

AGAPE - SELFLESS "CHRISTIAN" LOVE

Altruism claims that the most important doctrine is that the human being has no right to exist for their own sake. It says that you should not exist except to help others. Jesus agreed but held that this means that man must live for God and then neighbour. This is a variation of the usual altruistic idea that man must live for neighbour.

Christianity preaches agape - a love for others that gets no payoff biological or otherwise. Agape is the basic principle in the Christian faith - or at least the faith says it is. But if you can help another person, does it mean you must root out any desire for a reward or for feeling good even if that is only 1% of your reasons for acting? Yes! But only by suffering as much as you can for others can make that yes real. There is no other way to know.

The other thing that Christians say that agape is about looking after the weak and even the wicked though there is a risk that this could destroy you. Thus they deny that love is merely about biology about you surviving by looking after friends and family. Evolution causes us to love more than just friends and family. Those who say it shouldn't are forgetting that evolution enables us to survive and live but it is not planned. They seem to think that it intends survival of the most versatile - it does not. It just happens and does not happen perfectly or always as one might expect. A medicine for pain does not necessarily work against all pain. The medicine can help but it does not plan to help. Evolution is not a plan. It just is.

The altruistic doctrine implies that there is no such thing as human rights. Jesus said that altruism towards God matters more than altruism towards your neighbour which actually a harsher and tougher version of altruism that commands you to serve your neighbour at your own loss. God makes bigger demands than any neighbour would. Jesus for example said that God was perfect and asks everybody to be as perfect as him. Also it is easier to sacrifice for a neighbour you do see than a God who may not exist! It was the cleverest move in history when Christianity gave the world a law to keep that it cannot keep to see it torn apart by despair and frustration.

Jesus commanded that we are to love (agapao in the Greek the gospels were originally written in) God with all our hearts and strength and to love (agapao) our neighbour as ourselves. Agapao refers to self-sacrificing and unconditional love. A good translation would be altruistic love. In other words, it is a love that is independent of feeling or affection. For Jesus, you agapao yourself that does not mean you have great self-esteem at all. It means you treat yourself in accordance with what God calls good. You love yourself if you die for God for God commands that you die for him rather than break God's law. There is nothing consoling about this kind of love of self. Agapao was sometimes used to describe non-altruistic forms of love in ancient times but the way Jesus says God must be loved more than yourself certainly proves that he meant altruistic love. The context tells us what he meant by love. Anyway the other meanings of the word were loose and careless and rare so Jesus should be taken to mean altruistic love. The gospels were using the word properly.

Jesus declared that this agapao for God and neighbour was the greatest commandment. So it is more important to have agapao for your wife than eros, erotic love or sexual affection. It is more important to have it than to have the warm liking love (non-sexual affection) that is called philia for your friend or parent or brother or whatever. These other forms of love must be rooted out if they endanger agapao or if they are not based on it and taking their impetus from it.

Agape like altruism in general cares about your motives most of all. It is the kind of thinking that cares about spirituality and not people. It is totally ridiculous to say to a man who fears losing his wife to another, "You should fear the loss of her because it will mean you won't be able to be altruistic to her if she leaves." If that should be the way he should think he would not fear losing her at all!

Psychological egoism is the notion that no individual does anything against what she or he thinks or believes or knows is in his her or best interest. You are an egoist when you help John because you want to and not because he is suffering. If you are 99% concerned about John but cannot act unless the 1% is about you then clearly that concern is really a kind of concern. It is not the real thing.

You are an ethical egoist if you believe you should only help if you make it even in a small way about yourself. This makes egoism about choice not your psychological makeup.

Some religions argue for psychological egoism

God is that which is so good nothing and no one more good can exist. Even religions that say you are perfect in dealing with your fellow human being deny that you are perfect with God. Christians say there are flaws even in the good we do for

God - always. For some secularists and atheists, you are never really unselfish with others. For believers in God you are never ever really unselfish in your dealings with God.

