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ALTRUISM AND THE PROMOTION OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING: A CROSS-CULTURAL EXPLORATION

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This work is dedicated to,

A Vegetable Seller in Taiwan,



Ms. Chen Shu-chu's daily routine consists of getting up at 2:30a.m. to purchase vegetables from a wholesale market, opening her business between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m., and closing up shop at around 9 p.m. She works hard and lives frugally for the last 40 years only to help schools, orphanages, libraries, and charitable causes.

Forbes magazine named her one of the 48 outstanding philanthropists from the Asia-Pacific region in 2010, as the first of many awards that followed. She keeps going.....

"I do not place great importance on money. When I care and help others, I feel at peace and happy, and I can sleep well at night."

A Librarian in Tamilnadu, India,

Mr. Kalayanasundaram worked as a Librarian for 30 years. Every month in his 30-year service, he donated his entire salary to help the needy. He did other odd jobs to meet his needs. He donated even his entire pension to the needy. He must be the first person in the world to spend the entire earnings for a social cause.



American government has honored him with the 'Man of the Millennium' award with the cash award of 300 million Indian rupees, which he distributed wholly to the needy as usual. He continues to dedicate his life for the society.....

"We cannot sustain ourselves, unless we contribute to the society in some way or the other. I strongly feel if even one person does his bit towards social good, there will be some change."

And to,

the many unknown individuals, who try to make a better world
by going beyond themselves.....

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ABSTRACT

Altruism has been widely explored throughout history within the humanities. However, scientific explorations of altruism emerged prominently from evolutionary biology and social psychology. Recently, positive psychology gave impetus to altruism studies, adopting the specific perspective of well-being promotion. In particular, the theoretical framework of eudaimonia, founded on Aristotle's conceptualization of well-being as the pursuit of one's *diamon* (true nature or spirit unique to each person), highlighted the potential of altruism for fostering individual and community well-being. Its emphasis on the essential role of individual's contribution to society in the process of realizing one's *diamon* has led to an explosion of altruism investigations.

However, due to the theoretical contention and confusion that hover altruism concept, most studies have explored it as a behavior, missing to tap its full meaning and potential. Delving into the philosophical and epistemological reasons of the altruism debate/confusion, this work proposes that altruism and its potentials for human well-being can be optimized if it is explored from a value-based and psychological perspective, including multiple dimensions and features.

Moving from these premises, this study aimed at a cross-cultural exploration of lay people's definition and operationalization of altruism, as well as its role in promoting individual and community well-being. To this purpose, Altruism Questionnaire (AQ) was developed and administered to 432 adult participants (50% women), aged 30-60, living in India (N=216) and Italy (N=216) with secondary level education (50%) or graduation/post-graduation (50%). AQ comprises both open-ended and scaled questions, thus allowing for a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative) in data analysis. Participants were also administered other instruments with the aim of assessing the relationship of altruism with well-being dimensions: Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), that refers to the eudaimonic component of perceived meaning; Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), that evaluate the so-called hedonic components of wellbeing (positive affect and perceived achievements); finally, the Eudaimonic and Hedonic Happiness Investigation (EHHI), that explores both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, through the assessment of meaningfulness and happiness in various life domains.

Using the theoretical frameworks of bottom-up approach and grounded theory, qualitative data were coded and grouped into categories. Cross-cultural comparisons were performed through frequency analysis, Fisher's exact test, Chi square and Cell Chi-square analyses. As per the quantitative measures, group comparisons were carried out through T-tests. Subsequently, participants were divided into three groups based on their Perceived Level of Altruism (PLA), a scaled question included in AQ. The relation of PLA to well-being variables were checked using ANOVA, Tukey's post-hoc analysis, correlation coefficient and regression analysis. The joint evaluation of qualitative and quantitative results served as counter-checks, at the same time allowing for a more articulated interpretation of results.

Findings showed that in both cultures altruism was prominently perceived as a value, a psychological dimension, and a characteristic of interpersonal relationships, while the behavioral aspects accounted for only 20% of the answers. Cultural differences were prominently evident in the conceptualization and operationalization of altruism. Regression analysis showed that PLA predicted meaning in life and positive emotions, while it was not correlated to Satisfaction with life when controlling for presence of meaning and positive affect. PLA predicted meaningfulness and happiness in life domains that were characterized by eudaimonic or relational features, rather than in hedonic or individual focused ones.

Results suggest that altruism must be conceptualized and explored from a value-based perspective, taking into account the cultural variants, in order to optimize its potentials. Overall, altruism promotes a flourishing life that integrates and balances both Self (individual) and Other (community), hedonia (happy life) and eudaimonia (meaningful life), and that is filled with enriching inter-personal connections. Findings suggest a new approach to the conceptualization of altruism, and to the development of intervention strategies that promote altruism both at individual and community levels.

Key words: Altruism, well-being, positive psychology, culture, mixed-method approach

*“Only small men discriminate
saying:
One is a relative;
the other is a stranger.*

*For those who live magnanimously
the entire world constitutes
but a family.”*

Maha Upanishad 6.71-73

*“The fundamental delusion of
humanity is to suppose that
I am here
and you are out there.”*

*Yasutani Roshi,
Zen master (1885-1973)*

CHAPTER 1

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PURSUIT OF WELL-BEING

1.1. The Birth of Positive Psychology

In the beginning of the 21st century, positive psychology emerged as a movement highlighting the need “to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology” from human limitations, deficits and pathologies to human potentialities, resources and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5), propelling into action a long felt need. Since the days of Freud, psychological science had generally focused on all that ails the human mind (Benjamin, 1992; Koch & Leary, 1985; Maddux, 2002). Many researchers, however, unhappy with the disease model rooted in an illness ideology, turned to existentialism and phenomenology for a more comprehensive understanding of human development and existence (Misiak & Sexton, 1966). As a result, humanistic psychology, often known as the “third force” along with psychoanalysis and behaviourism, formally began in the 1950s (Bugental, 1964; Moss, 2001). It advocated that the central concern of psychology should include positive phenomena like love, courage, creativity, hope, happiness and self-actualization (Greening, 2006; Rathunde, 2001). In fact, the study of optimal functioning through subjective experience was proposed as early as 1906 by William James, in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association (Rathunde, 2001). Various humanistic psychologists like Jung (1933), Allport (1961), Rogers (1963), and Maslow (1971), to name a few, carried forward this call. The works of Abraham Maslow, in particular, is significant in the history of the positive psychology movement. Maslow wrote:

The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side; it has revealed to us much about man’s shortcomings, his illnesses, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology had voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that of the darker, meaner half (1954, p. 354).

Inviting psychology to focus on healthy and creative individuals in their potentials (Moss, 2001), Maslow even proposed the term “positive psychology” in his book *Motivation and Personality* (1954), through the title of the last chapter, “Toward a Positive Psychology.” Almost half a

century later, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi reclaimed the humanistic call to human wellness (Seligman, 1998, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and officially launched the positive psychology movement.

1.2. Characteristics of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is not a new school. It is a “novel approach to studying human behaviour, encompassing all areas of psychological investigation rather than a school or a paradigm” (Delle Fave, Massimini & Bassi, 2011, p.3). It explores the positive, generative, and potential aspect of individuals and groups. The growing interest of researchers and professionals in these topics resulted in a phenomenal growth and popularity in just a decade. A Psycho info search of the term ‘positive psychology’ brought 107,532 citations and a Google search yielded about 61,000,000 results (October, 10, 2012).

A salient aim of positive psychology is to catalyze a change of focus in psychology from illness to wellness. This highlights a crucial imbalance in psychology, as there are abounding models and empirical evidence on what goes wrong in individuals, while it is harder to locate corresponding works on human strengths and resources (Gabel & Haidt, 2005; Maddux, 2002). In order to counter balance the excess of attention laid on mental illness, the new movement focuses on exploring conditions and processes that contribute to the optimal functioning of individuals, groups and institutions (Gabel & Haidt, 2005; Keyes & Lopez, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As Sheldon and King (2001) state, “positive psychology came to be as nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues” (p.216). Positive features are explored not for reason of finding buffers against problems but for their relevance in themselves. However, it is not an “all is well” utopian perspective denying the negative aspects of life and the importance of studying them. In short, it can be referred as a science of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2011) that focuses on optimizing positive experiences, enhancing the development of individual positive traits and promoting positive social institutions - three pillars of positive psychology. The notable major aspect that distinguishes it from humanistic psychology consists in the methodological approach. The humanists prominently opt for qualitative methods to assess the “whole man”, while positive psychologists tend to use more rigorous, quantitative and reductionist methods (Froh, 2004).

1.3. The Pursuit of Well-being - Two Traditions

The pursuit of well-being is a core concept in the balancing mission of positive psychology. Overcoming the narrow definition of well-being as absence of illness, the causes, consequences, dynamics, and dimensions of well-being are investigated in both individuals and groups. In general, well-being explorations within positive psychology emerge from two different perspectives: the hedonic perspective and the eudaimonic one, both rooted in ancient Greek philosophy (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Notwithstanding the misunderstanding of Epicure's theory of *ataraxia*, which means freedom from worries or anxieties (cf. Delle Fave et al., 2011 for a detailed clarification), the Epicurean concept of hedonia is understood as the identification of happiness with pleasure, comfort, and enjoyment. The hedonic perspective considers happiness as a *state* that depends on the presence of positive emotions and the absence of negative emotions, and defines it as subjective well-being (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan & King, 2009; Diener, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 2000; Kahneman, Diener & Schwartz, 1999). Subjective well-being refers to what people think (Cognitive component) and feel about their lives (Affective component) (Schwartz & Strack, 1999; Diener & Lucas, 2000). In short, good-life is a pleasant life. The majority of researchers within positive psychology consider maximizing happiness, both at the affective and cognitive levels, to be the highest human goal (Kahneman et al., 1999).

In contrast, eudaimonia draws inspiration from the Aristotelian concept of *daimon* (true nature or a kind of spirit given to all persons at birth). The eudaimonic perspective refers happiness to the human ability to pursue complex goals that are meaningful to the individual and the society. Echoing closely the two Greek imperatives: “know thyself” and “become what you are”, in the Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle claimed that the highest good of life is to follow one's daimon. This means to engage in meaningful living and to cultivate self-truth and self-responsibility (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 1993). In short, good life is a meaningful one rather than just a pleasant one. Several theories and models have been built on the eudaimonic conception of happiness: personal expressiveness (Waterman, 1993), psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989a), social well-being (Keyes, 1998), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000), psychological selection and optimal experience (Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000), meaning detection and

construction (Baumeister, 1991; Emmons, 1986; Steger et al., 2006) and the classification on Character Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), to name a few.

The major difference between these two perspectives lies in the definition of well-being. In the hedonic perspectives happiness is a *state* characterized by positive feeling and personal satisfaction (Kahneman et al., 1999). In contrast, in the eudaimonic perspective happiness is considered as a *process* characterized by the development of resources and potentials, aimed at achieving optimal functioning and an integral fulfillment (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009). Further, while hedonia equates well-being to happiness, eudaimonia considers it to be distinct from happiness per se. Well-being, referring to optimal psychological functioning and experience, is a wider concept (Ryff & Singer, 2008), as there are some desires which produce pleasure but do not necessarily promote wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Given these differences, a lively debate is going on among researchers. It is claimed that eudaimonic perspective can easily be incorporated into the hedonic one, as its major outcome consists in SWB (Kashdan, Diener & King, 2008, Diener, Sapyta & Suh, 1998). Further, it is claimed that the possibility to get rigorous quantitative assessments of hedonic variables such as positive emotions (e.g., their frequency or intensity) makes them more relevant to positive psychology as a science of well-being (Kashdan, Diener, & King, 2008). On the other hand, the hedonic perspective is criticized as endorsing a narrow interpretation of well-being, due to its reductionist attempt (Ryan, Huta, Deci, 2008) and being a fallible indicator of healthy living (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Most researchers consider hedonia and eudaimonia as distinct perspectives, which are complementary rather than contradictory (Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick & Wissing, 2011; Gallagher, Lopez & Preacher, 2009; Keyes, 2007; Linley, Maltby, Wood, Osborne & Hurling, 2009). In fact, this debate has promoted a plethora of different but interrelated studies on the causes, consequences, and dynamics of well-being. Nevertheless, the concept of well-being still remains “controversial and unresolved” (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 159).

1.4. Individual and Collective Well-being

Well-being is indeed a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses individual, social and cultural components (Christopher, 1999; Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000). During the last four decades, cultural psychology and bio-cultural theories have highlighted the role of

culture in shaping human behaviour and experience (Berry et al., 1997; Cohen & Kitayama, 2007; Jablonka & Lamb, 2005). The investigation of different meanings of happiness and well-being across cultures challenges a homogenized and westernized concept of well-being (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Delle Fave et al., 2010; Delle Fave et al., 2011). Cultural influences on well-being variables has called for varied and multiple perspectives of well-being (Delle Fave et al., 2010). In particular, cross-cultural constructs developed to explain the social psychological patterns of culture (Hofstede, 1980), have raised questions on the inter-subjective dimensions of well-being. Is well-being individual based or/and community based? In other words, are there dynamics between individual and community well-being? Even though the debate around the definition of well-being addresses this question to a certain degree, it remains largely unexplored. Models and empirical evidences currently available within positive psychology can be grouped in two general approaches: i) separate dimensions and ii) inter-connected dimensions.

1.4.1. Separate Dimensions

Research grounded into the hedonic perspective generally considers that individual and community well-being are distinct and independent, without denying their possible interplay (figure 1.1). According to these theories, even though contexts and life circumstances can

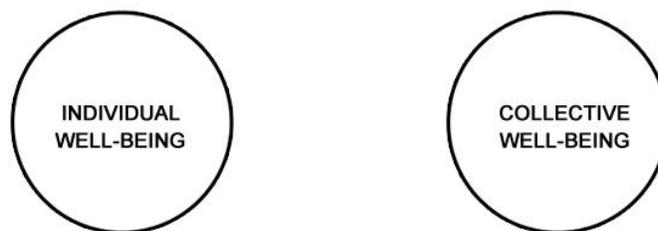


Figure 1.1. Separate dimensions

influence subjective WB, they account for just a small portion of its variance as humans can exercise high level of personal control over the external situations (Diener, 2000; Diener et al., 2003). Within this perspective, positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits and

positive societies and institutions can be developed independently. Overall, the majority positive of psychology studies concentrate on individual well-being (Wright, 2003).

Given the emphasis on subjective well-being, researchers within this approach focus on individual well-being, and on the conditions that allow for maximizing positive emotions and life evaluations (Kahneman, Diener, Schwartz, 1999). Within this perspective, group well-being is defined as the sum of positive functioning individuals. A community is positive and thriving if the majority of its members score high in SWB (Kashdan, Diener & King, 2008, Diener, Sapyta & Suh, 1998). Popular attempts to measure happy countries use such perspective of greater sum of happy individuals. Consequently, suggestions for policy makers to enhance global well-being rely on strategies to increase positively functioning individuals.

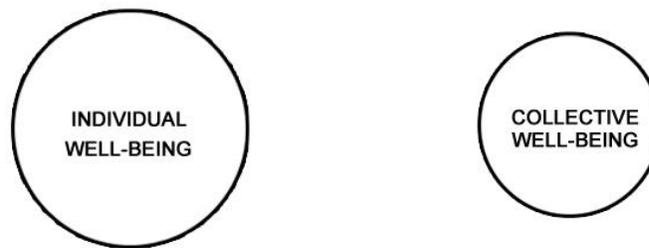


Figure 1.2. Individual centered, separate dimensions

As shown through the bigger circle for individual well-being in figure 1.2., this approach not only holds individual well-being as the focal research target but also considers it as the measuring rod of collective well-being. Distinct and independent individual well-being supersedes and is the road for collective well-being.

1.4.2. Inter-connected Dimensions

In contrast to the hedonic perspectives, eudaimonia highlights that well-being takes place in relation. Well-being is inter-personal and profoundly influenced by the surrounding (Ryff & Singer, 2008). According to Aristotle, an individual is not a self-sufficient entity and a person who acts egoistically is making the fundamental error to exclude social relationships and consequently good life (Jórgensen & Nafstad, 2004). Within the eudaimonic approach, a

considerable amount of works explored individual well-being in the context of relatedness. As shown in figure 1.3., individual and community well-being are perceived as distinct but dependent upon each other. However, three research orientations can be identified, based on the different definition of relatedness and its connection with well-being.

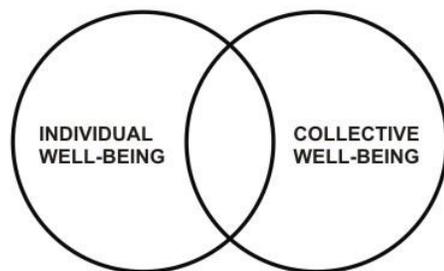


Figure1. 3. Inter-connected dimensions

The first orientation can be symbolized with the sentence: *“other people matter”*. Argyle (1987) and Myers (1999) claim that relatedness is one of the prominent factors that influence happiness. Consistently, loneliness is negatively related to positive affect and life satisfaction (Lee & Ishii-Kuntz, 1987). From the perspectives of attachment and intimacy, studies underscore that inter and intra differences in relatedness influence well-being (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1966; Le Guardia, Ryan, Couchman & Deci, 2000). In reviewing a number of studies, Nezlek (2000) claims that the quality of relationships predicts well-being better than the quantity of relationships. Highlighting the role of relatedness to individual well-being, these studies underscore the inter-dependent nature of well-being. However, they hold relatedness as antecedent and means for individual well-being. The slogan, “other people matter”, for example, tends to stop with the recognition that others exist and are important for individual well-being. It ends to be a mono-directional view, focusing on the individual well-being while largely ignoring how an individual matters to other people’s well-being. Interestingly, one of the meanings of the word ‘matter’ is ‘something that occupies space and can be perceived by one or more senses’. This sentence, “other people matter” symbolically represents a reminder to someone who has failed to perceive the presence of the others.

