ALTRUISM: TOWARD A PSYCHOBIOSPIRITUAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

by Nancy K. Morrison and Sally K. Severino

Abstract.   Altruism, defined here as a regard for or devotion to the interest of others with whom we are interrelated, is pitted against two other dispositions in human beings: nepotism and egoism. We propose that to become fully human is to become more altruistic. We describe how altruism is mediated by our physiology, is expressed in our psychological development, is evolving in our social institutions, and becomes the moral communities that enforce our sense of right and wrong. A change in any one of these influences changes our disposition—changes who we are and what we do—potentially making altruism more possible in the world.

Keywords: altruism; attuning; egalitarianism; interrelatedness; separation-attachment dialectic; spirituality

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution portrays creation as an ongoing and unfinished process. As part of that process, the destiny of human beings, we propose, is to realize deeply and fully our essential being. By this we do not mean acquiescing to some form of relentless causality; we mean accepting rather than failing or refusing to become fully human. This view distinguishes between being "human"—that phase of human evolution in which we now live—and being "fully human" when we all realize our essential being. We postulate that the more fully human we become, the more altruistic our world and we become. This calls us to reexamine altruism and its implications for our continuing process of becoming.

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The word *altruism* (from the Latin *alter*, "other") "was invented by Auguste Comte in the 1830s as a general term to designate care for others" (Green 2004). We propose that altruism arises from a state of consciousness in which we realize that we are all interrelated—that our interactions affect others positively or negatively and that altruism enhances relationships while nepotism and egoism can be destructive. When altruistic, we do not just love the other for who the other is; we love because we know that we are part of the other and the other is part of us. This is a love that recognizes connectedness at the deepest level. It reaches out to express the best in others and us.

We define altruism as a regard for or devotion to the interest of others with whom we are interrelated and with whom we express valuing of one another—including us—based in love.

We conceptualize altruism as emerging in the stage of moral development (Morrison and Severino 1997) that has been called philosophical integration (Gilligan 1982; Kohlberg 1984), which can be and is reached by some of us from age eighteen throughout the remainder of our lifetime. Altruism grows from earlier moral development. It builds on the innate capacities of empathy (appears in the first year of life) and shame (begins appearing in the second year) and the developmental achievement of guilt (begins developing at three to five years of age). Being a more advanced stage of moral development, altruism requires an awareness of relational connection (Taylor 1996) in which we acknowledge that the welfare of all is our welfare, and our welfare is the welfare of all (Ingram 2003).

SCIENTIFIC GROUNDWORK

The scientific groundwork for our understanding of altruism resides in four sources: the psychological development, the biological mediation, the sociocultural evolution, and the spiritual expression of altruism. Rather than calling our conceptualization psychobiosociospiritual, we shorten it to the less cumbersome *psychobiospiritual* conceptualization.

Psychological Development of Altruism.   In our chart of spiritual development (see facing page) that we derived from the works of infant researcher Daniel Stern (2004), former Roman Catholic monk and current public policy lawyer Jim Marion (2000), and mystic Bernadette Roberts (1993), we summarize our understanding of how altruism develops. Because both Marion and Roberts are Christians, Jesus is their defining feature of altruism, but persons from other religions might choose another defining feature such as Muhammad or Buddha.

According to our conceptualization, altruism is a dimension of spirituality that appears with the psychological changes in consciousness and self that permit the realization that we are all part of humanity. This is consistent with some empirical approaches (Spilka et al. 2003, 51) and with Marion's

Spiritual Development

AGES	CONSCIOUSNESS LEVEL*	ATTUNING**
INFANCY (0–1 1/2)		0–2 mos emergent self = body self innate ability to enter into the other's experience and participate in it 2–6 mos core self affect attuning: sharing inner feeling states 7–9 mos subjective self 12 mos social referencing is seen attuning gives rise to empathy 15–18 mos verbal self can grasp the intentions of others attuning to how others see us elicits the moral emotion of shame
	1–3 years archaic consciousness child's body is separate from mother's and others' body child's emotions are separate from mother's and others' emotions	
EARLY CHILDHOOD (2–6)		
	2–7 years magical consciousness the outside world revolves around the self	3–5 yrs narrative self by 5 has a more formal capacity to represent mental states of self and others by combining cognition and resonance attuning gives rise to the developmental achievement of guilt
CHILDHOOD (7–12)		
	7–12 years mythic consciousness the child learns to define itself by conventional rules and roles and sees its self-worth in following the "laws" and behaving properly	
ADOLESCENCE (13–21)		
	13–21 years rational consciousness can think abstractly and grasp universal principles average adult attains this	

*Derived from Marion 2000.
**Derived from Stern 2004.

