An Assessment of Nietzsche's Attack on Altruism, Pity and Sympathy

by

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Introduction

Said to be higher! - You say that the morality of pity
is higher morality than that of Stoicism? Prove it!
but note that 'higher' and 'lower' morality is not to be
measured by a moral yardstick: for there is no
absolute morality. So take your yardstick from
elsewhere and - watch out! [1]

Nietzsche's challenge to traditional morality epitomises the rigorous and uncompromising approach he took towards the many philosophical issues he addressed. His concern with values and morality underpin most of his writings.[2] The desire for a new approach to values impelled Nietzsche to mount a vigorous attack on value-systems that he considered outmoded, harmful or irrelevant. His aim was to draw attention to the damage he believed ensued from modes of behaviour he considered antithetic to the affirmation of life. The intensity of his concern focused on what he took to be the worst cases. Amongst those targeted as being particularly disastrous are *pity, sympathy* and *altruism*, which according to him, weaken both the giver and the recipient. They even threaten the viability of life as a whole. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche is uncompromising in his critique of Christianity, which he considers to be a major source of negative attitudes to life:

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[1]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale
 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) Book 1, 139, p. 88.

[2]Nietzsche's views as discussed throughout this essay are taken from a variety of sources. Those consulted most in regard to the main aspects of his thought are:
George Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1941); Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1983); E.E. Sleinis, *Nietzsche's Revaluation of Values* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Christianity is called the religion of pity.- Pity is opposed to the tonic passions which enhance the energy of the feeling of life: its action is depressing. A man loses power when he pities. By means of pity the drain on strength which suffering itself already introduces into the world is multiplied a thousandfold [3]

He goes further when expressing his fear of the consequences should sympathy become the norm:

Supposing the drive to attachment and care for others ('sympathetic affection') were twice as strong as it is, life on earth would be insupportable Daybreak, Book ll, 143, p. 91).

The practice of altruism is also castigated in a work which undertakes to deconstruct conventional moral teachings:

A Criticism of the Morality of Decadence.- An "altruistic' morality, a morality under which selfishness withers, is in all circumstances a bad sign. This is true of individuals and above all of nations (Skirmishes in a War with the Age, 35, p. 87, in 'The Twilight of the Idols' in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Levy).

Nietzsche's revolutionary and determined approach merits a further consideration of his views. He acknowledges that he may not be giving the final word on these issues, and shows that he wanted his views to be critically assessed. He saw himself as setting a trend in a motion, to be taken up and developed by others:

It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of those good and respected things, consists precisely in their being insidiously related, knotted, and crocheted to these evil and apparently opposed things - perhaps even being essentially identical with them. Perhaps! But who wishes to concern himself with such dangerous "Perhapses"! For that investigation one must await the advent of a new order of philosophers, such as will have other tastes and inclinations, the reverse of those hitherto prevalent - philosophers of the dangerous "Perhaps" in

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[3]Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Antichrist' 7, p. 131, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche,* vol.16, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T.N. Foulis, 1911).

every sense of the term. And to speak in all seriousness, I see such new philosophers beginning to appear [4]

One recent study of Nietzsche's revaluation project concurs with that view:

What incompleteness there is in the execution of his enterprise is a challenge to go further [5]

The intention of this essay is to try to go further, and to re-examine the nature of pity, sympathy and altruism. In keeping with Nietzsche's stipulation, the yardstick will not be from morality, but rather empirical evidence. Cases of pity, sympathy and altruism will be examined, with the aim of identifying both the motives of benefactors, and the effects of their behaviour on beneficiaries. Long-term implications of their practice in society will be considered, as will any wider effects on society as a whole. Consideration will then be given to the ramifications likely to occur should the presence of altruism, pity and sympathy be increased in society. Finally, a judgment will be made as to whether Nietzsche's revaluation is successful, whether in fact the factors in question do imply a negative valuation of life. The study begins with two issues crucial to an understanding of the work's main focus, firstly Nietzsche's own position, and secondly, the nature, definition and clarification of the issues under scrutiny.

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[4]Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Beyond Good and Evil' 2, p. 7, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol.12, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T.N. Foulis, 1911).

[5]E.E. Sleinis, *Nietzsche's Revaluation of Values* (Urbano: University of Illinois Press, 1994) p. 210.

Chapter One: Nietzsche's Case for Revaluation

1. Nietzsche's Background

Living during the second half of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche thought of society as pervaded with uncertainty and insecurity. He saw the prevailing pessimism as signifying a loss of faith. Traditional values and institutions were waning, and religion appeared to be losing its grip. Concerned to restore humanity's lost direction, Nietzsche undertook to investigate human conduct, in the hope of finding a new way forward.

2. Nietzsche's Philosophy

Nietzsche's ambitious task led him to question the notion of value, and the nature of value systems. He felt that it was in them that the cause of much misunderstanding about life lay. If life was misunderstood at its very core, then actions, responses, traditions, practices, rituals, systems, rules, in fact any domain of human conduct would be seriously impaired. Nietzsche's analysis brought him to the conclusion that the concept of value had been artificially constructed in order to regulate human conduct. In particular the idea of 'binary opposition' had been set up for human conduct so as to provide focal points for attributing praise and blame. In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche claims that morality does not exist in reality:

> *There are no moral actions whatsoever; they are completely imaginary. Not only are they indemonstrable ... they are altogether impossible. Through a psychological misunderstanding, one has invented an antithesis to the motivating forces, and believes one has described another kind of force; one has imagined a primum mobile that does not exist at all* [6]

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[6]Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House,1967) 786, p. 413.

Morality was enclosed in value systems, inherited over long periods of time from a variety of sources, none of which were infallible or absolute. Moreover, any value or system of values was a product of a particular perspective on life. Each perspective was limited by several factors, such as the nature of the human cognitive apparatus and the particular time, place and society in which one lived. The possibility of a universal perspective from which absolute moral claims could be established was thus denied. As a result of these confusions, widespread practices existed inimical to the best interests of human beings. Without the assurance of an absolute standpoint or the promise of eternal salvation, a vacuum existed where God and certainty had previously been located. Nietzsche felt compelled to search for a new justification of optimism. His reflections brought him to the view that whatever tragedies, or disappointments one suffered, life itself could still be celebrated and affirmed. The transforming of one's attitude towards life could enable humans of high calibre to overcome the worst situations. An essential requirement to the process was the re-orientation of traditional values.

3. Nietzsche's Revaluation

Nietzsche's re-appraisal of values includes his criticism of other philosophers. His criticism of their '*belief in antitheses of values'* is followed by the suggestion that our real values lie in direct opposition to what has been accepted traditionally:

> *In spite of all the value which may belong to the true, the positive, and the unselfish, it might be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life generally should be assigned to pretence, the will to delusion, to selfishness, and cupidity (Beyond Good and Evil, 2, p.7).*

In light of this, Nietzsche adopts a radically different approach to human attitudes and conduct. The power to affirm life, reflected in life-enriching activity, was the criteria by which values were to be measured. Values antithetic to life were to be rejected, while those which produced life-enrichment were to be promoted. Consideration of the values in our codes of conduct led Nietzsche to mount his attack on pity, sympathy and altruism. In a variety of ways, they act against the best interests of participants by reducing their power for life-affirming activity:

> *Pity insofar as it really causes suffering - and this is here our only point of view - is a weakness, like every losing of oneself through a harmful affect. It increases the amount of suffering in the world: .... Supposing it was dominant even for a single day, mankind would immediately perish of it. (Daybreak, 134, P. 85).*

Actions on behalf of others are equally repudiated, whether the altruism is genuine, or performed for one's own benefit:

> *- where the individual seeks a value for himself only in the service of others, one can be certain that exhaustion and degeneration are present. An altruistic disposition, genuine and without tartuffery, is an instinct for creating at least a secondary value for oneself in the service of other egoisms. (Will to Power, 785, p. 413).*

Nietzsche considers altruism as a form of devaluation of the human person. His proposed alternatives are to elevate human attitudes and endeavours:

> *But if we also want to transcend our own pity and thus achieve victory over ourselves, is this not a higher and freer viewpoint and posture than that in which one feels secure when one has discovered whether an action benefits or harms our neighbour? (Daybreak, 146, p. 92).*

He goes further when considering the contrast between power and weakness:

> *What it good? All that enhances the feeling of power, the Will to Power, and power itself in man. What is bad? - All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness? - The feeling that power is increasing, - that resistance has been overcome. Not contentment, but more power; not peace at any price, but war; not virtue, but efficiency ... The weak and the botched shall perish : first principle of our humanity. And they ought even to be helped to perish. (The Antichrist, 2, p. 128).*

Nietzsche cannot see a place for the favoured treatment of the weak in society, nor for encouraging those who would seek to help them. Given the radical nature of Nietzsche's stance, a closer examination of the nature of pity, sympathy and altruism is warranted.

