

2015

Altruism, Fact or Fiction?: An Exploration of Altruism and Egoism in the Context of Religion and Service Learning

Sarah Pawlicki
Parkland College

Recommended Citation

Pawlicki, Sarah, "Altruism, Fact or Fiction?: An Exploration of Altruism and Egoism in the Context of Religion and Service Learning" (2015). *A with Honors Projects*. 144.
<http://spark.parkland.edu/ah/144>

Open access to this Article is brought to you by Parkland College's institutional repository, [SPARK: Scholarship at Parkland](#). For more information, please contact spark@parkland.edu.

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/A/altruism/>



<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/17859/altruistic-behaviour>

Altruism, Fact or Fiction?: An Exploration of Altruism and Egoism in the
Context of Religion and Service Learning

Sarah Katharine Pawlicki

Parkland College, PSY-205-051W

5/5/2015



<http://thehumanist.com/features/articles/a-short-history-of-evolution-chapter-3-deconstructing-the-promethean-spark-part-3>

“It is a feeling common to all mankind that they cannot bear to see others suffer....

This feeling of distress (at the suffering of others) is the first sign of Humanity.”—

Mencius (as cited in Kohn, 1990, p. 63)

Many writers share Mencius’ perspective, believing human beings are intrinsically motivated to help when they become aware of other people’s sufferings. Of course, there are also many who deny the reality of altruism, believing people consistently act in selfish ways due to a nebulously defined concept of “human nature,” a notion defined by theories regarding the evolutionary advantages associated with self-centeredness (why would natural selection select for creatures who are self-sacrificing, especially if their act of sacrifice would mean they would be killed without producing offspring?), or because, as social psychologist Alfie Kohn postulates, theories supporting altruism are dismissed by scientists and the public alike as well-meaning fluff (Kohn, p. 36). This question is complicated further by disagreement among members of the scientific community about what altruism is, and about what actions can be defined as “altruistic.” Throughout the ages, philosophers, religious leaders, psychologists, biologists, and many others have weighed in on questions regarding altruism, and there has never been a clear victor in this ongoing debate. Religions have advanced philosophies involving altruism which have had a significant impact on many individuals’ displayed behaviors and beliefs while also providing reasons individuals ought to live an altruistic life. In conjunction with contemplating the nature of altruism from an academic viewpoint, I incorporated a more hands on, service-learning based component into my Honors project: I volunteered at the Champaign County Humane Society and at Salt and Light, a Christian ministry that provides job-oriented counseling, a thrift store and an inexpensive place to purchase food, and computer labs. I spent two hours a week at the Humane Society for the entire semester, and two to three

hours a week at Salt and Light for the latter half of the semester. I have volunteered at the Humane Society for several years now, but I originally started volunteering because of my love for all felines. I chose to volunteer at Salt and Light due to my interest in involving a religious component into my project, as I also took an Introduction to Religious Studies course this semester. In the following essay, I will discuss the vast array of opinions regarding the nature of altruism, perspectives four very different religions take on altruism, and my own experiences with volunteering this semester.

Whether altruism exists among humans is a difficult question to answer because definitions of altruism vary greatly. Berkeley University's website discussing altruism defines altruism as "... when we act to promote someone's welfare, even at a risk or cost to ourselves" (Greater Good Science Center, 2015). This self-sacrificial aspect of altruism is the characteristic many social psychologists quibble with, as researchers who emphasize human egoism believe no act is inherently self-sacrificial. This fundamental disagreement regarding humans' capacity for altruism that puts the needs of others before the needs of the self is eloquently expressed by philosophers dating back to Ancient Greece (Kessler, 2008, p. 186). The word "altruism" itself was created in 1851 by philosopher Auguste Comte, and is derived from the Italian word *altrui*, which directly translates to "of others." Comte intended the phrase to refer to benevolent behavior in general (Costello, 2001). The word has acquired more theoretical baggage now, and many people have created definitions for altruism. Edward O. Wilson stated altruism was "self-destructive behavior for the benefit of others" (Costello, 2001). Other researchers are more lax in their definitions, believing the actor in question may permissibly derive benefits from their altruistic act, as long as those benefits were not their primary motivation for taking action. If a person were purely, consciously motivated by a reward to himself/herself, then his/her action

would, generally, not be considered altruistic (Milo, 1973, p. 3-4). For example, there is a concept of reciprocal altruism, in which one person sacrifices for another with the expectation the other person will pay him/her back later by performing an equivalent act (Costello, 2001). Even though the word “altruism” is in the name of this concept, most researchers would not consider reciprocal altruism altruistic.

The argument regarding altruism versus egoism has flourished for centuries, and currently, it appears egoism is triumphing (Kohn, 1990, p. 36). Many contemporary social psychologists now favor egoism, but, despite the biological bent of egoism, which I’ll discuss later, some who favor altruism look to Charles Darwin as the originator of certain of their currently usable concepts. Darwin was originally puzzled by what he perceived as the altruistic acts of humans and other species of animals and came close to considering the presence of altruism as a fatal flaw in his theory of natural selection, as surely selection would favor the ruthless, not the self-sacrificial. Eventually, Darwin came to believe in what he called “sympathy” or “benevolence” inherent in human nature, stating altruistic behaviors are “an essential part of the social instincts” (Greater Good Science Center, 2015). Indeed, altruistic behavior could lead to cooperation, which could serve to perpetuate the species. However, certain social psychologists believe cooperative behaviors should not be allowed under the umbrella of altruism, as cooperation generally benefits both parties involved, and altruism, usually by definition, is utterly self-sacrificial (Kohn, 1990, p. 240). While Darwin’s belief that an instinct for kindness and cooperation exists has been supported by research indicating that when people behave in an altruistic fashion, portions of their brain linked to pleasure and reward are activated, many social psychologists also take this fact as evidence against altruism, as this

evidence can be interpreted to mean no act is actually unselfish, as the person in question is deriving a mental benefit from his or her action (Greater Good Science Center, 2015).