YOUNG ADULTHOOD (21–35)
ADULTHOOD (35–60)
MATURITY (60–)

vision-logic consciousness (some adults)	self transformed from blind to seeing by love
can take many different perspectives, integrate them and put them together in new ways	can attune to all and seek their good
	attuning gives rise to the developmental achievement of remorse and ***ALTRUISM***

Psychology tells us nothing beyond the vision-logic level where we can see and measure things. Spirituality says there is more. What follows is our understanding of spiritual development as it can develop over adulthood.

AGES	CONSCIOUSNESS LEVEL*	SELF DEVELOPMENT***

ADULTHOOD (21–)

	psychic consciousness	self revolves around a central axis, a "still-point"
		can attune to the still small voice within
	subtle consciousness	self identified with Jesus
	inner identification with Jesus	attuning to Jesus
	Christ consciousness	self realizes divinity self experiences union, oneness with God
	realized divinity must translate intuitions into words	attuning to joy
	nondual consciousness	seeing God as S/He is in Her/Himself (Christian) self disappears (Buddhist no-self) identity of what Is (Hindu One Ultimate Existent)
	being is doing God and I are One ***FULLY HUMAN***	attuning to the Unknown ***FULLY REALIZED ALTRUISM***

*Derived from Marion 2000.
***Derived from Roberts 1993.

Note: Although this chart presents spiritual development as linear, the process seems to be spiral or nonlinear with an ebb and flow. It is possible to attune to God without ever moving smoothly through previous stages and to reach vision-logic consciousness and beyond at an earlier age than the averages shown here.

assertion—with which we agree—that psychology tells us nothing about spiritual development beyond the vision-logic level of consciousness.

The concept of *self* deserves comment here. Psychologically the self is considered the center of our being. Spiritually the self is not the center of our being; rather, a life force—the power of creation, a power greater than but also within us—is deemed the true center. Both psychologically and spiritually the self is regarded as an essential human medium by which we know and experience each other and the power of creation. The purpose of having a self is eventually to go beyond it to our fully human nature, our fully altruistic nature, which is attained at the nondual consciousness level of spiritual development where self and other are One. This conceptualization of self is consistent with those who have studied religion from the view of the social sciences and have concluded that a psychological fundamental of religion is "elimination of the self, save as part of something greater" (Wilson 2003, 56). The "something greater" we understand to be our fully evolved human nature where self and other are One.

Referring to our chart of spiritual development, we can see that the development of the self during the first year of life depends on how caregivers regulate their child's emotions. The more they bring their child into positive emotions, the more positive emotions become the foundation of their child's being (Schore 1994; 2003a, b; Stern 2004). The means for doing this is a nonverbal interaction called "attuning." Attuning is *how we know with*—how we connect, interact with, and exchange energy and information between one human being and another, between one human being and other elements of creation, and even between different aspects (biological, psychological, social, and spiritual) within ourselves (Morrison and Severino 2003).

The natural development of the child within positive attuning encourages a capacity for empathy. The building blocks of empathy in children are evident in the very young. From birth, babies have an ability to respond to the emotions of others. Babies not only can imitate the facial expressions of parents and caregivers but also burst into tears if they hear another baby crying. At three months, they respond differently to happy or sad faces (Izard et al. 1995). One-year-olds show signs of distress, such as sucking part of their body or clothing, when shown videotapes of other children crying (Ungerer et al. 1990).

Also at one year of age, a child begins to show concern for others. In a well-known study, researchers trained mothers to observe and record their children's emotional responses to others, including the mother's own feigned states of sadness and joy. Researchers also visited once a month to record their own observations. The findings are noteworthy. At 13–15 months, more than 50 percent of the children tried to hug, pat, or touch another person who was distressed (signs of empathy). Responding to perceived emotions, they tried to make the other person feel better. At 18–20 months,

the responsiveness increased and was expressed in a variety of helping be-
haviors (moral behaviors), such as sharing goodies and bringing a shawl to
a shivering person. At 23–25 months even more children revealed empa-
thy. All but one child in the sample showed concern as well as helping
behaviors, mainly toward mothers but also including strangers (Zahn-
Waxler et al. 1992).