Chapter Two: Definitions and Possibilities

1. Definitions

A. General

Pity, sympathy and altruism are generally considered to be caring or helping qualities exercised by one individual or group towards another. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines them as follows:

> —*Pity - To feel pity for; to be sorry for. (sometimes implying slight contempt.) To move to pity; To grieve*[7]

> —*Sympathy - having a fellow-feeling; A (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another ... (*Shorter Oxford*, p. 2221).*

> —*Altruism -Regard for others, as a principle of action; opp. to egoism or selfishness* [8]

If we look at the words as a group, we can see that they could be understood as stages of response from one individual or group towards another. Pity indicates the initial feelings, the movement of the emotions; sympathy denotes the progress of feeling to the deeper stage of affinity, while altruism represents the development of action which then follows. Other relevant issues are contained in the definitions: Pity can imply 'contempt'; sympathy can be 'real or supposed', and altruism is understood as the opposite of egoism or selfishness. It is useful at this point to explicate - as far as possible - Nietzsche's usage of these terms.

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[7]Little, Fowler and Coulson, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* ,
vol. ll, ed. C.T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) p. 1594.

[8]Little, Fowler and Coulson, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*
vol. l, ed. C.T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) p. 54.

B. Nietzsche's Definition

Nietzsche's references to pity, sympathy and altruism require to be understood within his general thesis on life and revaluation. His reference to '*attachment and care for others*' and '*sympathetic affection*' (*Daybreak*, Book ll, 143), generally accords with the definitions above. But the quotations given from his writings, for example his reference to pity as '*opposed to the tonic passions which enhance the energy of the feeling of life: its action is depressing*' (*The Antichrist,* 7, p.131) show that he includes them amongst the negative influences with which he wants to dispense. For him, in most instances both the giving and the receiving of pity, sympathy and altruism are a deficiency, a detriment to the quality of life. There appears to be a distinct gap between the intentions of the benefactor or sympathiser, and the positive effects or lack thereof which result.

C. Usage in this Essay

For an objective critique of Nietzsche's work, an objective approach to the understanding of *pity, sympathy* and *altruism* is required. It is also likely that they will overlap, as altruistic actions spring from feelings of sympathy, which in turn, can be generated by feelings of pity. These characteristics will be either expressed as above, or referred to as *selfless feelings,* and *selfless actions,* and will be assumed to stand in opposition to *selfish feelings* and *selfish actions.* An examination of possible and actual instances follows.

2. Possibilities

In the twentieth-century, information required for the construction of social policies has prompted social psychologists and other analysts to conduct specially focused investigations of human behaviour. Many of these studies have sought to ascertain the boundaries between inherited and learned influences. The question has also arisen whether human beings are capable of selfless feelings or actions. This issue will be examined from both a theoretical and a practical point of view.

A. The Theoretical Possibility of Altruism

In addition to his condemnation of selfless actions as a form of weakness, Nietzsche also considered them to be deceptive. He believed that when confronted by another's suffering, we feel uncomfortable, and any remedial action taken is really for our own benefit:

> *But it is only this suffering of our own which we get rid of when we perform deeds of pity. But we never do anything of this kind out of one motive; as surely as we want to free ourselves of suffering by this act, just as surely do we give way to an impulse to pleasure with the same act - pleasure arises at the sight of a contrast to the condition we ourselves are in (Daybreak, 133, p. 84).*

> *There is far too much witchery and sugar in the sentiment "for others" and "not for myself," for one not needing to be doubly distrustful here, and for one asking promptly: "Are they not perhaps - deceptions?" - That they please- him who has them, him who enjoys their fruit, and also the mere spectator - '(Beyond Good and Evil, 33, p. 48).*

If helping another brings pleasure to the benefactor, the act could appear to be selfish, as implied by Nietzsche. If giving my non-driving neighbour lifts in my car makes me feel better about myself, I could be accused of doing it for that purpose. But there is no *proof* that I am; the truth could equally be that my only intention is to help her. These possibilities are

considered by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*.[9] He considers a number of issues regarding the possibility for unselfish action in his discussion of *Psychological Egoism*. Amongst his examples is the case of someone feeling good after donating money for famine relief. (p.66-69). Rachels concludes that not only is it not obvious that satisfaction must be the motive for such action, but rather, the very fact that one is *able* to feel satisfaction follows from the genuine desire to help:

> it is nothing more than sophistry to say, because Jones finds satisfaction in giving for famine relief, that he is selfish .... Moreover, suppose we ask why Jones derives satisfaction from contributing for famine relief. The answer is, it is because Jones is the kind of person who cares about other people: even if they are strangers to him, he doesn't want them to go hungry, and he is willing to take action to help them. If Jones were not this kind of person, then he would take no special pleasure in assisting them; and as we have already seen, this is the mark of unselfishness, not selfishness (Rachels, pp. 68-69).

The theory that feeling better in oneself when helping others necessarily implies a selfish motivation does not appear reasonable. Consideration of the issues involved indicates the precise opposite, that our feeling good stems from the fact that we do have a real concern for the other's welfare. Indeed, the pleasure felt by the doer would be unintelligible if the doer did not have a genuine desire for the well-being of the recipient. Nietzsche's suggestion that our helping actions are performed for our own benefit would seem at least, open to question. The matter will be taken further, by inquiring into whether human behaviour here is influenced in any way by genetic factors.

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[9]James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (1986: New York: McGraw Hill Inc, 1993).

B. The Practical Possibility

In his analysis, Nietzsche felt it was necessary to consider humans as 'natural' beings, in both their physical and mental aspects. He felt that this dimension had been neglected by other philosophers. It was particularly relevant to his conception of morality:

> *I will formulate a principle. All naturalism in morality - that is to say, every sound morality is ruled by a life instinct - any one of the laws of life is fulfilled by the definite cannon "thou shalt," "thou shalt not," and any sort of obstacle or hostile element in the road of life is thus cleared away (Morality as the Enemy of Nature, 4, p.30, in 'The Twilight of the Idols' in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche).*

The extent to which the 'life instinct' might influence human action is now addressed. As more is known about the human organism, it becomes increasingly apparent that genes play a large part in shaping our behaviour. Some of these investigations will be looked at to determine what types of selfless feelings and actions are possible, and what types actually occur.

The study of genes and their influences by Richard Dawkins[10] has produced some relevant material regarding genetic propensities. A brief summary follows:

The biological realm reveals an intense drive for survival, centralised in the gene. The gene has provided the main impetus in the process of evolution. Its prime task is to secure stable forms under which it can thrive and multiply. Alongside these stable forms there occurs the continual extinction of unstable life-forms, leading to the development of *replicators* and various types of *bodies.* Bodies that achieve successful

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[10]Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, new ed. (1976; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). This summary is taken from throughout the book.

survival techniques are those with genes conducive to that end. In genetic terms, 'selfish' behaviour is more favourable than 'selfless' behaviour.