Many other theories that suck the unselfishness out of altruism, leaving behind a self-serving, egoistic view of human nature, are prevalent today. For example, kin selection has presented a reason supposedly motivating altruism in various species. Kin selection posits parents giving up their lives to save their offspring or organisms dying for a cousin or sibling is not altruistic at all. Instead, these creatures are instinctively acting to preserve the portions of their genotype that may be present in the genotype of their relative (Costello, 2001). For example, William Hamilton, studying bees, noted worker bees often sacrifice their own lives for their queen, allowing her to “produce offspring with their genetic makeup.... an animal will sacrifice its own life only if as a result, its genes have a greater chance of being passed on” (Costello, 2001). Charles Darwin also finally noted this phenomenon in worker bees. This discovery preserved his faith in his theory of natural selection (Scishow, 2012). Kin selection refers to the concept of inclusive fitness, which assumes organisms don’t just want to preserve their direct offspring—they also want to ensure the survival of those who carry their genes more generally (Kohn, 1990, p. 183-184). A common example given of animal altruism, that is then used to make inferences about human altruism, regards the seeming sacrifice of vampire bats. Vampire bats have a remarkably speedy metabolism. If they are not able to feed every thirty-six hours, they will die. However, instead of letting unfortunate bats who were unable to locate blood perish, bats who were able to locate a food source will regurgitate blood in order to feed the weakening bat. Such behavior is frequently observed between parents and offspring, as well as among closely-related bats (Okasha, 2013). This behavior supports the theory of kin altruism. Yet, a biologist researching vampire bats, Gerald Wilkinson, noticed the bats didn’t always only

feed their relatives—female bats would also feed females who bore no familial relation to them whatsoever (Okasha, 2013). What did this behavior mean for the theory of kin selection?

The mysterious behavior of the vampire bats is now used to support the theory of reciprocal altruism, which can be essentially boiled down into “If you’ll scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” (Okasha, 2013). As I mentioned earlier, this theory argues against altruism as researchers typically define it, positing that all seeming acts of altruism are actually motivated by a desire for and an expectation of reciprocity. It is assumed vampire bats vomit blood into the mouths of fellow, non-related bats because they are increasing the likelihood another bat would do the same thing for them, if they themselves were unfortunate enough to be unable to find a decent source of blood (SciShow, 2012). Robert Trivers originated this theory as a way to explain altruistic behavior between individuals who were not related to each other (Okasha, 2013). However, it is essential to the theory of reciprocal altruism that the individuals in question are at least fundamentally acquainted with each other, and thus there is an expectation the person acting altruistically will see the person he or she is benefiting again (Okasha, 2013). Reciprocal altruism is incapable of explaining self-sacrificial behavior toward a stranger (particularly in Western cultures) because it is quite likely the person in question will never see the beneficiary of their kindness ever again (Okasha, 2013). Charitable donations are often explained by the theory of reciprocal altruism. Supposedly, people act in an overtly altruistic fashion in a very public forum, so we can expect to reap benefits associated with our kindness (Kohn, 1990, p. 187). If we give up significant amounts of time to serving others, many social psychologists believe we will, consciously or unconsciously, believe that, if we were to fall on hard times, others would be obligated to help us. Psychologist Nigel Barber describes such reciprocal

altruism by saying: “The adaptive rationale behind all of this is sort of an insurance policy. You pay in a small amount and benefit when you need it later” (Dingfelder, 2006).

However, what if we are discussing human altruism occurring between two strangers who will likely never see each other again? In this case, neither the theory of kin selection nor the theory of reciprocal altruism would apply. Many of the most impressive tales describing what certain psychologists understand to be human altruism involve two unrelated strangers. Philip Zimbardo (famous for the Stanford prison experiment), in a lecture entitled, “What Makes a Hero?” shows a video telling the story of Wesley Autrey, a middle-aged construction worker and former Navy veteran (2011). Autrey was on a subway platform with his two young children when he noticed a young man having a seizure. This man toppled backward onto the subway train tracks, directly into the path of an oncoming train. Autrey realized there was not sufficient time to jump onto the tracks and pull the man to safety, but he thought if he could lie on top of the man, and keep him from flailing or moving accidentally into the train’s path, the train might pass directly over them both. The clearance underneath the train was twenty-one inches. Still, Autrey leapt onto the tracks and shielded the seizure victim with his own body, and the train passed over them both with approximately half an inch to spare. Autrey had nothing to gain by acting as he did. In fact, his life was at risk and he was leaving behind his two daughters. Autrey describes how, while shielding the man, he told him, “Sir, you can’t move, I got two kids up here looking for their father to come back. I don’t know you, and you don’t know me, but don’t panic. I’m here to save you” (Zimbardo, 2011). This sounds like as explicit a description of true altruism as a social psychologist could possibly hope for. How could this be explained away and boiled down into fundamental egoism?

Significantly, many researchers believe altruism is ultimately personally pleasurable for the person acting altruistically. Many individuals come to this conclusion through logical analysis, essentially asking themselves, “What is motivating me to act altruistically? Why would I want to act this way if there was nothing in it for me?” The belief individuals derive benefits from acting altruistically is supported by certain research, including a famous study showing when people act in an altruistic fashion, pleasure centers in the brain are activated. The same pleasure centers are activated when a person has sex or eats chocolate. Endorphin release upon altruistic behavior has been referred to as the helper’s high. This innate drive creating altruistic behavior may have formed because acting prosocially once had an evolutionary benefit (Greater Good Science Center, 2015). Acting cooperatively might have led to a longer life and greater number of offspring for individuals than acting selfishly did. Empathy and corresponding altruism may have been selected for, not against.

However, ethologist and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins believes altruism may be possible in terms of kin selection and reciprocal altruism, but not in terms of the general larger population. Dawkins postulates the idea of “selfish genes,” stating if a gene didn’t “look after its own interests,” it wouldn’t be able to perpetuate itself (Dawkins, 2008). He believes reciprocal and kin altruism make sense in terms of natural selection, but purely self-sacrificial altruism does not. Yet, even he asks, “Aren’t humans rather nicer than even the theory of the selfish gene would suggest?” noting our ability to empathize with strangers’ emotions and act in a seemingly altruistic fashion (Dawkins, 2008). In the documentary *The Fifth Ape*, Dawkins meets with primatologist Frans de Waal, who has noted what he calls “consolation behavior” in chimpanzees (Dawkins, 2008). De Waal believes consolation behavior illustrates empathy and altruism beyond what Dawkins would predict in the context of selfish genes. De Waal disagrees

with Dawkins' theory regarding selfish genes, referring to it as "veneer theory"—a misguided notion that morals and kindness are but a mere veneer cloaking a morass of selfishness lurking underneath (Dawkins, 2008). De Waal expresses his concern that the notion of selfish genes might promote social Darwinism, "an ideological streak which says, well, animals are not nice to each other, we humans should not be nice to each other. There's no reason, for example, to help the poor, because the poor need to help themselves, and if they cannot do that, then they perish, and that's fine too" (Dawkins, 2008). This is certainly a way believing in a genetic, selection-oriented view of altruism can be socially damaging.

Also, mental and emotional variables such as self-esteem and compassion can lead people to act in an altruistic fashion. Often, we experience a surge of self-esteem after acting altruistically, perhaps because we feel we are acting in a manner approved of by society (Costello, 2001). The study of whether altruism is connected to positive feelings in the actor is complicated by the phenomenon of compassion. Author Caitlin Costello distinguishes between compassion and altruism by saying altruism is an action, whereas compassion is an emotion. While the two variables are often seen linked together, altruistic actions can occur, at least theoretically, without compassion, and compassion can be felt without acting on the basis of that emotion. Because these two factors are so often seen in close proximity to each other, it is unclear which factor is driven by what particular section of the brain (Costello, 2001). This might be seen as a difficulty in studying altruism, as separating the motivation for compassion and the motivation for altruism may well be virtually impossible. On the other hand, Costello posits that trying to divorce compassion from altruism is an unproductive pursuit, as the attempt negates the inherent links between a person's emotional and cognitive states (2001).