Empathy, then, is becoming aware of attuning; it is developing "mind-
sight" (Siegel 1999, 140). It is realizing that we are experiencing another's
feelings simultaneous with the other's experiencing what we are feeling. It
is reciprocity—valuing and respecting one another's inner experiences and
recognizing that both have the same and different inner experiences.

In the second year of life, children become more mobile and begin to
venture out on their own. Now caregivers begin saying "No," which in-
duces shame as the emotional response to a negative evaluation of the child's
self by another. The capacity for shame begins showing up as the verbal
self emerges—during Mahler's (1980) separation-individuation stage of
development, specifically during the practicing subphase that takes place
at 10–16 months of age. Developmentally, shame plays an important role
in the maturation of the self with regard to becoming autonomous and
forming the child's identity (Lynd 1958), developing capacities to observe
oneself and others (Schneider 1977), becoming socialized (Schore 1994),
and growing in awareness of one's connectedness to all creation.

Building on the capacity for shame, the child begins to understand that
actions have consequences and can cause hurt. This ability allows the
child to experience guilt in reaction to his or her own fault or action. Guilt
appears about three to five years of age (Sroufe 1979) at the end of Mahler's
(1980) rapprochement subphase and at the beginning of the fourth and
last stage of separation-individuation, that of consolidation of individual-
ity and the beginnings of emotional object constancy.

Sometime during or after adolescence, with the attainment of a level of
consciousness and maturity of self that recognizes interrelatedness, the per-
son can experience both remorse (the gnawing distress arising from aware-
ness that the injury of another is an injury to our own self) and altruism
(the pleasure arising from awareness that valuing another is valuing our
own self). Now moral identity is dependent not only on perceiving the
inner life of another and one's self (empathy) but also on the mutual expe-
rience of emotions where we co-create each other in ongoing self/other-
organization as we live together. In other words, the substance of moral
presence is co-created in dynamic interaction with someone else's moral
presence.

Biological Mediation of Altruism.   For understanding how our biol-
ogy mediates altruism, we draw from three sources. First is the recogni-
tion that human beings possess a complex sensory motor analyzer-effector

function of our brains. "The caregiver influences the trajectory of the child's developing moral capacities by shaping the neurobiological structural system that mediates such functioning. Neuropsychological and neurological studies suggest that the orbitofrontal cortex is centrally involved in empathic and moral behaviors" (Schore 1994, 354). With the development of our prefrontal cortical loop structures (Schore 1994; 2000; 2003a; 2003b), we can design and bring about pleasurable attachments and avoid painful separations, which, we believe, expresses the separation-attachment dialectic from which altruism derives. Psychiatrist Gregory Fricchione defines the separation-attachment dialectic as the tension between individuation and connectedness in human development. He sees altruism as "the healthy synthesis of self-affirming/self-realizing love (that which separates us out as individuals) with self-giving love (that which attaches us in empathy to community)" (Fricchione 2002, 360)—which is mediated by our prefrontal cortical loop structures.

Second is the scientific literature that delineates the biological foundation of the social behaviors of attachment and separation.

Many studies among mammals reveal neuroendocrine influences empowering attachment [and separation] behavior—in particular, the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin (Carter 1998, Insel [1997], Porges 1998). These influences involve genetic and evolutionary factors. They constitute the biological substrate of much social behavior. (Spilka et al. 2003, 59)

Psychologist Allan Schore puts it, "In growth-facilitating perinatal environments, the experience-dependent maturation of interconnections between the infant's right amygdala and right paraventricular hypothalamic nuclei could allow for coregulation of oxytocin and vasopressin release in early maternal-infant interactions" (2003b, 230–31). To this we add our own work that conceptualizes how human morality flows naturally from the biological state we live in (Morrison and Severino 2003). When we live in a state of joy, such as occurs when our autonomic nervous system is balanced and our limbic system is secreting dopamine, we experience love, and our morality expresses valuing based in love. When we live in a state of humiliated fury or retaliatory rage such as occurs when our autonomic nervous systems are aroused and our limbic system is hyperaroused, we experience fear, and our morality expresses judging based in fear. Our morality and our biology are mutually interactive. Changing either our morality or our biology changes both—changes who we are and what we do (2003, 855). Potentially, then, we can change our selves to make our disposition of altruism more powerful than our dispositions of nepotism or egoism.

