

## 5 Private morality - ethical rules and effects

This chapter takes up diverse aspects of altruism in everyday life. Do we have a natural propensity for altruism, or is cultural influence the driving force behind it? How much are we stimulated to act altruistically, and is altruistic morality in itself a positive factor? The portrait of reality we paint for our reasoning is a generalization from our experience. We believe that this portrait agrees well with the reader's understanding of ordinary human behavior. But we do not intend, by these means or sociological investigations, to demonstrate what is most "normal". Our focus is toward the next step, a reflection upon everyday life in terms of different ethical rules.

### 5.1 The happy beneficiary?

A transaction between individuals is dependent on two parties, not just one. The recipient's reaction is thus of great interest, whether the occasion be a compliment, a gift, or a service. It clearly forms the basis of the reciprocity, and an action which is not followed by a response is a failure. Altruism does not view the action as a chain, but as a series of one-sided actions from the main participant, the noble benefactor. His behavior does not constrain the recipient to act, but strengthens his own mode of action; good actions are valuable training for more good actions from the same person. It can be fruitful to interrupt this concentration on the altruistic giver, and devote some attention to the beneficiary as well. The latter is essential to the transaction, even if he plays a secondary role. His function of thanking and taking is obviously quite simple, and nevertheless it seems to be emotionally complicated.

John Steinbeck's novel "East of Eden" relates an interesting reaction. The town sheriff has confiscated material which was to be used in blackmailing prominent citizens. This paragon of justice destroys all the compromising pictures and is showered with gratitude. But the sheriff is gloomy, as he believes the citizens cannot bear this debt. He fears that he will lose his job in spite of momentary praise, and suspects that their mood will become irritation when they prove unable to perform an appropriate return service. Steinbeck's sheriff has seen the risk in burdening people with too much gratitude.

When one receives an excessively lavish present, one may think: "It will be expensive or difficult to reciprocate on the same level." Something cheaper would presumably have yielded more pleasure, a clearer sense of the giver's thoughtfulness, and a lighter feeling of obligation to give back. Much can be said for very small gifts where the need to give in return is not felt to be a heavy duty. A large gift before a relationship has grown strikes the recipient as problematic,

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not generous. If no "deal" results, he may feel dishonest, even though in principle he does not think he is under any obligation to the giver. If a deal does emerge, he wonders if he has been influenced by a deceptive gift.

No such return performance is demanded with very small gifts, but they still improve the atmosphere. Relationships are like ping-pong diplomacy. We begin cautiously and avoid compulsion, warming up with soft serves. As the wise poet of the "Havamal" had it: "Do not constantly give only great gifts! One is often praised for little. With a crust of my bread and a gulp of my drink, I won a friend on my way." <1>

If one is about to drown, one does not refuse a life-buoy. The lepers were naturally grateful to Jesus, and a bullied child is glad of a teacher who collars his persecutors. At the same time we see here an imbalance which tends to be unappealing, since we ourselves prefer to have the power of rewarding good with good and of meeting threats. Being helpless victims is not our ideal. A strong big brother is worth having, but standing on one's own legs is even better. People's self-confidence lies largely in their capacity for self-sustenance through work, without living on alms from others; experience shows rather unambiguously the social problems caused by unemployment. There is a negative reaction above and beyond the effects of poverty and lower status. To receive is to live on a moon with an emotional dark side.

The welfare state tries to solve this problem with a distorted equation. At the giver's end, the altruistic aspect is emphasized. It is slightly crude to stress that tax payments are being partly repaid; instead we are encouraged to see ourselves as Good Samaritans who generously step in for children, pensioners, the handicapped and so on. At the beneficiary's end, one attempts to cope with indebtedness by reinterpreting the transfer of funds as a "right". A recipient does not get a gift, but simply claims what he is entitled to, so he need not feel any burden of gratitude.

Among the complications of altruism is that the giver frequently does not elicit the reaction he expects of the recipient. There is something suspicious about a moral which has a Janus face and cannot be exhibited without extensive retouching; the grateful beneficiary is conspicuously absent. How can such a supposedly good act feel so wrong?

The idea of equality is easy to criticize. A fundamental example is the objection that it is not an ideal which many of its advocates sincerely strive for. In practice, equality means striving to have as much as someone who has more. We aim at a group on a comparatively higher level: the beggar at the worker, the worker at the director, the director at the chairman, and the chairman at the American chairman. Each can consider himself underpaid; in a word, "equality" means "more". In regard to gifts and return gifts, however, a genuine striving for equality goes on. Most of us feel exploited if the imbalance is too disadvantageous, and stingy if it is too advantageous. Both parties make a strong effort to straighten the scales, and this is a real idea of equality.

To a great degree, expressions of gratitude belong to the game of reciprocity. When one gushes about a relatively small gift or favor, one has other motives apart from spontaneous rapture. By praising a gift, we want to encourage renewed services, and thus we indirectly promise to reciprocate. All this is quite acceptable, unless gratitude itself is the only result. Then there is reason to propose a more reciprocal reaction: "Don't say thanks - invite in turn!"

## 5.2 Bringing up children

A way of putting human social behavior in perspective is to focus on children's behavior and upbringing. Many ordinary kinds of behavior can look comical, because children tend to have difficulty in understanding that a general rule is not general, but has certain qualifications. Their straightforward responses, and lesser cultural adaptation to complex patterns of reaction, may show us new angles of approach to altruism, egoism and reciprocity.

As sweet as children may be, it is clear that their primary wish is not to help their parents and fellow human beings - they have little ability, nor will, to do so. The first stage of childhood is unrestrained egoism, but children eventually learn to handle social situations more elaborately. In order to borrow toys and be offered candy, one must be able to give in return. Just as for adults, their human interplay is full of problems and conflicts, but their abilities grow rapidly. A common desire is to take charge of something and then distribute it to others. Is this an endeavor to be altruistic, or reciprocal? Since most children are brought up according to a value system in which altruism is prized, the former interpretation is favored - like the preference for viewing an act as a sign of intelligence rather than cunning. But when children give, they try to retain control. Others are not allowed to hold a resource or help themselves, and have to ask or be invited to use it. Giving is important, yet so is power over the resource. Thus it seems more correct to see such giving as training for reciprocal, not altruistic, behavior.

Another trait of children is their good memory for who has given them what. Even a child with a surplus of toys may have firm command of the donors' identities. This is a key ingredient for developing reciprocal behavior and stimulating further gifts. Fairness and unfairness arouse deep feelings in children, revealing an effort to find a workable system of mutual rules. Children develop from total egoism to more refined reciprocal behavior.