Alongside the 'selfish' inclination of genes, there is a place for co-operation in the gene story. Although not directly physically linked in a body, genes for mutually compatible characteristics, e.g. teeth and intestines, survive well together. Genetically based co-operation exists within and between species. However, genetic traits are not '*fixed and unmodifiable'* . We can apply learned behaviour to override our genetic instincts. Genes in fact, are slow to react as they develop survival techniques. It is the brain which immediately puts strategies into practice. Dawkins introduces the concept of '*memes'* - learned behaviour that can be passed on from one generation to the next, thereby breaking the nexus between animals and humans. Habits and traits which are passed on have the capacity to survive far beyond the inherited span of genes. Our own choices of behaviour can dominate and overcome many genetic inclinations.

Conclusion:

All life forms are physically controlled by their genes. Genes affect physical characteristics and behavioural abilities. Because the passing on of genes is vital for their survival, genes incline their 'hosts' (bodies) towards 'selfish' behaviour, that is, actions which promote their survival, as opposed to the survival of genes which belong to someone else.

Two important factors emerge from these studies. Firstly, not all self-regarding behaviour is selfish. Co-operation occurs in nature, as some actions are performed for the mutual benefit of organisms. Secondly, human behaviour is not solely dependent on genes. We are

free to promote strategies independent of those to which our genes inclines us, that is, selfless rather than selfish behaviour. From both a theoretical and a practical point of view, humans are capable of co-operative and selfless behaviour, and such behaviour is not necessarily against our natural instincts. These two issues will now be examined further to discover what actually happens in the human realm. Firstly, the study will focus on the degree to which humans overcome their supposedly natural selfish instincts to perform selfless or altruistic acts, and secondly, whether humans adopt any such actions as part of a co-operative strategy aimed towards mutual survival.

Chapter Three: Empirical Evidence for Genuine Altruism

1. Introduction to Batson

The study by C. Daniel Batson[11] consists of a detailed examination of different types of altruistic behaviour. He notes that the issue of whether humans are capable of selfless actions has been of interest to philosophers since the earliest studies of human nature, from the time of Plato and Aristotle until the present day (Batson, p.17-42). An upsurge of interest in the 1970s, resulted in many experiments by psychologists and other theorists. Their aim was to discover in what form selfless behaviour actually occurs. In commenting on their studies, Batson coined the term 'pseudo-altruism' to denote several varieties of behaviour which incorporated a degree of egoism (Batson, p. 43). The types of behaviour studied included: helping of any kind, regardless of motivation; helping to increase one's own self-esteem, and helping to reduce one's uneasiness at another's distress (Batson, p.43-45). Dissatisfied with this as the complete story regarding altruism, Batson pursued the matter further. He wanted to discover whether there was any evidence for altruistic behaviour which did not include any additional goals, in other words, 'genuine altruism.'

The essential criterion that distinguishes genuine altruism from 'pseudo-altruism' is motive. If I undertake to do my neighbour's shopping because I like the morning tea which I receive afterwards, I cannot be said to be practicing genuine altruism. But if my only intention is to help her, and my enjoyment of the morning tea is purely incidental, then my

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[11]C. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991).

action is genuinely altruistic. Batson's difficulty is that the study of behaviour alone tells us *nothing* whatsoever about motivation. We can cite the most apparently generous and self-sacrificing situations, but viewed externally, they do not reveal the motives of their participants. A more comprehensive approach than general observation was required.

Batson argued that there were a number of decisive factors in altruism. He recognised that goals could not be discerned externally, but could only be inferred; more than one instance was required to collect sufficient evidence, and also, if different goals were postulated, considerable light could be thrown on what the ultimate goal of the person's action might be (Batson, p. 65). If an investigation took these factors into account, it should be possible to provide important information about altruism. Such an investigation would have to examine true and potential goals in *different* combinations, thereby exposing the boundaries between purpose and action (Batson, p. 66). A suitable model for his experiment was required due to the gap between the intention of the helper and the action performed. The *Galilean* model was chosen as this contained pre-determined features which could be tested (Batson, p.67). The model allows for the variable factors necessary to the identification of true goals.

2. Research and Experiment

The initial stage of Batson's hypothesis considered three possible motivations for responding to a person's need for help: anticipation of reward and avoidance of punishment; the aim of reducing one's own unease at another's distress, and finally, a genuine desire to help for its own sake. These alternatives can be illustrated in the following way: I

have been informed that one of the three people required to help at the school canteen for the day is unable to attend due to illness. If only two people carry out the work required they will have to work much harder than usual and will be unable to take any breaks. They happen to know that I have no serious commitments for the day, and that I am available to help. If I choose to work in the canteen for the day, according to the model under discussion, there are three possible alternatives for my doing so:

1) I anticipate praise and gratitude from those whom I help out, or I am afraid of getting a reputation for being selfish and uncaring; 2) I feel very uncomfortable about the situation, and know my day would be spoilt anyway because of the way I feel, or 3) I want to help out because I am genuinely concerned for the discomfort that would otherwise be experienced by the other two people involved. The first two alternatives are recognised as being egoistic, whilst the third is the only genuinely altruistic response. The two possible egoistic reasons why people might respond to another's need are discussed by Batson. Motivation is recognised as sometimes occurring from the desire to receive rewards, avoid censure, or reduce one's own distress. Such options require to be removed from the available choices if one is to eliminate the non-altruistic response. Both contemporary and early psychologists concur that selfish responses are unsatisfactory as explanations of all instances of apparently selfless behaviour (Batson, p.82).

The third possibility is now examined:

The proposed argument for the existence of altruism outlined on Path 3 is, then as follows: Empathy is an other-oriented vicarious emotion produced by taking the perspective of a person perceived to be in need. It is distinct from personal distress. The magnitude of empathic emotion is a function of the magnitude of

the perceived need and the strength of the perceiver's attachment to the person in need. .... Consistent with the definition of altruism ... the ultimate goal of this motivation is to increase the other's welfare, not one's own (Batson, pp. 89-90).

 Batson noted that previous studies indicated that altruistic responses were motivated by feelings of empathy towards the 'victim' (Batson p. 58). It is worth noting that 'adopting the needy person's perspective' (Batson p. 83) is a crucial factor in the arousal of sympathy. Nietzsche also regarded an individual's perspective as an essential factor in their response to experience. Another important element in the empathy-altruism hypothesis is that the degree of empathy experienced is in proportion to both the amount of perceived need, and the amount of affinity felt towards the victim (Batson, p. 89). But even in cases where helping behaviour is motivated by sympathetic feelings, the possibility of egoistic influence is not eliminated. Although empathy is aroused, underlying egoistic motivations could still be present.

  It is possible that any action could be influenced by selfish desires, even if these desires are not immediately obvious. The presence of empathy could be related to social rewards, fear of reprisals, or removing one's own distress (Batson, p. 96-98). Again, the crucial question is the identification of ultimate goals. While these feelings could clearly be exerting an influence, the essential issue is the *aim* towards which the action is focused (Batson, p.100). Only if its aim is towards the victim, with the sole intention of relieving suffering, can the action be considered purely selfless or altruistic. Taking into account the evidence thus far, Batson devised a series of experiments to reveal the ultimate motives for helping behaviour (Batson, p. 113). Subjects were divided into three groups, with the aim of exposing any elements considered extraneous to the main purpose of alleviating the victim's suffering. These groups were

referred to as *Aversive- Arousal Reduction, Empathy-Specific Punishment,* and *Empathy-Specific Reward,* respectively.