The second orientation, instead, considers relatedness as an integral dimension of well-being rather than its antecedent. This orientation can be symbolized with the sentence, “*other people are part*”. It holds that individual well-being is incomplete without the others. Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being model (PWB), for example, considers relatedness as a defining dimension of individual well-being. PWB cannot be achieved in the absence of positive relations with others, as this is a central feature of a positive and well-lived life (Ryff & Singer, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In a similar vein, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) considers relatedness as a substantial need to be fulfilled in order to attain individual well-being. It goes a step further than PWB to claim relatedness as one of the basic human needs, without which self-determination and well-being cannot be achieved (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim & Kaplan, 2003; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In comparison to the first orientation, the second one optimizes the Aristotelian vision of good life that unfolds in relatedness and not in isolation. However, both PWB and SDT focus on well-being of an individual subject. They hold the individual to be both the point of departure and the point of arrival. The net result consists in a well-articulated perspective on the well-being of individuals who are in relation with others. Although in SDT “to experience caring for others” is one of the aspects of relatedness, along with interaction and being in connection to others (Ryan, 1995), the collective well-being remains a marginal concern. The importance of community for individual well-being is explored but not vice versa. According to Aristotle, fulfillment of one’s true nature includes both self-actualization and commitment to socially shared goals, referring to *belonging* and *benefiting others* (Waterman, 1993). Both PWB and SDT revitalize the first part of Aristotle’s good life (belonging) while tend to underestimate the second part (benefiting others). In general, these models and theories of individual well-being eclipse the collective well-being, missing one of the salient features of eudaimonic well-being.

The third orientation can be symbolized with the sentence, “*each one is part*”, given its emphasis that it is not only that “other people matter” and “other people are part” but also that an “individual matters to others” and “an individual is part” of collective well-being. The good life or the pursuit of daimon, for Aristotle, necessarily comprises one’s own contribution to the community life (Keyes, 1998, 2007). Given the importance Aristotle attributed to social

commitment and contribution, it is plausible to claim that eudaimonia endorses a substantially inter-subjective perspective, where individual and community well-being exist as distinct but inter-connected entities. The concept of inter-subjectivity emphasizes our inherently social nature, in contrast to the solipsistic individual perspective, and is neither purely subjective nor completely objective (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). As depicted in figure 1.3., an inter-subjective perspective of well-being underscores that both individual and collective well-being depend upon each other. One cannot be complete without the other.

The concept of Social Well-Being, proposed by Keyes (2002, 2007), articulates succinctly the inter-subjective nuance of eudaimonic well-being and can be claimed as the prominent face of third orientation. Keyes claims that individual well-being remains incomplete without social well-being in its five dimensions: social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization, and social acceptance (Keyes, 1998). An inter-subjective well-being perspective is the salient characteristic of Keyes' model of mental health. In contrast to a narrow definition of mental health as absence of mental illness, he defines it as flourishing. The term refers to an optimal condition of human functioning, characterized by high levels of both personal (SWB+PWB) and social well-being (Keyes, 2002). On the contrary, languishing is a condition devoid of illness as well as wellness, often characterized by lack of purpose, meaning and social contribution. The concept of flourishing with its social dimensions in particular by far remains the most popular concept of "each one is part".

1.5. Towards an Inter-connected Perspective of Well-being

The assumption that individual and collective well-being are separate dimensions prevents from achieving a comprehensive definition of the full life. Perspectives that consider them as inter-connected but tend to eclipse the collective well-being with individual well-being also are incomplete. Using a metaphor, these approaches deal with the well-being of a fish outside the context of water. It is plausible to claim that interconnectedness and inter-dependency is to humans as water to the fish. Evidences from cultural evolution theories confirm such a claim. According to Baumeister (2005) humans are designed by nature for community, since culture alone could not sustain for long what is not natural to humans. Bounded rationality, for example, makes it impossible for humans to live alone (Simon, 2001). Human newborns are more

vulnerable and dependent than any other creature. It seems impossible to construct even a virtual situation where a person can manage to survive without being helped. Humans could not have achieved the current level of social development and cultural evolution without depending upon each other. Contrary to the extensive emphasis on self-preservation, the need to belong takes precedence over in many circumstances. “Belongingness can be almost as compelling need as food” (Baumeister & Leary 1995, p.498). Individuals are ready to sacrifice even the self-preservation need in order to fulfill the need to belong, evolutionarily grounded together with survival and reproduction benefits (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Sedikides et al., 2006). Jean-Paul Sartre put emphasis on human freedom stating “Man is condemned to be free”. In a similar tone, it is plausible to state “Humans are condemned to be connected”. Quantum physics, considered the cutting edge of Western science, supports the assumption of interconnectedness with scientific evidences (Capra, 1999; Jones, 1986; Talbot, 1993). In exploring probabilities of existence and energy states, it highlights that everything in the universe is fundamentally interconnected and interdependent (Alistair, 1988; Feynman et al., 1965). One of the most popular examples is the Butterfly Effect, referring to the sensitive dependence on initial conditions, so that the little energy arising from a butterfly’s wings can affect the weather conditions of other planets.

Given the evidences on the inter-connected and inter-dependent nature of human existence, it remains important to adopt an inter-dependent perspective in the studies of well-being, as “good life is inherently a social one” (Peterson, Park & Sweeney, 2008, p. 20). Surprisingly, an inter-dependent perspective of well-being is scarcely found within positive psychology. Cross-cultural perspectives that proposed a double-sided nature of well-being - individual and collective - are still in a nascent stage. Massimini and Delle Fave (2000) offered a theoretical foundation of the inter-dependent perspective of well-being, highlighting the importance of the *context and its interplay in individual well-being*. Although their work is noted as “an ambitious theoretical framework offering a visionary call for *individual development in harmony with global evolution*” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, P. 9. Italics added), very few works have paid attention to it in the course of all these years. The inter-subjective nuance of eudaimonic well-being has not gained momentum within positive psychology as that of positive individual experiences and individual positive traits. Positive psychology manifests an obsession with

individual well-being. Consequently, the third pillar of positive psychology, positive groups and institutions, remains “a weak link” (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Peterson, Park & Sweeney, 2008, p. 20). It is proposed that the first step towards the systematic development of an inter-dependent perspective of well-being consists in investigating the reasons for such a gross neglect of the same. Is the malnutrition of the third pillar an oversight? Is the lack of attention to the role of social commitment and contribution an oversight? A careful evaluation points to a binary epistemological paradigm of the West and the historical reason of negative anthropology that guided psychology.

1.5.1. Problem of a Binary Epistemology

Positive psychology developed and continues to thrive within the binary epistemology of the Western culture. By definition, the binary system is an epistemological methodology by which, in language and thought, two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another, often within a value hierarchy that identifies one of them as “positive” and the other one as “negative” (Smith, 1996). It operates on a methodology of “discontinuity rather than continuity” (Goody, 1977, p.81), as one cannot conceive of 'good' if one does not understand 'evil' (Smith, 1996). Since pairs of opposites make sense only in their discontinuity and clear-cut boundaries, the binary system sets any pair of related terms or concepts in reciprocal opposition, such as presence/absence, male/female, and life/death. Such epistemological system has been dominant within Western culture, language, and philosophy, where organization and structure are fundamental (Sausser, 1916; Derrida, 1978). The Cartesian and Newtonian worldview, considering everything - from the human body to the universe - as a machine composed of separate interacting material particles, is a vivid example of this perspective (Burt, 1952; Butterfield, 1997). Within a binary conceptualization of world, self and other are dichotomized and contradictory entities, as shown in figure 1.4. (Sausser, 1916; Derrida, 1978).

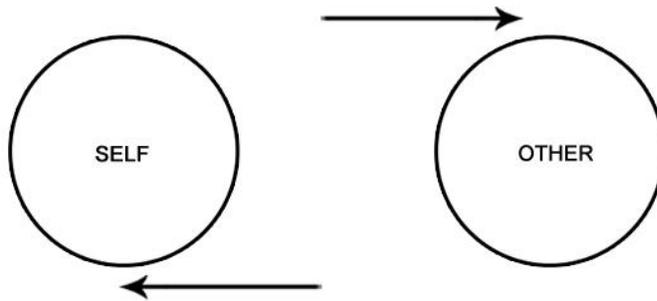


Figure 1.4. Dichotomized and Polarized Self/Other

Descartes is one of the most influential Western scholars supporting such distinction of self and other as two entirely separate and polarized entities (Rozemond, 1998). Due to its foundation on the Western binary epistemology, positive psychology prominently proposes individual and collective well-being as dichotomized and polarized entities. Moreover, it has prominently focused on one of these two poles by virtue of the historical context of a negative anthropology that guided psychology throughout its development.

1.5.2. Problem of a Seesaw Methodology

The second issue refers to the seesaw dynamics of Western anthropology and the role of binary system in the same. Binary oppositions are essentially value-laden, often as "positive" and "negative" poles, with an illusory order, where one of the two terms governs the other (Goody, 1977). Within the white/ black binary opposition, for example, the black is often less valuable and even negative (Derrida, 1978). In such a hierarchical structure one pole is above/high against the other that is below/low. Within the binary view of self/other, the self is often considered negative and less valuable within the classical Western thought (Fig. 1.5). A negative anthropology spearheaded by thinkers like Augustine, Luther and Calvin reinforced devaluation of the individual self, considered as morally inferior, evil, weak and naturally drawn to close on himself/herself (Fromm, 1947).

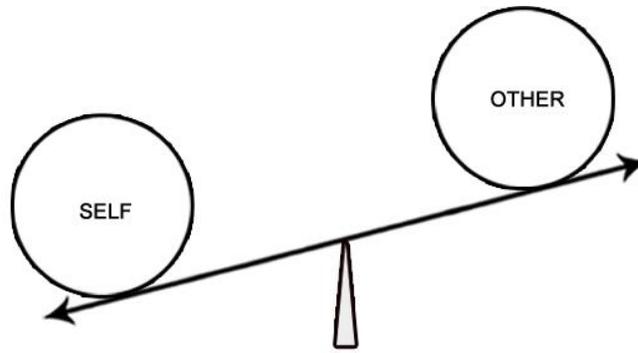


Figure 1.5. Self at the lower end of the Seesaw

Such perspective of individual as egoistic and instinctual had been popular within Western psychology until the middle of the 20th century (Fiske, 1992). Anthropologist Fiske claims that the predominant approach within psychology and sociology is the axiomatic postulate of human beings as asocial and egoistic individuals, often marked by the term ‘psychological egoism’. He wrote,

From Freud to contemporary socio-biologists, from Skinner to social cognitionists, from Goffman to game theorists, the prevailing assumption in Western psychology has been that humans are by nature asocial individualists. Psychologists (and most other social scientists) usually explain social relationships as instrumental means to extrinsic, nonsocial ends, or as constraints on the satisfaction of individual desires (1992, p. 689).

Such a negative anthropology stood in stark contrast to the foundational claims and goals of positive psychology, which emerged primarily to challenge the obsession of psychology on the negative. In continuity with the efforts of Renaissance and Enlightenment, positive psychology assumed the mission of reclaiming and protecting the good, moral, and social core of human persons. In line with the Aristotelian perspective of individuals as virtuous creatures, Seligman claimed that human beings are fundamentally social and moral (Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology has succeeded, without doubt, in revitalizing the Aristotelian idea of positive individual with its phenomenal works on positive subjective experience and positive individual traits (Jórgensen & Nafstad, 2004). The idiographic perspective that the uniquely subjective experiences are the basis of human action (Allport, 1954) was not only restored but also popularized. Positive psychology stretched the *P* component in Lewin’s classic formula to levels

that no other contemporary approaches reached¹. Reclaiming the virtuous individual as well as making him/her the *touchstone* represented the perfect product of a movement that emerged within a predominantly individual oriented cultural context (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). However, it did not solve the problem but only changed it. Given the value hierarchy, any reclaiming effort within a binary system is necessarily a process of swinging the seesaw. Positive psychology succeeded in swinging the individual to the upper end of the seesaw (fig1.6.), sometimes however ending up in an undue emphasis on individual well-being.

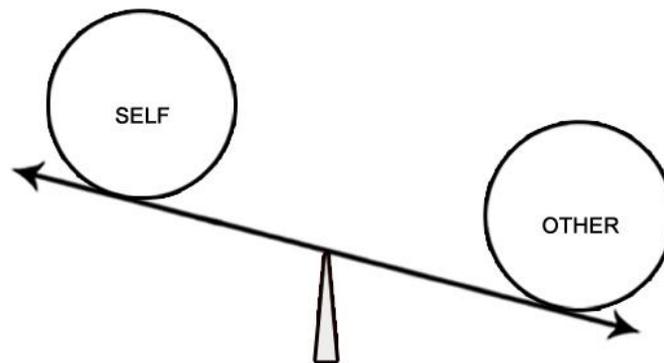


Figure 1.6. Self at the higher end of the Seesaw

Not surprisingly, within such an epistemological and historical context collective well-being and the eudaimonic inter-dependent perspective receive scarce attention. Aristotle's claim that social commitment and contribution are necessary features of a full-fledged human being remains difficult to grasp and comprehend. Why should following one's daimon involve commitment to socially shared goals and contribution to others? Why should one's pursuit of hedonic or eudaimonic outcomes be congruent with or help the seven billion others who aspire for the same? Would it not be a better strategy to increase individual well-being in order to achieve collective well-being? Notwithstanding the evidences from bio-cultural-evolution theories, Western tradition lacks convincing answers to the above questions. The dichotomized, polarized and seesaw view stemming from the binary system consists by nature in imbalance. Positive psychology, in fact, falls short of theoretical foundations that can justify and elucidate eudaimonic perspectives of 'an individual development in harmony with the global evolution'

¹. Kurt Lewin's (1935) field theory presents a schematic model of human behaviour (B) as a function (f) of both the person (P) and the environment(E). $B = f(P, E)$.

(Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000), unless a broader view taking into account other cultural systems is endorsed. Here, it is proposed that the Indian concept of Ṛta may better elucidate the eudaimonic inter-connected perspective of well-being.

1.6. *Ṛta* and Eudaimonia

In the Indian vision of *Rg Veda*, the universe is conceived as an ordered whole in which each part inheres the whole and the whole is balanced by the parts (Eliot, 1988; James, 1969;). This worldview is synthesized in the concept of *Ṛta*. Often mistaken for a ritual law or conflated with *Dharma*, *Ṛta* in Sanskrit means “that which is properly joined”, order, rule, truth, and the principle of natural order that regulates and coordinates the activities of the universe and of its components (Mahony, 1998). It refers to the cosmic order that knits together everything, from galaxies to atomic subparticles, influencing their nature and course. It is the supreme and ultimate foundation of everything, so that even Gods are part of it (Brown, 1992). In line with *Ṛta*, Einstein stated “Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect, as well as for the star. Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper” (Einstein, 1929). The concept of *Ṛta* is not based on a static or a fatalistic view (Panikkar, 2001); it is rather grounded into a world-view of interconnectedness², supported by quantum physics and bio-cultural evolution theories (Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Capra, 1999; Jones, 1986; Talbot, 1993). The Buddhist scripture Avatamsaka Sutra proposes a similar perspective of the universe where every being depends on every other being for their existence, underscoring the nature of the entire universe as made of intrinsically intertwined parts (Morgan, 2010).

². The cosmic interconnectedness (*Ṛta*) is concertized as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* in human level. It literally means “world is family” from the sanskrit word "vasudha" = the earth; "iva" = is; and "kutumbakam" = family. (Maha Upanishad 6.71-73; around 3rd c.B.C). In a very similar manner, Tamil Purananuru poem (Sangam Literature, 300 - 100 B.C.E) claims "யாதும் ஊரே, யாவரும் கேளிர்" (Yaadhum Oore, Yaavarum Kelir), meaning that every land is home-land and everyone is one's kinsmen.'

Within the paradigm of *Rta*, the entire cosmos is considered as a mosaic, consisting in the assemblage of many different parts in unison (King, 2003). In a mosaic, all tesseras differ from each other but all are connected both horizontally and vertically, according to varying patterns of complexity. The whole picture is incomplete in the absence of even just one piece, and the single unit makes no sense without the whole picture. Each part depends on the other and the whole depends on each part. In the same manner, the entire universe is ordered and intertwined. Such order/ harmony of the cosmos is reflected at the individual/societal level in *Dharma* (Kane, 1974). *Dharma* stands similar to Aristotle's daimon. It literally means 'that which upholds' from the Sanskrit word 'dhr' = 'to support', 'to sustain', 'to hold together', 'to bear' (Kiran Kumar, 2006). It includes ideas such as duty, vocation, a responsibility towards self, parents, family, society, humanity, and the entire cosmos (Saraswathi, 1995). However, it is neither a fatalistic nor a collective external demand nullifying one's individuality. Rather, it refers to the true nature/core of an individual that exists *within and in relation* to the wider context of the cosmos, as a mosaic structure (Murthy, 1966).

Within such a paradigm of inter-connectedness, well-being can be defined as a dynamic state of order, coherence, balance, and harmony. The Sanskrit word for well-being, *Swasthya* (Swa = self, Stha = being established) in its original meaning refers to being established in oneself (Kiran Kumar, 2003). Well-being refers to the process of establishing order and harmony within the various parts of an individual self – at physical, psychological, social, and transcendental levels. Interestingly, international investigations conducted in Western cultures, adopting a qualitative methodology detected similar conceptions of well-being as balance and harmony. Western lay people define well-being prominently as psychological balance and inner harmony (Delle Fave et al., 2010). Further, an individual *Swasthya* unfolds within the collective *Swasthya*, as an individual is an integral part of the whole. Dharma is presented as the right path of attaining individual *Swasthya* (Kiran Kumar, 2004, 2006; Kuppusamy, 1997), as following dharma alone can establish order/harmony both at the individual and the collective level concomitantly. Individual and collective well-being are two sides of *Swasthya* as two eyes of the

same body (Saraswathi, 1995). One of them devoid of the other is devoid of dharma. The Well-being devoid of dharma is incomplete and illusory - *Māya*.³

Perceiving reality as dual or separate is the principle manifestation of *Māya* that obstructs the perception of original condition/truth and eventually the path of liberation (enlightenment) and Sat-Cit-Ananda (bliss) (Kiran Kumar, 2003). Thus, well-being consists in the process of becoming aware of one's own responsibility in maintaining the order and balance of an intertwined complexity, where the extinction of even a particular type of a butterfly or a tiny bird, apparently meaningless to humans, may alter the universal pattern of interconnectedness and interdependence. Underscoring the indispensable nature of interconnectedness, *Ṛta* offers a vantage point wherein the eudaimonic emphasis of commitment and contribution to others in pursuing one's daimon is better elucidated.