How do we react if our child does not uphold its interests, but lets other children deprive it of things? Such behavior may be praised in the Bible, but few parents fail to be appalled if they see it in their child - they hasten to telephone the school psychologist. Is the poor tot a coward, or a budding saint? Altruistic behavior in a child probably worries its parents far more than does late perfection of

unrestrained egoism. What we want in a child is security with its own identity: an integrity that lends it strength to withstand enemies, trouble-makers and "bad company", as well as social ability to acquire and keep friends. This sounds very much like a plan for reciprocal competence - being able to live among others without losing personal integrity.

Altruistic generosity appears to be very misplaced in this picture, a high ideal that hovers at a distance from reality. If we see altruistic behavior in our children, we are not pleasantly surprised. Yet despite our actual opinion of what is right or wrong, a philosophical notion lingers that what we think wrong is really right. Are we so sure it is we who are wrong? Or do we come close to suspecting that the error lies in altruistic morality?

### 5.3 Selfishness and materialism

In everyday parlance, these two words are often considered a natural pair. They are also frequently connected with shortsightedness. This, however, is largely due to conventional moralizing with scant intellectual substance.

Many idealistic and altruistic systems do include anti-materialistic evaluations. Marx, who called himself a materialist, made numerous idealistic assumptions. But his thesis that the material claims of man were limited, and the ideal ones unlimited, is characteristically unfounded. Not much thought is needed to see that material competition and effort continue regardless of how high the material level becomes. Even with the greatest surplus, enough relative differences exist between people to make them go on striving. Even rich people from a poor background in a poor country soon develop high material ambitions, so this is not a unique heritage from a traditional upper class in the rich world. Adam Smith had a clearer grasp of both the effort and the effect: "The uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition, the principle from which public and national, as well as private opulence is originally derived."<2>

In many circles, though, materialism has been viewed as unworthy of display. Inherited money is best kept a bit discreet; its owner praises the principle that money is something one has, not something one talks about. While materialism is often taboo, it is also exciting and - as with sexuality - denial of it is half-hearted, involving a value judgement rather than a lack of interest. A basic distaste for money does not hinder people from possessing, or striving for, a huge fortune. In short, the critique of materialism is strongly inclined to be more of a posture, in line with a desired image, than a real position.

There is, nonetheless, an objection of a quite different kind than the idealistic. Laziness is an underestimated constraint. The limits of materialism have to do, not with a ceiling on consumption, but with the limitation of sacrifices and efforts. Usually, material

ambitions must coexist with other egoistic ambitions. It happens that other attractions are just as great: as La Rochefoucauld observed, "What frequently prevents us from abandoning ourselves to one vice is that we have several." <3> We all make choices which give priority to other goals besides maximizing our material resources.

It can often be questioned whether a person has balanced various goals correctly. In order to get a slight increase in salary, many people are motivated to make substantial changes in their lives. There are grounds for rejecting the "natural" bond between egoism and materialism, instead of condemning them both in unison. A more useful critique is to drive in a wedge by asking whether small material differences are really essential for one's self-interest.

People will always seek better pay for their work. Obviously, too, most people see advantages in a higher material standard of living, if for themselves - although they are more antimaterialistic in regard to others. And the striving for greater relative welfare is habitual, since our social situation depends on comparison with those around us. That we are better off now than a century ago, or than Ethiopians, is not enough for the majority. But the relativistic struggle is a zero-sum game, where higher productivity cannot create general satisfaction. Internationalization and increased information result in an ever larger number of objects for comparison: the man of ambition will never run out of people with more resources whom he yearns to surpass. If "the sky is the limit" defines our ambition, we remain unsatisfied.

Having a positive goal to keep striving toward is seemingly constructive, and certainly satisfying in psychological terms. To view oneself as disadvantaged may, perhaps, be of value in a wage negotiation, but otherwise it is tormenting. Adrenalin helps in an acute conflict situation when one has to mobilize physical energy, yet on most problematical occasions it favors neither the outcome nor one's physical well-being. In the same way, material ambition is a desire that can weaken our ability to profit by what we have, and - like a surplus of adrenalin - can make us act against our rational self-interest. Materialism is not bad as a balanced striving, but becomes bad as an irresistible craving.

Altruistic values unwittingly support materialism by equating it with egoism. An effective argument against materialism does not moralize over the ugliness of thinking of oneself, but gives reasons why materialism does not always serve one's self-interest. Many materialistic efforts in our society are rationally debatable. Altruistic sentimentality substitutes for more critical reflection and confirms, instead, the assumption that every material acquisition is an advantage to the owner.

#### 5.4 Egoists and egocentrics

The principal criterion of whether a person should be called an egoist is his behavior. It is sometimes also a question of attitude, and a

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person who is unaware of his egoistic behavior can be distinguished from one who is egoistic in action as well as philosophy. The latter may properly be termed a conscious egoist. The former - an egocentric, or egotist - does not consider himself egoistic, but attributes his self-obsession to the fact that he has such wonderful children, such an important job, such a heavy burden to bear, or the like. In his own view, an egocentric is simply more interesting than other people and deserves special attention.

How, then, does an egocentric react to egoist philosophy?

Normally he takes strong exception to it. The egoists are the others, who fail to appreciate his view. An egocentric often regards himself as spontaneous and enthusiastic, while associating egoism with a cooler personality. This description does have a point. He offers himself, which is positive if done with moderation. But a drawback is that egocentrism easily becomes excessive and places a strain on the surroundings. Deeper insight into one's own egoism should make an expansive person much more tolerable.

Some people communicate great ideas, like socialism and Christianity, to their surroundings. Others convey small ideas like cooking recipes, car tips, and how to put children to bed. All this, however, is readily exchangeable knowledge. By contrast, the core of the egocentric's message is that the surroundings are privileged to be in touch with the supreme chef, the universal fixer and the perfect parent.

To a true egocentric, this public relations campaign for himself is not egoism. It has nothing to do with egoism, but represents the unvarnished subjective truth, the self-portrait of an artist. His audience should be grateful for seeing the light.

Insight into his own and others' egoism does not transform a talkative egocentric into a silent cynic, but his awareness can render him less tedious. Every good story-teller needs a good listener, and the listener's interest grows if his own motives and interests are recognized and taken into account. The beginning is promising when the listener also thinks himself a notably interesting person. Two egocentrics may communicate by taking turns in delivering brief monologues about their excellence. A somewhat more advanced method is for one to concede the other's interests and seek a shared basis of contact.

The egocentric comes in a reserved version as well: a person who does not care about communicating, but keeps his distance with measured pride. He feels that he is admirable and that it is beneath him to justify his judgements. This type, too, should be helped by greater egoistic consciousness to become socially easier to deal with. Sometimes eccentric behavior is part of his image - as with an author who stammers, gropes for words, and speaks quite slowly. A difficult impression may succeed in arousing respect and interest, but it is implausible that such behavior is socially successful as a rule. Not getting trapped in one's own cliché ought to be an asset, and egoistic consciousness makes it possible to find alternatives. There are other perspectives on existence than that due to painful childhood

experiences.