The third source for understanding how altruism is mediated by our biology is the apt comparison of our human immune systems with groups. Biologist David Sloan Wilson writes that "the centerpiece of the immune

system is an open-ended process of blind variation and selective retention. Antibodies are produced at random and those that successfully fight invading disease organisms are selected" (2003, 30). "Antibodies that match antigens reproduce more, not by chance, but because the immune system has been constructed that way. . . . human social interactions have the same what-I-do-depends-on-what-you-do quality that marks the interactions between hosts and their disease organisms" (2003, 31). Wilson captures the interrelatedness that characterizes our human social interactions, our individual immune systems—indeed, our individual selves. In the words of cell biologist Bruce Lipton, we "are in truth a cooperative community of approximately 50 trillion single-celled citizens . . . that have evolved a cooperative strategy for their mutual survival" (2005, 27). Showing us by analogy how interrelatedness works within our bodies, both Wilson and Lipton capture what altruism means in terms of growth within communities—the what-I-do-depends-on-what-you-do quality of social interactions. "True love means growth for the whole organism, whose members are all interdependent and serve each other. That is the outward form of the inner working of the Spirit" (Ehrenpreis [1650] 1978, 12).

Sociocultural Evolution of Altruism.   Here we turn to the work of Christopher Boehm, the cultural anthropologist who has been most influential in developing the concept of egalitarianism as the starting point for studying all modern institutions. He defines egalitarianism as that product of human intentionality where people "consciously create, and carefully enforce, egalitarian plans" to keep tendencies to hierarchy decisively reversed (2001, 12). The weak must form unified moral communities to keep the strong in check.

He presents persuasive ethnographic evidence to support his hypothesis that

the spread of Paleolithic egalitarianism had a profound effect on basic mechanisms of natural selection. Specifically, selection at the between-group level was empowered at the expense of selection at the within-group level, a shift that profoundly affected human nature. This was the case because between-group selection supports the altruistic traits that have been so vigorously denied for three decades. (2001, 197)

Although he sees effects of egalitarianism on human behavioral dispositions in many spheres, Boehm singles out the social field.

I suspect that the most radical effect of the egalitarian syndrome on human behavioral dispositions came in the social field, because of robust selection of genes for altruism. That evolutionary saga ends with a species altruistic enough to cooperate quite efficiently in large or small groups, but at the same time prone to competition and conflict. This cooperation is possible because human groups invariably act as *moral* communities that implement prosocial blueprints even as they suppress the aggressive egoism and dedicated nepotism that are so powerful in our nature. (p. 254)

Thus, he portrays human nature as highly contradictory, leading to the production of the ambivalence of our well-known individual selfishness and our long-denied altruism (p. 15). The task for socialization is to direct children's "genetic potential for selfishness and altruism, doing so in a direction that leads to helpfulness and cooperation [and also] to praise their best adult altruists in everyday life" (p. 213).

Boehm's conceptualization of altruism is consistent with Fricchione's separation-attachment dialectical hypothesis about the evolution of altruism. Fricchione sees altruism as the healthy synthesis of human ambivalence between "self-affirming love . . . in which a person seeks out a love object to satisfy his own being" and "self-giving love . . . in which a person expends himself or herself in free . . . love for the other person" (2002, 358). He concludes that altruistic love "is the love which underlies all others, leads them towards the discovery of their limits, and releases a new possibility in the self which is created for communion" (p. 359), and "altruistic love can be seen as a completion of the separation-attachment dialectical process" (p. 360).

Boehm's conceptualization of altruism is also consistent with Ehrenpreis's "An Epistle on Brotherly Community as the Highest Command of Love" quoted earlier: "True love means growth for the whole organism, whose members are all interdependent and serve each other" ([1650] 1978, 12).

Spiritual Expression of Altruism.   At the outset we acknowledge that empirical approaches to spirituality, our fourth source of scientific groundwork, are fraught with problems. Sociologists note the difficulty of operationalizing spirituality (see McGuire 2002, 71). Psychologists describe the difficulty of defining and measuring spirituality (Spilka et al. 2003, 9–11).

No clear and consistent distinction has been made between *spirituality* and *religion.* Recognizing the considerable debate about separating these two concepts, we adopt a traditional distinction. "The connotations of 'spirituality' are more personal than institutional, whereas the connotations of 'religion' are more institutional, so spirituality is more psychological (and religion more sociological)" (Spilka et al. 2003, 9). We adopt the definition of spirituality used by researchers Michael King and Simon Dein: "a person's experience of . . . a power apart from their own existence. It may exist within them but is ultimately apart. It is the sense of relationship or connection with a power or force" (1998, 1259). This is consistent with Wilson's definition: "Spirituality is in part a feeling of being connected to something larger than oneself" (2003, 3).