1.7. At the Crossroads

Eudaimonia in conjunction with the paradigm of *Ṛta* calls for an inter-dependent conception of well-being. A need for such a perspective is echoed in various disciplines. In particular, the evidence of universal inter-connectedness acquired in quantum physics are consistent with the Indian medical system of Ayurveda that considers the human being as an interconnected whole, wherein imbalance is the cause of all diseases and establishing balance is the best strategy to promote health and well-being (Jayasundar, 2008, 2010). This integrated view overcomes the limitations of the biomedical models, based on reductionism of binary epistemology (Gandhi et al., 2003; Hawkey, 2009; Lazarou et al., 1998). At a more global level the world itself, more than ever before, is an evidence of the inter-connected nature of human existence (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968). No one person or country can achieve complete isolation from the others. The recent

³. *Māya*, emerging from Sanskrit root "matr" refers to the illusion that veils the *one* underlying reality of existence - *Brahman*. According to Vedanta philosophy, existence is a unified whole without a boundary, known as *Brahman*. *Brahman* does not merely refers to a god concept but to the existence as *one*. *Atman* (individual soul/ego), which is in reality identical with *Brahman*, believes that it is separate (dual) form the *Brahman* (One) because of *Māya*, the principle of an individual ego. In this regard enlightenment/liberation/*moksha* consists in overcoming ignorance (*Māya*) with knowledge (*vidyā*). *Vidyā* is the realization that reality is one and the distinction between consciousness and physical matter, mind and body, and the self and the universe is a false dichotomy. This realization, where the concept of duality fades, is *Darshan* (seeing/vision) leading to bliss. The Sanskrit word sat-cit-ananda: *Sat* meaning the essence that is pure and one; *cit* meaning consciousness and *ānanda* meaning absolute bliss, encapsules this perspective. Absolute bliss (enlightenment/*moksha*) consists in the realization of the truth (consciousness/awareness) that the reality is one (*Brahman*).

economic crisis and its impact on the whole world is a clear example. Climatic change, noted as one shared challenge of seven billion, is yet another convincing example.

Finally, growing awareness and emphasis of inter-connectedness can be found within positive psychology in the repeated calls for strengthening the “weak link”- collective well-being. After an exhaustive review of the existing perspectives on well-being, Ryan and Deci (2001) call for research and perspectives that will help individuals “... to seek hedonic or eudaimonic outcomes in the ways that are sustainable in the context of *seven* billion others who aspire to be fully functioning and satisfied in this earthly life” (P. 161. Italics added). What does it involve to support individuals in pursuing activities that “...besides being opportunities for individual happiness, also bring about positive outcome to their community”? (Delle Fave et al., 2011, p.14). How can individuals develop to be creative and satisfied persons while being as well participants and sculptors of a better world? (Smith, Christopher, Delle Fave & Bhawuk, 2002). In short, what does it mean to speak of positive individuals within positive communities and vice versa? These questions bring us to crossroads, inviting further investigations on the inter-dependent nature of well-being. Within the general theoretical framework of inter-connectedness, this work proposes to explore the eudaimonic emphasis of social commitment and contribution, and its relevance for both individual and community well-being, through the investigation of Altruism.

*“All things are connected like the
blood that unites us all.
Man did not weave the web of life,
he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web,
he does to himself.”*

*Chief Seattle
(1780-1866)*

CHAPTER 2

ALTRUISM – A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Altruism Studies – Past and Present

The French philosopher Auguste Comte coined the word *altruism* in 1851 from the Italian adjective *altrui*, meaning self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. Two years later the term entered the English language (Comte, 1852/1891). However, the concept of altruism can be claimed to be as old as human society itself, given its characteristic dimension of involving two people (Sober & Wilson, 1998). In fact, it had been a topic of interest, throughout the human history, for several disciplines in the domain of social sciences, such as religion, philosophy, politics, economics, and moral sciences. In particular, religion and moral sciences have paid greater attention to it as the value of altruism had been a principle teaching in all religions (Langford & Langford, 1974). The claim for unselfish love as the sole path towards flourishing life and the denunciation of narcissism and solipsism aim at eliciting and enhancing altruistic values and behaviours in individuals and in societies (Omoto, Snyder, & Berghuis, 1993; Post et al., 2002). In fact, religions and ethical traditions are credited for establishing a rich body of knowledge on altruism (Nesuner & Chilton, 2005). However, scientific explorations of altruism emerge prominently from evolutionary biology and social psychology.

2.1.1. Evolutionary Biology

Evolutionary biology initiated a scientific exploration of altruism, otherwise a topic of religions and ethics, with the aim of ascertaining its existence in living organisms. Within evolutionary biology two contending positions have been developed: the egotism-altruism hypothesis, and the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Piliavin & Charng 1990).

Based on the Darwinian concepts of fitness and self-preservation instinct, the *egotism-altruism hypothesis* denies the existence of altruism in living organism. Since genes are essentially replicators and are transmitted by means of individuals' selective survival strategies, they can only be “selfish” and not otherwise (Dawkins, 1989). Altruism defined as a behaviour that

simultaneously entails fitness costs to the agent and fitness benefits to the receiver is not possible (Kerr et al., 2004). Evolutionary behaviours that apparently benefit others are primarily adaptive strategies to satisfy one's needs, for example, the reduction of aversive arousal caused by seeing the suffering of others. We ultimately pursue, even in altruism, our egoistic goal to increase our own welfare. In fact, the selfish nature of genes makes altruism not just counterintuitive but even detrimental to the actor (Simon, 1993). Altruism is therefore, nothing but a myth (Dawkins, 1989).

The *empathy-altruism hypothesis* (Batson, 1991), on the contrary, acknowledges the existence of altruism in evolution based on the "alarm calling behaviour" (Colman, 1982; Sherman, 1985; Batson et al., 2008). Animals manifest behaviours that promote the survival of others at the cost of oneself. Within this framework empathy, defined as other-oriented emotional reaction to a needy neighbour, is considered a possible indicator of altruism (Batson et al., 2008; Piliavin & Charng, 1990). Supported by research on mirror neurons (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004), altruistic genes (Nedelcu & Michod, 2006), sterile workers (Okasha, 2005) and toddler's social interaction patterns (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1991), altruism is proved to be natural to living organisms.

The debate between these contending positions continues with seemingly no end, while a few researchers within evolutionary biology adopt a middle path between the egotism and empathy hypotheses - *reciprocal altruism* (Schino & Aureli, 2010; Trivers, 1971; Wilkinson, 1988). Reciprocal altruism claims that an organism acts in a manner that temporarily reduces its fitness and increases the fitness of another, with the expectation that the other organism will act in a similar manner later (Trivers, 1971). Notwithstanding the contentions, evolutionary biology has provided scientific foundation to the study of altruism.

2.1.2. Social Psychology

From a different perspective, social psychology contributed to the altruism exploration at two levels. At the first level, social psychology refuted the anthropomorphic approach of evolutionary biology that uses human intentions, such as selfish or altruistic, while referring to the fitness of evolving genes (Barash, 2007). On the other hand, humans are not passive vehicles of fitness seeking genes but possess the unique capacity to actively choose and direct their lives

according to intentional motives (Jablonka & Lamb, 2005). Hence, social psychology claimed that human motives rather than fitness effects should be the criterion of altruism (Sober & Wilson, 1988; Wilson, 1992), defining altruism differently. A behaviour undertaken voluntarily and intentionally, with the sole goal of benefiting another person without expecting any external reward, is defined as altruistic (Piliavin & Charng, 1990).

At the second level, a paradigm shift was initiated in altruism explorations in the 1980s by social psychology. It was intellectually unacceptable, until then, to raise an opinion that “true” altruism exists across disciplines - biology, psychology, sociology, and economics. Rather it was assumed that “anything, that *appears* to be motivated by a concern for someone else’s needs will, under scrutiny, prove to have ulterior selfish motives” (Piliavin & Charng, 1990, p.28). Various theoretical and empirical considerations about the empathy hypothesis (Batson et al., 1981; Batson & Coke, 1981; Batson et al., 1983; Batson, 1991; Hoffman, 1981; Karylowski, 1975; Vine, 1983) led to a reconsideration of the egoistic models. Affirming altruism to be part of human nature, various studies engaged in exploring the nature of altruistic personality (Aronoff & Wilson, 1984; Oliner & Oliner, 1988), the developmental dynamics of altruism (Chambers & Ascione, 1987), and the situational factors influencing altruism (Latane et al., 1981, Shotland & Stebbins, 1983). In particular, the exploration of social components and dynamics of altruism gained ground with altruism studies in politics (Rasinski & Tyler, 1986), economics (Margolis, 1982) and in social behaviours like provisions of public goods, philanthropy, and voluntarism (Kim & Walker, 1984; Morgan, 1985; Taylor & McGuire, 1988).

2.1.3. Positive Psychology

Building on the works of evolutionary biology and social psychology, positive psychology adopted a specific perspective of well-being to altruism studies. In particular, the theoretical framework of eudaimonia, underscoring the necessity of the individual’s contribution to their society in the process of realizing their own personal daimon, gave impetus to altruism studies (Keyes, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 1993). It highlighted the potentiality of altruism and altruistic behaviours in promoting both the well-being of the community and the individual (Post, 2005; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Altruism is perceived as one of the human potentialities, connected to a specific Character strength: Kindness (VIA-IS, Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Integrating existing studies and models from evolutionary biology and social psychology, positive psychology specifically focused on the societal and the individual benefits of altruism.

2.1.3.1. Altruism and Well-being

Altruism is prominently found to be enhancing the communal nature of human beings as it rests on the sense of the other. Societies are built on the foundations of mutual support, co-operation, and readiness to mitigate self-focus (Baumeister, 2005). The survival advantage of behaving altruistically is well documented in most species (Eisenberg, 1986). Altruism is essential not only for enhancing survival of societies but also for optimizing their resources. The psychological processes that give rise to altruism tend to make aggression less likely (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Spielman & Staub, 2000; Staub, 2003). Altruism helps to preserve and empower the social structures that foster forgiveness and gratitude (McCullough et al., 2004). Various studies have highlighted the societal benefits of empathic-concern - one of the portals of altruism. It sustains the willingness to provide long-term care for those in need (Sibicky et al., 1995), reduces prejudices (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), increases mutual care (Gordon, 2007), promotes positive consideration of stigmatized groups (Batson et al., 1997), and facilitates conflict resolutions (Batson et al., 2004). Rowe and Kahn (1998) highlighted a broad range of benefits of volunteering to public health system.

Interestingly, altruism offers various individual benefits as well. At the biological level, altruism is associated with dopamine D4 receptors. Kindness elicits the same reward circuits activated by eating and having sex (Bachner-Melman, et al., 2005; Harbauh, Mayr & Burghatr, 2007). Making donation activates the mesolimbic pathway, which is responsible for dopamine-mediated euphoria (Moll et al., 2006). Studies indicated that people who are more altruistic have more activity in the posterior superior temporal sulcus region even while performing emotionally neutral tasks (Tankersley et al., 2007). Various studies highlighted the health benefits of altruism with evidences prominently emerging from the investigation of altruistic pro-social behaviours (Hunter & Linn, 1980; Musick & Wilson, 2003). In a survey among US volunteers, participants reported better health than their peers, mediated by “helper’s high” (Luks, 1988), a pleasurable and euphoric emotional feeling often resulting in better health. Individuals coping with chronic pain experienced decrease of pain intensity as well as lower levels of disability and depression

when they began to help their peers (Arnstein et al., 2002). Several studies showed that volunteering is consistently related to reduction of depressive symptoms (Hunter & Lin, 1980; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Kahana et al., 2004; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Volunteering and caring behaviours were also significantly associated with reduced or delayed mortality (Brown et al., 2003; Harris & Thoresen, 2005; Oman et al., 1999; Rodin & Langer, 1976). Even the thought of giving or ruminating on compassionate helping enhances the immune system. For example, watching a movie on Mother Teresa's compassionate work was shown to significantly increase salivary immunoglobulins compared to watching a neutral film (McClelland et al., 1988).

Numerous psychological benefits are also derived from altruistic pro-social behaviours. Various studies established that pro-social behaviours positively influence happiness. Isen and Levin (1972) found that helping and happiness fuel each other in a circular fashion – a classic feedback loop. Pro-social spending was found to significantly increase happiness in contrast to personal spending (Dunn et al., 2008). In a survey involving 27,000 US adults, participants working as helping professionals reported higher level of job satisfaction than those whose job did not permit altruistic gratifications (Smith, 2007). Altruistic behaviours elicit positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004), promote development (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and psychological wellbeing (Ryff, Shmotkin, & Keyes, 2002), and foster positive self-image (Luks, 1991; Snyder & Lopez, 2007) and self-esteem (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Schwartz & Sendor, 1999). Results from a study involving participants living under difficult circumstances (prostitutes, homeless people, and inhabitants of Calcutta slums) suggested a link between altruism and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2003). A simple advertisement of the American Red Cross underscores it: “feel good about yourself – Give blood”. Volunteering is found to offer a sense of purpose, meaning, a sense of self-worth, a social role, social connections, better relationships, and health enhancement (Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Moss & Barbuto, 2010; Musick & Wilson 2003, Schwartz et al., 2003; Oman, 2007). Compared with self-oriented hedonic activities, the other-oriented eudaimonic activities were found to be significantly contributing to a meaningful and satisfying life (Steger, Kashdan & Osihi, 2008).

In synthesis, explorations across various domains and throughout centuries have highlighted the existence of altruism and its beneficial nature. In the last few decades, altruism has come to be

more than just a topic of pulpits, being advocated by scientific platforms. Varying health benefits, for example, have led some to wonder whether altruistic pro-social behaviours must be prescribed by healthcare professionals and be applied in public health system and government policies (Post, 2005; Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Given the variety of benefits derived from altruism, it seems logical that institutions and individuals cannot wait to engage in altruistic undertakings and interventions as they enhance health, happiness, and longevity of both individuals and communities. However, this task does not seem easy, given the persisting contentions, confusions, and uncertainty that hover altruism. Altruism remains a familiar yet nebulous concept within the scientific literature, still necessitating clarifications (Simon, 1993; Uyenoyama & Feldman, 1992; Wilson, 1992).

2.2. The Altruism Debate

Due to the varied and often contradictory approaches to the study of altruism, jargons like “altruism debate” or “altruism confusion” are often found in literature (Kerr et al., 2004; Piliavin & Charng, 1990). It is proposed that the ‘altruism debate’ could be an ideal point of departure to better disentangle the potential of altruism. A careful analysis highlights that the altruism debate is primarily an issue of definition, emerging from a mistaken perspective of self and other.

2.2.1. An Issue of Definition

Even though evolutionary biology is credited to have initiated the scientific exploration of altruism, its assumptions are the starting point of the heated debate. This debate started within evolutionary psychology itself, with some denying the existence of altruism based on the selfish nature of genes, while others affirming it based on empathy. In fact, selfish genes actually end up in serving the body, leading to the claim that genes must be altruistic rather than selfish. The alleged dichotomy between selfish and altruistic genes is an ambiguous use of anthropomorphic terms to describe evolving genes, ending in a blind alley (Barash, 2007; Hamilton, 2002). Social psychology corrected the naturalistic fallacy and the anthropomorphic approach of evolutionary biology underscoring human motivations (Barash, 2007). However, far from being resolved, the debate continued within social psychology, though moving the focus from the existence of altruism (is there?) to criteria of altruism (what makes it?). The “sole goal of benefiting another person” became the point of contention. A person can engage in altruistic pro-social behaviour

for purely altruistic motives or for selfish motives such as to win prestige, respect, friendship and other social and psychological objectives (Andreoni, 1990). Efforts were focused to differentiate the “true altruism” from “masked altruism”. Given the difficulty in identifying the motivation of *sole* benefit of the other (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), the proportions of observable benefits for the receiver and the agent were used to differentiate purely altruistic motives from masked selfish motives. Consequently, the “sole goal of benefiting another person” changed into “sole benefits to another person”, whirlpooling the debate further.

In fact, the debate prominently revolves around the definition of altruism. Within evolutionary biology, it concerned what is qualified as altruism, based on the multi fold interpretation of its defining criteria: fitness-effect, and the amount of benefit or cost to the actor, which would render an act to be altruistic or selfish (Boehm, 2008; Kerr et al., 2004). Within social psychology the debate concerned the “degree of benefits” that can ascertain the motive criterion of “sole benefit to the other”. Overall, at the conceptual level, the effort to define altruism and/against egotism (Uyenoyama & Feldman, 1992) emerges from a mistaken perspective of self and other.

2.2.2. An Issue of Mistaken Perspective of Self/Other

The primary source of the altruism debate is a neglect or misunderstanding of a core specific aspect of altruism definition. This aspect consists in the *interaction process between two entities* - “self” and “other”. “Self” refers to an agentic entity, and “other” as everything else other than self. Using the binary paradigm discussed in the first chapter, to conceptualize the interaction process between self and other is the primary reason for the existing contentions and confusions in altruism definitions. Within a binary paradigm, the self and other exist as: i) dichotomized and polarized entities, and ii) hierarchically related entities.