“Lord, the end of another messed-up day. I let you down at every turn. I’ve lived for myself all through” (page 4, Friday Penance, John C Edwards SJ, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1985). The Church says we do good works but only in the eyes of man. A selfish person is pleased when those who are totally self-interested do things that happen to work out for him. He will call them good. Calling people good does not necessarily mean they are being said to be altruistic.

Love and compassion are grey approximations and are not literally true. If you cannot do that well at them then somebody telling you to be loving and compassionate is only causing frustration and setting you up to fail. Religion should not be posing as a paragon of love and offering a God who is an ideal of perfection that makes you feel ineffectual and small. Its cruel. A grey religion should take the blame as a religion when members do evil as long as the members identify with it.

Accordingly, criticisms of the agape love include the observation that nobody really engages in it and so it is idealised in an unattainable way.

The Christian philosophers

Catholic/Christian philosophers know Psychological Egoism, the notion that nobody really does anything that selfless, is true and say so but always go back on it and distract us with other ideas to keep us from dwelling on it. They teach that when you do bad it is principally the good in the bad act that you want and you are only using the bad as a means to the good. And the purpose of it all is happiness. When you die for somebody it is because you are happy to at least under the circumstances. So if you were not happy to die for the person you wouldn’t. It is about you not them at all though the results look as if it is about them. You don’t will the death but some good. You cannot will somebody else’s good and not your own. That would deny the desire for happiness. You cannot be altruistic because you chiefly do the act because you are happy to.

“If evil be done, it is done as leading to good, or as bound up with good, or as itself being good for the doer under the circumstances; no man ever does evil for sheer evil’s sake. Yet evil may be the object of the will, not by itself, nor primarily, but in a secondary way as bound up with the good that is willed in the first place.” (page 3).

“All the human acts of all men are done for the one (subjective) last end just indicated. This end is called happiness” (page 4)

Quotes from Moral Philosophy, Stonyhurst Philosophical Series, Father Joseph Rickaby, SJ, Longmans, Green and Co, London 1912.

A saint

St Martin de Porres chose to be a Dominican lay-brother rather than be ordained for he didn’t feel worthy of the priesthood. Altruists applaud this. Indeed a true altruist would have to turn down benefits and privileges to let others have them instead. So a man thinking he is not as good as other people and who approves of worse than him going for ordination is to be applauded? His lack of self-love is applauded. If he thought he wasn’t worthy and shouldn’t be ordained then how could he sincerely have thought that other men were right to go forth for ordination? Others would say that Martin turned down the priesthood and the power to bring others to salvation so he wasn’t an altruist. Do you see how nobody agrees on what counts as altruistic behaviour? It’s all guessing.

The fakes

Many good people feel good about doing good and do good to remind themselves of their own dignity. They are thus not as selfless as they act. Actions speak louder than words but not when it comes to determining if somebody who seems selfless really is selfless. It is easier to believe that a person acting selfish is selfish. And it is selfish of do-gooders to appear to be saints - and the more saintly they seem to be the more selfish they are.

Good people don't like to dirty their own hands for they have a high view of their own moral dignity. But they like to hurt vicariously. They like to see others hurt their enemies. They may condemn it but they actually love it.

You cannot know if the man who got drowned trying to save a stranger's child was an altruist. The risk he took does not prove it. Perhaps in the heat of the moment he had no time to realise the risk he was taking. Perhaps dying as a hero was his way of committing suicide. If you put an altruistic interpretation on him, that may be altruistic of you but has nothing to do with showing he was one. And you are broadcasting your own altruism so how real is it then? I'd doubt it is real!

When belief in the altruism of people you really just an assumption or guess rather than a belief, you cannot argue, "I believe in the goodness of God despite the horrendous suffering in the world for I see God in those who look after them."

Such belief is arrogance for it is claiming you know that there is evidence when you cannot.

Why can't agape be just human not religious?

If agape is a good thing in principle then to call it Christian love ruins it. Love is love and should not be defined by a religion. Agape is human love not Christian love as if Christians alone were capable of it or as if it belonged to a religion that may be man-made. If the religion is man-made agape belongs to humankind not to it. The right of a religion to claim it would depend on its evidence that it belongs to it and not just to human nature. But there is no evidence and it is defeated by the fact that every religious culture or non-religious ones has its heroes and heroines who seem to put others first. They are not many but no religion or non-religion has more than another.

