

An analysis of the Definition, Origin, Causes, and Effects of Altruism

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Abstract. Starting from the definition of altruism, this paper first summarized "the view that altruistic behavior is jointly determined by genes and environment" through Rushton research results and gene-environment-related theories and introduced prosocial behavior to find out the commonality between prosocial behavior and altruistic behavior for joint research. Among the factors that affect the formation of altruism, this paper focuses on the role of culture, personality, and family environment. In this part, more mediating variables are used to analyze and speculate. In the part of culture, this paper divides culture into three parts: ideology and culture, agriculture, and religion. In personality, this paper mainly refers to the experiments of scholars such as Batson and Powell to explain the existence of altruistic personality and the factors affecting such personality. In the part of family environment, this paper believes that a good family environment is conducive to the formation of children's altruistic behavior. Finally, after consulting the relevant data to conclude that altruistic behavior will positively impact individuals, it is inferred that altruistic behavior will have the same positive impact on society as the impact on individuals.

Keywords: Altruism, Pro-social Behavior, Altruistic Personality, Family Environment, Culture, impact.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is not difficult to see such news reports: a patient notified that he was critically ill offered to donate his organs to a stranger waiting for help. When people saw the news that a girl took the initiative to undergo kidney transplant surgery for a strange girl waiting for a kidney transplant, they could not help but be moved and praised. Such altruistic behavior seems to be guided by instinct, and the onlookers will also issue unshakable and questioning affirmation and praise to the altruist. Since ancient times, experts and scholars have never given up the discussion on altruism, and the root and motivation of altruism have led to different theories. Material wealth seems essential in most people's lives in this society, full of egoism. Even in this case, "altruism" still occupies a high position in most people's hearts, and this contradiction has triggered more thinking. So, what is altruism? Is altruism in people's genes? How does the external environment affect altruism? This paper will make a summary and discussion based on these problems.

2. Literature review

2.1. Connotation

2.1.1 Definition

Altruism generally refers to the principle of life attitude and behavior that puts social interests first and sacrifices personal interests for social interests. It is selfless behavior for the welfare of others. In social psychology, most psychologists believe that altruism is an act of free will without expectation of future reward, that is, a voluntary and self-selected act of helping others. In psychoanalysis, there is also a relevant definition of altruism. Freud explained in "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" that altruism is a substitute pleasure obtained through identification and giving up one's interests and impulses for the benefit of others. In addition, a similar concept to altruism is pro-social behavior, which can be either an act of free will with no expectation of future reward, or an act of

helping others in return for the help they have received in the past or to compensate for the loss they have caused others [1].

2.1.2 Origin

Rushton and other researchers (1986) asked 1400 pairs of twins aged 19 to 60 to fill in the Self-Report Altruism Scale and found that the heritability of altruism was 0.60, so they believed that altruism was caused by genetic inheritance. In addition, many research findings point to the idea that altruism is in the genes and can be inherited through interaction with the environment to induce altruistic behavior. In terms of genes, studies have shown that serotonin, oxytocin, and Arginine Vasopressin, three transporter and receptor genes, together affect the occurrence of altruistic behavior [2].

Secondly, the environment is an essential factor affecting the expression of altruistic genes and genes. The gene-environment theory suggests that genes drive experiences and fall into three types: passive, active, and evocative [2]. In other words, genes determine or select the environment that an individual will experience, so there is a specific correlation between genes and the environment. An individual's genes will affect the environment in which he lives, and the two will synergistically act on an individual's altruistic behavior.

2.2. Reasons For the Existence of Altruism

Since prosocial behavior includes altruism and both are biologically based on empathy, prosocial behavior, and altruism are described together in the following paragraphs [3].

2.2.1 Culture

2.2.1.1 Ideological and Culture

Different ethnic cultures influence the formation and development of altruism. Different from the view that "all people are selfish" advocated by Western scholars such as Thomas Hobbes, in Chinese traditional Confucian culture, Confucius and Mencius insist that human nature is kind and altruistic, including the idea of "universal love, non-aggression" in Chinese Mohist traditional culture, which also contains the kernel of altruism [4]. Therefore, under the influence of the long-established ideas of Confucianism in China, people are more highly advocating altruism, and public opinion is more favorable to others, so it is easier to stimulate and inherit altruistic behaviors.

