

The Explanation of Altruism Based on Nagel's Rationalist and Batson's Empirical Approaches

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Submitted:
2021/8/1

Accepted:
2021/10/25

Keywords:

Altruism,
Motive,
Egoism,
Empathetic
concern,
Nagel and
Batson.

Abstract: Discovering human being's behavioral motivation has long been the subject of interest for psychologists and moral philosophers. Egoists associate all human being's benevolent actions to his desire to fulfill personal interests. In contrast, altruists claim that human being is able to answer other's need without achieving personal advantage. Psychologist Daniel Batson and philosopher Thomas Nagel strongly support altruism, using two different techniques. Batson supports altruism through an experimental approach by using altruism-empathy theory to challenge egoists claims. On the other hand, Nagel defends the possibility of rationally motivated altruism using explanation technique. This article uses descriptive-analytical approach to describe and assess Batson and Nagel's opinions. Finally, it shows that their perception about altruism is different. The important matter is that their different approach to support altruism provides a firm support against egoism.

DOI: 10.30470/phm.2021.530964.1999

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Introduction One of the questions that has always engaged thinkers' minds, especially moral philosophers and psychologists, is whether human can really be an altruist or not? Are there at least some people who are motivated to only fulfil other's needs in certain circumstances? Or, is altruism just egoism in another tempting clothes? Is human nature just egoist?

According to ethical altruism, other's benefit should be considered as a moral action. In fact, human being does not exist to follow his dreams, but the ethical condition of an action, is to priorities others to yourself. (Rand, 1984:49)

When they discuss ethical altruism as an ethical norm, usually they consider psychological altruism which is a descriptive theory about human nature and believes that human is naturally capable to act upon fulfilling other's needs. In contrast to psychological altruism, there is psychological egoism that claims human being is psychologically created to only fulfil his personal need and this motivates all his

actions, even those that seem altruistic (Scott). To claim that the ultimate aim is to help others is considered fake from this point of view. (Feinberg)

Obviously, this is a different view about ethical egoism because the aim of this view is not to express good and bad motivations, but to express what is the reason of human actions. The truth of psychological egoism makes moral altruism meaningless because the later considers what that human being cannot naturally do.

Nowadays, numerous criticisms are against psychological egoism (Laflette)

Avoiding desirability of this claim, we can never label real human motivation with self-interest (Blackburn). Perhaps understanding human being's inner motivation is one of the reasons to accept this view. However, not being able to validate this view makes it unscientific. Lack of experimental evidence makes egoism invalid.

While by purely rational justifications, we cannot prove or reject psychological egoism, accepting or rejecting it relates to

experimental psychology and scientific and experimental analysis. Rejecting egoism experimentally, firstly, makes any egoism theory invalid. Secondly, it makes it possible to understand human motivations, and finally shows that human motivation is beyond personal materialistic interests and, at least, some parts of human motivation is purely for others. This view is expressed by Daniel Batson.

Daniel Batson is an American psychologist who is famous for his empathetic-altruism theory. He proved the existence of purely altruistic motivation in the human nature. This idea expresses that feeling empathetic with another person and stimulates the sense of helping others. Batson supports empathetic-altruism based on precise tests and numerous experiments on human beings and disapproves egoism. Finally, he combines egoistic and altruistic motivations. Moreover, his theory is descriptive and does not directly relate to norms. However, considering the relationship between motivation and behavior,

altruism practically leads us toward ethics.

Besides Batson who proved altruism psychologically, Thomas Nagel, an American philosopher, defends altruism philosophically. Thomas Nagel is against both psychological, and ethical egoism and supports rational altruism. He explains altruism rationally. He invalidates the opposite view, ethical egoism, by extracting assumptions and irrational consequences of this view. Offering a kind of action theory, Nagel shows that deduction can solely create motivation for action and, consequently, he concludes that only by considering basis of motivation, we can reach ethics. Therefore, these two, with their own techniques- one psychologically, and the other philosophically- defended altruism and proved it. Therefore, this idea has both rational and experimental support.

Methodology: This research is done based on library research. Nagel's papers are translated into Farsi, therefore, there was no limit in reading papers on altruism. However, papers by Daniel Batson

have not been translated into Farsi yet. So, first we studied and translated his main book and then translated and studied various papers published by him related to the topic. Moreover, we discussed the concept with professor Batson via emails. Resources were sent by him to me via email.

As Batson's research is experimental and this paper is philosophical research, we tried to consider Batson's theory conceptually. Therefore, we did not explain Batson's experiments thoroughly and only focused on foundations and assumptions.

Findings: In this research, we tried to provide an overview about Nagel and Batson's theories on psychological altruism. Then we assessed both views. Batson questioned egoism by expressing empathetic theory. For Batson, it was important to show that human nature is not so selfish to neglect others' fate unless it is beneficial for him, but a part of human nature is altruistic. Without that human effort to boost healthy human relations would fail. Batson has emphasized on the relation between emotions and

motivations and considers deep emotional feeling called empathetic concern as the cause for altruistic motivation. He uses scientific and precise experimental techniques to show the motivation nature produced by empathy. He believes altruism is completely related to human-related facts. .

Accordingly, we showed that Batson and Nagel, using two different techniques, study the concept of altruism, while having different perception about this subject matter. We can be against Batson's empathetic-altruism and define altruism as a behavior, or like Nagel consider altruism only based on rationalism. What matters is that there is an intensive emotion in human that plays an important role in altruistic motivations. Studying empathetic concern and its relation with motivation by Batson was admired by psychologists and behavioral scientists since it helps to study human behavior.

Batson showed that empathetic concern is intentional and done consciously. In fact, it is the outcome of precise cognitive analysis of others' conditions. What separates him from Nagel is

that altruism is only rational and conscious according to Nagel while from Batson's point of view, apart from rationalism, love is a key element in creating altruism. Love is so important for Batson that he called empathetic-altruism theory value-development theory.

Batson showed that altruism is a strong and influential force in human life and has positive and negative consequences. Learning about them will help us to improve human welfare. Batson believes that altruism and egoism are related to ethics. Both can be against public interest and create behaviors that are against justice. Therefore, he did not establish an ethical system based on this motivation. He believes in desired motivation pluralism. Nagel, on the other hand, considers altruism completely ethical and he believes in the rational consequences of altruism.

Moreover, altruism from Nagel's point of view neglects self-interest ethically, and considers any emotions like empathy out of ethics. Like Hume and Batson, we can consider several motivations than one along with a combination

of self-interest and other's welfare as the basis of ethics. As such, it is possible to establish an ethical system based on several axioms. By precisely assessing weaknesses and strengths of each axiom, we can fix contradictions and reach unity.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Finally, the altruism as an original ethical theory points at a strong motivational force in human nature and has both rational and scientific support. This means it can take an important place in ethics. It even influences economy, politics and psychology. By direct and indirect strategies, people are led to consider others, cooperate with them to boost human society, and try to solve social problems. Accordingly, all people's benefit will be considered beyond personal interests. Therefore, by considering altruistic motivations and by creating unity and harmony between them, we can reach a positive ethical society.

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