

Altruism In World Religions

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Exploring a range of philosophical and religious thought from Greco-Roman philia to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, from Hinduism in India to Buddhism and the religions of China and Japan, the authors find that altruism becomes problematic when applied to religious studies because it is, in fact, a concept absent from religion. Chapters on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam reveal that followers of these religions cannot genuinely perform self-sacrificing acts because God has promised to ...

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In Altruism in World Religions prominent scholars from an array of religious perspectives probe the definition of altruism to determine whether it is a category that serves to advance the study of religion. Exploring a range of philosophical and religious thought from Greco-Roman philia to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, from Hinduism in ...

Altruism in World Religions

In 1830 philosopher Auguste Comte coined the term altruism to provide a general definition for the act of selflessly caring for others. But does this modern conception of sacrificing one's own interests for the well-being of others apply to the charitable behaviors encouraged by all world religions? In Altruism in World Religions prominent scholars from an array of religious perspectives probe the definition of altruism to determine whether it is a category that serves to advance the study of religion. Exploring a range of philosophical and religious thought from Greco-Roman philia to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, from Hinduism in India to Buddhism and the religions of China and Japan, the authors find that altruism becomes problematic when applied to religious studies because it is, in fact, a concept absent from religion. Chapters on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam reveal that followers of these religions cannot genuinely perform self-sacrificing acts because God has promised to reward every good deed. Moreover, the separation between the self and the other that self-sacrifice necessarily implies, runs counter to Buddhist thought, which makes no such distinction. By challenging our assumptions about the act of self-sacrifice as it relates to religious teachings, the authors have shown altruism to be more of a secular than religious notion. At the same time, their findings highlight how charitable acts operate with the values and structures of the religions studied.

The study of altruism and altruistic behavior has caught the attention of social scientists especially in recent years. What motivates individuals to cultivate attitudes and actions that promote the wellbeing of others at the expense of, or at the risk of negative consequences for their own? In our contemporary global society marked by conflict and violence among different sectors of the population in various regions of the world, and wherein religion can be a factor that exacerbates such conflict and violence, harnessing the power of religion towards directions of reconciliation, creativity, and altruistic action, remains a crucial task for humankind. This volume addresses a question especially relevant in our day: do people who profess religious commitment or affiliation in a particular religious community tend to nurture altruistic kinds of attitude and action more than others? Social scientists present results of their empirical studies on Japanese society, as well as on North American, European, Indian, and Thai societies, to focus on this issue and offer insightful reflections on the relationship between religion and society.

This is the first comprehensive resource on the subject of love in the teachings of the world's major religions, cultures, and philosophies.

David Sloan Wilson, one of the world ' s leading evolutionists, addresses a question that has puzzled philosophers, psychologists, and evolutionary biologists for centuries: Does altruism exist naturally among the Earth ' s creatures? The key to understanding the existence of altruism, Wilson argues, is by understanding the role it plays in the social organization of groups. Groups that function like organisms indubitably exist, and organisms evolved from groups. Evolutionists largely agree on how functionally organized groups evolve, ending decades of controversy, but the resolution casts altruism in a new light: altruism exists but shouldn ' t necessarily occupy center stage in our understanding of social behavior. After laying a general theoretical foundation, Wilson surveys altruism and group-level functional organization in our own species—in religion, in economics, and in the rest of everyday life. He shows that altruism is not categorically good and can have pathological consequences. Finally, he shows how a social theory that goes beyond altruism by focusing on group function can help to improve the human condition in a practical sense. Does Altruism Exist? puts old controversies to rest and will become the center of debate for decades to come.

Altruism in Cross-Cultural Perspective provides such a scholarly overview, examining the intersection of culture and such topics as evolutionary accounts of altruism and the importance of altruism in ritual and religion. The past decade has seen a proliferation of research on altruism, made possible in part by significant funding from organizations such as the John Templeton Foundation. While significant research has been conducted on biological, social, and individual dimensions of altruism, there has been no attempt to provide an overview of the ways that altruistic behavior and attitudes vary across cultures. The book addresses the methodological challenges of researching altruism across cultures, as well as the ways that altruism is manifest in difficult circumstances. A particular strength of the book is its attention to multiple disciplinary approaches to understanding altruism, with contributors from fields including psychology, anthropology, sociology, biology, communication, philosophy, religious studies, gender studies, and bioethics.

