

# The Sources and Influencing Factors of Egoism and Altruism

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing research on egoism and altruism, there is much debate about egoism. This study systematically reviews the sources and influencing factors of egoism. Through the method of retrieving the literature in the database, this review summarizes the different aspects of biology and genetic and cultural factors. Altruism and egoism are affected by various congenital or acquired factors. Besides genetic factors, cultural factors have a big impact on egoism. Cultural differences between the east and the west affect people's moral judgments. At the demographic level, gender and age are the main factors of self-interest. It is worth noting that children's moral decisions are malleable. This review can enhance the understanding of the field of moral judgment and guide children's moral education.

**Keywords:** *Egoism, Altruism, Genetic, Culturalism.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, people have paid great attention to the field of psychology, especially egoism and altruism. So what is egoism? What is altruism? What's the difference between self-interest and selfishness? The definition of egoism is the idea of only focusing on one's own interest and ignoring the interests of others or the collective. It regards individual interests as the above-all attitude and code of conduct towards life. It is manifested in the pursuit of fame and fortune, status and enjoyment by hook for extremely selfish personal purposes. Altruism is a selfless behavior for the benefit of others, recent studies have shown that human behavior is selfless, but it is beneficial emotionally[1]. Because previous studies were carried out almost entirely in north American society, it was not clear whether this was an entire explanation of altruism. Aknin and her colleagues compared Canadian children with children from remote islands in the South Pacific (Vanua) on whether altruism had the same emotional rewards for children on isolated islands[2]. One experimenter gave the children eight rarer and expensive candy, and asked the children to give one of their candy to the puppet (expensive donation), and the experimenter also gave the child a new candy to the puppet (non-expensive give). The experimental results show that children from Vanuatu show more happiness when giving their candy to the puppet than when the experimenter provides candy to the puppet. It

reflects a possibility for altruism to support emotional interests in different cultural contexts. It is also a virtue in many ideas and cultures. Not only is the happiness of others more important than themselves in moral judgement, but also altruistic behavior is defined as increasing the survival of others by reducing their own survival in evolutionary Genetics. Selfishness people are self-interested (only caring about their own interests), but self-interest does not mean selfishness. Good self-interest can meet their own requirements without harming the interests of others, but bad self-interest not only meets their own needs but also harms the interests of others[3, 4].

In the past, some scholars have already made some research and contributions to altruism and egoism. Therefore, this paper would introduce the sources and influencing factors of selfishness. First is the influence and relationship of selfish gene source in genetics aspects and biology aspects, second is characteristics of cultural communication, the third one is the influence of different cultures (regional culture, Eastern and Western culture and religious culture) on altruism and egoism with examples, the fourth one is the influence of gender and age differences on altruism and egoism with examples. This review summarizes most of the factors that mainly affect egoism and altruistic behavior, which can make certain contributions to this field.

## 2. SELFISH GENE SOURCE

Everyone knows that human-beings are cellular organisms composed of DNA such as cells, nucleus and chromosomes, many bindings to chromosomes are form genes. In short, the gene is a part of DNA that inside the animals determines their characteristics and replicates themselves sustained in the natural selection. Selfish genes share the same reasons, it constantly copies genes for survival and transfers from one individual to another in order not to be eliminated by nature. According to this process and definition, there are two articles are shown below.

### 2.1. *In the Genetics aspects*

When a creature reproduces sexually with another creature like an organism or animals does, it mixes different pattern of DNA from their parents, this relationship is called kinship. Most of us in the common impression, parents care about their children most and selflessly reward their children's love and dedication, but from the perspective of genetics, the view is different. For instance, Richard Dawkins who is a famous evolutionary biologist, believes that the parents who give love to their children is driven by our selfish gene[5]. Because of the combination of male and female chromosomes, children have their parents' general genes. Meanwhile, grandparents' love for their grandchildren is due to the grandchildren sharing a quarter of their genes. However, when there are many children in a family, genes would also make decisions for us, that is why the smallest child can get more attention and care from parents. Since the gene considers that the smallest one not only has a longer survival time than other children, but the genes can also be continued better, so they will be more favoured and protect the youngest child.