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, referenced in Caitlyn Costello's work, suggested a theory

regarding the connection between emotions and cognitions I believe is extraordinarily reasonable. He created the somatic marker hypothesis, which acknowledged the theorized presence of a physical indicator which alerts us to whether we are making a good or a poor decision. Essentially, somatic markers operate rather like heuristics, allowing us to make improved decisions faster. Thus, humans' innate inclination to act altruistically (if we even possess such an inclination) may be traceable back to a somatic marker alerting us to the practical, evolutionary benefits associated with acting altruistically, even though we might be initially inclined to act egoistically. Thus, positive emotions related to altruism (such as a boost to self-esteem) might be related to a somatic marker, developed after thousands of years of evolutionary development, creating a motivation and reinforcement for altruistic behavior (Costello, 2001).

Another biological explanation for empathy and altruism may be mirror neurons, defined as "a type of brain cell that respond equally when we perform an action and when we witness someone else perform the same action" (Winerman, 2005). Neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti, a member of the team who first noted the operation of mirror neurons, connected the presence of mirror neurons to the presence of empathy, postulating they help us place ourselves in another person's shoes (Winerman, 2005). Mirror neurons were originally discovered when researching the behavior of macaque monkeys, and the research springing from this study has initiated a swell of research exploring the function of mirror neurons in humans. While individual mirror neurons matching to specific behaviors have yet to be identified in humans (identifying such neurons would involve attaching electrodes directly to an individual's brain, which obviously has significant ethical implications for humans, and frankly, in my view, has significant ethical implications in the case of macaque monkeys as well), it has been established that our mental

processes are influenced by a fundamental network of mirror neurons. These mirror neurons mean not only that the same portions of our brain are activated by watching another person pick up an object as when we actually pick up the object ourselves, but that observing someone else's emotions can trigger such an emotion in ourselves (Winerman, 2005). Psychologist Christian Keyser and neuroscientist Bruno Wicker conducted a study in which they asked fourteen male participants to inhale unpleasant scents, and then to view a picture of someone clearly feeling disgust as indicated by their facial expression. The anterior insula—a portion of the brain responsible for registering scents—was activated in both cases, when the participant was actually experiencing the scent and when he was simply looking at someone who appeared to be experiencing a similar smell (Winerman, 2005). This suggests we are able, to a certain extent, to feel another person's experience, which implies we can feel each other's pain. Thus, one might postulate this explanation explains away altruism by stating that we act altruistically to reduce our own distress, prompted through mirror neurons by another person's distress (Kohn, 1990, 192). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks interprets this finding differently, saying: "We have mirror neurons that lead us to feel pain when we see others suffering. We are hard-wired for empathy. We are moral animals" (Sacks, 2012). Vittorio Gallese, a neuroscientist, states, "It seems we're wired to see other people as similar to us, rather than different. At the root, as humans we identify the person we're facing as someone like ourselves" (Winerman, 2005). This statement clearly has tremendous implications for theories regarding altruism.

Other individuals advance psychological egoism. The most extreme perspective associated with psychological egoism believes humans are fundamentally selfish, thus altruism cannot possibly occur (Milo, 1973, p. 3). Instead, we all are out for ourselves. Psychological egoists often don't believe we can act with the wellbeing of a fellow human as our sole

motivation (Milo, 1973, p. 3). Alfie Kohn defines psychological egoism as “the view that individuals always try to further what they believe to be their own interests...”, and links psychological egoism quite strongly with cynicism (1990, p. 181). Because this view suggests everyone is fundamentally selfish, it is often connected to social exchange theory, the idea all our social interactions are driven by a desire to maximize the rewards we derive from our relationships and minimize the costs we incur due to our relationships (Crash Course, 2014). Kohn believes the theory of psychological egoism has been widely accepted by the vast majority of society, to the extent we no longer debate whether humans are innately, fundamentally selfish. Instead, we presume human egoism is unavoidable and argue about whether such self-absorbedness is a positive or a negative characteristic (1990, p. 182). Kohn discusses the work of Sigmund Freud, who was fundamentally a psychological egoist. In Freud’s view, the more a person indicated a desire to help another person, the more that person was engaging in reaction formation—acting in a manner contrary to how he or she actually wished to act. In Freud’s own words, “all who wish to be more noble-minded than their constitution allows fall victim to neurosis” (as cited in Kohn, 1990, p. 190). Kohn states psychological egoism is appealing because it provides us with an excuse for behaving in less-than-admirable fashions. Instead of blaming our bad choices, we can blame the nebulous force associated with human nature (Kohn, 1990, p. 195-196).

Also, there are psychologists, philosophers, and researchers in various academic disciplines who believe egoism is preferable to altruism, choosing to argue that altruism exists and is undesirable instead of negating the concept of altruism altogether. These individuals are referred to as ethical egoists (Milo, 1973, p. 7). Ayn Rand, the founder of the philosophical school of Objectivism, once stated she “disapproves” of altruists, believing them to be “evil”

(Rand, 2009). She objected to the self-sacrificial element of altruism, asking an interviewer, “Why is the happiness of another person important, good, but not your own?” (2009). In existential terms, she disliked the notion that a person was required to serve others in order to “justify his existence” (2009). People are “entitled” to their own happiness, and altruism is an unhealthy, but present, attitude (2009). Ayn Rand did not argue altruism was not a force in the world. She simply believed the world would be better off without it. Contemplating altruism as a moral virtue was objectionable, but recognizing that you, yourself, an individual, *wanted* to help another person and would derive some sort of mental, emotional, or physical benefit from helping that person, was permissible to Rand (2009). Philosopher Thomas Hobbes presents a similar view of ethical egoism on the basis of what he feels humankind’s “natural rights” are:

...the first foundation of natural right is this, that every man as much as in him lies endeavour to protect his life and members. But because it is in vain for a man to have a right to the end, if the right to the necessary means be denied him, it follows, that since every man hath a right to preserve himself, he must also be allowed a right to use all the means, and do all the actions, without which he cannot preserve himself. (Hobbes, 1642/1973, p. 22)

Clearly, Hobbes is not a philosophical supporter of altruism, instead favoring both psychological and ethical egoism. Whatever a person must do in order to preserve himself or herself is permissible, thus altruism is not a relevant moral factor in terms of Hobbes’ worldview.

