed on 21 July 2017
- Mujcic, Redzo and Frijters, Paul. 'Altruism is Society : Evidence from a Natural experiment involving Commuters'. Discussion Paper No. 5648, April 2011. Retrieved from ftp.iza.org > accessed on 20 May, 2017.
- Sen, Amartya. 'Utilitarianism and Welfarism.' The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.76, No.9, pp – 463-489, retrieved from <http://links.jstor.org/sici> Accessed on 12 June, 2017.
- Shermer, Michael. 'Are We getting Better', review of The Moral Arc : How Science and Reason Lead Humanity Toward Truth, Justice and Freedom, New York : Henry Holt, 2015. Pp. 541. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org> > Accessed on 3 April, 2017
- Tan, Wee Liang and Williams, John N. and Tan, Teck Meng. Defining the social in Social Entrepreneurship : Altruism and Entrepreneurship. Institutional knowledge at Singapore Management University, retrieved from <http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/1kcsb-research/B80>. Accessed on 10 October 2017.

YouTube Videos :-

- Brook, Yaron. 'Origin of Altruism – Ayn Rand Centre for Individual Rights'. Online Video clip, Youtube. Youtube, 22 January, 2009. Web. 22 May 2017. <http://www.aynrandcenter.org>
- Brook, Yaron. 'What's the Difference between altruism and Benevolence?' Ayn Rand Institution. Online Video Clip, Youtube. Youtube, 10 December, 2012. Web. 3 March 2017. www.laissezfaireblog.com
- Rand, Ayn. 'The Morality of altruism'. Online Video Clip, Youtube. Youtube 26 October 2009. Web 10 June 2017. <http://www.libertypen.com>
- Rand, Ayn. "Why Capitalism is the Only Moral System". Online Video Clip, Youtube. Youtube, 8 January 2017. Web 20 September 2017. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/yaronBrook>
- Singer, Peter. "The Why and How of Effective Altruism". Online Video Clip, Youtube. Youtube, 20 May 2013. Web. 3 October 2017 <http://www.ted.com/translate>
- Singer, Peter. "Ethics, Utilitarianism and Effective Altruism". Online Video Clip, Youtube. Youtube, 6 September 2014. Web. 11 October 2017. <http://www.scifuture.org/petersinger>