2.2.2.1. Dichotomized and Polarized Entities

In the binary system “Self” and “Other” are dichotomized and polarized entities without any possible mutual benefits. A vivid example of such perspective in psychoanalysis is Freud's theory on narcissism, centred on the infants’ tendency to direct libido towards their own person (primary narcissism), subsequently diverting it toward other objects. If these “object-

relationships” are blocked, the libido is returned to one's own person (secondary narcissism). According to Freud, there is an almost mechanical compartmentalization of love between ego and other objects. The more love one directs toward external objects, the less love one has for oneself, and vice versa (Lowen, 1997). Endorsing the perspective of self and other as entities without any mutual benefits in altruism definition leads into a vicious circle. Within this framework, authentic altruistic acts must benefit *only the other*, without any self-benefit. The notion that self and others represent two alternatives, lying at opposite poles without mutual benefits, is however debatable. Every helping act not only serves others but also the self with certain remote self-benefits like reciprocity, appreciation and feeling good about oneself (Schwartz, 1992). Can anything be completely selfish or altruistic? Is it really possible to draw a clear distinction between purely altruistic or selfish actions? Can some forms of self-benefit from an altruistic act change it into an egotistic one? The jigsaw puzzle of altruism is irresolvable within such dichotomized and polarized perspective of self and other.

2.2.2.2. Hierarchically Related Entities

Due to the inherent hierarchical organization of the binary system, the interaction process between self and other are grounded into a value a hierarchy. A negative view of self as narcissistic, pleasure seeking and sinful, in need of constant taming by society has guided classical Western thought throughout the centuries (Derrida, 1978; Fromm, 1947). Within such perspective, hating oneself is considered not only a value, but also a virtue. Notwithstanding the efforts to reaffirm the positive status of the self during Renaissance and Enlightenment, a tendency to devalue it persisted, setting altruism conceptualizations within a polarized notion of positive altruism in contrast to negative egotism.

A crucial aspect of the altruism v/s egotism model is the identification of self-love with selfishness, as opposed to love for others. This assumption has been pervading Western theology, philosophy, and daily life (Fromm, 1964). Selfishness and self-love however remain far from being identical. The German word *Selbstsucht* (addiction to self) very adequately expresses the connection of selfishness with other kinds of *Sucht* – greediness (Fromm, 1947). In particular, greediness in its various forms is characterized by insatiability, thus implying impossibility to attain real satisfaction. Selfish persons are always anxiously concerned with themselves, driven

by the fear of not getting enough. The root of selfishness is basically a dislike of oneself that leads to compensation, currently identified by psychiatry and clinical psychology with the narcissistic personality disorder (Campbell & Foster, 2007; American Psychiatric Association 2000). Differently from Freud's conceptualization, narcissistic persons love neither others nor themselves; they are thus ready to die as well as to kill. Selfishness, in fact, is opposite of self-love. However, self-love and selfishness are interchangeably used in altruism definitions. Evolutionary biology, for example, equates the natural tendency to self-preservation with selfishness and holds it a case against the possibility of altruism among living beings, claiming that selfishness is natural to organisms. Self-preservation is however self-love rather than selfishness. Ego psychology highlights the necessity of primary narcissism for self-identity, since the sense of "self" cannot emerge without self-love (Mahler, 1968). Research studies on attachment showed that in order to develop empathic skills children must receive a secure basis of love and attention from their caregivers in early infancy (Bowlby, 1958; Schore, 1994). This issue is clearly addressed in most religious traditions. Buddhist scriptures highlight the importance of the practice of *metta* (loving-kindness) meditation, grounded into the assumption that "You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe deserve your love and affection" (Salzberg & Kabat-Zinn, 2008). The same concept is repeatedly stated in the Bible: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19, 18; Matthew 22:37–39). However, existing altruism definitions remain entrapped with an alleged identity of self-love with selfishness.

2.3. Research Gaps and Point of Departure

A research gap emerges from the existing altruism literature with reference to three basic issues: i) neglect of altruism concept, ii) behavioural reductionism, iii) moving beyond the binary perspective.

2.3.1. Neglect of Altruism Concept

The concept of altruism is substantially neglected. Given the confusion and contentions surrounding it, many scholars tend either to disregard it as unimportant or to consider it as an unattainable goal (Weinstein, 2008). Researchers interested in related topics rather started focusing on the *outcome* of other-regarding emotions and pro-social behaviours. Consequently, altruism literature is dominated by research and evidence of the beneficial outcome of other

oriented emotions and pro-social behaviours for individuals and societies (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Oman, 2007; Post, 2005; Tankersley et al., 2007). While this approach may seem concrete and pragmatic, the need for a clear definition of altruism cannot be ignored. In fact, information abounds on the effects of altruism but not on altruism *per se*, leaving the term elusive and ambiguous. A concept so intimately connected to individual conduct and so central in all the value systems developed by human cultures cannot be left to assumptions. It requires an explanation or at least an exploration (Delle Fave, 2004) of its components, dimensions, meaning, sources, and associated domains. The need to explore the concept of altruism *per se* is bolstered by the behavioural reductionism that permeates existing literature.

2.3.2. Behavioural Reductionism

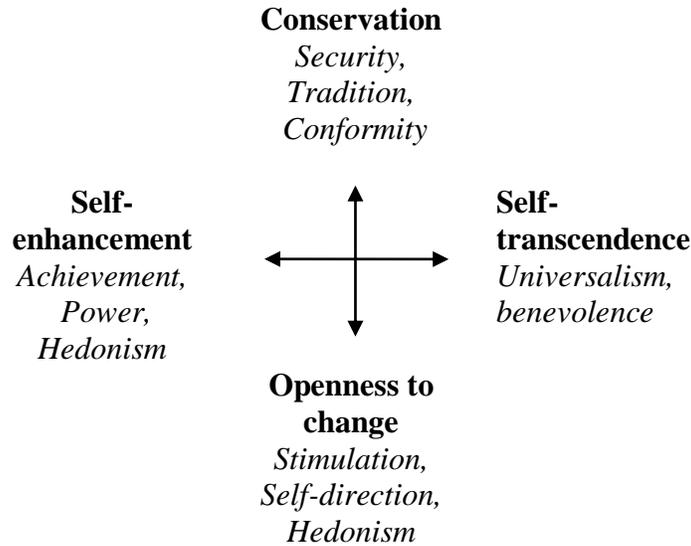
By definition, reductionism refers to the attempt to understand the nature of complex things by reducing them to the interaction of their parts, or to simpler or more fundamental things (Cottingham et al., 1988). In their efforts to engage in a scientific enquiry of altruism, both evolutionary biology and social psychology focus on the behaviours (the observable variable) to investigate the underlying motives: egoistic or altruistic ones (the latent variable). However, they end up in reducing altruism to behaviour. Evolutionary biology defines altruism as a *behaviour* that increases the fitness of the other while decreasing the fitness of oneself. Social psychology defines altruism as a *behaviour* undertaken voluntarily and intentionally with the sole goal of enhancing other's well-being. Consequently, the existing literature on altruism primarily considers it as synonym or part of pro-social behaviour. This view has direct consequences at the assessment level. The popular Self-Reported Altruism Scale comprises 18 statements referring to pro-social helping behaviours as indicators of altruism (Rushton et al., 1981). Contrary to its claims, Nickell's (1998) helping attitude scale neither corrects this reductionism as it focuses on the attitude referring to pro-social helping. Nevertheless, helping and pro-social behaviour can be considered as manifestations of altruism, but they cannot be equated to it. Altruism cannot be just a behaviour, as it involves cognitive, emotional, motivational components emerging from the complex interplay between personal belief, values, and culture. The definition provided by Comte in 1851 does not tie altruism down to behaviour. Similarly, the definitions that can be found in various languages (English, Italian and Tamil dictionaries - Merriam Webster online,

Garzanti online and Tamil Online Dictionary) emphasize relational, psychological and value features of altruism, besides the behavioural ones. Philosophy, religions, and moral sciences underscore altruism as an essential value and virtue towards which humans are called forth (Nesuner & Chilton, 2005). Behavioural reductionism does not only go against perspectives of altruism proposed by religions and cultures, but also reduces the potential of altruism. Its psychological features, for example, remain basically unexplored. Behavioural reductionism also discriminates between people who can perform altruistic activities such as volunteering, and people who do not perform them (due to physical impairment or social constraints).

A deeper and broader understanding and application of altruism is possible if it is explored from the perspective of value. Values are important and enduring beliefs or ideals of what is good and what is not. They are desirable goals that vary in importance and influence individuals' perceptions, decisions and behaviours (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Moreover, values can be seen as defining features of a culture (Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 1992). Given the crucial role of values in individuals' perceptions and preferences, altruism must be explored from the perspective of value, perceived beliefs, and ideas, and in such perspective can be highly sustainable. In fact, a glimpse of such a perspective is found in the Value In Action - Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS, Peterson & Seligman, 2004), in which altruism is enlisted as part of the Kindness strength. However, the existing behavioural perspective of altruism clouds the ten questions intended to measure kindness and altruism in the VIA-IS, calling for further investigations.

2.3.3. Moving Beyond the Binary Perspective

In contrast to prevailing behavioural perspectives, Schwartz's value inventory (SVI) adopts a perspective of value to altruism. It is based on a circumflex model comprising ten "value types", super-grouped into four major categories: "Conservation v/s Openness to Change" and "Self-enhancement v/s Self-transcendence" (Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2010).



(Created as per Schwartz's Value Inventory Categorization)
(1992, 1994)

Figure 2.1. Super grouping of values in two basic bipolar value dimensions

Altruism is grouped in the category of self-transcendence along with universalism and benevolence. Nevertheless, in spite of its power of synthesis and clarity, Schwartz's model is built on the binary perspective of polarization opposing self-enhancement to self-transcendence. Even though these values can be arranged in a circle (Bilsky & Koch, 2002), they are considered as bipolar value dimensions even then. Almost every existing theory of altruism is entrapped within a binary perception, highlighting the third issue within the research gap. Here, it is claimed that the concept of altruism can never be fully grasped with the binary perspective of self and other, that does not just confuse the process but more importantly misses a unique feature of altruism – its dialectical feature. Altruism can be a path where both individual and collective well-being take place concomitantly. It is apparently paradoxical that altruism often associated with going “outside” of oneself is actually highly involving the self (Davis et al., 2004; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Religious traditions often refer to this process as a “paradoxical giving”, a model of self-actualization through self-transcendence. The Bible, for example, claims that by losing oneself one discovers oneself, presenting the example of a seed

that dies only to germinate (John 12:24). Such a dialectical process of self-actualization through self-transcendence is in fact underscored in Aristotle's perspective of daimon, according to which true human happiness – eudaimonia – is furthered more “by loving rather than in being loved” (350 B.C/1985, p.1159). Only from an inter-dependent perspective, the unique capacity of altruism to unfold both individual and collective well-being concomitantly can emerge. The dialectical/paradoxical feature of individual and collective well-being cannot be conceived or/and comprehended within a binary model grounded into the juxtaposition of alternative perspectives. A complex perspective is needed, that integrates altruism and egotism rather than setting them in opposition (Batson et al., 1999; Batson, Ahmad & Stock, 2004).

It is proposed that an interconnectedness world-view could be such a complex perspective as it not only reconciles but also optimizes the dialectical feature of altruism. Within this framework, self and other are not *either/or* entities in binary opposition, rather they are *intertwined* and *dialectical*. One of the clearest examples to clarify this relationship is the Chinese conceptualization of Yin and Yang, described as two different but complementary entities that interact within an integrated dynamic system (Graham, 1986). These seemingly contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world, to the extent that they give rise to each other in turn. Likewise, self and other are interconnected and interdependent entities. While preserving their reciprocal differentiation, they can only exist as specific “self” and “other” within their relation, at both the logical/conceptual and practical levels. Moreover, this relation is based on their complementariness rather than exclusiveness or opposition. The conceptualization of self/other as inseparable and interdependent entities is not an issue of metaphysics. Systems theory strongly emphasizes the interconnected and interdependent nature of self and others (Bertalanffy, 1950). In Erikson's theory of development, ego-identity unfolds only in the context of others, along with integration into society and culture. A deficiency in either of these factors may increase the chance of identity crisis or confusion (Cote & Levin, 2002). Attachment theories underscore the role of connections in self-development (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Self psychology claims that a child is able to develop an ‘ego identity’ only by three basic and fundamentally relational needs: need to be loved, need to idealize and need to belong. An individual sense of self cannot emerge without the connection to the other (Kohut, 1971).

More recently, the self/other dialectical relation emerged in self-determination theory (SDT). This theory focuses on three psychological needs – need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence - considering them as organismic necessities for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being (Deci & Ryan 1980, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Connel, 1989). Even though SDT does not specifically address the issue of self/other relation, the cultural debate arisen around the need for autonomy is relevant to our discussion on altruism. The role and importance of autonomy as a basic need was called into question in the light of the different conceptualizations of self, endorsed by individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis et al., 1995). Claiming against a definition of autonomy as isolation and individualism, SDT underscores the importance of autonomy in connection to relatedness and vice versa, so that autonomy without relatedness ends up to be mere individualism, while relatedness without autonomy becomes just a passive subordination (Knee & Uysal 2011). Kagitcibasi (1996, 2005) effectively contributed to this contention, arguing that autonomy at the cost of relatedness or vice versa is not helpful, and proposed to address the issue in terms of “autonomous-relational self”. The term can be useful far beyond its original context as it succinctly articulates the entire debate around self and other, and synthesizes the nature and dynamics of their relation. More specifically, it corrects the two misconceptions of altruism debate, namely dichotomizing self/other and equating self-love with selfishness. It endorses an interconnectedness perspective in which, differently from the binary, self is always “autonomous-relational”; its focus on the *process between Self and Other* contributes to better understand and explain altruism.

To the best of our knowledge, no models and investigation tools are available to explore the concept of altruism within the theoretical perspective of inter-connectedness (Ṛta), and as a human value related to both self-actualization and social empowerment (Eudaimonia). Based on these premises this study was conducted as an exploratory attempt to partially fill the altruism research gap.

CHAPTER 3

THE STUDY

3.1. Aims and Methods of the Study

Taking into account the research gap outlined in the previous chapter, the present study aims at investigating; a) the concept of altruism per se, and b) the role of altruism in promoting individual and community well-being.

To achieve the first aim, altruism will be explored in its components, dimensions, meaning, sources, and associated domains. Given the existing contentions and confusion among researchers and discipline, a phenomenological exploratory methodology enquiring lay conceptions on this controversial topic was preferred. To this purpose, a qualitative method was adopted as the lay perspectives and definitions remain prominent empirical foundations for any term or construct in psychology (Sternberg, Conway, Ketrion & Bernstein, 1981). Endorsing the epistemological strands of hermeneutical realism⁴ qualitative methods aim at gathering an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using open-ended questions, qualitative methodology offers participants the opportunity to convey their perceptions and understanding in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose among fixed responses. It evokes answers that are rich and explanatory in nature, meaningful and culturally salient to the participant. Given its ability to generate answers that are both anticipated and unanticipated by the researcher, qualitative methods clarify, confirm or correct the professional and researchers' categories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

⁴.Hermeneutical realism is closely related to critical realism (Hathaway, 2002). It claims that even the best knowledge is constructed in some sense (Brown, 2003; Sandage et.al., 2008), without however reducing knowledge to mere human construction. In short, it holds that reality is both *given* (out there prior to understanding) and *made* (understanding is an outcome of interpretation). Emphasizing the role of interpretation in understanding and explaining reality is the distinctive characteristic feature of hermeneutical realism.

In addition, a cross-cultural perspective was included to make the qualitative exploration more robust. In recent times, cross-cultural psychology and bio-cultural theories have highlighted the role of culture in shaping human behaviour and experience (Berry et al., 1997; Jablonka & Lamb, 2005). Cultures play a powerful role in shaping human functioning, and even evolution (Boehm, 2008; Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Romney & D'Andrade, 1964; Triandis, 1994). Given the ubiquitous nature of culture, we assumed that altruism - due to its characteristic nature of involving two people - must be guided by cultural norms and values. For the purpose of this study, findings will be interpreted within the prominent cultural construct developed in psychology - Individualism/Collectivism (Hofstede, 1980). The essential difference between individualism and collectivism lies in the concept of self. Collectivistic cultures emphasize the prominence of social norms and rules in directing individual behaviour, giving priority to social harmony; the individualistic cultures focus instead on individual independence and autonomy, since the person is the primary unit of the society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, Chan, Bhawuk, Iwao & Sinha, 1995). Studies have shown that individualism and collectivism play a crucial role in eliciting and shaping other oriented emotions and pro-social behaviours (Ersoy, Born, Deros & Van der Molen, 2011; Gautam, Van Dick, Wagner, Updhyay & Davis, 2005; Hui, 1988; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kimmelmeir, Jambor & Lenter, 2006; Leung & Iwawaki, 1988; Levin, Norenzayan & Philbrick, 2001; Miller, 1994). For example, the core values of individualistic cultures, such as self-actualization, individual achievement and personal autonomy, contribute to the increase in pro-social behaviours (Kimmelmeir et al., 2006). In similar line, another study highlights that certain words in a culture, for example, *simpatia* (Spanish) or *simpatico* (Portuguese), emphasizing and prioritizing amiability rather than achievement and productivity, increase helping behaviours towards strangers (Levin et al., 2001). Cross-cultural differences in pro-social emotions and behaviours lead us to assume that such differences must exist also in the conceptualization of altruism. As languages, habits, beliefs, values and social structures show great diversity across cultures, specific concepts and activities do not necessarily have the same meaning (Ang, 1998; Delle Fave, Massimini & Bassi, 2011; Fehr & Russell, 1991; Lu & Gilmour, 2006; Pflug, 2008; Triandis, 1994). Most terms used in psychological and social research are not neutral, but are related to specific cultural meanings and variations (Delle Fave, 2004; Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009). Hence, the first aim of this study

will be pursued through a cross-cultural qualitative exploratory method, specifically investigating; a) how do people define altruism; b) perceived individual and social consequences of altruism; c) perceived difficulties in being altruistic; d) sources of altruism concept; e) locus/contexts of altruistic behaviours and associated experiences; f) reasons for being altruistic. A special focus is given to the cultural similarities and differences in the above investigation processes.