2.2.1.2 Agriculture

Different farming practices can also affect the development of altruism. Studies have shown that farming impacts the formation and development of collectivism, but collectivism and altruism belong to the relationship of inclusion, so it is speculated that farming will affect the formation and development of altruism.

First of all, different farming affects the development degree of collectivism. According to "The Rice Theory" proposed by Thomas Talhelm et al. in a paper published in Science in 2014, since rice cultivation requires more labor than wheat cultivation, at the same time, most of the irrigation work of rice requires collective labor to complete collectivism is more evident and complete in areas where rice is grown. In addition, altruism is considered extreme collectivism [5], and altruism is covered by collectivism, so it can be concluded that different farming cultures also influence altruism.

2.2.1.3 Religion

Regardless of the differences and conflicts between different religions, studies have found that altruistic behaviors under religions tend to occur within the same religion. In a 2017 study on religious belief, Bennett and Einolf showed that religious activity can trigger pro-social behavior and promote altruistic motivation. This study contradicts the idea that religious individuals are motivated by self-interest rather than altruism. Similarly, the correlation between altruism and religious belief was moderate and significant, and 76% of the subjects in the experiment confirmed the positive

relationship between religious belief and altruism. It shows that altruistic intention increases with increased religious belief [6].

The relationship between religious belief and altruistic behavior can be inferred from the public's trust in national leaders because the public expects leaders to make decisions that benefit most of the country's people, not just their interests. It can be seen that altruism has an essential influence on the election of leaders. In a survey of U.S. presidential elections and religion, majorities have more faith in religious leaders and are likelier to vote for a religious president. Since leaders represent an altruistic tendency and religious belief can be used as the mediating variable of leaders here, it can be inferred that there is a specific relationship between religious belief and altruism, and most of them are positive.

2.2.2 Altruistic Personality

Altruism is considered a key to socialization and a significant personal trait [7]. Researchers Penner and Finkelstein believed that "altruistic personality" refers to an enduring tendency to consider the welfare of others, to care about others, and to act in the interest of others [1].

In recent years, the concept of altruistic personality has been gradually accepted and recognized, and generous personality has been explored as a factor in studying altruism. Batson and Powell's 16-year longitudinal study of children between the ages of 4 and 20 and questionnaires conducted by other researchers in specific situations supported the existence of altruistic personality. In addition, a recent study shows that an altruistic personality with empathic participation has the consistency of altruistic tendency across scenarios, which once again confirms the existence of a generous personality. At the same time, a generous personality has five essential components, namely: social responsibility, which has a positive correlation with the occurrence of altruistic behavior; Empathy, or empathy, is positively correlated with altruistic behavior; Belief in a just world: Altruistic behavior occurs mainly when social injustice occurs; Internal control: Internal control is manifested as a person's confidence in oneself and a sense of responsibility to others, and is positively related to the occurrence of altruistic behavior; Low egoism: Studies have shown that the lower a person's self-centered tendencies, the more likely they are to inspire altruistic behavior [8].

2.2.2 Family

In analyzing the connection between family and altruistic behavior, the idea that "A affects B, and B has a certain connection with C, so A will affect C" is speculated; B acts as a mediating variable here.

The first idea is empathy as a B variable. Empathy is the foundation of individual altruism, and the sense of security and encouragement brought by the family environment can cultivate individual empathy ability (except for patients with empathy disorder). In addition, empathy can promote individual prosocial behaviors. That is to say, family environment is positively correlated with the occurrence of altruistic behaviors. Empathy is the mediating variable between family environment and altruistic behavior. Some socialization theories point out that the earliest prosocial behavior is formed under the cultivation of parents, and the prosocial behavior is affected by various factors in the family environment.

Meanwhile, in one study, researchers used the Family Environment Chinese version and Basic Empathy Chinese based on analyzing the questionnaire survey of male and female students in a particular university. The Version found that family environment affected empathy, thus affecting prosocial behavior and altruistic behavior, and there was a gender difference in the conclusion, revealing that the mediating role of empathy was more prominent in college students. In other words, the role of the family environment in cultivating and shaping empathy is more significant in male students [9].