A relatively egoistic view of mankind increases respectfulness rather than toughness, since the most fundamental respect for another person is the very recognition of his egoistic interests. He is more interested in his work and problems than in one's own. This acceptance of egoism's focal role removes plenty of air from the egocentric's balloon, and undermines his attempts to launch himself as the focus. Among the most unpleasant kinds of egoism is the unconscious variant, whose philosophical starting-point is to see oneself as an unselfish human being.

## 5.5 Subegoism

Moral problems often concern good resolutions and the human inability to put them into practice. This shortcoming also occurs in regard to less highly esteemed aims, and failure to reach egoistic goals is a widely neglected problem. There are many types of action which do not qualify as egoistically rational. We frequently have vast trouble with making correct judgements in concrete circumstances - and wrong judgements are inevitable, if also lamentable.

People who consciously avoid the company of others can be baffling to us. It is hard to enter the feelings of a pillar saint or a solitary round-the-world sailor, and understand how such an inclination makes them happy. The intention here is not to psychologize over such "asocial" behavior, but only to note that these persons attain a situation they strive for. It seems more credible that we assess their minds wrongly, than that they completely misjudge their interests.

This section will concentrate on a different group of actions and behavior than the active choice of solitude. We mean the type of actions which people perform with egoistic motives, but which do not achieve egoistically rational aims. These actions systematically go against self-interest, without praising any moral of self-sacrifice.

Modern societies include a host of people who would like to have much more social interaction, yet fail and experience a social deficiency. This phenomenon can be explained by reference to changes in society. We no longer live in villages with many relatives, few inhabitants and several joint projects. Single households are now common; relatives are less numerous and tend to live in other cities; it is easy to feel alone in the crowd. One cannot even gossip about people one does not know, and famous figures in the press become surrogates. The social consequences of urbanization are comprehensible, but loneliness is not unavoidable. Most people manage to take the step which, in our terms, can be described as a transition from communities with emphasis on kin selection to a society with more reciprocity. It is unreasonable to explain all social difficulties for a lonely individual by the fact that others are peculiar or troublesome; a person who has no friends is probably his own worst problem. Exaggerated mistrust, stinginess, sensitivity and aggressiveness are

some causes of negative reactions from the surroundings.

Involuntary loneliness often arises from a disbelief in coping with reciprocal exchange. If one thinks that, after inviting neighbors to coffee and cake, one would only be reinvited to bread and water, one may prefer not to be exploited by them, leaving each party alone in front of his television. People who make a very pessimistic assessment of opportunities for cooperation will conclude that it is better to stand apart than to bear others' burdens along with one's own. We call this behavior "subegoism": behavior that does not achieve a person's aims, and has social effects which he actually wants to avoid. He seeks a good friend, but cannot himself act as a good friend should do, since he does not believe that others will do so.

This skepticism owes to several factors. Personal disappointment is certainly often among them. We all suffer stabs in the back - and deal a few ourselves - but most of us recover and do not judge all our friends by one friend's treachery. However, some build up a shell to protect them from the surroundings, and become isolated by it.

Subegoism is also quite possibly influenced by moral philosophy. Altruistic propaganda does not directly refer to the personal profits of cooperation, but lays more stress on solidarity, sympathy and self-sacrifice. One should give in joy without expecting to get in return, and a beneficiary has no clear obligations. This makes a doubter still less dedicated, and one easily overreacts against an idea which is so pretentious and unsystematic. In defending oneself from the sacrifice philosophy's unwarranted demands, the reciprocal baby is thrown out with the altruistic bath water.

If we could escape from altruistic moralizing and establish a predominance of reciprocal morality, subegoism would be likely to receive effective criticism. Clearer rules would lower the number of disappointments, something which egoists especially welcome. Cooperation should not be justified by individual sacrifice of self-interest, but chiefly by the benefit to self-interest. We must not sacrifice ourselves to each other, but grow in a mutually giving society. For such an objective, altruistic morality is not an ally but a coffin to carry about. Modern society demands a great deal from the human capacity for collaboration. The existence of good morals is now even more decisive than in a time of strong, close bonds which were not as sensitive to disturbance by confused preaching.

## 5.6 The human mind

A leading issue in philosophy is how what are seen as the Good and Right should be coupled with human mentality. "What is good for man?" asked Aristotle, and this is still hard to answer. John Milton spoke of extreme subjectivism: "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven." Such a weak connection between well-being and success is illustrated by Napoleon, who at the end of his life estimated that he had experienced no more than six happy days. If one must do things like being crowned by the

Pope or winning battles against two Emperors in order to have a nice day, the chances of attaining happiness through outward achievement are pretty small.

A question of importance for the problems in this book is whether people become happy by seeking and reaching goals that benefit their self-interest. The contrary theory is that, instead, happiness comes from sacrifices and contributions to other goals. These goals are often benefits for fellow human beings. If the orientation is toward a special person and is reciprocated, though, its moral value is lower according to the altruistic perspective. It should rather be a gift to an unknown stranger or, best of all, to an irreconcilable enemy.

Religion considers the will of God to be the ultimate goal, and since God wishes well to mankind, or at least to believers, he brings them happiness. The religious answer is that the right faith yields happiness. While happiness is not the aim of human striving, it becomes a side-effect. The idea that some goals are easier to reach as indirect consequences of striving toward other goals, than when they are sought directly, recurs elsewhere. This was also Oscar Wilde's view of happiness, and Henry Ford's view of money. A corollary hypothesis is that the operational aims which seem to lie near a goal of happiness are delusions that take us astray. Could the right way be, not social success and material welfare, but the beggar monk's thorn-strewn path? As we know, after a long hike, even a normal snack tastes heavenly, and hunger is the finest spice. Thus, the search for a link between self-interest and happiness - or unhappiness - points to various paradoxical answers.

### Unhappiness

The high living standard in liberal societies has evidently not solved all of their problems. Faults that have not been rectified are bound to exist, as do drawbacks in available solutions. However, the crux of this issue is a suspicion of more fundamental weakness - a fallacy in the very fact of success. Are contemporary human beings really happy, even if they have not been mistreated by criminals, authorities, or fate?