The second aim revolves around exploring the potential of altruism in promoting both the individual and collective well-being, guided by the eudaimonic interdependent perspective. Endorsing Keyes's integrative model of well-being (2002, 2007) and in view of our claims of its inter-dependent feature, altruism is explored in relation to both hedonic and eudaimonic components of well-being. Based on the prevalent terminology and conceptualization of hedonia and eudaimonia within positive psychology (Kahneman, Diener & Schwartz, 1999; Keyes & Annas, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2001), 'positive emotions' and 'satisfaction with life' were adopted as hedonic components while 'meaning in life' for eudaimonia. Within hedonic view, presence of positive emotions and absence of negative emotions is considered the hallmark of well-being. Satisfaction with life adds a specific component of cognition to the affect orientation of hedonic perspectives (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1988; Ryan & Deci, 2001). It refers to a subjective and over all evaluation of one's state of life, focusing prominently on the present and affect. Previous studies have prominently explored pro-social and altruistic behaviours and their potential in enhancing positive emotions (Frederickson, 2004; Oman, 2007; Post, 2005), positive self-image (Luks, 1991), and self-esteem (Lyumbomirsky, 2007), warranting our aim to explore the psychological features of altruism and their role in hedonic well-being.

On the other hand, meaning in life has been claimed as the most prominent feature and measure of eudaimonic well-being (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Emmons, 1986; Keyes, 2002, 2005, 2007; Peterson et al., 2005; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Stegar, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006; Waterman, 1993). Meaning in life refers to a sense of coherence in one's life (Battista & Almond, 1973; Baumeister, 1991; Reker & Wong, 1988), the goal directedness or purposefulness (Emmons, 2005; Frankl, 1963; Ryff & Singer, 2008), and the ontological significance of life (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). It encompasses beliefs (Park, 2010), values

(Baumeister, 1991) and goals (Emmons, 1999). It serves as an integrating factor giving a sense of who they are, offering ability to withstand distress, and to attain purposes beyond their present and solitary selves (Steger, 2009). Frankl (1963) claimed that humans are characterized by a 'will to meaning', an innate drive to find meaning and significance in life and the failure leads to psychological distress. Endorsing Frankl's claims, recent studies have highlighted the encompassing role of meaning in life for individual development and well-being (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Reker & Woo, 2011; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Steger, Oishi & Kesebir, 2011). This has resulted in a plethora of explorations on meaning. In particular, investigations into the sources of meaning in life - content and meaning-making process - have gained focus given its role in enhancing well-being. Content refers to experiences, activities, goals, and emotional states that imbue life with meaning, whereas the process refers to the psychological mechanisms involved in the quest for meaning (Wong, 2012). In light of the significance ascribed to meaning for eudaimonic well-being, we aim to explore the role of altruism in enhancing meaning in life. To the best of our knowledge, there are no specific studies that focus on this relationship, except for few studies that have highlighted indirectly the potential of pro-social behaviours to enhance meaning in life (Oman, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2003). To this purpose, the commonly used distinction of presence and search for meaning is adopted (Steger et al., 2006). Within this framework, presence of meaning refers to the perceived experience that one's life is meaningful while search for meaning refers to the drive and orientation toward finding meaning in one's life.

The choice of quantitative measures in the accomplishment of the second aim renders the entire work a mixed-method approach or multi-trait/multi-method research (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Creswell, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003a). Mixed-method is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches intended to generate a comprehensive and better understanding of research problems than what one approach can do in isolation (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Jick, 1979). In this work, the qualitative explorations in two cultures gather lay conceptions and perceptions on altruism per se (first aim) while the quantitative measures investigate altruism in its relation to individual and community well-being (second aim).

3.2. Research Hypotheses

Concerning the first aim (a), we hypothesize that participants will define altruism within a general perspective of values rather than just within a pro-social behavioural perspective, underscoring its dimensions and features. Further (b), we expect that altruism must also entail different meaning and dynamics across cultures, strongly shaped by local norms and expectations. As per the second aim (c), we hypothesize that higher perceived levels of altruism may lead to higher levels of presence of meaning and a corresponding lower level of search for meaning. Various studies show that perceived presence of meaning in life predicts positive affect and satisfaction (Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger & Kashdan, 2006; Steger, Oishi & Kesebir, 2011). Hence, (d), we expect that individuals with a higher level of altruism must also report higher levels of positive emotions and life satisfaction. However, in line with eudaimonic claims that following daimon consists in pursuing meaningful endeavours which are not always pleasurable (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Della Fave et al., 2011; Keyes, 2002, 2005, 2007; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 1993), we expect the relationship of altruism with positive emotions and life satisfaction to be differently qualified. In this regard (e), we hypothesize that positive emotions and subjective well-being must be correlated to altruism prominently through a eudaimonic perspective of meaningful life and not merely a hedonic perspective of happy life. We expect similar results in the measures of happiness and meaningfulness level in life domains. Hence, (f), we hypothesize that higher levels of altruism must be correlated with significantly higher levels of happiness and meaningfulness in those daily life domains that prominently involve eudaimonic features or interaction with others, compared with domains showing hedonic features or individualistic focus.

3.3. Research Instruments

In line with the aims of the study, a battery of instruments was carefully chosen. The “Altruism Questionnaire” (AQ) was developed to qualitatively explore the concept of altruism. After a literature review on the topic and more specifically on the existing altruism measurements, a preliminary version of the questionnaire was developed and first administered to a group of adult participants to assess clarity of the items. The questionnaire was developed in English and subsequently translated into Italian and Tamil by expert professionals, following the procedures

of translation and back-translation. A pilot study was carried out in India (60 participants) and Italy (59 participants). Based on the findings provided by the pilot study, it was decided to include two more open-ended questions.⁵ The final form was used in the present study. To measure the hedonic and eudaimonic features, validated and popular instruments were adopted. Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were used to investigate the hedonic components. As per the eudaimonic components, Meaning of Life Questionnaire (MLQ) and Eudaimonic Hedonic Happiness Investigation (EHHI) were used. MLQ and EHHI were preferred given their potential to investigate meaning and to check for inter-correlations between hedonic and eudaimonic variables in altruism. EHHI, for example, helps to detect overlap of happiness and meaningfulness in life domains (Delle Fave et al., 2010) while MLQ's subscales are shown to be significantly correlated with measures of positive and negative affect, and satisfaction with life (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009).

3.3.1. Altruism Questionnaire (AQ)

AQ comprises nine questions. Seven of them are open-ended, and these give participants an opportunity to articulate answers in their own words without any restrictions. These questions investigate participants' own definition of altruism; perceived benefits and difficulties in being altruistic; personal and social sources of participants' concept of altruism; narration of enacted altruistic behaviours while being an agent and a recipient respectively, along with associated experiences; reasons for being altruistic. Two 5-point scales further assess participants' perceived level of being an altruistic person, with values ranging from 1 ("Absolutely not") to 5 ("Absolutely yes"), and the frequency of meeting altruistic persons, with values ranging from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Very often").

⁵. Findings of the pilot study were initially presented as a poster at the Second World Congress of Positive Psychology (Philadelphia, July 23-26, 2011). An article on the same is accepted for publication, under condition of revisions, in a major Indian Journal, and is in the process.

3.3.2. Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)

The positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) is a commonly used instrument to assess Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA). In the 20 items scale, 10 items measure positive affect while the other 10 items measure the negative affect. Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely), thus scores could range from 15 to 75 on each subscale. Factor analysis has consistently confirmed the two-factor basic structure of the PANAS - positive and negative affect (Watson & Clark, 1994), and it is widely used with translations in various languages. PA and NA are often used to identify the emotional components of subjective well-being from a hedonic perspective (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985).

3.3.3. Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is a well-established and commonly used instrument to measure life satisfaction within the hedonic perspective. SWLS adds a component of life satisfaction to that of the presence of positive affect and absence of negative affect, often summarized as happiness (Diener & Lucas, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001). It consists of five items that are rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), generating a total score from 5 to 35 of subjective judgment on the general satisfaction of life. It is shown to have good psychometric properties, including high internal consistency and high temporal reliability. The scale has 2-month test-retest reliability index of .82, and a Cronbach alpha-reliability index of .87 (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993, 2008).

3.3.4. Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) is a brief measure assessing perceived meaning in life in terms of presence of meaning, and search for meaning. It is a 10-item scale with two subscales (five items each), intended to measure the presence of meaning and the search for meaning respectively. Items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true). The total scores could range from 7 to 35 on each subscale. The scale is claimed to have good psychometric properties of internal consistency, structural validity, and test-retest stability (Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006). The two-factor

structure has been replicated through confirmatory factor analysis in multiple samples, and a multitrait-multimethod matrix has established convergent and discriminant validity (Steger et al., 2006).

3.3.5. Eudaimonic Hedonic Happiness Investigation (EHHI)

Eudaimonic Hedonic Happiness Investigation (EHHI) is an instrument that combines both eudaimonic (meaning) and hedonic perspectives (subjective well-being) of well-being with objective (work, standard of living, health conditions) and subjective (personal growth, spirituality/religion) well-being indicators. Adopting both qualitative and quantitative measurement, it explores specific features of happiness and relates them to other well-being components like meaning and subjective well-being. It is a set of eight questions. Six of them are open-ended questions inviting participants to provide their own definition of happiness; to list the three most important goals and the three most meaningful things in their life; and to explain why those goals and meaningful things are relevant to them. These questions provide information on lay definitions of happiness, goals and meaningful things in life, and the motives underlying them. Two 1-7 point rating scales investigate subjective judgment of the level of happiness and the level of meaningfulness associated with ten different life domains identified in line with earlier studies (WHOQOL Group, 1998, 2004, 2006). The domains are: Work, Family, Standard of living, Interpersonal Relationships, Health, Personal Growth, Spirituality/Religion, Society issues, Community Issues and Leisure. A phenomenological approach is used for the interpretation of the qualitative data, following the investigator triangulation based on the approach of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The EHHI is reported to be the only instrument presently available for a cross-cultural mixed-method exploration of happiness adopting both eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives (Delle Fave et al., 2011).

3.3.6. Socio-demographic Questionnaire

A short socio-demographic section provided information on participants' gender, age, education level, work, standard of living, marital status, number of children, religion, frequency of religious practice and hobbies. Participants answered to each item using defined categories (gender, marital status, and standard of living) or open answer (age, level of education, work and religion).

3.4. Participants

The study involved 432 participants from two different countries: India (N = 216, 50% women) and Italy (N = 216, 50 % women), aged between 30 and 60 (Indian $M_{age} = 44.48$, $SD = 8.66$; Italian $M_{age} = 44.24$, $SD = 7.73$). In line with the religious diversity patterns characterizing the two countries, 65.74% of the Indian participants were Hindu, 20.47% Christian, 13.43% Muslim and 0.46% as having no religion, while 85.91% of the Italians reported to be Christian, 11.74% as having no religion and 2.35% Gnostics. As per religious practice, 34.67% of the Italians reported regular practice, 44.72% occasional practice and 20.60% no practice. The large majority of Indian participants (82.87%) stated to regularly practice religion, while 15.28% reported occasional practice. In both groups, most participants reported an average standard of living (85.65% Indians, 80 % Italians). As for marital status, in the Italian group singles accounted for 26.39%, 54.63% of the participants were married and 18.98% reported other status (widowed, cohabiting, separated/divorced). The majority of Indian participants were married (88.89%), 7.41% single and 3.7% in other status.

As per education, 50% of the participants had completed secondary level education in both groups, while 15.28 % and 34.72% (India), and 8.33% and 41.67% (Italy) had completed graduation and post graduation respectively. Among Italians the most represented job category was office workers (68.98%) consisting of white-collar jobs, business, finance, marketing and sales. Helping professions, including health professions, social work, teaching, counseling and psychotherapy, followed with 21.76%. Among the Indians Home managers were 36.57% followed by office workers (32.41%) and Helping professionals (31.02%)

Group comparisons of the demographic features through a Chi-Square procedure detected significant differences in the answer distribution. As regards religious practice ($\chi^2 = 104.39$, $df = 2$, $p < .0001$) Italians more often reported no practice while Indians more often referred to practice religion regularly. The group difference in marital status ($\chi^2 = 74.92$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$) was mostly due to the higher number of Indians reporting being married and the higher number of Italians reporting being single. Finally, differences in occupational status ($\chi^2 = 67.16$, $df = 2$, $p < .0001$) derived from the higher percentage of office workers within the Italian group and the higher percentage of home managers among Indians.

3.5. Analysis

3.5.1. Development of a Coding System

After data collection, the coding process started with the laborious task of first listing down every answer provided by the participants for the open-ended questions. Using the perspectives and methodologies of grounded theory, prominent names and categories were identified within the answers through an inductive process (Morse, 1994; Spiggle, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In particular, during several meetings, all answers from open-ended questions were grouped into categories diversified for each question, based on the theoretical and practical coding strategies previously adopted for classifying similar typologies of answers (Delle Fave et al., 2011; WHOQOL, 2006). In the final version, all answers were attributed numeric codes; eight answer categories were obtained for the definition of altruism, ten for the perceived benefits and nine for difficulties, eight for sources of the altruism concept and eleven for reasons to be altruistic. As per the description of enacted altruistic behaviours five relational contexts were identified while answers on the associated experiences to the altruistic behaviours were grouped into ten psychological categories.

3.5.2. Coding Procedure

Subsequently each answer was coded by additional coders, who had not been involved in the coding development. Doubtful and ambiguous answers were discussed in the group and coded jointly. Answers that did not find consensus due to lack of clarity in their formulation were treated as missing values. An inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistics (Cohen, 1960) was performed to determine consistency among raters in including answers into the same category. The inter-rater reliability ranged from $\text{Kappa}=.898$ (Benefits of Altruism) with a $p<.001$, 95% CI (.837, .959) to $\text{Kappa}=.912$ (Difficulties in being altruistic) with a $p<.001$, 95% CI (.849, .975). According to Landis and Koch (1977), Kappa values above .80 describe almost perfect agreement.

3.5.3. Data Analysis

3.5.3.1. Data Analysis - AQ

For each open-ended question, the answer percentage distribution across categories was first analyzed through frequency calculation. This offered a global overview of the qualitative answer distribution. As a second step, within each category the number of participants who provided at least one answer in that category was computed. Since each participant could provide up to six definitions of altruism and up to four answers to all other open ended questions, this procedure allowed to weight for the multiple use of the same category across each participant's answers. Fisher's Exact Tests were subsequently run on these frequencies to check for group differences between India and Italy. As for rating scales, within each group Spearman's rank index was calculated to test correlations between the two rating scales, while Mann-Whitney U tests were performed between Indian's and Italian's ratings for each scale. Cultural factors were the prominent focus of investigation in the above group comparisons.

With the aim of identifying significant differences related to gender, education, age, stand of living and job category, we chose a preliminary analysis on three open-ended questions as a trial: definition of altruism, sources of altruism concept and reasons for being altruistic. No prominent significant differences emerged. Hence, it was decided not to further focus on these variables.

In order to check for any significant role of the perceived level of being an altruistic person on the perception of altruism, the global sample was divided into three groups based on the scores of the rating scale. Self-reporting or self-assessment remains a valid and popular means of altruism measurement (Rushton, Chrisjohn & Fekken, 1981). Participants scoring 1 and 2 were grouped under the label "Low Altruism" (LA) (N=32; Italians = 12). Participants scoring 3 labeled as "Medium Altruism" (MA) (N=132; Italians =87). Participants scoring 4 and 5 were aggregated as "High Altruism" (HA) (N=268; Italians =117). Given the higher number of participants included in HA group, we first checked for any factor that may inform the group composition before proceeding with any comparative analysis. The role of culture, gender, age, education, job, standard of living and religious practice were controlled, using T-tests and ANOVA procedures, to rule out their significant contribution to the group composition. No significant differences in the perceived level of being altruistic were found except for education

($f = 3.10$; $p < .046$). Having checked these issues, this group composition was used for further analyses. Chi square procedure was used to check for group differences in the answer percentage distribution across categories, after weighting for multiple use of the same category. An analysis of cell chi square values was used for more specific evaluations of significant group differences within the answer categories.

3.5.3.2. Data Analysis - Hedonic and Eudaimonic Measures

We wanted to explore the relation of altruism to hedonic and eudaimonic well-being variables through PANAS and SWLS, and MLQ and EHHI respectively. Mean scores of PANAS, SWLS, and MLQ were computed and a series of T-tests were run to check for cultural differences (India and Italy) in these well-being measures. Given the enormous amount of qualitative and quantitative data generated through EHHI, only the domain specific scaled measures on happiness and meaningfulness were taken into account for analysis. The mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) methodology of EHHI was helpful to explore meaningfulness in life domains. In addition, it allowed to check for the levels of happiness in life domains in relation to altruism. T-tests were used to detect significant cultural differences in these scales.

As a second level of analysis, we checked for the relation between perceived levels of being altruistic and hedonic and eudaimonic well-being variables, pooling participants from both the cultures in the three groups – LA, MA, HA. First, the global group score on the perceived level of being an altruistic person was used. Spearman correlation technique (two tailed) was carried out with EHHI measures of happiness and meaningfulness in life domains. Pearson correlation procedure was run for PANAS, SWLS, and MLQ. To make the results more reliable, correlation value of $r = .2$ was set as threshold value; only variables showing correlation value above this cut-off limit were considered for further analysis. The relationships among these variables were analyzed through a partial correlation procedure. Partial correlation measures the degree of association between two random variables while removing the effect of other controlled random variables, making the results more robust and able to predict the true correlation coefficient of variables. Hence, those variables that remained significantly correlated after running the partial correlation analysis were accepted as independently related variables. These analyses highlighted the relation between being altruistic and two well-being variables: Presence of Meaning and

Positive Affect. Subsequently, we ran a group wise analysis (LA, HA & HA), expecting that significant group differences should be detected in the same well-being variables identified through the previous partial correlation. The ANOVA procedure detected significant group differences in the same well-being variables, underscoring the relationship of altruism with these variables. Tukey's post-hoc test was used to identify difference pairwise.