Other researchers simply feel a belief in pure, widespread altruism is hopelessly naïve. One such writer is Garrett Hardin, author of *The Limits of Altruism: An Ecologist’s View of Survival*. Hardin critically comments:

Is pure altruism possible? Yes, of course it is—on a small scale, over the short term, in certain circumstances, and within small, intimate groups. In familylike groups one should be able to give with little thought of ‘nicely calculated less or more.’ But only the most naïve hope to adhere to a noncalculating policy in a group that numbers in the thousands (or millions!) and in which many preexisting antagonisms are known and many more are suspected. (1977, p. 26)

Hardin believes altruism is contraindicated, describing “enlightened egoism” as the “best motive that we can rely on” (1977, p. 27). He goes on to say individuals (such as Wesley Autrey) who strive to save lives actually are directly contributing to the larger problem of overpopulation. These idealistic individuals who choose to intervene and preserve lives, whether by donating blood, sending money to support a nation in the midst of a debilitating famine, or by diving into the path of an oncoming train, are not heroes or altruists. They are confused egoists who are simply contributing to a significant problem by refusing to acknowledge the cold, hard fact that the vast majority of nations are greatly exceeding the carrying capacity of their land (Hardin, 1977, p. 58-59, p. 66). Altruists do not do anyone any favors by saving lives. They simply worsen the condition of the world our descendants will inherit. So, perhaps altruism does truly exist, but it is not necessarily desirable. Also, altruism is not widespread. Hardin postulates, “In large groups altruism has little chance to grow by an infective process; it is most likely to be nipped in the bud. It does not become part of a self-fulfilling prophecy; it is selected against. ‘How could it be otherwise?’” (1977, p. 26-27). Extrapolating from Hardin’s position, the reader is led to assume innate altruism is not a typical characteristic seen in all of humankind. However, those of us who lack innate altruism admire people who act in an inherently altruistic manner.

We copy their behavior, perhaps out of awe or a desire for the rewards these altruists receive, without paying consideration to whether altruism is helpful or merely appealing.

However, many individuals also argue in favor of humankind's innate altruism. Philosopher David Hume posited altruism (or "social virtue") is an intrinsic part of our nature, even going so far as to say, "The voice of nature and experience seems plainly to oppose the selfish theory" (as cited in Kohn, 1990, p. 205). Hume believed if we did not innately understand and appreciate the concept of altruism, we would never be able to describe the concept as we do. In his own words, "Had nature made no such distinctions founded on the original constitution of the mind, the words *honorable* and *shameful*, *lovely* and *odious*, *noble* and *despicable*, had never any place in any language..." (Hume, 1751/1973, p. 38). Hume also brings up an interesting point concerning the theory stating all altruistic acts are ultimately egocentric, and thus not representative of true altruism. He notes that we are capable of deriving great pleasure from learning about altruistic acts performed long ago in ancient times and distant lands, even though we ourselves gain no material benefit from the actor's past altruism. Hume believed this fact suggests we favor altruism for unselfish reasons (1751/1973, p. 40).

Another supporter of innate altruism is psychology professor Justin Aronfreed, who conducted a famous research experiment in which he presented children with a box involving two levers, one of which might cause a piece of candy to be dispensed, and the other of which might cause a red light to flash on (each consequence only occurred sixty percent of the time after the lever in question was pulled). The first step of this experiment entailed a female confederate of the experimenter demonstrating the box for the participants in the experiment, who were all six-to-eight-year-old girls. When candy was produced, or when nothing happened,

the experimenter's apparent emotional state remained nondescript. However, when the red light flashed on, the experimenter expressed glee verbally, and gave the child an affectionate squeeze. Control groups involved a group in which the confederate only expressed her pleasure verbally, and a group in which the confederate only hugged the child after seeing the red light. After this demonstration, the child was allowed to operate the box, with the understanding she could keep all the candy she received. Whenever the child hit the lever turning on the red light (that only the confederate could see), the confederate reiterated her pleasure. Children who had been hugged and were exposed to the confederate's verbal pleasure during the demonstration were likelier to be "altruistic" and switch on the red light for the confederate than were children exposed to just the confederate's happiness. They were also likelier to be altruistic than children who had simply been exposed to physical affection by the confederate after flashing the light. In fact, they produced the light more frequently than they took candy for themselves. Thus, social rewards certainly played a factor in the production of altruism, but, according to Aronfreed's specific definition of altruism, "altruistic" behavior did occur. According to Aronfreed,

The more general paradigm for the acquisition of an altruistic component of behavior consists of two basic prerequisites: first, the attachment of potentially reinforcing empathic and vicarious changes of affectivity to social cues that transmit information about the experience of others and the establishment of the instrumental value of such overt acts... (Aronfreed, 1968/1973, p. 114-119)

Thus, altruism may have to be reinforced and created, but it is an existing factor in human behavior in Aronfreed's view.

“There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the greatest creed.” –Woodrow Wilson (Woodrow Wilson Center, 2015)

Religion plays an important role in a great deal of research and study regarding altruism. Alfie Kohn comments, “In a society that teaches us to associate morality with religion, one naturally assumes that a strong relation exists between piety and pity, between God and good. After all, the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity, like those of most supernatural belief systems, contain reminders to be compassionate and charitable” (1990, p. 79). Essentially, religions instruct practitioners on how best to conduct their lives, hearkening back to the immortal question posed by the Greek philosopher Socrates: How should one live (Kessler, 2008, p. 186)? Religions answer this question in many ways, approaching the issue using different tactics than social psychologists do. Social psychologists studying altruism are clearly preoccupied with whether humans actually act in an altruistic fashion on Earth. In the words of Gary E. Kessler, author of *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases*, “The moral viewpoint is based on a distinction between what is the case and what ought to be the case. We often distinguish between what is real and what is ideal.... Religions take into account the gap between how we do live and how we ought to live” (2008, p. 187). Thus, religions tend to focus on whether altruism is a desirable characteristic in human interactions, and whether the divine instilled the potential for altruism into human hearts. The majority of major religious traditions contain some sort of reference to altruistic behavior and many attempt to cultivate altruism amongst practitioners (Kohn, 1990, p. 79). In many cases, these attempts are successful. Political scientist Robert D. Putnam, during the research process for his book *Amazing Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, conducted a study that found religious individuals (specifically, in his study, Christians and Jews) were likelier than nonreligious people to donate to charity,

volunteer their time to help various charitable causes (particularly causes involving homeless individuals), and donate blood. According to his research, whether or not someone is religious is a far more accurate predictor of whether someone will act altruistically than their sex, age, race, socioeconomic class, or level of educational attainment (Sacks, 2012). However, various religions perceive altruism very differently. I shall discuss Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, and Jainism in terms of their perspectives on the concept of altruism, the human potential for altruism, and the desirability of altruism.