A surprising difficulty is suggested by phenomena like suicide. We are biologically oriented to survive, yet our awareness of mortality means that this goal is impossible in the long run. Hence a basic contradiction arises between the survival instinct and the mental insight that life is ephemeral. As a paradox of existence, it surely has great psychological significance. To twist Descartes: "I think, therefore I face problems." Thought has not remained a mere tool for survival, but becomes a recalcitrant counsellor. The secondary impact of intellect and imagination cannot be eliminated, so we are torn between the attractive chances of winning particular battles and the general conviction that our war is futile.

Some suicides may be regarded as rational, that is, the best solution in a serious predicament. Old people who kill themselves to lighten the burden on their family's resources, terminally ill patients

who refuse treatment, and prisoners who similarly avoid torture or treason, are examples. But what of all other suicides? A typical annual figure in modern societies is 20 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants; in Hungary it is 41. Suicide is often the most frequent cause of death in younger age groups, and in Denmark it has accounted for a third of the deaths among men aged 25-34.<5>

To a certain degree, suicide originates in the problems caused by the above-mentioned paradox of existence. A sophisticated form of it is found in Oriental ideas which oppose the survival instinct and advocate an escape from life, which might be termed philosophical suicide. In any case, most suicides are motivated not by the littleness of one's life in relation to the universe, but by the contrary perspective - relatively small problems loom so large that they affect one's desire to go on living. Compared with other people's desperate fight against tiny odds in great suffering, suicide appears bizarre. To deny life's possibilities seems the most artificial sort of affliction by excess. Inadequate rationality does not exclude deep tragedy; the needless nature of dramatic self-destruction is, rather, a reinforcement of the tragedy.

Granted, suicide is only the tip of an iceberg. Besides such acts, there are many unhappy people whose survival instinct is not entirely crippled. They experience extreme confusion about the conditions of existence. T. H. Huxley summarized the bright and dark sides of human development thus: "The divine faculty of imagination, while it created new heavens and new earths, provided them with the corresponding hells of futile regret for the past and morbid anxiety for the future."<6>

When it comes to practical effort, life is less chaotic than in the realm of feelings and philosophy. Just as Napoleon's want of euphoria did not diminish his energy, most people keep their chins up, though not as far out in front. We may not be sure that our goals are ideal solutions, but we assume them to be improvements worth attaining.

Religion tries to resolve the existential paradox, but whether its attempt can be called successful is doubtful. Suicide statistics are not conspicuously lower in more religious societies. Religion often seems to be a straw grasped in anguish rather than a viable solution - a painkilling pill instead of an effective operation technique.

## Guilt

A key component of some religions is their view of victims and guilt. When the concept of original sin is added, we have a further burden, in addition to the inevitability of death. It is thought to be morally exquisite to feel guilt. Any decline in real suffering motivates an extra sense of guilt, and the paradox is sharpened. Yet guilt is not a natural feeling in this form, but an artificial influence. From an evolutionary perspective, it is seen as a warning signal of setting aside reciprocal behavior. An extreme instance of guilt occurs in Catholic mortification practices, where the sinner himself applies a righteous punishment; man's guilt before higher powers is great, and

grows with each new false step. Confession is a means of guiding guilt feelings toward a religious faith. It ought to have a positive effect and lessen psychological burdens, were not the rest of religion devoted to promoting and strengthening guilt feelings.

While feelings of guilt are not uplifting, there is another way out, besides regret and sacrifice. One may feel oneself to be a victim - not primarily a sinner, but afflicted by someone else's sin. A contest arises for the status of being mainly a victim instead of a sinner. This outlook has also been nurtured by many secular movements. In principle, one feels sorry for everybody who claims to belong to a persecuted group; and in the prosperous welfare state, the competition is stiff to join such groups and avoid sitting on the defendants' bench. Familiar candidates are pensioners, women, blacks, immigrants, criminals, the low-paid or unemployed or handicapped, rural inhabitants and so on. What remains is a "majority" consisting of white, well-educated, well-paid, city-dwelling men. Others drift, so to speak, between the wretched minority and that majority, which is supposed to feel guilty. On an international scale, four billion people in poor countries and their wealthy leaders are included in the oppressed minority.

Both the accuracy of this picture and the psychological edification in such an orgy of self-pity call for reflection. Is it good for the overwhelming majority to feel like an oppressed minority? We think the answer is definitely negative. To begin with liberal society, all of its groups have every reason to be grateful for their fortune in being born here and now. Even in a poor country, solid grounds exist for seeing life as a favor and an opportunity.

As for the "white man's burden", it is presumably a burden without any bearers. There are further rules of exception which are not as generally recognized, but which eliminate more individuals from the ranks of the privileged. Once all the men with tyrannical bosses, empty pockets, broken health, and shaky marriages are omitted, the majority is reduced to almost zero. The few voluntary individuals who are left might, indeed, be branded as victims of persecution and thus form an oppressed group. As Strindberg remarked, "Man is to be pitied."

Religion is not the only source of the victim-and-guilt complex. Our ability to share others' success is limited, so those who succeed are justified in restraining their boasts about it. Few things earn as much applause as stories of how the rich and powerful struggle against life's small problems, preferably with even less success than the audience.

Attitudes of entreaty and suffering can, however, be a social handicap. We also have a limited ability to feel sympathy, and there is a psychological defense against transparent attempts to create and exploit suffering. We think little of self-pity for other reasons as well, and its strategy risks becoming counterproductive. It leads to passivity and an incapacity for solving one's own problems. If one fails to mobilize help, the result is self-destruction.

A solution to this dilemma is collective indignation: everyone in

a group is a victim of the powers that be. Such a stance often gives rise to resentment which may be psychologically fortifying for the group's members. A wide range of group-egoistic projects appeal to, and actually demand, our support. Before praising resentment for its strengthening effect, though, one should weigh its negative effects on the surroundings. Like excessive self-confidence, resentment can be an advantage to oneself but a plague to others. Indignation seems to be a dangerous fuel for self-righteousness and implacability, which heighten the intensity of human conflicts. Group egoism that instead regards a conflict as an opposition of self-interests is much more mature and reasonable. Nor does it lead to passivity, since one need not be hysterical in order to become energetic.

Hence, the notion of victimization is a very dubious phenomenon in both its self-pitying and resentful variants. To abandon this notion does not, taken alone, solve the existential paradox, but does provide a way to avoid some of the confusion and unhappiness which the notion entails. A first step toward a healthy mentality is to stop viewing oneself as a victim.

### Happiness

Just as discussions of health are more concerned with illness than with good health, the closest attention is paid to unhappiness. In this discussion, too, it is worth emphasizing a fairer view of existence: life gives many causes for rejoicing. In this context, the most relevant aspect is happiness in doing something for others - the joy of being generous.