Further, a procedure of regression analysis was used to check for any causal relationship among the correlated variables. After having established the normality in error distribution and meeting statistical assumptions, linear regression analysis was carried out using 95% interval level. Regression analysis demonstrated the predictive role of perceived altruism on two well-being variables. As a final process, we wanted to gain specific information on life domains that are prominently relevant and related to altruism. We hoped that such life domain oriented investigation of meaning and happiness can help to concretize the above findings of regression analysis. Procedure of ANOVA coupled with Tukey's test highlighted the prominent life domains, both in meaningfulness and happiness, which are relevant to individuals according to their perceived level of being altruistic.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1. Perception of Altruism Across Cultures

4.1.1. Definition of Altruism

In defining altruism, the global sample provided in total 1054 answers. As shown in figure 1, participants mostly referred to Selflessness (22.60%) followed by Care/Concern (19.90%). Value/Virtue (18.97%) and Helping/Doing good (18.70%) ranked third and fourth with almost similar percentages. The category Love/Relationships accounted for 15.93% of the answers while Sacrifice for 3.80%. Two participants stated that altruism does not exist.

Figure 3: Definition of Altruism

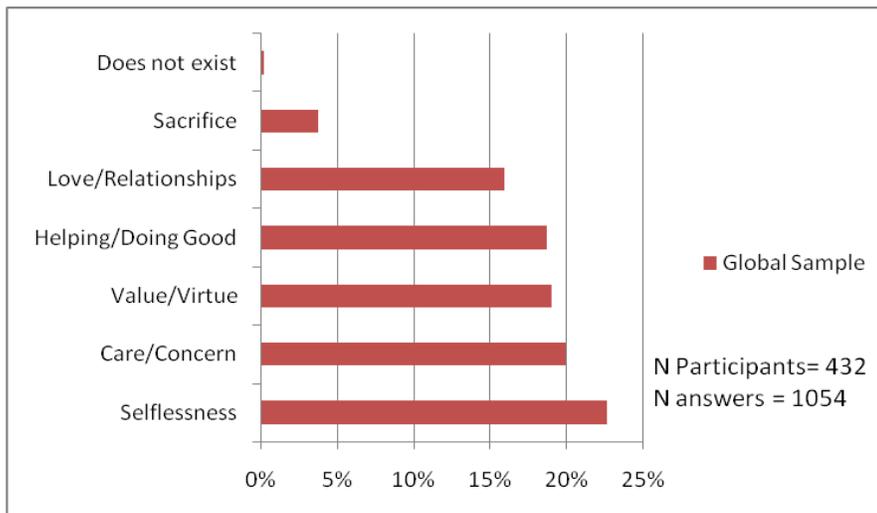


Table 1 shows the percentage distribution in each category of the Italian and Indian participants who provided at least one answer in that category. A striking similarity was found as concerns Selflessness, with 42.13% of the Indian participants and 37.04% of the Italians referring to it. Compared to Italians, a significantly lower percentage of Indians referred to Care/Concern and Helping/Doing Good. The category Care/Concern comprises answers referring to “caring”,

“considering”, “thinking”, and “feeling” for the other person, while Helping/Doing Good consists of activities like “helping”, “doing a good work”, “donating” and “volunteering”. On the contrary, Value/Virtue and Love/Relationships were referred by a significantly higher percentage of Indians. Value/Virtue includes answers like “an important value”, “noble virtue”, “mark of being human” and “essential for a community well-being”. Love/Relationships consists in answers such as “love for others”, “being a person of love”, “compassion/empathy” and “relationships”.

Table 1: Definition of Altruism - Percentage distribution of participants across categories in the two countries

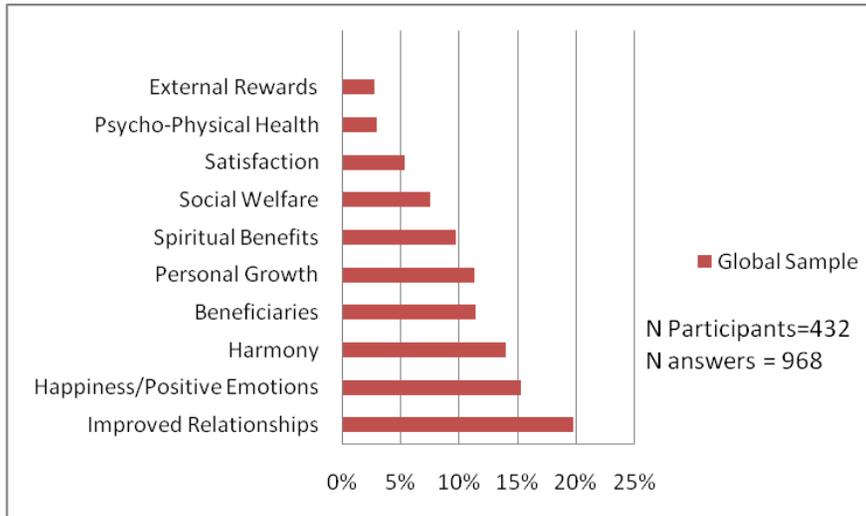
Definition of Altruism	Indians % (N=216)	Italians % (N=216)	p ^a
Value /Virtue	56.02	12.04	.0001
Love/Relationships	44.44	19.91	.0001
Care /Concern	38.43	56.48	.0002
Helping/Doing good	25.93	54.17	.0001
Sacrifice	11.57	6.02	ns
Selflessness	42.13	37.04	ns
Does not exist	-	0.93	ns
Total No. of answers	452	423	

Note: ^a Fisher’s Exact Test. N= No. of Participants

4.1.2. Benefits of Altruism

Answers from the global sample were prominently focused on Improved Relationships (19.73%) as benefit of altruism, followed by Happiness/Positive Emotions (15.30%) and Contentment/Harmony (13.94%) - referring to inner peace and serenity. Beneficiaries (11.4%) comprised answers indicating benefits to other people. Personal growth, Spiritual Benefits, Social Welfare, and Satisfaction followed. Psycho-Physical Health and External Rewards scored least.

Figure 4: Benefits of Altruism



The cross-cultural comparison (Table 2) highlighted that both Indian and Italian participants reported Happiness/Positive Emotions as the prominent benefit, followed by Beneficiaries. As indicated by Fisher’s Exact test, a significantly higher percentage of Italians referred to Personal Growth and Satisfaction, while Indians referred to Improved relationships, Harmony and Spirituality.

Table 2: Benefits of Altruism - Percentage distribution of participants across categories in the two countries

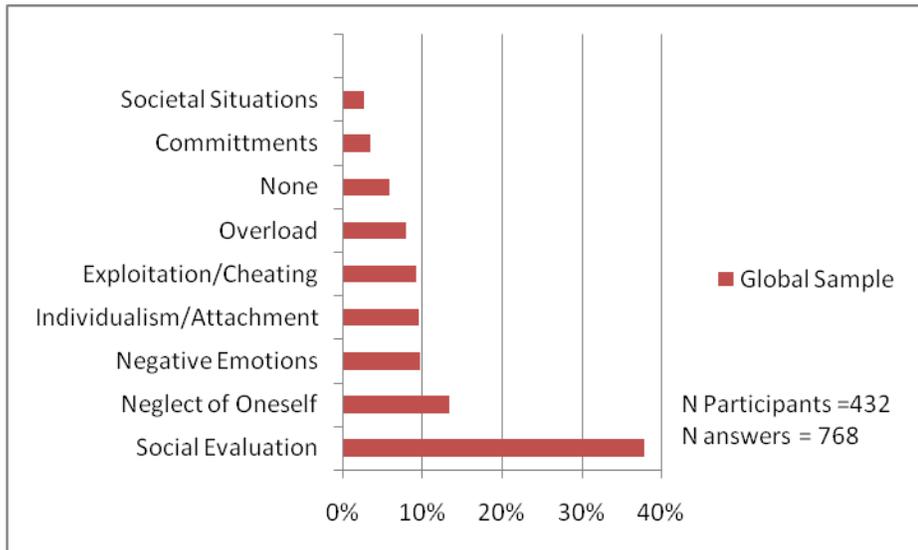
Benefits of Altruism	Indians % (N=216)	Italians % (N=216)	p ^a
Personal Growth	12.96	31.49	.0001
Satisfaction	3.70	20.37	.0001
External Rewards	6.02	7.41	ns
Harmony	37.96	16.67	.0001
Happiness/Positive Emotions	34.72	32.87	ns
Psycho-Physical Health	4.17	8.80	ns
Improved Relationships	38.43	23.61	.0012
Beneficiaries	24.54	23.15	ns
Social welfare	16.67	11.11	ns
Spirituality	33.33	2.78	.0001
Total No.of answers	424	410	

Note: ^a Fisher’s Exact Test. N= No. of Participants

4.1.3. Difficulties of Altruism

Social Evaluation, referring to criticism, opposition and isolation, was perceived as the major difficulty in being altruistic, accounting for 37.90% of the answers in the global sample. Neglect of oneself directly followed (13.41%). Negative Emotions, Individualism/Attachment and Exploitation/Cheating showed almost similar percentages of answers (9.80%, 9.63% and 9.24% respectively). Overload, referring to perception of frequent or high demands, sacrifices and financial burdens, was reported in 8% of the answers, while 5.98% referred to the category “None”, indicating that there are no difficulties in being altruistic.

Figure 5: Difficulties in being altruistic



Group comparison (Table 3) highlighted a significant difference in Individualism/attachment, with Italians stressing this aspect significantly more than Indians. The category includes answers indicating personal attachment and difficulty to rise above selfishness. On the other hand, Neglect of Oneself, Negative Emotions, Overload, Social Evaluation and Commitments were reported by a significantly higher percentage of Indians. Commitments refer to one’s responsibilities at family/ work and the demands of one’s daily routine.

Table 3: Difficulties of being Altruistic - Percentage distribution of participants across categories in the two countries

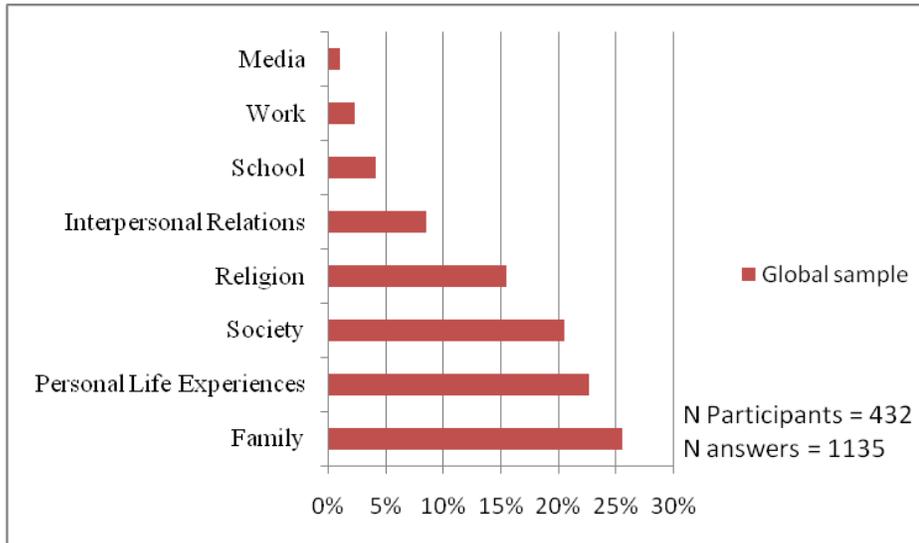
Difficulties of Altruism	Indians % (N=216)	Italians % (N=216)	p ^a
Individualism/Attachment	2.31	28.24	.0001
Neglect of Oneself	23.46	16.67	.0333
Negative Emotions	23.15	7.87	.0001
Overload	23.61	1.85	.0001
Exploitation/Cheating	12.50	16.20	ns
Social Evaluation	58.80	31.94	.0001
Societal Situations	3.24	6.02	ns
Commitments	9.26	2.31	.0031
None	8.33	12.96	ns
Total No. of answers	328	301	

Note: a Fisher's Exact Test. N= No. of Participants

4.1.4. Sources of Altruism Concept

Family (25.50%), Personal Experiences (22.64%) and Society (20.50%) represented the most frequent domains described as the sources of participant's altruism concept. Personal Life Experiences comprises personal life events, attitudes and personal values. Religion (15.50%) and Interpersonal Relations (8.50%) followed. School accounted for 4.14% and Work for 2.30%. Media (1.05%) ranked the lowest.

Figure 6: Sources of Altruism concept



As shown in Table 4, both groups referred to Family and Personal Life Experiences as the two prominent sources of altruism concept with over half of the participants in the two cultures referring to Family and almost 50% to Personal Life Experiences. As concerns the differences, a significant higher percentage of Italians referred to Religion, Interpersonal Relations and School, while a significant higher percentage of Indians referred to Society.

Table 4: Sources of Altruism concept - Percentage distribution of participants across categories in the two countries

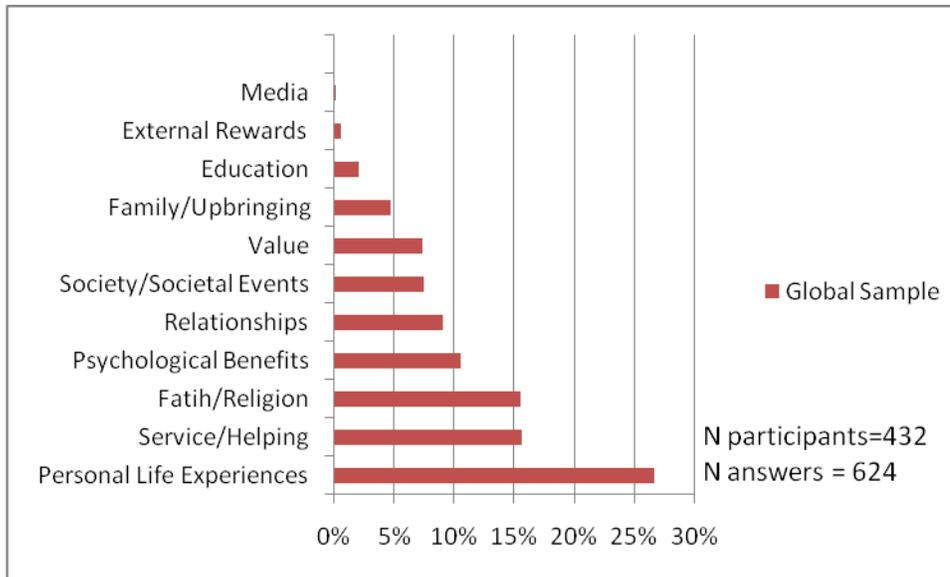
Sources of Altruism Concept	Indians % (N=216)	Italians % (N=216)	p ^a
Family	53.70	56.94	ns
Interpersonal Relations	16.20	25.46	.0240
School	5.56	13.89	.0052
Work	3.70	8.33	ns
Media	3.70	1.39	ns
Society	50	33.80	.0001
Religion	28.24	42.59	.0025
Personal Life Experiences	52.78	45.37	ns
Total No. of answers	462	492	

Not:. ^a Fisher's Exact Test. N= No. of Participants

4.1.5. Reasons for being altruistic

While the source of altruism concept was predominantly referred to a source external to the individual, this open-ended question prominently focused on the perceived internalized source/motive for being altruistic. Answers of the global sample referred to Personal Life Experiences (26.6%) as the most predominant reason for being altruistic. Service/Helping (15.6%) and Faith/Religion (15.54%) were reported as the second and third reasons. Service/Helping comprised answers referring to “volunteering”, “involvement in social activities” and ‘activities of NGOs’. Psychological Benefits, including answers such as “satisfaction”, “happiness” and “feeling useful”, was reported as the fourth major reason. Education, External Rewards and Media were the last three with 2.10%, 0.64% and 0.20% of the answers, respectively.

Figure 7: Reasons for being altruistic



As shown in Table 5, both the groups reported Personal Life Experiences as the major reason for being altruistic. Fisher’s exact test detected group differences, with a significantly higher percentage of Italians referring to Service/Helping and Psychological Benefits, while Faith/Religion and Family/Upbringing were prominently referred by Indians.

Table 5: Reasons for being Altruistic - Percentage distribution of participants across categories in the two countries

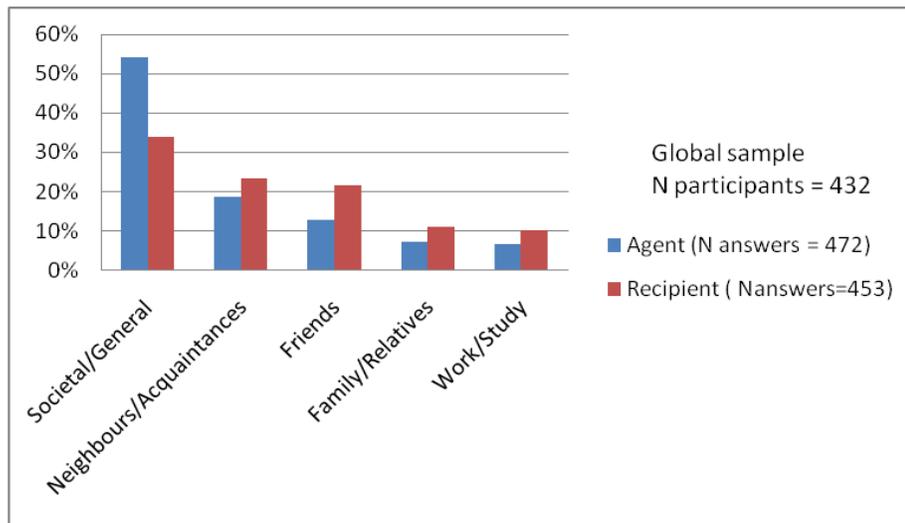
Reasons for being altruistic	Indians % (N=216)	Italians % (N=216)	p ^a
Family/Upbringing	9.72	2.78	.0045
Relationships	13.80	8.80	ns
Education	1.39	4.63	ns
Media	0.46	-	ns
Society/Societal Events	12.96	8.33	ns
Faith/Religion	34.72	3.24	.0001
Personal Life Experiences	34.26	36.11	ns
Service/Helping	15.74	26.39	.0092
Psychological Benefits	6.02	18.06	.0001
External Rewards	-	1.85	ns
Value	9.26	10.19	ns
Total No. of answers	298	260	

Note:.^a Fisher's Exact Test. N= No. of Participants

4.1.6. Enacted Altruistic Behaviours

In describing an enacted altruistic behaviour, participants offered a list of behaviours in two conditions: being an agent (472 answers) and being a recipient (453 answers). In both the situations, the answers of the global sample (Figure 6) referred to similar relational contexts within which altruistic behaviours took place. Society was referred as the most prominent context with 54.02% (being an agent) and 33.82% (being a recipient) of the answers. Neighbors/Acquaintances followed with 18.82% (agent) and 23.42% (recipient) of the answers. Friends ranked third (12.92% & 21.53%) and Family/Relatives fourth (7.41% & 11.03%). The context of Work/Study was the least frequently referred with 6.83% (agent) and 10.20% (recipient) of the total answers.