Each option was tested by means of several experiments. The aim of the first group, *Aversive-Arousal Reduction,* was to expose behaviour oriented towards reducing the distress of the benefactor rather than that of the beneficiary. To this end, laboratory experiments were conducted in which the appropriate features were present. The first of these experiments is described as follows:

> *In the first two studies, female undergraduates observed a young woman named Elaine, whom they believed was receiving uncomfortable electric shocks. They were then given an unanticipated chance to help by volunteering to take the shocks in her stead. Both ease of escape and empathy were experimentally manipulated.*
> *To manipulate ease of escape, participants in each experiment were informed that if they did not take Elaine's place, either they would continue to observe her take the shocks (difficult escape condition) or they would not (easy-escape condition). Level of empathic emotional response to Elaine's suffering (low v high) was manipulated differently in the two experiments. In the first, similarity was used to manipulate empathy; in the second, an emotion-specific misattribution technique was used (Batson, p. 113).*

Various responses were possible. Following the experiment, results were collated and analysed. They showed that many participants who had been manipulated to feel little empathy for Elaine reduced their distress by either taking the option, if available to them, to leave the experiment, or choosing to take the shocks in Elaine's stead if it was not. Leaving may have been for the purpose of reducing their own distress, as feeling the shocks may have been a less severe experience than watching someone else take them. One interesting result relates to the participants who had been manipulated to feel strong empathy with the victim. Whether their opportunity for 'escape' was difficult or easy, a high proportion of them chose to give help (Batson, p. 116-117). Further experiments were conducted, to progressively identify, isolate and

eliminate possible selfish motivations. Out of six experiments, five showed the results anticipated in the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson, p. 111) in which *selfless* helping, as opposed to *selfish* helping was predicted for the majority of empathy-induced participants, regardless of whether they were able to 'escape' or not (Batson, p. 126).

The next task was to test the second option, the *Empathy Specific Punishment* hypothesis. Suitable experiments were set up to obtain responses in a variety of situations. Because factors, such as possible ultimate and accidental goals, were altered between experiments, the reasons behind helping behaviour could be discerned. The first one of these experiments was conducted by Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, and Varney in 1986:

> *individuals feeling either low or high empathy for a person in need were confronted with an opportunity to help in a situation in which no one else - not even the person in need - would ever know if they decided not to help. If socially evaluative circumstances are a necessary condition for the empathy-helping relationship, as the social-evaluation version of the empathy-specific punishment hypothesis proposes, then in such a situation the empathy-helping relationship observed in past studies should disappear.. On the other hand, if empathy evokes motivation to reduce the victim's need, as the empathy-altruism hypothesis proposes, then even in this situation the relationship should remain (Batson, p. 129).*

In other words, if participants declined to help the needy person, they could not receive social disapproval as no one individual would be aware of the full details of the situation. Should help be offered, there would be no egoistic-type rewards available to those volunteering. The experiment consisted of participants receiving letters from a lonely long-distance student, and their responses being recorded (Batson, p.130). Manipulation and alteration of factors in the subsequent tests removed possible misleading combinations of circumstances. The results from

seven trials showed that the balance weighed in favour of the empathy-altruism hypothesis. Here, this meant that any help given was not connected to avoiding 'punishment', and was thus attributed to genuine altruism (Batson, p. 148), or, in other words, selfless actions flowing from selfless feelings.

The third and final group of studies addressed the remaining possibility, the *Empathy-Specific Reward* hypothesis. The focus of the experiments was on isolating and eliminating the opportunity to receive social or self-rewards:

> *The empathy-specific reward hypothesis claims that we learn through socialization that we are eligible for special praise from others or special self-rewards when we help a person for whom we feel empathy. Thereafter, when we feel empathy, we think of these social or self-rewards and help out of an egoistic desire to gain them (Batson, p. 149).*

The experiments investigated connections between helping behaviour and anticipated rewards. Tasks of an elementary nature were connected to the opportunity to reduce the number of electric shocks to be received by another participant (Batson, p. 150). Features of the tests were varied within and between experiments, such as some participants having their opportunity to help withdrawn. Results showed that the helping behaviour demonstrated could not, in the majority of instances, be reconciled with the empathy-specific reward hypothesis, but was more in keeping with the empathy-altruism alternative (Batson, p. 173), that is, help was given solely for the benefit of the 'sufferer' or 'victim.'

Batson recognised the difficulty of the material with which he was dealing. To state categorically the motives for any given action is virtually impossible. But if experiments are set up that eliminate all possibilities of

selfish motivation, it is reasonable to assume that the motivation which remains is altruistic. Batson concludes that while a certain proportion of the evidence remains ambiguous, and could reflect either egoistic or altruistic motivation, there is a small amount which definitely indicates the presence of selfless actions, motivated by selfless feelings (Batson, p. 207-208). If an experiment produces these findings, we need to take seriously the presence of pure altruism in the world. It is this possibility which concerns Nietzsche.

3. A Hypothetical Case

What Nietzsche fears most is increasing what he considers to be destructive altruism, cases where a dependent relationship exists, care being administered in one direction only, such as in cases of sickness. Only Nietzsche's own words can adequately convey the intensity of his feeling:

> *The sick represent the greatest danger for the healthy; it is not the strongest but the weakest who spell disaster for the strong .... The sick are man's greatest danger; not the evil, not the "beasts of prey." Those who are failures from the start, downtrodden, crushed - it is they, the weakest, who must undermine life among men, who call into question and poison most dangerously our trust in life, in man, and in ourselves .... But no greater or more calamitous misunderstanding is possible than for the happy, well-constituted, powerful in soul and body, to begin to doubt their right to happiness in this fashion. Away with this "inverted world"! Away with this shameful emasculation of feeling! That sick should not make the healthy sick - and this is what such an emasculation would involve - should surely be our supreme concern on earth; but this requires above all that the healthy should be segregated from the sick, guarded even from the sight of the sick, that they may not confound themselves with the sick. Or is it their task, perhaps, to be nurses or physicians?*
> *But no worse misunderstanding and denial of their task can be imagined: the higher ought not to degrade itself to the status on an instrument of the lower, the pathos of distance ought to keep their tasks eternally separate! Their right to exist, the privilege of the fulltoned bell over the false and cracked, is a thousand times greater: they alone are our warranty for the future, they alone are liable for the future of man. The sick can never have the ability or obligation to do what they can do, what they ought to do, how can they at the same time be physicians, consolers, and "saviours" of the sick?[12]*

[12]Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Genealogy of Morals' in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. W. Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1966) Third Essay, Section 14, pp. 557-561.

The sick are incapable of being their own consolers or healers, and the healthy are not to degrade themselves by helping them. Nietzsche believed that this point was fundamental to the future of humanity. If the healthy wasted themselves on the sick, the strong on the weak, the rich on the poor, they could become exhausted, take on something of their opposite, and spread weakness like an infectious disease, thereby obstructing the enrichment of human life which Nietzsche sought to provoke. His view is challenging, but assessment of it on rational grounds is difficult. Looking at an opposing viewpoint may help the process. Although the view may not directly answer him, it may bring to light points not yet touched. One person who consciously dedicates her life to altruistic work with the most sick and wretched people on earth, writes the following:

> *I must be willing to give whatever it takes not to harm other people and, in fact, to do good to them. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise, there is no true love in me and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me .... We all thirst for the love of others, that they go out of their way to avoid harming us to do good to us. This is the meaning of true love, to give until it hurts ....When I pick up a person from the street, hungry, I give him a plate of rice, a piece of bread. But a person who is shut out, who feels unwanted, unloved, terrified, the person who has been thrown out of society - that spiritual poverty is much harder to overcome .... Then there was the man we picked up from the drain, half-eaten by worms and, after we had brought him to the home, he only said, "I have lived like an animal in the street, but I am going to die as an angel, loved and cared for." Then, after we had removed all the worms from his body, all he said, with a big smile, was: "Sister, I am going home to God" - and he died[13]*

Mother Teresa refers to several elements as important in human life: '*injustice ... peace ... spiritual poverty*' and on several occasions '*love*'. She obviously sees these as fundamental issues when considering the

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[13]Mother Teresa, *Whatever You did unto One of the Least of These, You did unto Me* - address to the Annual National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. Feb 3, 1994. Published by the Schiller Institute, Inc. P.O. Box 2044, Washington D.C. 20041-0244 (202) 544-7018.

worth of both individuals and society. In addition, she indicates that it is acceptable, even desirable that in cases where humans are deficient or incapable in themselves, others of better circumstances, prompted by pity or sympathy, should aid them. But is there any factor, fundamental to uplifting human life which determines the appropriate response of the strong to the weak? Should it be that proposed by Nietzsche, or that proposed by Mother Teresa? What argument could show one way or the other, whether society is better served by devoting its resources to the care of, for example, a chronic alcoholic, or instead to the education of a potential musical genius? The research required to adequately answer these questions is beyond the scope of this paper, but I offer some suggestions.