### 2.2. *In biology aspects*

During the process of reproduction, one strange gene meets another strange one. The competition for genes has begun from that time, both males and females all want to keep their genes in this "competition", which can spread and continue their genes in a wide range. Therefore, this is kind of competition and mutual help is called reciprocity. Biologically, both females and males all have a certain tendency to have promiscuity, so they may like to have more offspring. But the reproduction cost of females is higher than that of males. When the female is fertilized, the foetus begins to conceive inside the mother, with the increase of pregnancy, the foetus would also absorb a large number of nutrients from the female body. In contrast, the reproduction cost of males is low, so most females like to exchange the same price with males before reproduction. As an illustration, before the female bird reproduced with the male bird, the female bird would let the male bird forage and nest for the born birds. To

prevent the male bird from mating with other female birds after giving birth, they would ask the male bird to provide their material in advance to ensure future living conditions. The truth also applies to human beings. When a man and a woman want to get married, they usually judge the future efforts between each other. Therefore, before a woman accepts a man, she would make the man pay more materially and physically subjects, such as buying a car, a house, and a diamond ring. On the contrary, to continue his gene better, men would pay unconditionally to women in the early stage, however, in the later stage, they would feel that it is enough for them pay and cheat with other woman during the pregnancy.

Richard Dawkins also said that genes are only statistically meaningful. There is no moral concept for genes themselves, they just control the life in the world to achieve the purpose of reproduction and expansion. Human beings are extremely special compared with other living organisms, they would adopt children and pay their attentions and feelings to them, even regardless of genetic inheritance, in terms of human reproduction, they are not only for mating or reproduction, but also persevere with love and responsibility, parents now maintain a certain balance in their dedication to their children which means that would not favor boy gender or the smallest as before. So, what factors subtly affect human altruism and egoism?

### 2.3. *Characteristics of cultural communication*

Human beings would restrain their selfish behavior through culture(regional culture or education) and thus do something altruistic behavior. The spread of culture is similar to heredity, which can lead to a certain degree of evolution. But it is moderate that makes human beings more special than other" survival machines. This process of cultural transmission is called meme [6].

The meme is hereditary, the process of meme transmission is the process of meme inheritance. For example, if a certain religious belief is spread as meme, it would continue to be inherited from the believer all the time.

The meme is variable, the transmission process of meme is not all perfect, because sometimes they are often transmitted from one person to another without the continuous intervention of the creator. In a sense, they can have their own lives. If people talk about an event, it may continue to be transacted to countless people, they may add some details or delete some content. The meme is selective-memes have different communication capabilities. Some memes are easier to pass on, while others are never disseminated. For instance, when people learn to sing songs, they often find that some songs are easier to remember and spread quickly, however, the others are rarely sung.

### 3. INFLUENCE FACTORS

#### 3.1. Culture factors

The spread of regional culture has a great impact on altruism and egoism. Take an example of the economy in northeast China, people living there who like to make friends, so altruistic behaviors occur frequently, since they believe that altruism is the best way to achieve egoism, and emotional investment would bring greater returns on benefits as well. However, in the northwest of China, altruistic behavior occurs relatively low, because their regional culture believes that networking investment would bring extra trouble to them.

Differences in Eastern and Western cultures also affect altruistic behavior and self-interested behavior[7]. In Western culture, some authoritative scholars such as Thomas Hobbes, Richard Dawkins and Sigmund Freud believe that people are selfish and they would give priority to their own interests. For example, two newborn babies do not humbly breastfeed to each other. Similarly, two babies in the same womb compete with each other to absorb nutrients from their mother, to grow up better. However, in the traditional Chinese oriental culture, scholars put forward different opinions from Western scholars. Mencius is a representative of Confucianism in the Warring States period of China. In his statement, human nature is kind and altruism. The kindness of human nature is the same as water flowing down, which is the law of nature. But if people beat the water with their hands, the water would splash, and if people block the water, the water may also flow backwards up the mountain. This principle also applies to human beings. Changes in nature and the direction of water flow are all affected by external forces. Compared with Mencius's theoretical concept, Xun Zi, another scholar who is at the same period as him, believes that human nature is selfish and evil, even people with good intentions can pretend. The overall view is somewhat similar to the Western scholars. Generally speaking, when discussing human nature, altruism and egoism, the cultural differences between the west and East are different[8, 9].