Jesus claimed that he would give his life for us. It didn't have to be so terrible for him for he could have done this without the extreme agony of the cross. He could have saved us by dying in his bed or by being decapitated. He claimed that he loved others more than himself. (By the way that would prove that he was not God – for God owes himself all his love being the infinitely perfect being. If Jesus loved others for the sake of God then he did not really love others more than himself.) He went against God and apostatised from the Jewish and Christian faith that said the neighbour was to be loved as yourself.

Now God does not need our love. He is God and so he must have all he needs for he is all-perfect and all-powerful. Yet religion says that God expects to be put first and get most if not all our love. If this is not hardcore altruism then what is? God implies that altruism as in degradation of the self for the pleasing of another, especially God, is the divine law. It tells us to be altruists where God is concerned. If we are to be like that with God then we are to be like that with other people too if possible. Religion says we are to behave altruistically towards others for God's sake. It doesn't mean this at all for it teaches that the love of God should be our sole motive for helping others. To love others for God's benefit is not loving them at all though they may benefit.

Love of neighbour

The Jesus command to love your neighbour as yourself is no help in guiding you. Say you have to decide for example if you should give a kidney to save your brother. When it is not your duty to give the kidney, you are loving your neighbour as yourself if you don't. When you do give you are still loving your neighbour. Jesus made a law of the rule. That is like making a law of the rule, "Morals are hard to figure out". It's stupid.

If I need my medicine and have only have enough for myself left and my neighbour needs it, it tells me only to give it to my neighbour if he needs it more. But if he and I have the same need I may use it myself or give it to him – it is up to me. But if my neighbour is a better person than I am or if his health is more important than mine for he has a family I should give him the medicine and do without. The Bible God commands that I must think of everybody else as better than me (Philippians 2:3, Matthew 15:21-28) and myself as the worst of sinners (Ephesians 3:8/1 Timothy 1:15). In other words, you must abandon your rights. You must wish you could endure the worst fate possible if it could save others (Romans 9:1-4).

When a little girl broke her finger and was in agony and the little sister tells their father, "Daddy, I wish it was my finger", everybody in the love myself and others brigade commends this. But this is loving another more than yourself not as yourself and yet it is not love for if the sister really loves you she would be offended by you saying that.

The doctrine of loving your neighbour as yourself implies that if you are interacting with another person you must love him with half the love in you for that time keeping the other half for yourself. Even if it does not necessarily imply that people want it to and act as if it does. So they are not the great agape people they say they are.

Say they are right that it is half me and the rest for everybody else. What do you do if you are interacting with several people? Do you keep half the love for yourself and give everybody an equal portion from the half that is left? That is loving yourself more than each individual neighbour so it breaks the rule. It means your life is equal in importance to a hundred neighbours. You can toss a coin.

You and 10 people is 11. If you work with ten people you have to divide your love among them and yourself equally so that each gets 1/11th of the love. You would have to change your feelings all the time depending on how many people you are dealing with so the philosophy implies hardcore altruism for it will only be a matter of time before this behaviour results in depression.

Those who say you should love your neighbour as yourself contradict themselves by commanding you to help ingrates who will give you nothing but abuse and who will slander and backstab you in return. That is really loving the other person and not yourself. It's altruism.

Many of the love others as yourself theorists say the more you love somebody emotionally and in the will the better. But this strong love is a tremendous source of suffering and fear and pain. Love is pain for love is desire and Buddha was right to see desire as pain. Even when you are laughing it brings you the pain of knowing you cannot change reality and make yourself laugh happily forever. If love is pain, then the more love and pain the better. Thus love can only be altruism. To love yourself emotionally is to hurt yourself and if you should hurt yourself you should practice altruism with all its blood and tears. If you treat yourself right without feeling anything you avoid this.

The agape doctrine is empty sweetness to get you into the Christian rattrap and to get you slammed as evil if you refuse. Agape is not what it is made out to be.