A person who is pleased when he does a good deed, and dismayed when he exploits others, is obviously guided toward nonegoistic behavior more strongly than is an emotionally neutral person. But is this a movement toward altruism or reciprocity? Some emotional signals are quite clear. If one has neglected to perform a return service, one feels a heavy burden. Receiving a Christmas present, after neglecting to buy any, incurs an acute debt of gratitude. Forgetting to send a planned Christmas gift to starving people in Ethiopia may well be less burdensome. Thus, if one's inner voice has to choose between altruism and reciprocity, the choice seems unambiguous. A plausible interpretation is that, during the course of evolution, we acquired emotional impulses and reactions which promote reciprocal behavior, since it is highly expedient for the individual.

Yet the question is whether positive feelings exist only for reciprocal actions, or also for altruistic actions. A possible argument is that reciprocal actions yield stronger negative signals. One is more ashamed over a neglected return service than over a broad surplus which one does not share with others. Positive feelings, however, may be more positive for broad generosity than for a return service which is seen in part as a duty.

On the other hand, such initial generosity can largely be interpreted in both ways, as either broad generosity or a reciprocal

initiative. The latter view is supported by the fairly unanimous reactions we get from our surroundings. If we are burdened by personal problems and make minimal initiatives, a total lack of interest greets us. A fluttering glance, a limp handshake, or an uninspired tone of voice means that our new acquaintance reacts negatively or cautiously. By contrast, good humor tends to elicit a friendly reception. The emotional rewards of a positive attitude are so enormous, in relation to their effort, that it must be considered profitable and not as self-sacrificing.

The argument is sometimes heard that, for example, reciprocity cannot explain why one person jumps in to save another who cannot swim. Precisely because the other cannot swim, it is not only unlikely but impossible that he will jump in and return the service! But this belongs to countless instances of trivial misunderstanding about the reciprocal model. It goes without saying that reciprocity builds upon the usual practice of returning a different type of service than what was received. And besides the expected direct return service, there may be an indirect reward, as when the rescuer is praised in the local newspaper and gains status in the eyes of his friends - by no means a negligible dividend.

Since reciprocity is often profitable, it has probably acquired an emotional reinforcement that facilitates such behavior. A skeptic might object that, even if this is the historical background, it could have evolved into altruistic behavior through cultural influence; thus, from natural reciprocity we would obtain cultural altruism. This is a plausible interpretation. All past propaganda can hardly have failed to have any effect whatever. Still, even with broadly generous actions, we often expect the beneficiary to feel and show gratitude; otherwise we are disappointed. We seem to have reciprocal feelings even when doing things that are really altruistic.

Acting like a charitable Samaritan has scarcely been endowed with supportive emotional reactions by the evolutionary process, as this behavior is not biologically rational. Both giving and receiving one-sided gifts have been unusual. A parasite cannot live if the host animal is extremely rare, so an eagerness to take without any impulse to give back has not been supported either. We are not averse to a degree of bias in our favor, but it feels a bit grotesque to do all the taking. Despite criticism of our excessive egoism, we see here an egoistic feeling that appears to be relatively undeveloped.

At the beginning of this section, it was asked whether we become more happy by serving self-interest or by making sacrifices for others. The happiness resulting from selfless sacrifice appears to be quite illusory. However, we often feel glad about having contact with people who we find willing and able to have a mutual relationship. If a lack of gratitude crushes these hopes, the joy of giving quickly fades. Most of what we call generosity can be seen as a gesture for the purpose of getting direct return services or indirect responses on a reciprocal basis. Only the remainder is due to altruism.

Sympathy, empathy and justice

Many people stress that feelings for others, while perhaps not all-embracing, are essential. Many agree with David Hume's picture: "There is some benevolence, however small...some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and the serpent." Rousseau noted two basic features of human nature: the instinct of self-preservation, and sympathy. Many others also emphasize the emotional capacity for empathy with others' situation. There is a natural goodness which is a significant source of cooperation and social development. Many more philosophers, such as John Stuart Mill, lay great weight on what they view as a fundamental ability to feel sympathy and empathy.

Empathy - being able to assimilate other people's feelings, perspectives and opinions - is an important social ability, not least in understanding the requirements for cooperation. Sympathy is often a term used with stronger emotion, and more as defining an attitude, than empathy. One takes a stand for those one sympathizes with.

Sympathy arises in numerous positive contexts. An example is loyalty. It is not supported by altruistic morality, which places higher value on being generous toward others than toward one's friends. From a reciprocal viewpoint, however, loyalty is clearly a valuable trait, since cooperation is gradually reinforced by services and return services. It is then crucial that the chain not be broken as a result of minor strains and problems, but can resist disturbance. A strong sense of loyalty is a shield against such influence.

In addition, sympathy assumes more questionable forms, such as emotional support for some people instead of others. Frequently we excel at expressing sympathies that conflict with our normal values: we feel sorry for a known criminal, lament the misfortune of a person we actually dislike, and so forth. Many sympathies strike us as eccentric extravagances and fruits of free fantasy. Through emotional statements, we can create a personality for ourselves; yet the emotions often seem artificial or shallow. Honor is commonly attached to strong statements, but they come to resemble those about wine or whiskey: having firm and distinctive preferences of taste is very important, whereas the exact formulation becomes a sheer gamble. It is surprisingly effective to influence the picture of oneself with powerful expressions of sympathy.

A sense of justice, which rests on the capacity for empathy, is brought to attention in ceremonial situations, but is often given low value. Although an honorable attitude, it is more theoretical than practical. To demand that people guide their actions with more rational feelings, which strive for objectivity, is almost asking too much of them. The sense of justice is frequently regarded as a basis for the legal system, not for private action and without a high evaluation in reality.

In this perspective, biased sympathy has no unequivocally positive function. It is often a disturbing emotional influence that

diverts attention from the sense of justice, which places demands on us that are not always immediately attractive. Unmotivated sympathy or sentimentality can be a good excuse for deviant behavior which serves our personal comfort. Most people are critical of an intellectually prepared egoism, but think that a sensitivity to emotional willfulness is "human". Before the whims of feelings, all other attitudes are to bend their heads in reverence.

A reason for this concentration on emotional sympathy instead of a rational sense of justice is the influence of altruism, which inhibits that sense by making such excessive demands that the choice is no longer between right and wrong, but between wrong and still more wrong. This, of course, is a motivational turn for the worse. The basic principle is that one has a duty to give everything and, when one cannot realistically do so, the next step is a command to give as much as possible. In the moral relativism created by altruism, it is difficult to establish strong operative principles.

Recognition of the self-inflicted problems of altruism puts the choice between sympathy and an empathetic sense of justice in a new light. Our powers of judgement tend to be highly colored by our own outlook. Personal problems are magnified and little neutrality is maintained, except in very formalized situations. If we make a judgement by starting from sympathy, the difference grows between us and our counterpart's problems. Subjectivity is even greater in emotional than in rational terms.