Nietzsche is anxious to promote a healthy, thriving society, one in which the strong, healthy and vigorous will prosper, able to enjoy the finest fruits of art, music, literature, in fact the greatest embellishments of life to which human endeavour can aspire. Nietzsche's views on the results of interaction between the sick and the healthy, or the weak and the strong, would prompt him to prefer the allocation of resources to the potential musical genius, rather than to the ailing victim. On the other hand, Mother Teresa's attitude shows she would see more positive benefits ensuing from the kind of helping actions she has described. She believes they will bring an increase in justice, peace, spiritual wealth, and love, and that it is the presence of *these* things which enhances life. If our yardstick at this point is Nietzsche's requirement for life-enhancing values, we need to consider which of the above positions is the most tenable.

The first consideration is whether or not unconditional helping provokes the spread of weakness, sickness and degradation, or peace, justice, spiritual growth and love. No conclusive answer can possibly be given to a question like this, as the outcome depends on many complex factors. What is certain is that Nietzsche's outcome cannot be taken for granted. Let us accept therefore, that Mother Teresa's viewpoint warrants further investigation. If as she states, caring for the alcoholic brings an increase in peace, justice, spiritual wealth and love, we need to assess whether they contribute more enhancement to life than would the enrichment of culture envisioned by fostering the musical genius. But, there is a pertinent point to bear in mind. An integral part of the affirmation of one is the conscious rejection of the other. By devoting resources to the care of the alcoholic we are consequently choosing to deny the training of the musician, and by choosing to train the musician we are simultaneously abandoning the alcoholic.

In the first option, fostering the training of a brilliant musician will allow him to realise his fullest potential, bringing personal satisfaction and enrichment to him as an individual. As his music could be appreciated by countless others across both space and time, numerous other lives will be enriched also. There is little difficulty in affirming the abundance of life-enhancing potential in this component of option one. Added to this, the life of the alcoholic will entail continual suffering, illness, and eventually premature death. None of the proposed qualities of justice, peace and the like will be engendered, either for the alcoholic or for those who would have cared for him. Also, persons who might have helped the alcoholic will have deliberately chosen not to do so. On the other hand, in the second option, the alcoholic is cared for, and, although he still suffers and eventually dies a premature death, his suffering is eased. The

musician is neglected, does not reach his full potential, and thus denies enjoyment to millions. There is both perplexity and complexity in any attempt to assess these alternatives. Reaching the fullness of one's potential, especially when others stand to share in the products, is undoubtedly life-affirming. But what of the neglect and disregard for the life another human being, albeit unproductive, even wasted, which is the price?, or the lost opportunity for altruistic actions? The crucial question is, which is the more serious loss, and which is the more valuable gain? Perhaps it is possible to weigh one option against the other.

Denying training to the musician means that one individual does not develop his talents, and that many people are denied the pleasures of his music. Withholding assistance to the alcoholic means that he suffers more, dies prematurely, and that there is less of the values claimed for altruistic action than there might otherwise have been. An insight into the reaction of volunteers working in the slums of India is revealed in the following extracts:

> *The work gives a certain sense which is somehow beyond an ordinary feeling - I don't know how to describe it really, it was just peace. Tremendous peace would descend upon me every single day*[14]
> *The more you give the more you get And all the time you're giving, loving and helping, more is given to the world, more than we'd ever know from our one small step. It's like having a kind of empathy with the heart of the world (A Simple Path, p. 177.)*
> *I know that I will continue to work with the poor because of the satisfaction and the happiness it brings to me. I've been happier here than I've ever been so I shouldn't ignore this. There's something in it, something there. In hindsight I see how unhappy I was in the past - a lot of people I know have this feeling, this restlessness, and convince themselves they are content (A Simple Path, p. 140).*

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[14]Mother Teresa, *A Simple Path*, complied L. Vardey (London: Random House, 1995) p. 177.

The feelings of pleasure are similar to those noted earlier (Rachels), as being characteristic signs of genuine altruism. The issue might now be expressed as personal fulfilment and life-enrichment through music, or human survival and life-enrichment of the kind felt by the altruist. The factors in the first alternative are simple enough to identify, but what of the second? What is there about contributing to the survival of a human-being from the lowest rungs of society, and the kind of consequences outlined, that could make it the superior choice?

Extolling the virtues of the musician is at the same time extolling the virtues of his music. Its capacity to express emotion, passion and spirit brings an affinity between humans who experience them. When one considers the issue of 'affinity' one finds that it lies at the base of most types of positive human interaction. Affinity consists in part of fellow-feelings, having things in common, and shared understandings. The more different elements there are between humans, the less affinity there is. Conversely, it follows that where there are fewer differences between people, the more elements there must be in common, and therefore the more affinity.

The level of least difference between humans must be at the most fundamental level of human experience - that is, human life itself. Human life may thus provide the foundation for all affinity between humans. If this is so, affinity between humans in selective areas may be underpinned by a concealed affinity at a deeper level, even dependent on it. Thus, should the foundation be threatened, all which rests on it would be undermined. Consequently, to prefer the training of the musician to aiding the survival of the alcoholic implies that one is choosing to support an element of the enrichment of life over and above the fact of life itself.

It also suggests that one is supporting life at one level, but negating it at a more fundamental one. If we take our consideration beyond a single instance, we might reflect on what might happen should such principles become accepted, as Nietzsche suggested. Would the kind of society which allows the neglect of 'inferior' human lives, on behalf of the superior and excellent, be one which we could seriously accept? Could it legitimately take its place in a 'civilised' world? Could we cope with the many principles of equity, fairness, justice and traditional understandings of moral responsibility which it would confront? More importantly, would life as a *whole* be threatened once we begin to make *some* life expendable? While there can be no conclusive answer, consideration of the above factors indicate that curtailing altruism may hold damaging consequences not entailed in those which Nietzsche feared by its further spread. Attention will now be focused on altruism as a co-operation strategy.

Chapter Four: Altruism as a Co-operation Strategy

1. Introduction to Axelrod

The study by Dawkins on genes and their influence refers to co-operation within and between species. To a degree this co-operation is part of the survival strategy of the natural world.   Human behaviour is paradoxical inasmuch as it is so like, yet so different from the rest of nature. We are so much more able to manipulate our behaviour to our own ends. Able to develop new ways of responding, we are not bound solely by our genes. Dawkins recognised this:

> *Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish. Let us understand what our own selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have the chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to [15]*

Like altruism, co-operation has a history of interest amongst theorists, particularly in the latter part of the twentieth-century (Axelrod, p.3-4). Robert Axelrod studied the question, with particular interest in its evolutionary ramifications:

> *The evolutionary perspective suggested three distinct questions. First, how can a potentially cooperative strategy get an initial foothold in an environment which is predominantly non-cooperative? Second, what type of strategy can thrive in a variegated environment composed of other individuals using a wide diversity of more or less sophisticated strategies? Third, under what conditions can such a strategy, once fully established among a group of people, resist invasion by a less cooperative strategy? (Axelrod, p. xii).*

We already know that, a) nature permits co-operation as part of survival strategy, and that b) research indicates that altruistic behaviour does occur in human society. The questions posed by Axelrod are relevant to

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[15]Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Co-operation* (London: Penguin, 1984) p. viii.

as they help in assessing Nietzsche's proposals regarding the diminution of selfless actions motivated by concern for others.