Figure 8: Relational Contexts of Altruistic behaviours



Group differences are presented in Table 6. As per being an agent of altruistic behaviour, a significantly higher percentage of Italians referred to the context of Friends while Indians referred to Neighbors/Acquaintances. As per being a recipient of altruistic behaviours, the contexts of Friends, Work/Study and Family/Relatives were referred by a significantly higher percentage of Italians. The Indians, instead, referred to Neighbors/Acquaintances and Societal/General.

Table 6: Relational contexts of Altruistic behaviours - Percentage distribution of participants across categories in the two countries

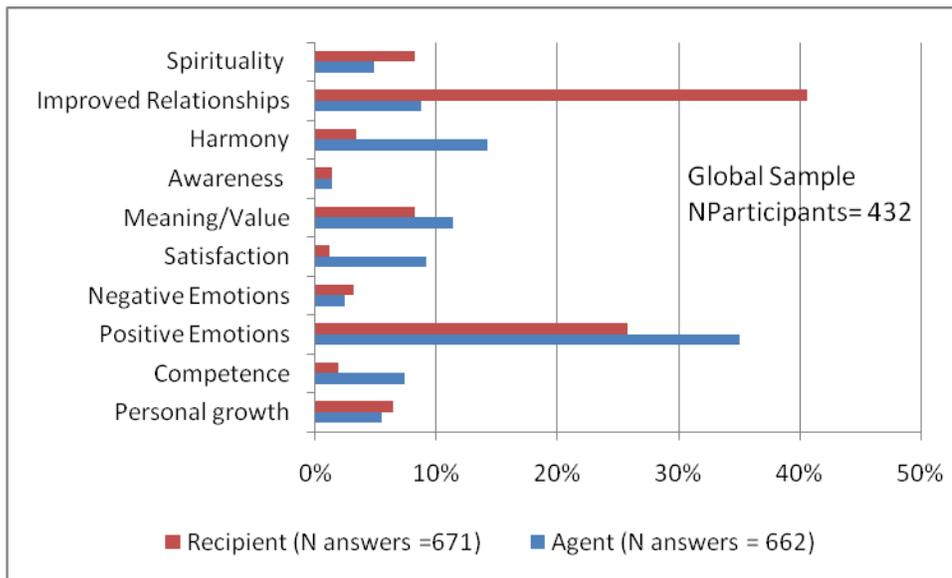
Relational contexts of Altruistic acts	Agent of altruistic act			Recipient of altruistic act		
	Indians% (N=216)	Italians% (N=216)	p ^a	Indians% (N=216)	Italians% (N=216)	p ^a
Family/Relatives	5.56	10.19	ns	7.87	15.28	.0233
Friends	5.56	20.37	.0001	13.89	29.63	.0001
Work/Study	5.09	9.72	ns	5.09	16.20	.0001
Neighbours/Acquaintances/Societal/General	33.33	5.56	.0001	34.26	12.04	.0001
Societal/General	54.63	53.24	ns	33.33	13.43	.0001
Total No. of answers	225	214		204	197	

Note: ^a Fisher's Exact Test. N= No. of Participants

4.1.7. Experiences Associated with Altruistic Behaviours

As shown in Figure 7, Positive Emotions was the most prominent experience associated with enacting an altruistic act, with 35.04% of the total answers. Harmony (14.19%) and Meaning/Value (10.12%) followed. Harmony refers to feeling of “inner peace”, “contentment”, and “serenity”. Meaning/Value consists of answers like “perceiving meaning of life”, “fulfilling one’s duty” or “realizing the value of helping”. Improved relationship was reported as the fourth major experience (8.76%). As per being a recipient, Improved Relationships predominated with 40.68% of the answers. Positive Emotions (25.5%) and Spirituality (8.19%) were the other two prominent experiences.

Figure 9: Experiences associated with altruistic behaviours



Fisher’s exact test showed group differences in both the conditions (Table 7). In being an agent of altruistic acts, a significantly higher percentage of Italians referred to Satisfaction, Meaning/Value and Negative Emotions. Indians more frequently reported Positive Emotions, Competence, Spirituality and Personal Growth/Engagement. As per being a recipient, a significantly higher percentage of Italians referred to Negative Emotions, while the Indians mentioned Spirituality, Personal Growth, and Meaning/Value. However, there was a striking similarity (57.87% of Italians and 48.15% of Indians) in highlighting Improved Relationships as a prominent experience while being a beneficiary.

Since the answer categories were similar for both the conditions and that certain categories were referred recurrently in both conditions, we wanted a more specific analysis of the recurrent categories for any qualitative differences as same words/categories can have multiple meanings. In fact, the answers of recurrent categories pointed to different aspects of the psychological categories. A significant higher percentage of Indians referred to Personal Growth in both the situations. In being an agent, the answers referred to “becoming a better person”, “determination” and “acquiring insights”. On the other hand, in being a recipient, answers referred to “wanting to follow the example”, “inspired” and “encouraged/motivated in life”.

The group difference in Meaning/Value manifested similar difference. A higher percentage of Italians referred to it while being an agent, with responses such as; “discovering meaning of life”, “realizing the value of helping” and “maintaining purity of conscience”. In being a recipient, instead, a significantly higher percentage of Indians referred to it with answers like, “there is hope in the world”, “people are good”, and “social values are alive”. As per the category of spirituality, answers were; “fulfilling God’s commandment”, “loving God” and “service to God” in being an agent, while they were “experiencing God’s intervention”, “grateful to God” and “growing in faith” in being a recipient.

Table 7: Experiences associated with Altruistic behaviours - Percentage distribution of participants across categories in the two countries

Experiences associated to Altruistic Behaviours	Agent of altruistic act			Recipient of altruistic act		
	Indians% (N=216)	Italians% (N=216)	p ^a	Indians% (N=216)	Italians% (N=216)	p ^a
Personal Growth	10.65	4.63	.0284	15.74	2.78	.0001
Competence	16.20	5.09	.0001	2.31	3.70	ns
Positive Emotions	54.17	33.33	.0001	29.17	30.56	ns
Negative Emotions	-	7.41	.0001	1.37	7.41	.0036
Satisfaction	4.63	23.15	.0001	0.93	2.31	ns
Meaning/Value	13.43	23.83	.0042	14.82	7.41	.0057
Awareness	4.17	-	.0036	1.39	2.31	ns
Harmony	23.61	17.59	ns	4.17	6.02	ns
Improved Relationships	12.50	11.57	ns	48.15	57.87	ns
Spirituality	12.96	0.46	.0001	21.30	0.93	.0001
Total No. of answers	309	288		301	262	

Note: ^a Fisher’s Exact Test. N= No. of Participants

4.1.8. Being and Meeting Altruistic Person

The 5 point scale participants used to rate their perceived level of being an altruistic person showed a median value of 4. The scale used to rate the frequency of meeting altruistic persons yielded a median value of 3. In the global sample, Spearman's rank index detected a positive inter-correlation (.139, $p < .01$) between the scales. Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare Italian and Indian participants' ratings. No significant group differences were detected in the frequency of meeting altruistic persons. As per the perceived level of being an altruistic person, Indians (mean rank = 234.7) scored significantly higher than Italians (mean rank = 198.3) ($Z = -3.180$, $p < .001$).

4.1.9. Perceived Levels of Being Altruistic (PLA) and Perception of Altruism

As previously indicated, the global sample was divided into three groups based on the scores of the perceived level of being an altruistic person; LA (N=32; Italians = 12), MA (N=132; Italians = 87) and HA (N=268; Italians = 117). Since a higher number of participants ranked themselves as altruistic, with values of 4 and 5 on the five point scale, an analysis of the group composition was first carried out. No significant role of culture, gender, age, education, job, standard of living and religious practice was found, except for education ($f = 3.10$; $p < .046$). In particular, Tukey's post-hoc analysis showed that post-graduated participants (N=165) significantly differed from participants with graduation (N=51) and secondary level of education (N=216), ranking themselves less frequently with values of 4 and 5. This raised questions on the role of education in the perceived levels of altruism and was considered in the process of further analyses.

A comparison among these groups was carried out in the answers to the open-ended questions. Chi square procedure detected significant differences among groups (Table 8). Significant group differences emerged in most answers except for the perceived benefits of altruism, sources of altruism concept and relational contexts of altruistic behaviours. In the definition of altruism, significant group differences emerged in Helping\Doing good. More specifically, the evaluation of cell Chi square values highlighted that LA group referred to it significantly more frequently, contributing 45% of the chi square value, than MA and HA. As per the difficulties, significant group differences emerged in Selfishness/Attachment and None. Evaluation of cell Chi square values highlighted that MA group referred to Selfishness/Attachment significantly more

frequently (40% of χ^2 value) than LA and HA. On the other hand, the category None was referred significantly by HA group in comparison to other two groups (57% of χ^2 value).

In reporting the reasons for being altruistic significant group differences were detected in Faith/Religion and External Rewards. More specifically, the evaluation of cell Chi square values highlighted that MA group referred to Faith/Religion (39% of χ^2 value) more frequently than LA and HA. As per the category External Reward, only a very few percentage of participants within each group referred to it. Among them, LA group referred to it significantly more frequently than the other two groups (80% of χ^2 value). Finally, in the experiences associated with altruistic behaviours categories Meaning/Value and Harmony showed significant group differences. Analysis of cell chi square values showed that HA group referred to them significantly more frequently (50% for Meaning/Value & 48% for Harmony of χ^2 values) than MA and LA groups.

Table 8: Perceptions of Altruism - Percentage distribution of participants across significantly different categories in the three groups

	LA (N=32) (Italians=12)	MA (N=132) (Italians=87)	HA (N=268) (Italians=117)	χ^2 (df= 2)	P
Definition of Altruism					
Helping/Doing good	50.00	40.91	35.45	6.32	<.05
Difficulties of being Altruistic					
Selfishness/attachment	27.27	25	8.21	27.35	<.001
None	5.30	6.25	13.81	7.42	<.05
Experiences associated with altruistic behaviours					
Meaning/Value	9.38	12.31	22.73	8.34	<.01
Harmony	6.25	18.18	23.51	5.88	<.05
Reasons to be altruistic					
Faith/religion	9.38	9.85	24.63	14.63	<.001
External rewards	9.38	0.76	0.00	27.45	<.001

Note: N= No. of Participants

Significant group differences were also detected in meeting altruistic persons ($F=9.76$, $p <.0001$). Tukey's test at 95% confidence limit showed that LA group ($M=2.66$; $sd = 0.83$) differed from both MA ($M = 3.17$; $sd= 0.64$) and HA group ($M= 3.24$; $sd = 0.71$) with significantly less frequency of meeting an altruistic person.

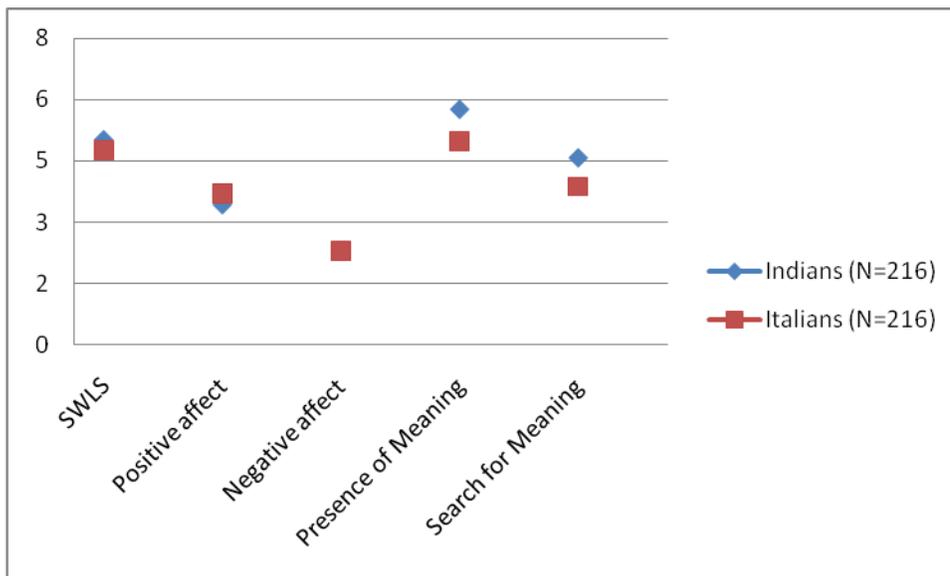
4.2. Altruism and Well-being Measures

As a second step, the relationship between altruism and well-being variables (hedonic and eudaimonic) was explored. Analyses were carried out at two levels; i) cross-cultural comparison of well-being measures, ii) perceived level of being an altruistic person (PLA) and its relation to well-being variables.

4.2.1. Cross-cultural Comparison of Well-being Measures

A cross-cultural comparison of hedonic (PANAS and SWLS) and eudaimonic (MLQ and EHHI) well-being measures was carried out (Figure 8 & Table 9)

Figure 10: Well-being measures in the two countries



T-test analysis detected significant group differences in the measures, except for Negative affect. Italians scored significantly higher in Positive Affect, while Indians reported higher values in SWLS, Presence of Meaning, and Search for Meaning.

Table 9: Well-being measures in the two countries

Scales	Group Means (sd)		t (df)	P
	Indians (N=216)	Italians (N=216)		
Positive Affect	3.43 (0.54)	3.70 (0.52)	-5.28 (430)	<.0001
Negative Affect	2.30 (0.75)	2.30 (0.69)	-0.14	ns
Satisfaction with Life	5.01 (1.42)	4.77 (1.11)	1.97 (406)	<.05
Presence of Meaning	5.75 (0.95)	4.99 (1.17)	7.38 (413)	<.001
Search for Meaning	4.57 (1.52)	3.88 (1.69)	4.47 (430)	<.001

Note: sd = standard deviation. df = degree of freedom.

N= No. of Participants

Groups also differed in EHHI measures of happiness and meaningfulness level in life domains. In the level of happiness (Table 10), the significant group difference in the domain of Health was due to the higher mean score of the Italians. On the other hand, the higher mean score of Indians in the domains of Spirituality/Religion, Society, and Community resulted in significant group differences. Community refers to people who live in the same area or share the same interests, usually interacting with one another, while society indicates an extended social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization (Delle Fave et al., 2010). Life domains of Interpersonal Relations, Work and Standard of living also showed significant differences, with Indians having a higher mean score.

Table 10: Level of happiness in life domains in the two countries

Life Domains	Group Means (sd)		t (df)	p
	Indians (N=216)	Italians (N=216)		
Work	5.36 (1.70)	4.50 (1.36)	5.74 (410)	<.0001
Family	5.86 (1.49)	5.68 (1.26)	1.36 (429)	ns
Standard of living	5.17 (1.49)	4.89 (1.16)	2.12 (406)	<.0341
Interpersonal relations	5.66 (1.31)	5.17 (1.17)	4.12 (429)	<.0001
Health	5.20 (1.58)	5.53 (1.12)	-2.52 (387)	<.0120
Personal growth	5.01 (1.65)	5.09 (1.22)	-0.56 (397)	ns
Leisure - free time	4.51 (1.73)	4.54 (1.49)	-0.19 (421)	ns
Spirituality/ religion	5.29 (1.75)	3.97 (2.03)	7.17 (414)	<.0001
Community issues	4.45 (1.84)	3.64 (1.96)	4.42 (430)	<.0001
Society issues	4.32 (1.94)	3.27 (1.70)	5.94 (422)	<.0001

Note: sd = standard deviation. df = degree of freedom.
N= No. of Participants

As per meaningfulness (Table 11), Italians scored significantly higher than Indians in the life domains of Family, Health, Personal Growth, and Leisure. The Indians, instead, reported higher scores in Spirituality, Community Issues, Work, and Standard of Living.

Table 11: Level of meaningfulness in life domains in the two countries

Life Domains	Group Means		t	p
	(sd)			
	Indians (N=216)	Italians (N=216)	(df)	
Work	6.25 (1.15)	5.56 (1.11)	6.33 (428)	<.0001
Family	6.40 (1.03)	6.63 (0.75)	-2.60 (392)	<.0097
Standard of living	5.83 (1.28)	5.12 (1.13)	6.08 (429)	<.0001
Interpersonal relations	5.87 (1.32)	5.84 (0.98)	0.29 (398)	ns
Health	5.92 (1.38)	6.54 (0.72)	-5.83 (325)	<.0001
Personal growth	5.47 (1.67)	5.99 (1.08)	-3.85 (368)	<.0001
Leisure - free time	5.05 (1.71)	5.35 (1.11)	-2.17 (369)	<.0310
Spirituality/ religion	5.56 (1.64)	4.63 (1.89)	5.41 (414)	<.0001
Community issues	5.10 (1.55)	4.50 (1.46)	4.11 (423)	<.0001
Society issues	4.87 (1.67)	4.69 (1.33)	1.23 (408)	ns

Note: sd = standard deviation. df = degree of freedom.
N= No. of Participants

4.2.2. PLA and its Relation to Well-being Variables

Notwithstanding the cross-cultural differences, the specific relationship of PLA with well-being variables was investigated at the global sample level and subsequently at the level of the three PLA groups: LA, MA and HA.