In the Christian New Testament, Jesus is quoted as saying, “I assure you, only with difficulty will a rich man enter into the kingdom of God. I repeat what I said: it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23-24, New American Bible). Jesus also commanded his disciples to be “openhanded” in their dealings with the poor (Deuteronomy 15:11, New American Bible). Such statements create Christian perceptions of altruism, which closely tie into the social responsibility norm, often cited as a motivation for altruistic behavior. The social responsibility norm is defined as “an expectation that people will help those dependent upon them” (Crash Course, 2014). Many religions emphasize the responsibility people with wealth have to take care of people less fortunate. Such acts of charity are frequently associated with altruistic behavior, depending on a person’s definition of altruism. Also, of course, Jesus is the obvious example of self-sacrificial altruism in Christian traditions. According to Christian myth, Christ gave up his life to save the souls of all humankind. Jesus’ sacrifice was not without personal pain and anguish—the apostle Matthew reports Jesus’ very last words were, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46, New American Bible). Jesus was capable of true personal suffering on the behalf of others, and thus defined altruism for the developing Christian community. Altruism is

considered a positive virtue in Christian communities, as Christian individuals tend to attempt to emulate Jesus' actions throughout the course of their own lives.

Next, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, *zakat*, deals with *Sadaqah* (charity) directly (Hidaya Foundation, 2015, 2.0). Charitable giving is often considered a form of altruism. *Zakat* states the requirement that all Muslims give 2.5 percent (or more) of their income to charity (Hidaya Foundation, 2015, 2.0). The term *zakat* literally translates to “to be clear, to grow, to increase,” and serves a purifying function for the individual offering *zakat* (Hidaya Foundation, 2015, 2.0). While offering *zakat* is mandatory for a practitioner of Islam, it is explicitly considered an act of worship, not some sort of religious tax (Hidaya Foundation, 2015, 1.0). Muslims choose to give *zakat*; they are not forced to. This incorporates part of the definition of altruism I discussed earlier— while altruism may be considered a social responsibility, and thus in a way obligatory, altruism must also be voluntary. As in Christianity, the individual will ultimately benefit from his or her altruistic acts. The Quran states, “You will not attain piety (righteousness) until you spend of that which you love. And whatsoever you spend, Allah is aware of it” (Al-Quran 3:92). Also, the Quran promises that greedy, egoistic misers will eventually face divine wrath and castigation:

Those who hoard up treasures of gold and silver and spend them not in the way of Allah; give them the news of a painful punishment, on the Day when that [wealth] will be heated in the Fire of Hell and with it will be branded their forehead, their sides... [and it will be said to them] ‘This is the treasure you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard.’ (Al-Quran 9:34-35)

Thus, Muslims and Christians may both be strongly motivated toward altruism for ultimately self-serving, egoistic reasons. All people understandably wish to avoid divine, horrific punishments. If people are sacrificing themselves technically for the good of another, but actually to avoid negative divine consequences, then surely they are not acting in a truly altruistic fashion. The emphasis on horrific punishments supports theories regarding psychological egoism, as individuals attempt to placate a terrifying divine authority and preserve their own wellbeing by, essentially, playing nicely with each other (Milo, 1973, p. 4). Altruism in this context does not fit the definition of altruism as doing good without consideration for one's own welfare.

Certain sects of Islam advocate a concept called the divine command theory of ethics, which postulates the divine provides an ethical code all humans must follow (Kessler, 2008, p. 188). However, the logical derivatives of this belief vary between practitioners. Muslim scholar Al-Ashari, living relatively soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, stated that because Allah is omnipotent, morals and morality depend solely on what Allah decrees. If Allah, in the course of a commandment, stated egoism was the preferable mode of human conduct, then egoism would be the only morally allowable stance for practicing Muslims. In the Quran, it is clear Allah favors altruistic, charitable conduct, but the Asharites, followers of Al-Ashari, believed this was not because altruism was "right" or "desirable" in human terms, but simply because Allah decreed it. Allah has the power to change His mind, and thus the entire moral code governing humanity could be turned topsy-turvy at any point (Kessler, 2008, p. 188-189). This view was expressed in direct competition with a rival interpretation of Islam put forth by the Mutazila school of theological thought. The Mutazila instead said Allah chose to promote certain behaviors (such as altruism) because such behaviors were objectively *right* (Kessler, 2008, p.

189). This dissension boils down to whether Allah advocating for a particular behavior makes the behavior right, or whether Allah promotes a particular behavior because it is inherently right. This Quranic disagreement had repercussions for the ways in which altruistic conduct was viewed. The Mutazila school of thought essentially asked, if people acted altruistically because Allah wanted them to, but they were secretly egoists at heart, were these people actually acting in a moral fashion (Kessler, 2008, p. 189)? This question connects back to the question frequently asked by social psychologists: What factors can motivate altruistic behavior? Can external factors, such as punishment or reward, lead to an altruistic act, or do such motivating factors automatically make an act non-altruistic? As we've seen, this question has been asked by both psychologists and Muslim theologians for quite some time.

Altruistic conduct is also a pivotal issue in Confucianism, which is often practiced in conjunction with Daoism. Confucianism, founded on the basis of the teachings of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, focuses a great deal on the significance of altruism and virtue (Kessler, 2008, p. 191). Confucius, in the course of his famous work *Analects*, instructed people about *de*, which is translated as "virtue" (Kessler, 2008, p. 191). In the context of ancient Chinese culture, the word "virtue" implied excellence and the attainment of power. Excellence could, and did, include moral excellence, but other factors were also integral to the idea of excellence. One of Confucius' central teachings involved *ren*, which has been variously translated as "love," "benevolence," and "kind-heartedness" (Kessler, 2008, p. 192). This concept includes many of the behaviors we associate with altruism, so clearly Confucius felt traits we associate with altruism are positive and desirable. However, he did not necessarily believe humans inherently possessed altruistic, kind-hearted tendencies. Instead, he suggested such tendencies could be taught to people. In Gary E. Kessler's words, "*Ren* is not something we are, but something we

can become by cultivating our social, aesthetic, cognitive (thinking), and moral powers. It refers to what we might call ‘ideal human nature.’ It is humanity at its best, having realized its full positive potential” (2008, p. 192). When reading this quote, one might be struck by the similarities between Confucianism and many of the tenets of positive psychology, a field and method of psychological inquiry “founded on the belief that people want to live meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best in them, and to enhance their experiences...” (Positive Psychology Center, 2014). These Confucian beliefs naturally correspond to the concept of *shu*, the ability to see other people in the same way as one perceives oneself (Kessler, 2008, p. 192). Social psychologist Thomas Nagel stated that the ability to see other people as being as fully human as oneself, and thus deserving of the same treatment as one would feel entitled to, is an essential element of altruistic behavior (Nagel, 1970/1973, p. 124). Thus, Confucianism advocates for this aspect of altruistic conduct. Seeing other people in the same way as one sees oneself, in Confucianism, naturally leads to *zhong*, which involves all humans’ responsibility to do their best to help other people (Kessler, 2008, p. 192). Generosity and kindness are obviously important tenets of Confucianism. If Daoism, which sets forth the viewpoint that the correct way to live is also the “natural” way to live, is incorporated into this Confucian perspective, the result is that altruistic conduct is seen as the natural state of affairs—a type of behavior that is by the Dao (Deffenbaugh, 2009, p. 145). Thus, while Confucianism emphasizes the power of teaching altruistic behavior, Daoism suggests altruism and kindness are, in fact, innate and natural components of human nature, as what is virtuous and desirable is also natural.