In order to promote cooperation and understanding among people, the sense of justice seems a better approach than sympathy for a selected few. This sense functions better with a moral system that promotes clear-sightedness and honesty, instead of emotional priorities.

### Psychological altruism

Another pertinent question is whether people ever do things which are psychologically altruistic. In Chapter 2, we mentioned the sophistical and fruitless notion that even a person who actually sacrifices himself is doing so voluntarily and therefore obeying an egoistic desire. True altruism then becomes impossible.

A more interesting aspect is the fact that we commonly act with several motives in parallel. A soldier going to war believes both that he is fulfilling a duty to his country, and that his life will improve when he returns home as a war hero to meet men's admiration and women's fascination. Those who support a nation at war point to the soldier's motive of duty, while those who do not are persuaded that he acts out of egoistic, hardly altruistic, motives.

Such views amount to banal propaganda, but the real mixture of motives is extremely difficult to dissect. Presumably everyone wants to avoid conflicting motives and tries to make them harmonize. Any objections to a chosen kind of behavior are revised so that different motives work together towards a certain act, enabling it to agree with both egoistic and altruistic motives. Yet this complicated tissue of

belief, judgement, hope and self-delusion does not seem worth penetrating more deeply. We prefer to focus upon the resultant actions and how they should be interpreted with minimal speculation about motives. It is also of interest to examine the influence of different moral ideologies on human mentality, and what effects this influence has upon actions. The mind is not an end-station in our perspective, but only a way-station through which rules of social morality affect actual behavior.

## 5.7 Problems of reciprocity

The unilateral agitation for altruism has been defended by claiming that it needs support by propaganda, whereas "lower" moral systems are more spontaneous. For instance, reciprocity is supposed to function well without ideological underpinnings. Unfortunately this is an overestimation of reciprocity, as it is seldom really so autonomous and free of obstacles.

The first of these is a difference in time and risk. It is always a calculated disadvantage to perform the initial service, and in order to compensate for the risk of loss, the giver will want a premium. One would not part with a banana so as to get back a banana 80% of the time. This alone renders the two services unequal in value: the return service must be worth more to include the compensation. However, a specific recipient will not want to make an extra effort as a result of other recipients shirking their reciprocal duties. This is a reason why one has to think of gifts whose benefit to their recipient is greater than the privation for the giver.

A further problem is that gifts and return gifts are frequently different in character. Fair comparisons are hard - how large a potted plant corresponds to an evening's babysitting? The gift's value to the recipient is paramount, but the giver's sacrifice in coming up with the gift is also an important factor. A bouquet of flowers is still the same bouquet regardless of how it was bought, but its evaluation is affected by a knowledge that the giver travelled day and night to buy it.

Nor is reciprocal behavior necessarily open and honest. There are many opportunities for increasing the value of a gift. Among the most inviting is to magnify the sacrifices and trials that lie behind it. This motivates an even larger return gift. Indeed, the giver may try to inflate his gift's value for the recipient - but this can be controlled more effectively, since the recipient often knows better what is true and what is hot air. The privation, consideration, discomfort and effort that led to the gift are less verifiable by the recipient, and thus are more commonly exaggerated. It is not implausible that altruism partly originated in such privation propaganda, where the sacrifices of givers were aggrandized into huge achievements. From being a secondary issue in a reciprocal relationship, they became ever more central and, in an altruistic transaction, ultimately primary.

The idea of sacrifice raises several questions, as the size of a

sacrifice is significant for that of the return service it demands. People who always make dramatic efforts are difficult to cooperate with, and we avoid anyone who turns the slightest act into a gigantic project; we do not find the result of his sacrifices to be worth the ensuing obligation of reciprocal effort. Hence, exaggerated sacrifices - or the very mention of them - can defeat their objectives.

An expensive but less appreciated gift burdens the relationship. For, say, a wreath of flowers, the recipient himself may have been willing to pay only a fraction of the price that the giver paid. Yet he feels obliged to pay about the same price for a return gift, so his net profit from the two transactions is decidedly negative. A more appealing present might be a bottle of tax-free liquor: the recipient can value it at the taxed price he would pay, exceeding its cost to the giver. With a suitable return gift, both parties can make a net profit. Reciprocity depends on both parties benefiting by cooperation in the long run, which calls for attention to effectiveness on both sides. High sacrifices with low utility for the other party are a derangement of reciprocity, and soon put a stop to themselves.

A cautious reciprocal strategy is to avoid moving first, since it is safer to move when others have already performed a service. But the initiative offers possibilities, not only risk. Some bad investments are inevitable, yet they create new relationships with attractive individuals. One must have clear attractions of one's own in order to succeed with a passive strategy, because all too many people actively seek social contacts. A passive reciprocal individual easily becomes a wallflower.

Reciprocal relationships place a number of demands on the actors. One needs a reliable memory, an offensive approach, and a readiness to risk a bad investment. The results improve with an ability to make one's efforts seem greater, although not so great that they disturb the relationship's rationality.

Conventions are helpful, but problems occur when two parties regard two different conventions as normal. Dinner guests may assume that it is enough to express their gratitude on the occasion, as well as eventually inviting back - whereas the hosts may think it normal to be thanked by telephone. Such a small point of etiquette illustrates how easily irritation can arise. On many issues of wider importance, it is essential that the cooperation - the reciprocal behavior - be supported by conventions and morals. In today's society, public morality is devoted to altruistic morals of dubious practical value. Much is said about the virtues of sacrifice and consideration, while forgetting the socially prevalent and thus more meaningful role of reciprocity.

## 5.8 Effects on conduct

Some companies state which guarantees they offer, and how they correct faults; others boast that their products are always faultless. True, faultlessness is a lofty aim - but is it actually a good and realistic

aim, or an insidious trick glowing in the eyes of ambitious marketing directors?

Many have noted the paradox that what is "best" is often the worst enemy of what is good. <9> Lofty morals are reduced to daydreams when a pious mood sets in. And who can cast the first stone? Not even Jesus passed all his trials without wavering, and no one can ask more of an ordinary mortal than an awkward attempt to reach a difficult goal. Failure is excused in advance when it cannot be said that the priest and the marketing director have laid the standard too low.

A serious problem is that altruistic actions have little utility value. Reciprocal morality involves an intensive search for transactions with low sacrifice and high utility. But altruism spurns such clerkish calculations and focuses on the sacrifice itself - the greater, the better. Moreover, altruism has several philosophical inconsistencies. Suppose that two people, both good altruists, meet in the rain outside a door. Each insists that the other should go in first, and is glad to get wet for the other's sake. Unless they are to stand there and be soaked, they must come to terms which can be called "reciprocal altruism" in the total sense: one of them is entitled to stay longest in the rain now, if he promises to let the other make a sacrifice for him in the future!

