Spring 2013

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[Handout #19]
C. Daniel Batson, "How Social an Animal: The Human Capacity for Caring"

Q: In our interactions with others do we ever really care about them, or is the real target of our concern always exclusively ourselves?

Instrumental value	Terminal value/ Ultimate goal
valuable for some other ends	valuable for its own sake

Q: Each of us values at least some other people. Do we value these others for their own sake – a terminal value – or for ours – an instrumental value?

§ Social Egoism

1. The only persons we are capable of caring about, ultimately, are ourselves.
2. We value others only instrumentally; we care for their welfare only to the degree that it affects ours.
3. We are social egoists; altruism, the view that we are capable of valuing and pursuing another person's welfare as an ultimate goal, is pure fantasy.

§ Altruism

1. We *are* capable of valuing and pursuing another person's welfare as an ultimate goal.
2. *The empathy-helping relationship* – We are more likely to help someone in need when we *feel for* that person, when we feel emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion and tenderness.

§ Motivation for Altruism: egoism or altruism?

Egoism: Helping others in need is an instrumental goal on the way to the ultimate goal of benefiting oneself.
  (i) **Aversive-arousal reduction:** When we feel empathy for someone in distress, we feel distress too. We act to relieve their distress simply as an instrumental means to the ultimate goal of relieving our own distress.
  (ii) **Punishment avoidance:** We anticipate feeling especially ashamed or guilty if we do not help someone for whom we feel empathy.

(iii)   **Reward seeking:** We anticipate feeling especially good about ourselves if we help someone for whom we feel empathy.

> Bernard Mandevillle (1714/1732):
> > There is no merit in saving an innocent baby ready to drop into the fire: The action is neither good nor bad, and what benefit soever the infant received, we only obliged our selves; for to have seen it fall, and not stove to hinder it, would have caused a pain, which self-preservation compelled us to prevent.

Q: Do you agree with this view? According to Mencius, having that sense of not bearing to see the child die is itself the beginning of a moral sense.

Altruism: The motivation for helping someone in need is altruistic, not egoistic.
- (i)   Self-benefits may follow from benefiting others, this does not prove that self-benefits are the helper's goal.
- (ii)   It is at least logically possible that the self-benefits are unintended consequences of the helper's reaching his or her *ultimate goal of benefiting the other*.

Q: How do we settle on the debate?
A: We must examine the actor's motives.

§ Distinguishing between Egoistic and Altruistic Motives

Q: How do we test people's ultimate goal? What is the methodology?
__ We can infer the person's motive from his or her behavior (observe more than one behavior). The following two steps provide an empirical basis for inferring the nature of a person's motivation:
- (i)   observe the person's behavior in systematically varying situations that involve a change in the relation between the potential ultimate goals
- (ii)   engage in conceptual analysis of the various potential alternative goals for the person's action

* Discussion:
__ Isn't this method only useful for testing the person's character rather than the act itself? Couldn't one have single altruistic acts without a consistent pattern?

§ Testing Results

1. **Escape (easy vs. difficult) x Empathy (low vs. high) design**

Results of these experiments have consistently conformed to the pattern predicted by the empathy-altruism hypothesis, not to the pattern predicted by the aversive-arousal reduction explanation.

2. Justification x Empathy Design

The logic behind this technique is that if a person is helping to avoid shame and guilt, then if we provide information that increases the justification for not helping, the rate of helping should drop. But if a person is helping out of an altruistic desire to reduce the other's suffering, then even with increased justification, the rate of helping should remain high.

Result: Once more, results supported the empathy-altruism hypothesis.

§ Conclusion

1. If the empathy-altruism hypothesis is true, then we must radically review our views of the human capacity for caring.
2. We are capable of being altruistically motivated.
3. We can care about others' welfare as a terminal/ultimate value, not just as an instrumental value for our sake.

§ Questions for reflection:
1. "Motive" implies deliberation and conscious awareness, but in many altruistic acts, the subjects acted spontaneously, without deliberation or conscious awareness of their own motives. How do we incorporate this kind of phenomena in our explanation?
2. There could be different altruistic acts: those that are done spontaneously, without prior reflection, and those that are done with consideration of various factors and ultimate deliberation. Is the former necessarily "better" or more "ethically worthy" than the latter? What are the scenarios for each type of altruistic acts?
3. If one acts altruistically with the ultimate goal of one's self-benefits, should we judge this person any differently because of his or her motive?
   a. the philanthropists who aim to get a tax break or get respected
   b. those who would not feel good about themselves if they had not helped (aversive-arousal reduction)
   c. those who would be ashamed if they had not helped (punishment avoidance)
   d. those who would be happy for helping (reward seeking)
4. The whole theory is based on the assumption that altruism should be based on a form of pure empathy – a concern for others' welfare alone. But why can't the sense of shame or the sense of being proud of/pleased with the self be a morally worthy motivation as well?