While all the worlds' major religions preach the virtues of altruistic, selfless behavior, Tibetans, in particular, make altruism a primary focus of their spiritual practice. Tibetans' unyielding commitment to their unique form of Buddhism has affected Tibetan behavior to the extent that religion can no longer be separated from any other component of their culture. Through the meditation practice of the Lojong, Tibetan Buddhists, who make-up the vast majority of the country's population, have trained their minds to discard their egos and live their lives for the benefit of all sentient beings. This dissertation briefly examines the Lojong meditation practice and how the Buddhist principle of altruism discussed in these simple Eight Verses has influenced the thoughts and actions of the Tibetan people. Using hermeneutics, this dissertation explores how the altruistic philosophy of the Buddha has manifested itself in different components of Tibetan culture including history, economics, environment, medicine, art and politics. Future research could provide additional examples of the influence of Buddhist principles on different aspects of Tibetan culture than those explored in this document, a more comprehensive study of the effect of altruistic religious principles on other cultures and nations, and an examination of other methods of mind training.

In this book, Stephen J. Pope argues that contemporary scientifically-based theories of the evolution of altruism provide important insights into one of the fundamental moral problems of Christian ethics, the natural basis of love and its ordering. He explores the contributions evolutionary theory makes to our understanding of the biological foundations of kin preference and reciprocal care, the limits of love, and the need for an ordering of love—issues relevant to any ethic that accords a central role to the deeply natural affections found in friendship, marriage, and the family. He proposes that understanding human nature in its broader evolutionary context brings to ethics a needed balance between the personal and biological dimensions of human nature. In the context of Catholic ethics, Pope points out functional similarities between Thomas Aquinas's use of then-available scientific theories in his interpretation of the natural basis of primary relationships and Pope's own efforts to avoid the deficiencies that characterize contemporary Catholic interpretations of love based on personalism and existentialism. He concludes with a call for a multidimensional interpretation of love, one that incorporates scientifically-based theories about human nature together with an appreciation of the significance of motives, intentions, and freedom, for the ordering of human affections and moral responsibility. This book will be of interest to moral theologians, especially those concerned with the topics of love, justice, and natural law ethics.

Resisting the tendency to separate the study of religion and politics, editor Jacob Neusner pulls together a collection of ten essays in which various authors explain and explore the relationship between the world's major religions and political power. As William Scott Green writes in the introduction, "Because religion is so comprehensive, it is fundamentally about power; it therefore cannot avoid politics." Beginning with the classical sources and texts of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism and Hinduism, God's Rule begins to explore the complex nature of how each religion shapes political power, and how religion shapes itself in relation to that power. The corresponding attention to differing theories of politics and views towards non-believers are important not only to studies in comparative religion, but to foreign policy, history and governance as well. From early Christianity's relationship to the Roman Empire to Hinduism's relationship to Gandhi and the caste system, God's Rule provides a basis of understanding from which undergraduates, seminarians and others can begin asking questions of relationships "both unavoidable and systematically uneasy."

Separated from its anchorage in religion, ethics has followed the social sciences in seeing human beings as fundamentally characterised by self-interest, so that altruism is either naively idealistic or arrogantly self-sufficient. Colin Grant contends that, as a modern secular concept, altruism is a parody on the self-giving love of Christianity, so that its dismissal represents a social levelling that loses the depths that theology makes intelligible and religion makes possible. The Christian affirmation is that God is characterised by self-giving love (agape), then expected of Christians. Lacking this theological background, the focus on self-interest in sociobiology and economics, and on human realism in the political focus of John Rawls or the feminist sociability of Carol Gilligan, finds altruism naive or a dangerous distraction from real possibilities of mutual support. This book argues that to dispense with altruism is to dispense with God and with the divine transformation of human possibilities.

The author of the international bestseller Happiness makes a passionate case for altruism -- and why we need it now more than ever. In Happiness, Matthieu Ricard demonstrated that true happiness is not tied to fleeting moments or sensations, but is an enduring state of soul rooted in mindfulness and compassion for others. Now he turns his lens from the personal to the global, with a rousing argument that altruism -- genuine concern for the well-being of others -- could be the saving grace of the 21st century. It is, he believes, the vital thread that can answer the main challenges of our time: the economy in the short term, life satisfaction in the mid-term, and environment in the long term. Ricard's message has been taken up by major economists and thinkers, including Dennis Snower, Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, and George Soros. Matthieu Ricard makes a robust and passionate case for cultivating altruistic love and compassion as the best means for simultaneously benefitting ourselves and our society. It's a fresh outlook on an ardent struggle -- and one that just might make the world a better place.

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