An objection to ethical egoism is that what one means by right action depends on which party one is, and that the actions one thinks should be done depend on whose perspective one views the situation from. This weakness occurs in altruism as well, and to an even greater degree. In judging the effects of action, it takes no account of the person who is most concerned, namely the actor himself.

On a less theoretical and more practical level, these altruists are bound to get through their door in the end; as luck has it, nobody can be a perfect altruist. But the problem of the two Good Samaritans is no laughing matter. In an older generation permeated by Christian etiquette, exaggerated consideration is a frequent cause of worry. Such people may be so apprehensive of what others believe, feel, and think, that they neither have time to reveal their own thoughts, nor regard this as appropriate. Suppose, again, that two people go to see a film which, each imagines, will interest the other. Alternatively, each could present his own preferences and then a common solution could be sought which is good for them both. The advantage of pleasant company must be weighed against seeing a film which is not one's favorite. Usually a solution can be found, but two Good Samaritans are quite capable of failing.

Advocates of moderate altruism maintain that we become a bit more friendly after, for instance, hearing an episode from the life of Jesus and drinking coffee at church. Their assumption is that, without altruism, man would have nothing but a bellicose form of egoism to live by. The reciprocal alternative, however, indicates that cooperation would work well, if not better, without altruism. The church serves mostly as a confession chamber: it frees us from guilt, and guilt that is largely created by the church itself. Many people who do not believe in its altruistic message still hope for a placebo effect: even if God

does not exist and the priest is a charlatan, some feel motivated to do positive deeds. Nonetheless, to see altruistic ideas as a safe and stimulating sort of noise is rather misguided. They obscure the modest principles of reciprocity with their extravagant moral monuments.

What, then, would it mean to get rid of altruistic morality and substitute a reciprocal one? First, there would be a decline of "turning the other cheek" and a heightened sense of justice, with more civic courage and strength to leave the path of least resistance. This may sound like a dangerous recommendation in view of all the aggressive individuals in society. But tough egoistic behavior often depends on its being accepted, even though not praised. While a schemer flourishes best among peaceful altruists, an equitable climate is harder on him. Despite contrary ambitions, altruism has the effect of promoting egoistic behavior. An altruistic giver opens the door to an egoistic recipient - they are meant for each other. To avoid supporting unhealthy egoism, one should not only speak out against it: behavior that concretely counteracts it is necessary. The parasite and the altruist live in continual symbiosis, so a radical way of combating parasitism is to combat altruism.

The egocentric self-pity which is respected today would also fall on hard times. With a reciprocal morality, it follows that one will make some fruitless efforts; but however disappointed one may be, there are good reasons for not regarding oneself as a victim. Human dignity rests upon a sense of being more a subject with power than an object of power. We are, of course, largely victims of the powerful - yet we have a freedom of action that should be forcefully utilized. Trying to move the powerful with prayers and complaints is seemingly pointless and humiliating. By contrast, discovering opportunities for cooperation implies a need for openness and an ability to understand the interests of others. One has to distinguish what is reasonable from what is exaggerated, and creatively find new possibilities of mutual benefit. This is not a restricted kind of egoism or selfish sentiment, but a challenge to recognize and realize potentialities in a world which is full of what we call happiness, as well as of inevitable misery and violence.

A further discredit to altruism is action in which the recipient's advantage is less than the giver's sacrifice. It is commonly held to be both good in itself, and good training for more beneficial sacrifices. Here we need a reassessment from a secularized viewpoint, instead of attaching intrinsic value to "Christian" or "socialistic" behavior. Otherwise we risk attempting to invent the moral equivalent of a perpetual-motion machine. A widow's farthing is spent on something less urgent than her own needs, but she may be given a farthing by someone else. The process is seen as productive and creative, not as a source of losses.

Against the account of altruism, too, is its indirect contribution to subegoism, as already mentioned. By dominating over reciprocal morality on the normative level, altruism promotes defensive behavior in many people. They adopt a narrow-minded egoism which does not serve their self-interest, because they have accepted the altruistic picture

of reality as a choice between restricted egoism and selfless altruism. In turning to the former, they miss the possibilities of reciprocity.

### A movie with a moral

There are countless characterizations of the altruistic ideal. An example of interest, being somewhat unusual, is Frank Capra's classic film *Life is Wonderful* from 1946. Capra was matched by few other directors in his capacity for consistency, and he made no bones about his message. As an adept creator of films he was able to be both clear and sentimental without becoming banal.

The leading figure, George Bailey (played by James Stewart), is a sympathetic soul who has helped many people through the years in a small town, Bedford Falls. His own dreams of going out into the world and doing great deeds never came true; some duty to his fellow citizens always intervened. He goes on financing and building houses. The day before Christmas, a predicament arises: the bank inspectors arrive, just as eight thousand dollars have disappeared. The hero is faced with bankruptcy and prison on grounds of embezzlement. Desperate, he stumbles down to the river, intending to jump in and earn a huge sum of life insurance for his wife and children. So far, the tale is familiar: a brutal world breaks a good man in Bedford Falls as easily as in Brecht's Szechuan. He wavers toward the bridge like Jesus on Golgotha, prepared for a final act of self-denial.

Now, however, Capra introduces an angel, who leads George on a tour around the town as a stranger, to see how it would have looked if he had never been born. He finds that a great deal is different. His brother has drowned for lack of brotherly assistance, and his wife has become a frightened, unmarried librarian. The old druggist, whom George would have saved from making a dangerous medication, has turned into a crazed alcoholic. The whole place has fallen into the hands of its rich man, Potter, and begun to acquire the decadence of Las Vegas.

After this adventure, George is relieved. To be sure, he never worked the wonders he yearned of in youth, but all these small acts have proved him to be very important for his neighbors. They give him back the will to live - he regains his human worth by having been of value to others. Through the angel's experiment (a metaphor of memory), George is transformed from a suffering altruist into a happy one. Such is the moral of the movie.

But that is not the end of the story. When George returns home after rejecting the notion of suicide, a further change occurs. Those he had helped during the years come to help him out of his economic dilemma. In a jubilant scene, they stream across the threshold with praise and support for their past benefactor. Capra is careful not to be didactic by adding a shot of the egoist Potter's way of celebrating Christmas. Still, we know the lot of a man who is feared by many and loved by none. Alone with his bleak servant, he sits in a wheelchair, physically and emotionally handicapped. Good triumphs over evil.