Religion can be understood as the organizational framework of the broadest cultural expressions and attitudes, values and ideologies in a culture. People cannot separate culture and religion at all. Therefore, the studies compared samples of altruism and help behavior in Thailand and the United States, and how religion influenced the results of the experiment[10].

Participants included 56 native non-Buddhist American college students (50% of whom are Christians and 48,3% do not identify with any religion) and 62 native Thai students (95% of Thais believe in the Mahayana Buddhism, which generally teaches conflict avoidance, social harmony, opposes disrespect and aggressive behavior, interdependence and the moral

meaning of causality), studying in the San Francisco Bay Area and Bangkok.

Two measurement methods are used. First is the self-reporting altruism scale (SRA), which is usually used to measure altruism as a personality trait, and participants rate the 20 projects that they participated in. The second method is the altruistic perception test (AAT), which measures altruistic attitudes through the projection process. There are five cards in total. The investigator would ask the participants to tell a story with a beginning and end according to these five cards, and answer the corresponding questions.

The final test results show that, in standard self-reporting and predictive measurements, Thai students showed lots of altruism and helping tendencies than American students. On the SRA scale, Thais have more altruistic behavior than Americans ( $M=51.5$ ,  $SD=8.07$ ), meanwhile, it is obviously more helpful than Americans in AAT tests. To prevent deviations in results caused by religious interpretations, the investigators interviewed some participants in two different culture as well, they found that Thais mention religion as a reason for help more frequently than Americans, on the other hand, Americans frequently mention that religion is not a reason to help, which explains that religion is also an important factor in culture.

#### 3.2. Demographic factors

Nowadays, both men and women are in an equal society, but there may have different opinions in judgements between different genders especially for egoism behavior and altruistic behavior. Some scientific research has found that when the "egoistic demand curve" of males and females intersects, the results show that males are more sensitive to prices and females are kinder when altruism is expensive. conversely, when it is cheap, males become more altruistic. From the results of this experiment, it can be seen that males are more likely to be completely selfish or selfless, while females are often egalitarian and prefer to share equally[11].

Age differences are also an influencing factor. Even if the children have altruistic behaviors as well. The investigators studied the reaction of nearly a hundred nineteen-month-old children when they saw sweet fruits such as blueberries and grapes. When the experimenters put the fruits on the plate and pretended to reach for it and show their thirst for fruits, 58% of the children picked up the fruit and handed it to the experimenter. when the experimenter did not reach out, there is 4% of the children were willing to help give the fruit.

Investigators are also curious about whether young children are still so generous when they are hungry. After all, although they cause some losses for themselves, some altruists are still willing to help others. Therefore, the investigators selected a different group of young children.

Repeat the experiment before eating time, which means that they should feel hungry according to the biological clock. Even in this hungry situation, 37% of children took the initiative to hand over the fruit to experimenters who pretended not to get it[12].

It is worth noting that young children can take food unimpeded (the experimenter's path to food is blocked by a table), instead of giving it up. Moreover, the child did not receive any verbal prompts and requests like "can you give me that food" or "thank you" with no facial expression response (no matter what they did, the experimenters always maintained a stable and frozen expression). Similarly, the experimenters would not give young children any reward. But they would still be given away.

The evidence shows that children's altruism has proved to be malleable. Rodolfo Cortes Barragan, the leader of the study who decided to continue to conduct more in-depth research and fully understand how to maximize the development of children's altruistic behavior and promote human beings towards a loving society.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As the research has demonstrated, human beings altruism and egoism are affected by various congenital or acquired factors. Congenital factors are the selfish nature inherited from our own genes, to reproduce genes more efficiently. But the acquired factors would vary according to the cultural differences in the environment. The current studies suggest that the culture like geographical culture, religious culture, Western and Eastern culture both affect the spread and development of altruism and egoism, such as Thais are more altruistic than Americans. Demographic factors are also one of the main factors affecting altruism and egoism, which are manifested in gender and age differences. In terms of gender, males are more altruistic than females when facing low prices, while females would pursue equality more. Secondary for age differences, especially for children, the experimental results also prove that children's altruism has a certain plasticity. This paper concludes the main influencing factors, which can be more convenient for readers or other researchers to read and query, find materials faster and summarise them completely. However, hoping this essay can bring more research and references value to the filed of altruism and egoism.

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