2. Research and Experiment

Axelrod begins by addressing the question of how co-operation might be established in society without the necessity for imposition (Axelrod, p. 4). He takes it as given that self-interest is not necessarily in opposition to that of others. Often our own well-being is intrinsically bound up with that of those close to us. The difficulties in behavioural strategies occur mainly when the connections between people or groups are not immediately obvious. In order to yield the required data, Axelrod devised a game-strategy which would allow simulation of helping situations by means of game-play (Axelrod, p. 7-8). The game was set up to test responses to opportunities to act in one of two different ways. Either one could choose to 'co-operate' or to 'defect.' However, the results of what one did were not dependent solely on one's own move. The *Prisoner's Dilemma* game took into account the moves of both players when awarding rewards or punishments.

Four alternative results were possible. If both players chose to co-operate, both were awarded three points. If both players chose to defect, each received only one point. In the case where player A co-operated and player B defected, A receives nothing while B received five points, points being similarly awarded where the moves are reversed. It can be seen that an element of risk is involved whichever move one choses to make. The idea is that consideration of the other party by co-operating can lead to either a good score for both, or, where the consideration is only one-sided, the so-called 'sucker' loses out completely, and the

'cheat' gets away with more. Such a game may seem to be a long way from a consideration of Nietzsche's philosophy on pity, sympathy and altruism, but the acceptance of a particular principle of personal conduct between individuals may impact on society. Where that behaviour becomes policy, the effect can be significant. Using the game to investigate a co-operation strategy may provide information on its use as a social policy.

The *Prisoner's Dilemma* game was used to test the possible strategies. A number of factors were discovered to be essential to the effective use of the game as a model for behaviour. When predicting the likely gain or loss at each move, each player had to take into account the move of the other player, in addition to the past history of moves (Axelrod, p. 30). Because of the requirement for cumulative information, tests were carried out by means of computer tournaments. Participants were invited to submit strategies; the submissions were tested and analysed by computer in order to determine which strategy was the most effective in initiating and maintaining a scheme for co-operative behaviour.

Axelrod describes the first test as follows:

> It was structured as a round robin, meaning that each entry was paired with each other entry. As announced in the rules of the tournament, each entry was also paired with its own twin and with RANDOM, a program that randomly cooperates and defects with equal probability. Each game consisted of exactly two hundred moves (Axelrod, p. 30).

In each move, co-operate or defect were the only possible moves, yet because the score depended on an interrelationship between moves, final scores were the results of a complex process. Amongst the tactics examined, the simplest proved to be the best (Axelrod, p. 31).

Designated *Tit for Tat*, it began with co-operation, and from then on responded in kind to its opponent. This meant that if the other player defected, *Tit for Tat* also defected; if the opponent co-operated, *Tit for Tat* did also. Other entries which also scored high were ones with similar rules to those of *Tit for Tat*. Those which scored the worst were entries which chose to defect without receiving prior provocation. The problem with these types of moves is that once a defection has been made, co-operation is difficult to re-establish:

> *A major lesson of this tournament is the importance of minimizing echo effects in an environment of mutual power. When a single defection can set off a long string of recriminations and counterrecriminations, both sides suffer (Axelrod, p. 38).*

If one responds to the defection, then one may be contributing to an ongoing chain of defections. On the other hand, should one continue to co-operate, one may be encouraging one's opponent to take further advantage. One can clearly see an analogy with life. If my neighbour ignores my requests to quiet her dog which barks most of the night, I may choose to play my radio at full volume while she is taking an afternoon sleep. After that, she is unlikely to develop much sympathy towards my request.

The second round of the *Prisoner's Dilemma* game drew a large variety of game-strategies. Amongst the considerable number of complex options available, it was again the very simple *Tit for Tat* which won (Axelrod, p. 42). Some interesting patterns were beginning to emerge. If a strategy was slow to respond to a defection from an opponent, it was likely that the defections would continue (Axelrod, p. 44). Being too relaxed or lenient was not conducive to a strong, productive result. As the participants in the second round of the game were aware of the

results produced by the first round, their entries were considerably influenced by them (Axelrod, p. 47). Any such cumulative influence could be considered as an evolving pattern of behaviour (Axelrod, p. 49). Further extrapolation of results suggest that *Tit for Tat* is most rewarding when paired with itself, especially when compared to playing against a persistently defecting opponent. Axelrod's study sought to build on his basic findings, suggesting some interesting implications for human conduct.

By playing successive rounds of *Prisoner's Dilemma,* consideration of human behaviour from an evolutionary perspective was possible (Axelrod, p. 49). A number of factors were found to be relevant to the establishment of a co-operative strategy (Axelrod, p. 171). These factors included such things as changing social environment and the outcome of simulation of many generations. The repeated playing of the game revealed how the various strategies either died out or became established. Analysis was particularly oriented to examination of the '*dilemma of co-operation*' (Axelrod, p. 173). One's own potential for gain was always risked by co-operating, but rewards for both players were more secure in the long run once the opponent co-operated also. But to establish the practice of co-operation in society requires more than one willing individual. If one is operating in a hypothetical all-defecting environment, the effect of a single co-operating individual is nil for as long a co-operation remains unreciprocated (Axelrod, p. 175). However, with sufficient numbers of people the story is different:

> cooperation can emerge from small clusters of discriminating individuals as long as these individuals have even a small proportion of their interactions with each other. So there must be some clustering of individuals who use strategies with two properties: the strategies will be the first to co-operate, and they will discriminate between those who respond to the cooperation and those who do not (Axelrod, p. 175).

An essential component to establishment then, is that understanding is reached amongst a group of individuals on how they will respond to each other under given circumstances.

The viability and maintenance of successful strategies are also questions which can be addressed by the consideration of successive generations through game-play (Axelrod, p. 49). A resistant strategy requires the capability to survive amongst all possible opposition. Progressive elimination of unstable strategies reduced the field of contenders until, once again, *Tit for Tat* won (Axelrod, p. 53). Its endurance remained unrivalled:

> *Tit for Tat never lost its first-place standing in a simulation of future generations of the tournament . Added to its victory in the first round of the tournament, and its fairly good performance in the laboratory experiments with human subjects, Tit for Tat is clearly a very successful strategy (Axelrod, p. 53).*

Pertinent to success is the relation between a given strategy and the conditions under which it prevails. The opponents of *Tit for Tat* soon realise that the only way they can make gains is to work with, rather than against it, in other words, to co-operate. Further analysis of results showed that to resist invasion by other strategies, it is necessary to respond to a defection immediately (Axelrod, p. 62); if this does not occur, a pattern of defection by the other player could be established; also, co-operation can be maintained when the relationship between players is expected to continue, in other words, if the future is sufficiently relevant.

The final analysis of these experiments can be summed up as follows: the establishment of co-operation in a society depends on the presence

of *groups* rather than single individuals; *Tit for Tat* is the most viable long-term strategy; swift, rather than delayed retaliation to defection is vital, and finally, players are influenced to co-operate by their awareness that the nature of future conditions will be an inevitable consequence of present decisions. A hypothetical example of reciprocal co-operation is given in Dawkins' study of 'selfish' genes.

3. A Hypothetical Case

Dawkins drew attention to the fact that in nature a certain amount of behaviour is co-operative rather than competitive. The degree to which co-operation occurs in the apparently ruthless realm of nature is surprising. Dawkins specifically notes the grooming between members of some species, both birds and animals. The suggestion is that birds who require to preen themselves to remove damaging ticks would be unable to reach their own heads. Thus, they could groom each other on the top of the head, reciprocating the act as and when required. As this would not necessarily be immediately, some sort of memory would be required by the birds in order to identify to which of their fellows they owed favours. Dawkins quotes previous studies which indicate that reciprocal behaviour does in fact promote memory development in nature (Dawkins. p.183-184).