For defining religion we take William Scott Green's suggestion to "adopt the well-known definition of Melford Spiro: [religion is] 'an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings'" (Green 2004, 10). This definition, too, is consistent with Wilson's: "The word religion is derived from the Latin 'religio,' which

means 'to unite or bind together" (Wilson 2003, 220). He defines religion as a group-level adaptation. We "should think of religious groups as rapidly evolving entities adapting to their current environments" (2003, 35).

These definitions allow us to link spirituality and individual morality with religion and group physiology. In turn, "perhaps the most intensely felt human cultural attachment is that of religion [which] . . . becomes the repository for the memes [ideas and units of culture that get passed from generation to generation] that consecrate genuine altruism" (Fricchione 2002, 358). This is consistent with Wilson's conceptualization of human groups: "Human groups function as adaptive units primarily by having a *moral system* that regulates behavior within the group" (2003, 51). Wilson then brings us full circle back to physiology by viewing "groups as organisms whose function requires a complex and highly organized physiology" (2003, 46).

DISCUSSION

We have proposed a conceptualization of altruism that builds on the work of those who espouse relational psychological models, which emphasize the powerful intersubjective influences that co-create us. If altruism arises from a state of consciousness in which we know that we are all interrelated and that the universe is one indivisible dynamic whole, the distinction between self and other becomes a false dichotomy. This does not mean that it is an unnecessary one; the dichotomy is essential for early—birth through adolescence—human psychological, biological, and spiritual development. We must clearly know who we are before we can know who we are in relation to someone else.

But, once we have an identity, the crucial question becomes "Which nature are we living in—our altruistic nature or our nepotistic, egoistic nature?" The nature we are living in determines our definitions of *self* and *other*. When we live in our altruistic nature, we define self and other as interrelated *subjects*. When we live in our nepotistic or egoistic nature, we define them as separate *objects*. Different definitions mean not that reality is relative but that our perception of reality is relative—relative to our state of being, which derives from the mutual interaction of our biological, psychological, sociocultural, and spiritual aspects.

In our altruistic nature, we perceive self and other as one felt being where the consequences of our actions affect each of us. In our nepotistic or egoistic nature, we consider self and other as separate and believe that the consequences of our actions toward the other do not affect us. The basic question is whether an interaction creates altruistic growth for all or creates nepotistic or egoistic growth for all.

A real-life vignette illustrates these different perceptions of reality.

Kay is a freckle-faced happy girl who spends her summers in a small Midwestern town with her grandmother. When she was nine years old,

her seven-year-old cousin, Ted, joined them for a fun-filled summer. Kay vividly remembers—because of the feelings it engendered in her—an incident that she observed the day Ted was to return home. It involved Ted, her grandmother, and her grandmother's landlady, Marsha.

As good-byes were being said to Ted, Marsha appeared to tell everyone that her "gold" was missing. The "gold" referred to rocks speckled with gold that adorned her garden. When Ted revealed that he had packed the rocks with his belongings, Grandmother, whose egoistic disposition allowed her to judge others with impunity, responded, "Ted, you are bad! You broke a rule. You should never steal." Grandmother remained unaware of the impact of her condemnation on others and herself, but Kay clearly remembers her diminished vitality as she felt Ted's humiliation.

Marsha, whose altruistic disposition allowed her to attune positively to Ted's feelings, responded, "Ted must be very sad about leaving and wants to take a bit of us with him." Kay clearly remembers her increased vitality and hope for Ted in response to Marsha's words.

Grandmother countered Marsha, "No, he wants to hurt you!"

Marsha disagreed: "No, because he's leaving, he is hurting."

Each beholder's disposition determined her moral stance. Grandmother's morality—mediated by the physiology of her rage toward Ted—expressed judging of Ted and his behavior. Once judging him as "bad," she felt that the appropriate response was to punish him, which she did by shaming him: "Ted, you are bad!"

Marsha valued rules as much as Grandmother did, which led her to report the theft. If Marsha had not reported the theft and had just replaced the rocks, Ted would have left in a state of unresolved guilt. Even though his theft was an attempt to preserve relationships, unresolved guilt would have kept him feeling like a thief.

By naming the theft without blaming, Marsha allowed Ted to acknowledge his deed without overwhelming humiliation. She also invited Ted to experience more clearly his pain of separation. Marsha's morality—mediated by the physiology of her love for Ted—expressed valuing of Ted and his inner sadness. As Ted and Marsha rescued the rocks from the car and replaced them in Marsha's garden, Ted's self-esteem and Kay's vitality were restored. Their growth in altruism was enhanced.