Lastly, Jainism has an extremely interesting perspective regarding altruism. Jains emphasize the importance of avoiding egoism more than the importance of cultivating altruism. Ascetism and renouncing worldly personal desires are essential components of Jainism (Kessler,

2008, 205). According to Jain myths, the Venerable Ascetic Mahavira, one of the founders of Jainism, plucked out all of his hair, strand by strand, after his revelatory experience, to indicate his lack of concern for his own fleshly existence (Kessler, 2008, p. 204). Clearly, supporters of egoism would be hard pressed to find a distinctly egoistical motivation for Mahavira's apparent disinterest in his own physical comfort. For Jains, the concept of desire is highly problematic, as desire translates into karma, which keeps people rooted in the endless, nonproductive cycle of death and rebirth. Jains, like Buddhists, attempt to break out of the perpetual cycle of reincarnation, and egoistic desire is what Jains believe ensnares people in the circle of life and death (Kessler, 2008, p. 205-206). A well-known Jain myth tells the story of a man who falls into a deep well. As he topples, he manages to grab onto a tree branch. Much to his despair, he notices two mice chomping on the tree branch he's clutching, and he realizes that soon, the mice will bite through the tree limb and he will plummet into the deep, inescapable waters. The mice's chewing provokes vibration in the tree branch he's hanging onto, causing a beehive above the man to jiggle. Thus, sweet drops of honey fall near and on the man. Instead of attempting to resolve the serious predicament he's in, the man reaches for the tasty drops of honey. Because of his rash actions, he plunges into the well, presumably to his death (Kessler, 2008, p. 203). This tale is told to emphasize the unproductiveness and undesirableness of desires of the flesh. Such egoistic desires are the downfall of humankind, keeping us fixated on trivialities instead of attempting to break free of the bonds holding us to Earth (Kessler, 2008, p. 203-204). The Jain focus on avoiding egoism translates into a desire to perpetuate and advance altruism. In order to break free from the cycle of reincarnation, Jains believe one must follow the proper path, entailing right insight, right knowledge, and right conduct (Kessler, 2008, p. 206). The concept of right conduct can be broken down into five narrower fields: nonviolence, honesty,

nonstealing, chastity, and nonattachment (Kessler, 2008, p. 206). None of these characteristics look precisely like how Americans tend to conceptualize altruism, but all these characteristics emphasize the significance of eluding egoism. Clearly, Jains do not subscribe to either psychological or ethical egoism. Instead, Jains believe such perspectives contribute to the entrapment of hapless souls in the cycle of death and rebirth.

Interestingly, all the religions I encountered in the course of my studies advocated altruism in some way, which has significant implications for today's supposedly secularizing world. Alfie Kohn discusses his opinion that the modern world is becoming both increasingly cynical and increasingly desirous of supposedly scientifically valid answers—which, by definition, must be pessimistic or at least self-consciously skeptical (1990, 38, p. 42). It is possible this alteration in the way individuals choose to view altruism also relates to the increasing secularization of today's world. Many religious scholars, notably Mircea Eliade, have decried the growing secularization of the modern world. Eliade, in his magnum opus *The Sacred and the Profane*, wrote in 1957:

It should be said at once that the completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit... desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and... in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies. (Eliade, 1957, p. 13)

This process of secularization has carried on, noticeably impacting our cultural viewpoint on issues such as altruism. While once the concept of altruism was supported due to its ties to a vast assortment of religious traditions, now many people view altruism skeptically. It will be

interesting to see how views of altruism change as the impact of religion waxes and wanes in the upcoming years, as the two concepts are undoubtedly connected.

I now turn to the service learning component of my project: volunteering at the Champaign County Humane Society and at Salt and Light. Regarding my longstanding volunteerism at the Champaign County Humane Society, I originally chose to volunteer there because of my love for animals. Intriguingly, Alfie Kohn has an interesting perspective on why humans are often so keen to assist animals when they might not be as excited about helping fellow humans. He relates humans' own feelings of self-efficacy and dehumanization regarding potentially altruistic situations to individuals' helping preferences—whether they'd prefer to assist a fellow human or an animal. Kohn postulates, “Perhaps when we cannot be of help, when we feel overwhelmed by dehumanizing forces, we displace our responsiveness to other species. Thus, the greater the diminution of the sense of shared humanness... the more fuss is made over animals” (2008, p. 139). The crux of his argument is that when altruism toward others, a natural human impulse, is subverted, we redirect our altruistic impulses toward animals (2008, p. 139). Kohn also discusses the reasons many people give for devoting their time and money to, for example, helping a blind dog instead of providing a human with a seeing-eye dog—animals are seen as being appealingly “innocent” (2008, p. 140). This has intriguing implications regarding the way we human beings perceive ourselves—as flawed, guilty individuals whose inherent nature leans toward depravity. Kohn cites two compelling examples illustrating his hypothesis. Firstly, he discusses a television documentary that focused on the days leading up to the execution of a twenty-six year old prison inmate in Mississippi. Obviously, the documentary's topic was inherently disturbing. A short segment of the documentary depicted authorities using a rabbit to test the toxicity of the gas chamber the young inmate was about to be sent to. The

warden at the prison where the documentary was filmed later said he was overcome by a deluge of critical mail from horrified people—but far more people were indignant about the prison’s treatment of the rabbit than the prison’s killing of the inmate (2008, p. 139-140). Kohn also uses the example of Francis Ford Coppola’s film *The Godfather* to illustrate his point regarding humans’ relationship to other animals. Kohn quotes Coppola, who once commented to an interviewer, “Thirty people were shot in the movie, but people only talked about ‘cruelty to animals’” (2008, p. 140). I can relate to Coppola’s quote—when watching *The Godfather*, I continued watching after several graphic scenes depicting humans hurting humans. However, after the notoriously ghastly scene featuring the horsehead stashed away in the Mafioso’s bed, I shut off the television, disgusted and appalled. Kohn acknowledges that this impulse to protect animals stems from a fundamentally admirable element of most humans’ personalities—a desire to protect the voiceless, the weak (2008, p. 140). However, Kohn is intrigued by the fact so many people choose to focus exclusively on animal rights when blatant violations of human rights are clearly rampant (2008, p. 140).