Another view is "security - attachment" as the B variable. The sense of personal security brought by the family environment can promote altruistic behavior. This security is reflected in the degree of attachment that parents can bring to their children, especially the mother's significant role. The researchers studied 1,447 children (50.4% male and 49.6% female) between the ages of 7 and 12. The

results confirmed that pro-social behavior, i.e., altruistic behavior, was positively correlated with the degree of attachment to parents and negatively correlated with the feeling of abandonment by parents. Although some studies show that the relationship between the two is weak, the influence cannot be excluded [10].

2.3. Impact

2.3.1 On Individual

First of all, altruistic behavior is beneficial to individual happiness. A study examining the relationship between prosocial spending and happiness in 136 countries found a significant positive correlation between charitable giving and happiness in 120 countries. The relationship between altruistic behavior and personal happiness is not only reflected in the cost of money. Some scholars have found that altruistic behavior displayed on the Internet is also positively correlated with improving happiness. Moreover, tracking experiments have found that the happiness of altruistic behavior is more lasting than that of non-altruistic behavior [11, 12].

Secondly, altruism also has a positive effect on an individual's physiology. Studies have found that altruistic behavior can effectively reduce stress and depression. Compared with purely egoistic behavior, altruistic behavior has a lot less psychological burden and reduces the psychological pressure on individuals. Some studies conducted pain tests on the subjects and divided them into the charitable and control groups. Through monitoring the brain areas related to pain, it was found that the pain of the altruistic group was significantly lower than that of the control group, thus concluding that altruistic behavior can effectively relieve pain. In addition, studies have found that altruistic behavior can effectively improve people's physical health [11].

2.3.2 On Society

From small to large, the influence of altruism on individuals can be extended to society. The increase in social altruism can effectively maintain social stability, enhance social harmony, and enhance the life happiness of the whole society. At the same time, it can also maximize the humanitarian care of the society. In 2008, after the devastating earthquake in Wenchuan, China, monks in the Arhat Temple in Shifang, a hard-hit city, helped doctors deliver 108 babies. According to Buddhist precepts, the temple can not see blood or light or eat meat and fish. If you do not observe, that is to break the precepts. In Buddhism, the person who breaks the precepts damages personal merit can not be perfected. However, in the face of life, the temple's abbot, Master Suquan, still put life first, regardless of personal interests, broke three prospects, led monks to assist doctors in providing help for pregnant mothers, and welcomed the arrival of 108 new lives together. The altruism practiced by Suquan and the monks displays humanitarian care, bringing the dawn of new life to the devastated area. While conveying truth, kindness, and beauty to society, it not only consoles people's hearts but also injects humanitarian force into the disaster area at that time.

2.4. Revelation

From the perspective of the positive impact of altruistic behavior on individuals and society, cultivating and encouraging altruistic behavior is necessary. Because genes and environment determine altruistic behavior, when people can not change the innate genes, they can change the acquired environment to cultivate individual altruistic behavior. As an essential environment affecting personal development, school and family can focus on cultivating children's compassion, social responsibility, and internal control ability to cultivate children's altruistic behavior. At the same time, it is suggested that the state and society should strengthen the promotion and guidance of family-style construction, strengthen legal constraints, reduce the occurrence of domestic violence, reduce the negative impact of a bad hostile environment on children, provide children with a safe and attachment environment, guide the correct intimate relationship, and promote the occurrence of acquired altruistic behavior by using the family environment.

3. Conclusion

This paper combined prosocial behavior in the definition part to explain the commonality of altruism and prosocial behavior; that is, both are helpful behaviors that follow their own will in the present regardless of future reward, and both are based on empathy. Seeking the commonality of altruistic and prosocial behavior is conducive to developing the following multi-factor analysis of altruistic behavior. In the part of the origin of altruism, this paper concludes that altruism and altruistic behavior are caused by innate genes and acquired environment through reading literature and mainly cites relevant experiments and theories here. Next, in discussing the causes of altruistic behavior, this paper lists five related factors and discusses the specific relationship between each factor and the occurrence of altruistic behavior. In analyzing the influence, this paper argues that altruism will positively impact individuals, that is, society. Based on this point of view, this paper focuses on the cultivation responsibility of society and family for individuals. The final revelation of this paper mainly focuses on the acquired environmental factors that cause the occurrence of altruistic behaviors. At the same time, some scholars pointed out that the occurrence of altruistic behavior does not exclude the participation of egoism. Scholars believe that only actual altruistic behavior is healthy, and only true altruistic behavior can bring about the positive impact of altruistic behavior on individuals mentioned above.

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