Grandmother's and Marsha's morality differed. Each believed she was right and doing what was best for Ted. Grandmother believed that Ted was bad and that shaming him would make him a better person. She might even consider Marsha immoral for not punishing him. Marsha believed that Ted was hurting and that addressing his pain would set him right. She might even consider Grandmother immoral because her shaming inflicted more pain on Ted.

In this essay we move beyond shame and guilt to introduce altruism and remorse as more complex and later developments of moral dispositions in

which we gain a sustained awareness of our interconnectedness with all others and all creation and in which we experience another's happy or sad state as our own. Both altruism and remorse express love.

While many can see altruism as an expression of love, some might question remorse. Even Sigmund Freud, however, wrote about the connection of love with remorse. In "Totem and Taboo" Freud described the totem meal as an anthropological ritual expressing a mob of brothers' hate for their father. But beneath their hate lived love: "they loved and admired him too. After they got rid of him, had satisfied their hatred and put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him, the affection which had all this time been pushed under was allowed to make itself felt. It did so in the form of remorse" (Freud 1913, 143). Remorse builds on affection that is no longer pushed under by hatred. It involves mourning the results of our hatred, forgiving our hated other and our self, and transforming our selves to living more consistently in a disposition of altruism.

IMPLICATIONS OF OUR CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ALTRUISM

One implication of our conceptualization of altruism concerns health—both mental and physical. Sophisticated scientific studies confirm that violence begets violence, manifested in both mental and physical illness (Heim et al. 2000; 2001; Perry 2001), and altruism enables altruism, manifested in both mental and physical health (Henry and Wang 1998; Porges 1998; 2004; Wang 1997).

The process that creates altruism is a relational process. This implies that the individual self is a relational self (Dunn 1995). The health of one determines the health of all (Natterson 1991; Stolorow and Atwood 1996). This interrelational view challenges us to change our core human question from Who am I? to Whose am I? Whose am I in relation to all others? Whose am I in relation to a power or force apart from me?

Another implication of our conceptualization of altruism relates to religion. It asks our religious institutions to provide sacred symbols that can represent an altruistic moral system and provide a means to put that moral system into action. The role of religion then becomes a means of achieving coordination of moral communities that facilitate adequate development to sustain people in their abilities for altruism.

Our conceptualization of altruism also clarifies the essential role of culture, which is to urge the growth of the entire community. Here Boehm's egalitarianism calls for bidirectional control of society: Leaders are required to coordinate action in a large society, but they in turn must be controlled to prevent abuse of their power. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most influential American theologians of the twentieth century, recognized this when he wrote about the future of our civilization,

if we should perish, the ruthlessness of the foe would be only the secondary cause of the disaster. The primary cause would be that the strength of a giant nation was directed by eyes too blind to see all the hazards of the struggle; and the blindness would be induced not by some accident of nature or history but by hatred and vainglory. (1952, 174)

Perhaps the most powerful implication of our conceptualization of altruism is that each person can change his physiological, his psychological, and his spiritual aspect to become more altruistic. Becoming more altruistic individually affects others. This is particularly relevant today, as an incredibly violent twentieth century ends and we face the invention and diffusion of increasingly effective (and increasingly long-distance) means of mass destruction. His Holiness the Dalai Lama puts it well:

The central question—central for the survival and well-being of our world—is how we can make the wonderful developments of science into something that offers altruistic and compassionate service for the needs of humanity and the other sentient beings with whom we share this earth. (Dalai Lama 2005, 10).

There are no neutral consequences to the influence of our human nature on others or others on us. When we live in our altruistic nature and interact with people who are living in nepotistic or egoistic natures, any number of effects can result. Someone in a nepotistic or egoistic nature can be transformed to an altruistic nature; someone in altruistic nature can be drawn into a nepotistic or egoistic nature. Partial effects can also result. For example, someone's altruistic nature can be distorted but not totally drawn into a nepotistic or egoistic nature. Alternatively, someone's nepotistic or egoistic nature can glimpse an altruistic nature but not be transformed.

Our conceptualization of altruism has implications also for the further study of spirituality and what it means to become fully human. It provides a framework—as proposed in our chart of spiritual development—for studying spiritual levels of consciousness and spiritual developments of the self. Perhaps such investigations will clarify what is truly altruistic and distinguish it from what are a particular society's prejudices at a particular time.

NOTE

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