ISSN: 2634-9221
European Journal of Applied Sciences; Vol. 14 No. 03 (2026) (155-156)
https://doi.org/10.14738/ejas.1403.10810

# Altruistic Acts Usually Emanate from 'Natural Selective' Motivations

Michael Gurevitz

1. Department of Plant Molecular Biology and Ecology, George S. Wise Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv 69978, Tel Aviv, Israel

In 1858 Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallach published their theory about 'Natural Selection' that was accepted thereafter as a major driving force in evolution. Main principles in their theory were: Traits important for fitness and survival must be inherited, and the best traits are being selected through reproduction. The principles of the 'Natural Selection' theory raised selfishness (an egoistic tendency to improve fitness and guarantee survival) as a major evolutionary factor. Yet, the selfishness driving force seemed to contradict a previous theory published in 1830 by the French sociologist/philosopher Auguste Comte, who coined the term 'Altruism' {derived from the Latin word *alteri* (other), as the concern for the well-being of others without expectation for a reward or reciprocity (unselfishness). Not only that the putative contradiction between the selfishness (egoism) principle of 'Natural Selection' and the unselfishness principle of 'Altruism' elicited an unstoppable debate between proponents of the two theories, it also raised questions about the basics of 'Altruism' and whether it could be related only to humans. When Darwin was asked for his opinion, his answer concentrated on the steep personal cost of an altruistic action as a potentially fatal challenge to his 'Natural Selection' theory: In other words, if life was a continuous struggle for existence, how could a selfless individual live long enough to reproduce and inherit his 'noble' traits? Despite this enigma, Darwin was still aware to the widespread phenomena resembling altruistic behavior, not just among humans (e.g., honeybees defend the hive by committing suicidal stings; ants sacrifice their life to protect the swarm; birds raise offspring that aren't their own; lions share hunted meat with a wounded herd-member; human soldiers sacrifice themselves in a battle to save unknown comrades; people risk their life to save strangers even animals). Importantly, an additional facet of altruistic behavior appears in Comte's philosophical book 'Religion of Humanity', where he noted that altruistic behavior could stem from embedded sense of duty (e.g., motherhood in *Animalia*) or from deep feelings of empathy originating from a core aspect of morality, like solid friendship between humans that involves concerns mostly for the interests of the friend. Hence, except for a genetic built-in motherhood urge that dictates a protective behavior, other forms of altruistic-like deeds may be based on developed social rules and dignity often driven or influenced by various emotions and circumstances. Interestingly, the two theories implying selfishness or unselfishness, seemed paradoxical and provoked a discussion ever since being published. Whereas the unselfishness theory involved numerous examples of acts that seemed to corroborate the 'Altruism' theory, the putative underlying motivations have not been fully scrutinized. At the same time, supporters of Darwin's theory claimed that selfish (egoistic) intentions actually underlined any altruistic act. As a result, two main perspectives emerged. A tough perspective like that argued by the mathematician/philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who claimed: "Is there such thing as a truly selfless act? Altruistic deeds are often a display of weakness, decay and

lack of belief in one's self and own goals. To help your neighbor is often to hinder yourself". In parallel, a less decisive, yet quite emotional perspective was instigated by Martin Luther King Jr.: "If any civilization is to survive, it is the morality of 'Altruism' that men have to reject", but at the same time "let us try to teach generosity and 'Altruism', because we are born selfish, and so, everyone must decide whether he walks in the light of creative 'Altruism' or in the darkness of destructive selfishness". This emotional claim was further supported in a way by Albert Einstein's reference: "Contribution to others or to society is far more important than personal success or the accumulation of wealth'. Still, despite the different perspectives, a clear ('pure') altruistic motivation still remained to be described as most examples for altruistic actions, including the sacrifice of bees and ants to protect their colonies, or the behavior of the birds that raised offspring of others, could be explained on the grounds of an embedded instinct evolved to support the survival of the species, much like the evolved protective instinct of motherhood. Furthermore, although humans ready to sacrifice their life for others might have acted on the basis of deep feelings of empathy originating from a core aspect of developed social morality, they operated most likely on the basis of a built-in evolutionary concealed urge, which at a brief glance might have resembled a pure altruistic act, while actually derived from an evolved trait of species survival following the 'Natural Selection' theory. Another example of an altruistic-like behavior was raised in Amotz Zahavi's 'Handicap Principle', claiming that altruistic acts could actually constitute costly signals used by individuals to advertise quality, fitness and social status toward potential mates or rivals (Zahavi, A., 1997, The handicap principle: a missing piece of Darwin's puzzle. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-510035-8. OCLC 35360821). This theory, however, does not prove 'pure Altruism', and thus could be categorized under 'apparent' altruistic acts, based on a concealed selfish objective driven by 'individual selection'. It seems, though, that the many examples raised as unselfish (altruistic) acts, actually were driven by either genetically embedded urges/instincts, or by concealed selfish objectives derived from the 'Natural Selection' evolutionary process.

**In conclusion:** A 'pure' unselfish motivation of generosity, without any expectation for recognition, reward or improvement of 'self-esteem', is truly hard to define: Even the assumption that such an act was based on a concealed feeling of empathy and compassion (e.g., volunteering, donating organs) could actually originate from a desire for reputation, or even just to strengthen the 'self' value, which indirectly fortifies the personal image ('Self impact'), while upgrading feelings of bravery, confidence and consequently the self-esteem.

Overall, the difficulty to attain an altruistic behavior that does not underlie any concealed self-motivation in favor of an individual, species or the entire society, may suggest that Comte's 'pure Altruism' should remain a theoretical unproved idea. At the same time, all examples of altruistic acts raised by various philosophers, psychiatrists, and writers (e.g., sacrifice, donations, philanthropy, generosity, instincts) actually underlie various motivations (often concealed ones), and therefore they are all led by 'individual selection' (selfish objectives). Therefore, their categorization should be restricted to 'Apparent Altruistic' behavior driven by selfish motivations that fit the 'Natural Selection' theory. Hence, the alleged unsolved paradox between 'Natural Selection' and 'Altruism' seems to fade away.