If this narrative is examined in the light of our discussion, it

raises a number of questions. They illustrate weaknesses, not chiefly in the film's presentation - in fact, the idea is quite powerfully expressed, with a main character who attracts strong sympathy from the audience - but in the philosophy of altruism. A fundamental objection is that it would have been enough to portray ordinary reciprocity. Had George simply sat down in an armchair and considered whether suicide was necessary, his problems could soon have been solved by friends, without any divine intermezzo. His friends had the means not only to make him happy, but also to cover his acute financial needs. His altruistic rebirth did nothing to deal with these economic trivia. Reciprocity is less virtuous, yet is evidently more substantial.

With a less altruistic and more reciprocal outlook, George might even have been right to expect help from his friends. In the altruistic view of mankind, despite all talk of love, there is a quite inegalitarian element. The species consists of an A-team, altruists, and a B-team, those in need of benefits. The latter, like lepers and beggars in the Bible, are a miserable lot obsessed with their fecklessness, suffering and self-pity. They can do nothing but stretch forth their bowls for alms. To expect a return service of them is not just immoral, but utterly unrealistic.

George, by regarding himself as the only good person in Bedford Falls, was incapable of recognizing other qualities than misery in his neighbors. Were his brother, now a national war hero, and his childhood friend, who became wealthy through George's advice, merely feckless lepers? They might well have felt gratitude and possessed both the will and the resources to do so. Yet our hero is stuck in the altruistic rut and cannot conceive of such a possibility. According to the one-sided moral in the Sermon on the Mount, he has given without a thought of getting anything back.

The altruistic analysis did not, however, fit the people of Bedford Falls. The closing scene makes the entire town a manifestation of reciprocal morality, by those who want to reward good with good. We can easily remove the ideological keynote, altruism, and leave the story intact - less cinematographic, but more realistic. On the other hand, without reciprocity, the film's optimism is gravely weakened. It remains one of many sad tales with a moral of how difficult altruism is in a nonaltruistic world. The film offers a reflection that denies its purpose: we could stop praising good gestures and intentions whose rewards lie in the soul's depths or heaven's heights, and begin to build with the stronger timber of reciprocity, which can truly work wonders in life.

This film might also illustrate discussion of another issue: whether man is a means or an end. Advocates of altruism invariably emphasize that they regard man as an end, not a means, while the opposite holds for reciprocal morality. Their claim is audacious, but its logic is no less slim. A reciprocalist is accused of treating others as means to his own welfare, and the accusation is not for the crime which it specifies. He does not insist that his neighbor should act as a means for him. He believes that all people are ends in themselves - a principle which is central to individualism, and

fundamental to the morality of integrity and reciprocity.

The altruist analyzes this situation differently. When he says that he sees man as an end, he implies something very different, just as George regained his lust for life when he understood that he had been important to others. The altruist is implying that the end consists of his fellow human beings, or Mankind, whereas the individual man is a means. His message is always that man becomes happy by serving others, not oneself.

Let us therefore stress that reciprocity and the morality of integrity consider an acting individual as an end, and not a means, in stark contrast to altruism. It is odd that this simple, transparent relationship should be the object of so much denial, lying and subterfuge. Since altruists give the impression of being proud of their morality, they ought to stand up for it more stoutly.

The question remains of whether altruism's practical opinion is correct. Does anyone become happy who views himself as a means for others, or for mankind? Certainly we are glad if we manage to do something of value for our friends. We understand that George feels proud when he watches his "If I hadn't been born" scenario. But what sort of feeling is it - altruistic happiness? An alternative would be to interpret it as a reciprocal feeling. When we succeed in helping others, we are glad because we can expect a return service: the cooperation may prove fruitful.

An example, which may illuminate our motives, arises when we make an effort for someone else that does not yield good results. According to altruism, we should be satisfied, since the important point is the sacrifice with a good intention. But according to reciprocity, we have less excuse for contentment, as our effort has been a mistaken investment with no benefit to the recipient. It seems realistic to infer that, emotionally, we function in greater agreement with the reciprocal than with the altruistic hypothesis.

Altruism tries with drunken stubbornness to avoid the sight of causal connections. A good deed must be done without reflection or social awareness. As soon as the giver notices a social reaction, he falls to a lower level, becoming a simple-minded reciprocal individual. In order to pass the test of moral virtue, one has to preserve the goodness by playing dumb. Wise, well-considered, insightful goodness is replaced by a moralistic word - calculation. Pure goodness should hold onto its virginity! As Martin Luther said: "Good deeds make no one a good man, but a good man does good deeds." He is a lonely sower who cannot expect any harvest.

## 5 Summary

Many straightforward questions place altruism in a suspicious light. What makes us suffer most, not being able to return a good service

or not sharing our affluence with anonymous masses? What do we say if our children display totally selfless behavior, such as donating their toys to needy strangers, or encouraging a bully by turning the other cheek? Altruism involves a unilateral relation between a giver and a recipient, and the praise goes to the giver - but what is it like to be a unilateral recipient? How can something which is supposedly so good feel so bad? Altruistic moralizing often tries to impart guilt for the purpose of urging altruism (which, interestingly enough, is to apply an idea of reciprocity); yet in order to avoid the feeling of guilt and the sacrifices it entails, many choose instead to regard themselves as victims, leading to either self-pity or resentment.

The principle of reciprocity is effectiveness, meaning that the profit to the recipient must be greater than the cost to the giver, each party being alternately a giver and a recipient. That reciprocal behavior works in practice is not guaranteed, but demands - among other things - an understanding of the counterpart's needs, so as to increase his advantage and thus the chances of continued cooperation. Altruism works in a diametrically opposite way. Some needy person does have to exist if we are to perform an altruistic act at all, but the aim of altruism is maximum sacrifice, and preferably the sacrifice is greater than the profit to the recipient. This system is rational only from the recipient's point of view; consequently, altruism promotes parasitic behavior. The enormous claims of self-sacrifice lead many people to abstain from reciprocal relationships that would be rewarding: altruism contributes to subegoism, an irrational egoism. If altruism were systematized, everyone, and ultimately even the parasites, would lose.

## Notes Chapter 5

### Private morality - ethical rules and effects

1. Havamal, p. 29.
2. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 443.
3. La Rochefoucauld, *Moral Reflections*, usually called "Maxims". After Preserved Smith, *A History of Modern Culture*, Vol. I, p. 466.
4. Milton, *Paradise Lost*.
5. *Newsweek*, August 26 1991.
6. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 55.
7. Descriptions of man's strong impulse to reciprocate are given, for example, by Brown, *Social Psychology: The Second Edition*, and Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*.
8. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*.
9. This statement has been ascribed to Montesquieu among others.
10. Luther, *Om en kristen människas frihet*. 1520 Weimarupplagan Band 7, p. 32.