Personally, I chose to volunteer at the Humane Society because I loved animals and doubted my efficacy in terms of being able to do much in order to assist humans. I was (and, to a lesser extent, still am) paralyzed by the vast and horrifying extent of human suffering, and I (as I believe most people do) worry about my lack of ability to contribute significantly enough to the alleviation of human misery. After discussing research regarding the potential correlation between self-esteem and prosocial behavior, Kohn states, “Less doubtful is the association between helping and an internal locus of control—that is, the belief that one can influence events and affect things that happen to oneself. Several studies have confirmed this relation... a related concept, a generalized sense of competence, also predicts prosocial behavior” (2008, p. 77). I

think a large component of why many people are inclined to donate time and effort to animal rights is that most people feel more competent to help animals than they do to help people. In my limited experience, one isn't as haunted by feelings of incompetence and inadequacy when working with animals as one may be when endeavoring to assist humans. One may realize the problem of mistreated animals is also vast, but the crushing sensation of not doing enough is not so prevalent. It is easier, in my experience, to accept that a cat appreciates whatever attention it receives—whether five minutes of petting or an hour of play—than to accept only being able to give a homeless person a dollar instead of giving them a home. Taking care of animals is simpler than taking care of humans, and it is easier to feel immediately efficacious when helping animals.

I began volunteering at the Humane Society in the fall of 2008, and have been volunteering there for a few hours a week ever since. One must accrue a certain number of hours before one is allowed to become a cat socialization volunteer, but I crossed that threshold and now am permitted to take cats out of their cages to a “get-acquainted room” to play, which is a great deal of fun. The vast majority of my experience at the Humane Society has been wonderful. When I started volunteering with my best friend, the majority of our work involved the kitchen and the laundry room—doing the dishes (and remembering to put all the dishes into a bleach bath and then re-rinse them prior to drying them, as per our instructions), cleaning the drawers and shelves in the kitchen (one of my earliest and fondest memories of the Humane Society is of pulling every single thing that was in a drawer or on a shelf out, setting everything on the floor, and scouring all available surfaces with delightful lemon-scented cleaner. Even then, I had an odd idea of fun!), and doing laundry. Now, we are familiar with more things that need to be done, although we still work on dishes, laundry, and cleaning. A more recent favorite task is

making Kongs—mixing dry dog food with canned dog food, and then scooping said mixture into rubber feeding toys. The toys then go into the freezer. After a while, they are taken out and given to the dogs, who derive a great deal of entertainment from trying to get every last bit of food out of the toys. One of my family's dogs (Eve, a Staffordshire terrier mix) is especially fond of these toys, so I like providing them for dogs at the Humane Society.

However, in my opinion, the best part of volunteering at the Humane Society is working with cats. After putting in a certain number of volunteer hours, volunteers are permitted to attend an orientation discussing the proper role of cat socialization volunteers. I adore cats, so I was quite eager to attend the orientation as soon as possible. My friend and I now frequently work in the back cat room, which is wedged in among dog kennels. The room sometimes gets overlooked because prospective adopters often don't expect another cat room in among the dogs, so we like spending time with cats there. Currently, we're working with/playing with a cat called Tom, who is delightful and adorable in every way—aside from the fact that he sometimes decides he'd rather play with the entirety of a person's arm than the toy the person is holding. Trying to curb cats' bad habits at the Humane Society is probably one of the most rewarding parts of volunteering—you can help make a cat more potentially adoptable by teaching it to behave itself. Also, this part of volunteering is a lot of fun because it allows us to become better acquainted with individual cats throughout the years. I've had many feline favorites during the time I've volunteered at the Humane Society: Josie (a black and white cat who had a tiny head, tiny paws, and a massive body—and was thus rather hilarious-looking, especially when holding her pink fuzzy fake mouse in her mouth), Izzy (who acted like the reincarnation of Mrs. Norris, Argus Filch's cat from the Harry Potter series), Jacques and Gus (a pair of extremely intelligent cats who attempted to climb the door of the get-acquainted rooms at the Humane Society), and

Eleanor (an escape artist who would sneak out of the communal cat room she was in and then sneak guiltily through the Humane Society's halls, pretending she was where she was supposed to be).

I have been volunteering for the Champaign County Humane Society for quite a while, so I wanted to add something new for my honors project instead of just writing about my CCHS volunteering. Thus, part of my honors project involved volunteering at Salt and Light, a terrific Christian ministry. Salt and Light provides job-oriented counseling and mentoring programs, computer labs, an inexpensive place to purchase food, and a remarkably well-equipped thrift store. I initially chose to look into volunteering at Salt and Light because I wondered whether the religious dimension of the organization would alter the experience of volunteering significantly, or if volunteers would cite different reasons for their decision to help out at Salt and Light. At Salt and Light, I worked in the Two Trees thrift store, bagging purchases, hanging clothing, sorting through jewelry, beads, and buttons, folding clothes, cleaning, etc. The first day I went to volunteer, I could only stay for two hours, and after two hours, I honestly wished I could stay longer. I appreciated that I was kept busy. I always feel guilty when I volunteer somewhere but actually have nothing to do. If I'm volunteering, I want to be put to work! Also, I enjoyed bagging purchases for the cashiers at Salt and Light, as they are all extremely kind, wonderful people. There is a great variety of objects people are able to purchase at Salt and Light—people may walk away from the store with a television, two sweaters, a few knickknacks, and a shower curtain—and it was fun on my first day to see how much customers were able to buy at the store.

The second time I went to volunteer, a week later, I hung up a bunch of clothing that had just come into the store, taking it from racks at the front of the store to the proper clothing racks

near the back of the store. I worried a little more about accidentally messing something up when working on hanging clothing in its proper place, as that task was slightly more complicated than bagging, but I enjoyed the opportunity to see the store in more detail, as well as to learn about the surprisingly and annoyingly complex sizing system operating in clothing. It left me bemoaning the fact that we have numbered sizes for anything. I'd happily take clothes that fit slightly less well in order to avoid the, "Am I a size sixteen? Eighteen? Twenty-three and a half?" dilemma. Getting out onto the store's floor provided the opportunity for me to interact more with people who were coming into the store to shop, which was lovely. Getting to know the store a tad better definitely made me look forward to when I had a clear idea of where everything in the store was, so I could be more helpful. Getting to interact more with shoppers at Salt and Light also made me rue the day in grade school when I had the opportunity to learn Spanish and I absolutely was not diligent at all. Thus, I know a tiny bit of Spanish, French, Latin, and American Sign Language, but not nearly enough to be handy in any particular situation. I am relatively sure I had thought at the time I would never especially want to know any language other than English—eleven-year-old me was sadly mistaken. Recently, I've started cleaning at Salt and Light as well. Cleaning the thrift store's dressing rooms is certainly going to become part of my volunteering ritual.