He then hypothesises the likely outcome should some birds not be prepared to pay back the benefits received. Those refusing to acknowledge grooming are 'cheats', while those who initiate grooming, but whose actions are unreciprocated, are 'suckers.' If the majority of birds are 'suckers', the chance of each being groomed by one of their fellows is high. Were cheats to mount an invasion however, suckers

would be outdone by their opponents' survival techniques. Under these circumstances, should the damage caused by ticks be fatal, the population of suckers would diminish until extinction occurred, but subsequently, having no-one to groom them, cheats would then suffer the same fate.

Dawkins then postulates the existence of 'grudgers' (Dawkins, p.185). These are birds which groom their fellows, neighbours and strangers alike. They differ from suckers insofar that they have a definite expectation of reciprocation. They make a point of remembering those to whom they have shown favour. However, if the grooming task is not returned when required, the grudger remembers the cheat, and subsequently withholds his service. A small population of grudgers amongst a large population of cheats will make little headway, but if there are sufficient numbers to form a relevant sub-group, numbers could gradually increase until the orientation of the whole group is changed:

> *When this critical proportion is reached they will start to average a higher pay-off than cheats, and the cheats will be driven at an accelerating rate towards extinction (Dawkins, p. 185).*

Computer-simulation proved to Dawkins that his thesis was correct. Where sufficient grudgers operated in a mixed society of grudgers, cheats, and suckers, grudger would prove to be the most viable. The interesting fact relating to the predicted fate of a largely cheating population is that although their favourable ratio ensures their outliving any opponents, their insular behaviour seals their own fate of eventual extinction (Dawkins, p. 186). Dawkins concludes this part of his study with an account of the amazing conduct of certain species of fish

(Dawkins, p. 187). Large fish resist the opportunity to eat smaller prey because of the advantageous symbiotic relationship.

The parallel between Dawkins' findings and those of Axelrod is striking. In both cases, groups rather than individuals are necessary to establishing co-operation in a society. Both support the viability of reciprocal altruism, beneficial behaviour enacted by one towards another, returned immediately in Axelrod's model, later in that of Dawkins. In terms of human behaviour, this could be understood as caring or helping actions performed by persons or groups towards others, who would remember both the actions and the performers. At some time, either sooner or later, when help was needed by the first persons or groups, those whom they have helped would return the favour. Plausible examples on an individual, group, and even global level are not difficult to imagine.

One student may help another through a difficult time, to find later that her friend does the same for her. A resident, secure family may nominate and foster a family from a repressive, war-torn regime. Some years later, their own fortunes may change for the worst, but, remembering how they had been cared for, the now successful former migrants may financially help their former benefactors. Finally, a country ravaged by drought and famine may receive generous food supplies from their more fortunate neighbours, or even from the other side of the world. Climatic conditions could subsequently change, reversing the previous situation, and causing the prior generosity to be reciprocated.

To summarise our progress thus far: Nietzsche's attack on pity, sympathy and altruism stems from his belief, firstly, that they may not be

genuine, and secondly, that *if* they are, they hold life-diminishing potential; Rachels concludes that *Psychological Egoism* cannot explain all instances of apparent altruism, and that feeling good about helping confirms the genuine character of altruistic motivation; Dawkins highlights the place held by co-operation in nature, and also distinguishes genetically influenced action from self-conscious choice; Batson concludes that genuinely altruistic action can and does occur; examination of a particular case of such altruism throws Nietzsche's conclusion into doubt; Axelrod's studies lead to the belief that, given certain conditions, co-operation can be established and maintained in a previously non-co-operative society, and further, that it is, in fact, the most viable of the strategies considered; a re-examination of Dawkins shows that he concurs with Axelrod's conclusions. Before considering the relevance of these findings to Nietzsche, it would be appropriate to examine the other side of the issue: Is there a negative aspect to altruism?

Chapter Five: Objectivist Ethics - a Possible Objection?

Nietzsche's objection to altruistic practices and the sentiments that cause them has been outlined. As part of his morality, they have little place in a world that seeks to promote and enhance life to the full. The argument against altruism has been taken further by Ayn Rand. It is not possible to deal with all her objections here, but a selection will illustrate key aspects of her thinking. In her explication of *Objectivist Ethics*[16], she refers to certain principles by which one should live:

> *The standard of value of the Objectivist ethics - the standard by which one judges what is good or evil - is man's life, or: that which is required for man's survival qua man (Rand p. 23).*

> *Productive work is the central purpose of a rational man's life (Rand, p. 25).*

> *The basic social principle of Objectivist ethics is that just as life is an end in itself, so every living human being is an end in himself (Rand, p. 27).*

> *The Objectivist ethics proudly advocates and upholds rational selfishness - which means: the values required for human survival (Rand, p. 31).*

In her elaboration of these principles she emphasises the importance of one's own happiness, claiming that it is part of the same issue as one's survival (Rand, p. 29). Contrasted with this are actions oriented towards *another* person's survival. She considers actions on one's own behalf and those on behalf of others as mutually contradictory:

> *Altruism declares that an action taken for the benefit of others is good, and any action taken for one's own benefit is evil. Thus the beneficiary of an action is the only criterion of moral value - and so long as that beneficiary is anybody other than oneself, anything goes .... Observe what this beneficiary-criterion of morality does to a man's life. The first thing he learns is that morality is his enemy: he has nothing to gain from it, he can only lose; self-inflicted loss, self-inflicted pain*

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[16]Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: The New American Library, 1961).

and the gray, debilitating pall of an incomprehensible duty is all that he can expect (Rand, p. viii).

Her explication of *selfishness* is less severe,

the exact meaning and dictionary definition of the word "selfishness" is:

concern with one's interests (Rand, p. vii).

Altruistic actions, actions performed for the benefit of others then, are contradictory to one's own interests, in other words, a sacrifice. Such a concept is also evil:

> *It is not necessary, in this context, to analyze the almost countless evils entailed be the precept of self-sacrifice .... A sacrifice, it is necessary to remember, means the surrender of a higher value in favor of a lower value or of nonvalue ... or if one gives up a lesser value in order to obtain a greater one - this is not a sacrifice, but a gain (Rand, p. 40).*

For Rand then, altruistic actions and their attendant sentiments impede the actions necessary to preserve one's own life, and consequent happiness. To employ one's self in the service of others is to prostitute one's own best interests to those of someone else. To do so is both irrational and immoral.

Consideration of Rand's objections raises several issues relating to the theoretical and practical implications of an other-regarding morality as compared to a self-regarding morality. Two of these issues will be examined; the first relates to her definitions of terms and the second to her stated consequences of altruistic actions. Three of Rand's definitions will be queried, *altruism, selfishness,* and *sacrifice.*

She takes altruism to mean that action undertaken on behalf of others is good, whilst that taken for oneself is evil. Standard definitions of *altruism* are readily available:

—unselfish concern for the welfare of others: opposed to egoism[17]

—Regard for others as a principle of action; opp. to egoism or selfishness (The Shorter Oxford, p. 54).

—unselfish concern for the welfare of others[18]

—unselfish interest in the welfare of others [19]

These definitions have in common an acknowledgment of attention given by individuals to other persons. Two out of the four definitions refer to the presence of opposition between altruism and egoism. However, I am unable to locate any evidence for the contention that altruism implies '*that any action taken for the benefit of others is good, and any action taken for one's own benefit is evil'* Rand implies that there necessarily exists a correlation between helping others and depriving oneself. Results of the investigation so far indicate that this is not always the case.

Rand claims the dictionary definition of *selfishness* to be '*concern with one's own interests'* . My research came up with the following:

—caring only or chiefly for the self; regarding one's own interest solely or chiefly; proceeding from love of self; influenced in actions solely by a view to private advantage (Websters, p. 1646).

—Devoted to or concerned with one's own advantage or welfare to the exclusion of regard for others (Oxford , p.1934).