I enjoy volunteering at Salt and Light, in part because the religious dimension of the organization makes it so one feels very strongly that the volunteers and employees are working toward a goal greater than their own personal gain. Regardless of whether pure altruism can exist in human minds, religion presents a worldview positing that sheer altruism is not only possible, but desirable. It is a place where one is given the opportunity to interact with individuals who clearly, explicitly believe there is something greater than ourselves that is worth working and

striving for. Personally, I'm not especially religious, but I'm inspired and moved by people's conviction that there is something greater than human life, and that humans are capable of acts of tremendous kindness, generosity, and altruism. Perhaps we are all truly inherently egoistic, but volunteering at Salt and Light has helped me to see more clearly that I'd prefer to believe we are capable of altruism and that humanity is not, generally speaking, utterly self-focused. I completely acknowledge the possibility this is not the "truth"—but I'd prefer to believe humankind is inherently good and altruistic than inherently corrupted and egoistic. Salt and Light is a very non-cynical place, and I enjoyed the opportunity to volunteer there.

I plan to volunteer at the Humane Society and Salt and Light until I leave town to attend Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. I'd certainly like to continue volunteering at an animal-related organization, particularly since I won't be able to have cats in my dorm room. My service-oriented experiences, this semester and in the past, have made me love community service and I hope to continue to be involved in such work in the future. I have contemplated volunteering with the Peace Corps after graduating from a four-year institution. My plans, at the moment, certainly aren't complete or well-thought-out, but I hope to be able to better my community, be it my immediate, local community or the global community, after graduation. Examining the motives for my desire to behave "altruistically," I must say: I tend to agree with social psychologists who believe altruism stems from a desire to fulfill an inherent, innate need. I believe altruism is a genuine phenomenon, but perhaps one must attain a certain level of moral development before one is capable of true acts of altruism. Based on the reading I did during this project, I have concluded altruism is a genuine phenomenon, based most significantly on the convincing data and theories presented by Kohn and Zimbardo. However, perhaps true "altruism" is not something regularly attained on an everyday basis by the majority of humanity.

Perhaps, instead, humans must attain a certain level of moral development prior to being capable of true altruism. I have examined my own motives for community service and recognized that, at least in part, I do volunteer simply because volunteering makes me happy. Happiness can certainly result from an altruistic act, but I am decidedly motivated by said happiness, which perhaps lessens the inherent “altruism” in service. However, in my view, deriving enjoyment from a task designed to help others, and even being motivated by wanting to attain that happiness, isn’t necessarily a negative characteristic, making such actions less worthy than fully altruistic actions. Instead, I find it hopeful that humans may be naturally inclined to derive pleasure from helping each other, as I feel such a phenomenon speaks well of “human nature.” Rather than questioning whether pure, non-self-serving altruism exists, perhaps we ought to focus on doing good for others, regardless of our motives. Instead of adopting cynical worldviews in response to certain apparent lacks of altruism, we could take pleasure in the joy we derive from assisting others, and be pleased that both ourselves and others can be made happier by our acts of service. As Rabindranath Tagore once commented, “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy” (Holmes, 1951).

References

- Aronfreed, J. (1973). Altruistic behavior. In Milo, R. (Ed.), *Egoism and altruism* (108-119), Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. (Original work published 1968).
- Costello, C. (2001). Altruism: Selfish or selfless? Retrieved from <http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/bb/neuro/neuro01/web2/Costello.html>.
- Deffenbaugh, D. (2009). World religions: Environmentally active. In Myhre, P. (Ed.), *Introduction to religious studies* (135-152), Winona, Minnesota: Anselm Academic. (Original work published 2009).
- Dingfelder, S. (December, 2006). Altruism: An accident of nature? *Monitor*, 37(11), 44. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/dec06/altruism.aspx>.
- Crash Course. (2014, November 24). Aggression V. altruism: Crash course psychology #40 [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoTx7Rt4dig>.
- Dawkins, R. (2008). Richard Dawkins on altruism and the selfish gene. [Video file]. In *The Fifth Ape*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8C-ntwUpzM>.
- Eliade, M. (1957). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc.
- Hardin, G. *The limits of altruism: An ecologist's view of survival*. (1977). Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Hidaya Foundation. (2015). 12.1. Gold and silver. The Quran. Retrieved from

<http://www.hidaya.org/publications/zakat-information/gold-and-silver>.

---. (2015). 2.0. What is the meaning of zakat? Retrieved from

<http://www.hidaya.org/publications/zakat-information/what-is-the-meaning-of-zakat>.

---. (2015). 1.0. What is zakat (obligatory charity)? Retrieved from

<http://www.hidaya.org/publications/zakat-information/10-what-is-zakat-obligatory-charity>.

---. (2015). Why is paying zakat beneficial to me in this world? Retrieved from

<http://www.hidaya.org/publications/zakat-information/why-is-paying-zakat-beneficial-for-me-in-this-world>.

Hobbes, T. Self-love and society. (1973). In Milo, R. (Ed.), *Egoism and altruism* (17-25).

Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. (Original work published 1642)

Holmes, J.H. (1951). *1864-1942: A Quaker's affirmation for man*. Richmond: Friends United Press. 287. Tagore quote.

Hume, D. Morality, self-love, and benevolence. (1973). In Milo, R. (Ed.), *Egoism and altruism* (37-51). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. (Original work published 1751).

Kessler, G. (2008). *Studying religion: An introduction through cases*. Third edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Kohn, A. (1990). *The brighter side of human nature*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

- Milo, R. (1973). Ed. *Egoism and altruism*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc.
- Nagel, T. The possibility of altruism (1973). In Milo, R. (Ed.), *Egoism and altruism* (119-130). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. (Original work published 1970).
- Okasha, S. (2013). Biological altruism. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/altruism-biological/#AltLevSel>.
- Positive Psychology Center. (2014). Home page/mission statement. Retrieved from <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>.
- Rand, Ayn [LibertyPen]. (2009). Ayn Rand--- the morality of altruism. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51pMod2Aaso>.
- Sacks, J. (2012, December 23). The Moral Animal. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/opinion/the-moral-animal.html?pagewanted=print&_r=1.
- SciShow. (2012, July 3). Altruism [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKtOXvA14X4>.
- The Greater Good Science Center. (2015). "What is Altruism?" Retrieved from http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/altruism/definition#what_is.
- Winerman, L. (2005). The mind's mirror. *Monitor*, 36(9), 48. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct05/mirror.aspx>.

Woodrow Wilson Center. (2015). The Woodrow Wilson awards. Retrieved from

<http://support.wilsoncenter.org/page.aspx?pid=427>.

Zimbardo, P. (2011). "Philip Zimbardo: What makes a hero?" [Video file]. The Greater Good

Science Center. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grMHzqtRm_8.