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[17] *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Supervisor J.L. McKechnie (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1955) p. 53.

[18] *Collins Australian Pocket Dictionary of the English Language,* ed. W.A.Krebs (Sydney: Collins, 1981) p. 23.

[19] *The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, ed. F.C. Mish (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc, 1989) p. 39.

—too much concerned with one's own welfare or interests (Collins, p. 767).

—taking care of one's own comfort, pleasure, or interest excessively or without regard for others (Merriam-Webster p. 657).

Again, common threads can be found among the slightly varied definitions, namely those of referring to the *excessive* degree of self-interest. Two of the four definitions mention that self-concern is at the expense of other-concern, and a third speaks of its restricted nature. Selfishness is usually understood as going beyond the range of the mere *self-regard* implied by Rand's definition. To infer that selfishness is simply concern for one's own welfare is to disregard an essential element in its meaning. By doing this, Rand's argument in favour of selfishness omits one of its important consequences.

Rand has interpreted *sacrifice* as the subordination of higher value to lower value. Several dictionaries reveal the following:

—a giving up, destroying, permitting injury to, or foregoing of some valued thing for the sake of something of greater value or of having a more pressing claim

—a selling or giving up of something at less than its supposed value (Websters, p. 1593).

—The destruction or surrender of something valued or desired for the sake of something having a higher or more pressing claim; the loss entailed by devotion to some other interest; also the thing so devoted or surrendered

—A loss incurred in selling something below its value for the sake of getting rid of it   (Oxford, p. 1871).

—a giving up, destroying, etc. of one thing for the sake of another
a selling of a thing at less than its value (Collins, p. 744).

—Loss, Deprivation to accept the loss or destruction of for an end, cause, or ideal (Merriam p. 642).

Common to these definitions is the notion of rejecting one thing to obtain another. But what is salient in this instance is that the relationship between that rejected and that gained is not fixed. Three definitions refer to a commodity of *lower* value being surrendered for that of a *higher*; three refer to the reverse situation, that is, giving up something of a *higher* value for something of a *lower*, and finally, one definition does not refer to relative values at all. But Rand's definition infers that one always gives up a higher value for something lower, thus implying that one always loses out.

A number of principles are claimed for objectivist ethics, for example that the standard of judgement for good or evil is human life, the central purpose of which is productive work, and that survival depends on 'rational selfishness'. If what counts as good and what counts as evil relates to its ability to sustain human life, one needs to assess Rand's judgments in light of that understanding. Can we be certain that 'rational selfishness' is necessarily the best method to ensure human survival? It is apparent from Rand's understanding that she regards the activity of caring for the self as standing in opposition to that of caring for others, which is evil. None of the experiments or investigations so far discussed support the idea that selfless actions necessarily oppose self-regarding actions, or that selfish actions are the most life-sustaining strategy amongst the available options. Dawkins' symbiosis and 'grudger' strategy, Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis, and Axelrod's reciprocal altruism all strongly imply the precise opposite, namely, that many altruistic actions are of mutual benefit to both giver and receiver, and that they are conducive to long-term survival. In view of these findings, Rand's objections to the practice of altruism cannot be regarded as conclusive.

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion

The task remains to measure the findings of this study against Nietzsche's arguments. His objections centred on the belief that selfless feelings and selfless actions are seriously detrimental to the human condition. Nietzsche also believed that many cases of apparent altruism were not genuine. A central aim of this essay is to test his theories against empirical evidence to discover the correctness of his views, and whether a re-appraisal of pity, sympathy and altruism is required. Evidence indicates that at least two kinds of altruistic behaviour do occur, genuine altruism, and reciprocal altruism, also referred to as co-operative behaviour.

Research by Dawkins into genes reveals that while the genetic impulse is fundamentally 'selfish', learned human behaviour can predominate when desired. In other words, genes do not always *prevent* us from acting as we choose, altruistically or otherwise. Rachels concluded that certain features of apparently altruistic actions confirm the authenticity of such motivations. In Batson's investigations, true altruistic actions were found to have occurred in experiments where empathy had been established between participants. Study of a hypothetical example tested Nietzsche's thesis regarding possible damaging outcomes of altruism.

Experiments also revealed that a considerable amount of reciprocal altruism is practiced. The seemingly unrelenting world of nature abounds in co-operative behaviour, within and between species. In his analysis of game-play theory, Axelrod found that co-operation was

the best option. The implication is that co-operative behaviour holds a real and significant place in the natural world, especially in the human domain.

These findings reveal a number of points relevant to Nietzsche's thesis on the status of pity, sympathy and altruism. His claim that most cases are either deceptive or predominantly egoistic was not supported by any of the theorists considered. Experiments where pity motivated empathy and helping actions did not suggest any weakening or adverse consequences. Consideration of altruistic actions which might be performed on behalf of the sick, wretched or poor show that they might not necessarily undermine life in the way feared by Nietzsche.

Studies of reciprocal altruism bring to light its potential as a strategy for co-operative behaviour. Nietzsche is correct in his assumptions that thoughts of the others are often allied with thoughts of self, but not that the best outcome necessarily lies in promoting the self over others. A brief assessment follows of both the long-term implications and the possible wider consequences, firstly of genuine altruism, and secondly, of reciprocal altruism.

No evidence has been brought to light in any of the studies, which suggests that detrimental effects might ensue in the long-term, of either selfless feelings or selfless actions. The study of genuine altruism showed it to have provided relief in simulated crisis situations. Cases of the poor and sick like those helped by the volunteers in India will not be eradicated overnight. The accounts of help given by the workers suggest they experienced considerable benefit from their work. Consideration of

the issues involved suggests that human life as a whole could be threatened if we take for granted that some forms of life are expendable.

Examination of reciprocal altruism has shown its potential benefits in society. It appears to be an intrinsic part of nature, and to be an effective component in human interaction. As part of the genetic framework it is strategically aimed towards long-term survival. Computer studies of both Dawkins' grudger strategy and Axelrod's game-play show it to be the best survival strategy. Extrapolating to the world of human activity suggests that co-operative behaviour holds an essential place among individuals and groups. It holds advantages which cannot be attributed to other strategies, such as those of 'sucker' and 'cheat.' What this means in practical terms is that persons who consistently subordinate their needs and concerns to those of others will eventually become deficient in themselves. Alternatively, those who exercise excessive power and domination, constantly taking from others, may appear to 'win' in the short term, but will eventually run out of resources. Long-term survival requires the balanced approach of co-operation.

Increased co-operation throughout society provides a framework for problem-solving and negotiations on many fronts, such as educational, economic and political. Mutual consideration yields a more satisfactory outcome than arrangements which take into account the needs of only one side. An excessively power-dominated structure will deplete its own potential by over-indulgence, thereby becoming unviable. On the other hand, the spread of co-operative approaches to negotiations and problem-solving will have a more stabilising and productive effect. Co-operation in policy-making provides for mutual input, thus ensuring more mutually satisfactory outcomes.

Relating these findings to Nietzsche's philosophy will be assisted by recapitulating key aspects of his thought. With the conviction that values and certainties were missing, that attitudes towards life were deficient, and that a new approach was required, Nietzsche undertook to change attitudes which he found detrimental to life. His commitment to the curbing of pity, sympathy and altruism was based on his estimation of them as in general weakening and life-depleting. However, the evidence indicates that the presence of selfless feelings and selfless actions do not necessarily operate in the way suggested by Nietzsche. It appears that they can form a positive component in human affairs.

Concern for others, whether one-sided, generated by feelings of pity, or whether calculated, generated by mutual concerns, is capable of being a significant asset to life in a number of ways. While there cannot, of course, be a single conclusive answer to this issue, a society based on a secular social order may not be as damaged by an increase in pity, sympathy or altruism as was feared by Nietzsche. There is strong case that many of the forms which he feared do bring positive consequences, and may, in fact, be part of the natural foundation for positive human life which he so earnestly sought.

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