4.2.2.1. Analysis on the Global Sample

As shown in Table 12, a Spearman correlation analysis detected a positive correlation between PLA and the level of happiness and meaningfulness in life domains. To make the results more reliable, a higher strength of relationship ($r = .2$) was adopted as a cut-off value. In the level of

happiness, PLA was most prominently correlated to the domains Interpersonal Relationship and Society. As per levels of meaningfulness, Interpersonal Relationships and Community were highly correlated to PLA.

Table 12: Spearman correlations between PLA and EHHI measure of level of happiness and meaningfulness in life domains

Life Domains	Happiness	Meaningfulness
Work	.158**	.182**
Family	.089	.018
Standard of living	.130**	.183**
Interpersonal relations	.269**	.256**
Health	.057	.075
Personal growth	.179**	.126**
Leisure - free time	.055	.115*
Spirituality/ religion	.153**	.165**
Community issues	.186**	.222**
Society issues	.216**	.178**

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01

The Pearson correlation procedure was used to check for bivariate correlation coefficients among PLA, SWLS, PANAS and MLQ. As shown in Table 13, among the correlated variables, Presence of Meaning had the highest strength of relationship with altruism (r = .213; p < .01).

Table 13: Pearson correlations among PANAS, SWLS, MLQ and PLA

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1)Altruistic Person	-					
(2)Positive affect	.176**	-				
(3)Negative affect	-.041	-.252**	-			
(4)Satisfaction with Life	.137**	.408**	-.355**	-		
(5)Presence of Meaning	.213**	.243**	-.282**	.508**	-	
(6)Search for Meaning	.083	-.053	.240**	-.174**	-.176**	-

Note: ** p < .01

To make the analysis more conservative, a partial correlation analysis was carried out, controlling for other contributing variables. In controlling for Satisfaction with life and Positive Affect, PLA was significantly correlated to Presence of Meaning (r = .191; p < .0001). PLA was also significantly correlated to Positive Affect (r = .126; p < .009) when controlling for

Satisfaction with Life and Presence of Meaning. There was no significant correlation between PLA and Satisfaction with Life when controlling for Presence of Meaning and Positive Affect.

4.2.2.2. Analysis on PLA Groups

As concerns the mean score of hedonic (Figure 8) and eudaimonic (Figure 10) well-being measures in the three groups, an increasing trend from LA to HA is evident for all measures, except for Negative Affect.

Figure 11: Hedonic Measures in the three groups

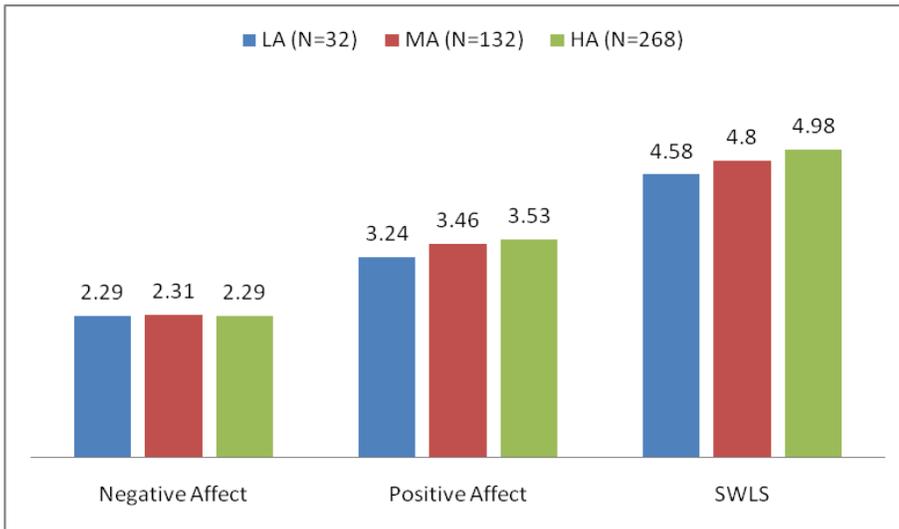
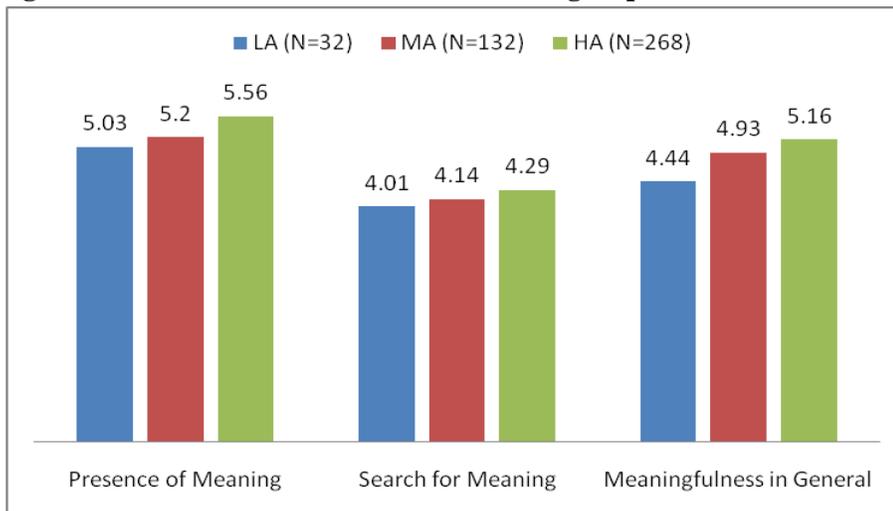


Figure 12: Eudaimonic Measures in the three groups



As shown in Table 14, ANOVA showed among the three groups significant differences in Presence of Meaning and Positive Affect, confirming the results of partial correlation. No significant group differences were detected for SWLS, Negative Affect and Search for Meaning. Tukey’s test was used for a more specific analysis of the group differences. At 95% confidence limits, HA group significantly differed ($p < .05$) from both MA and LA groups in the Presence of Meaning. As per Positive Affect, HA was significantly different from LA.

Table 14: Well-being measures in the three groups

Scales	Group Means			f	P
	(sd)				
	LA (N=32)	MA (N=132)	HA (N=268)		
Satisfaction with Life	4.58 (1.09)	4.80 (1.18)	4.98 (1.34)	1.97	ns
Presence of Meaning	5.03 (0.98)	5.20 (1.18)	5.56 (1.09)	10.78	<.0001
Search for Meaning	4.01 (1.45)	4.14 (1.69)	4.29 (1.64)	0.65	ns
Positive Affect	3.24 (0.46)	3.46 (0.47)	3.53 (0.52)	5.26	<.0054
Negative Affect	2.29 (0.72)	2.31 (0.64)	2.29 (0.69)	0.06	ns

Note: sd = standard deviation, N= No. of Participants

A regression analysis was further employed, exploring the relationship among the three variables: PLA, Presence of Meaning and Positive Affect. Statistical assumptions were controlled and normality in error distribution was established. A linear regression analysis at 95% confidence interval was used. PLA predicted Presence of meaning ($t = 20.23$; $B = .33$; $Beta = .18$; $p < .0001$; lower bound = .164 and upper bound .499). In a similar confidence interval PLA predicted Positive Affect ($t = 31.59$; $B = .11$; $Beta = .14$; $p < .0001$; lower bound = .044 and upper bound .192), endorsing the results of qualitative explorations on the perceived benefits of altruism (fig 2) and experiences associated to altruistic behaviours (fig 7). In both the questions, answers of participants prominently referred to the category of Positive Emotions.

An analysis on EHHI measure of life domains with an ANOVA generated concertized information consistent with the regression findings. As shown in Table 15, significant differences across PLA groups emerged in the levels of domain meaningfulness. The domain of Interpersonal relations was the most prominent one, but group differences were detected in seven other domains as well. In all the significantly different domains, a comparison of group mean scores highlighted an ascending order from LA to HA, suggesting that a perceived higher level of altruism is related to a higher level of meaningfulness in most of the life domains.

Table 15: Level of Meaningfulness in Life domains in the three groups

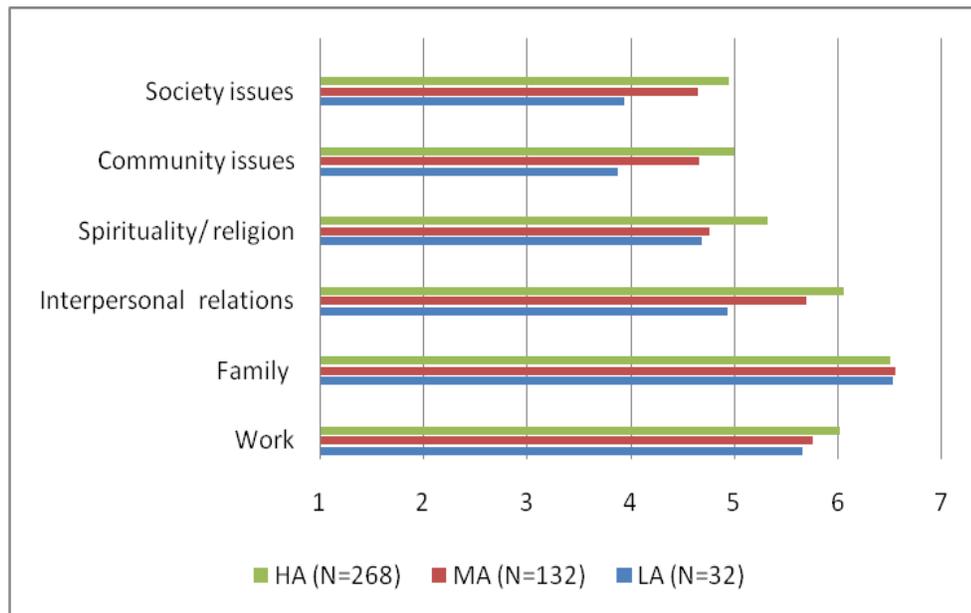
Life Domains	Group Means (sd)			F	p
	LA (N=32)	MA (N=132)	HA (N=268)		
Work	5.66 (1.21)	5.76 (1.19)	6.02 (1.17)	3.04	<.04
Family	6.53 (0.80)	6.55 (0.91)	6.50 (0.93)	0.13	ns
Standard of living	5.10 (1.27)	5.33 (1.24)	5.60 (1.27)	3.74	<.02
Interpersonal relations	4.94 (1.44)	5.70 (1.15)	6.05 (1.07)	15.87	<.0001
Health	5.66 (1.64)	6.30 (1.01)	6.27 (1.13)	4.44	<.012
Personal growth	5.03 (1.66)	5.78 (1.24)	5.79 (1.48)	4.20	<.015
Leisure - free time	4.75 (1.78)	5.15 (1.35)	5.28 (1.45)	2.03	ns
Spirituality/ religion	4.68 (1.85)	4.76 (1.87)	5.32 (1.78)	5	<.007
Community issues	3.87 (1.38)	4.66 (1.51)	5.00 (1.52)	8.67	<.0002
Society issues	3.94 (1.73)	4.65 (1.45)	4.95 (1.49)	7.07	<.001

Note: sd = standard deviation, N= No. of Participants

Tukey's test was used for specific analyses of differences between groups. In Interpersonal relations, all the three groups differed from each other. In Community issues, Society issues, Personal growth and Health, MA and HA significantly differed from LA. In Spirituality/religion

HA group scored significantly higher than the other two. As per Work and Standard of living no significant group differences were found in Tukey’s test, contrary to ANOVA output. This is explainable given the lower value of ‘F’ and its significance level. These results indicate that a higher perceived level of altruism show a higher level of meaningfulness in life domains that predominantly involve eudaimonic or relational features (fig 11).

Figure 13: Level of Meaningfulness of groups in life domains characterized by eudaimonic or relational feature



As per levels of happiness across groups, ANOVA again detected Interpersonal relations as the most prominent altruism-related domain. As shown in Table 16, only three other domains: Society issues, Community issues and Spirituality/religion significantly differed across groups.

Table 16: Level of Happiness in Life domains in the three groups

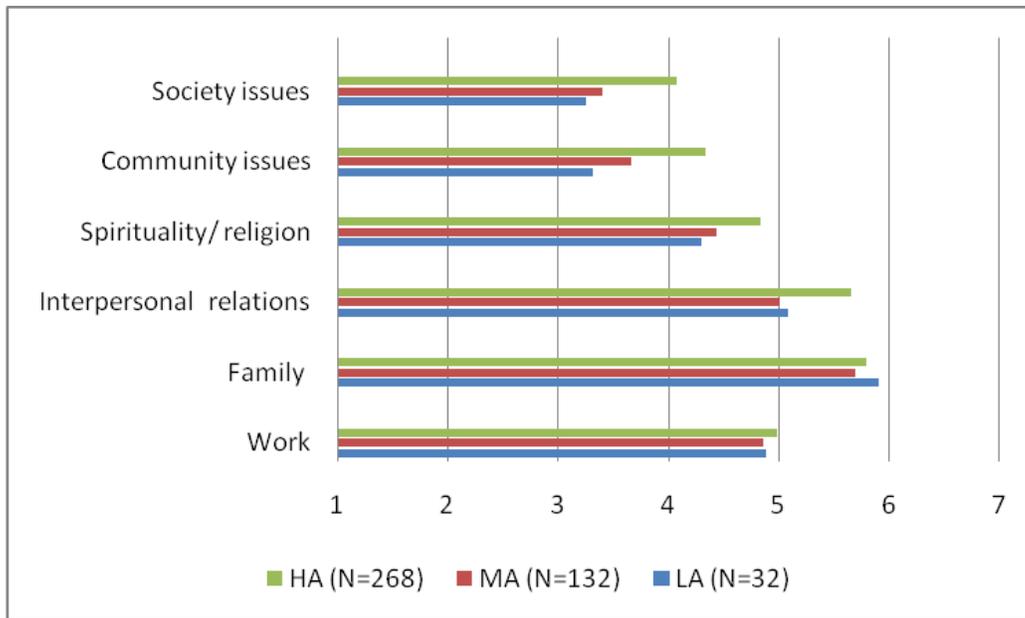
Life Domains	Group Means (sd)			F	p
	LA (N=32)	MA (N=132)	HA (N=268)		
Work	4.88 (1.52)	4.86 (1.26)	4.99 (1.76)	0.28	ns
Family	5.91 (1.15)	5.69 (1.31)	5.80 (1.45)	0.46	ns
Standard of living	4.81 (1.23)	4.94 (1.32)	5.11 (1.37)	1.17	ns
Interpersonal relations	5.09 (1.15)	5.01 (1.30)	5.66 (1.21)	13.67	<.0001
Health	5.34 (1.36)	5.46 (1.17)	5.33 (1.48)	0.42	ns
Personal growth	4.75 (1.34)	4.93 (1.26)	5.15 (1.55)	1.75	ns
Leisure - free time	4.44 (1.95)	4.49 (1.49)	4.57 (1.64)	0.16	ns
Spirituality/ religion	4.30 (2.08)	4.44 (1.91)	4.83 (2.03)	3.21	<.0414
Community issues	3.31 (2.12)	3.66 (1.87)	4.34 (1.91)	8.12	<.0003
Society issues	3.25 (2.03)	3.40 (1.78)	4.07 (1.90)	7.10	<.0009

Note: sd = standard deviation, N= No. of Participants

Tukey's test showed that all three groups significantly differed from each other in Interpersonal relations and Community issues. As per Society issues and Spirituality/religion HA participants scored significantly higher than MA ones. A comparison of group mean scores showed that individuals with a higher perceived level of being altruistic report higher level of happiness as well in life domains characterized by eudaimonic or relational features (fig 12). In particular, a linear regression analysis showed at 95% confidence interval showed PLA predicted higher levels of meaningfulness ($t = 20.62$; $B = .47$; $Beta = .25$; $p < .0001$; lower bound = .300 and upper bound .639) and happiness ($t = 17.27$; $B = .41$; $Beta = .21$; $p < .0001$; lower bound = .254 and upper bound .627) in the domain of interpersonal relations. In similar statistical measures, PLA

also predicted levels of happiness and meaningfulness in the domains of community ($t = 6.71$; $B = .58$; $Beta = .18$; $p < .0001$ and $t = 11.82$; $B = .46$; $Beta = .19$; $p < .0001$, respectively), and society ($t = 6.62$; $B = .51$; $Beta = .17$; $p < .0001$ and $t = 12.25$; $B = .41$; $Beta = .17$; $p < .0001$, respectively).

Figure 14: Level of Happiness of groups in life domains characterized by eudaimonic or relational feature



Finally, it is interesting to observe the domain of family as it had the highest mean score among all the domains in both meaningfulness and happiness for all the groups. However, no significant group differences were detected in this domain in both measures. This is understandable given the investigation focus of this study – altruism. Further, it can be ascribed to the vital role of family in individual’s life, despite any kind of individual differences. This observation is consistent with a cross-cultural study on domain related happiness and meaningfulness, in which participants across cultures referred to family as one of the most prominent locus of happiness and meaningfulness (Delle Fave et al., 2010).

The only side effect of altruism is happiness.

The effect of altruism is flourishing life.

CHAPTER 5

DICUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This work aimed at exploring the concept of altruism, its operationalization, as well as the potential of altruism in promoting individual and community well-being from a eudaimonic and inter-connected perspective. To this purpose, information was gathered using a mixed-method approach among adult participants living in India and Italy. Findings are discussed in line with the proposed hypotheses.

5.1. Altruism Conceptualization

Questioning the prevalent behavioural reductionism, we hypothesized that participants will define altruism from a value-based perspective, highlighting its multiple dimensions and features.

It is interesting to note that no participant omitted to answer the open-ended question on the definition of altruism, or provided confused and unclear description. Contrary to the contention and confusion dominating among the academicians about this term, participants' answers suggested considerable familiarity and clarity of the concept. Only two participants stated that altruism does not exist. The role of values, cultural norms and expectations, religion teachings and ethical guidelines can be credited for this familiarity, to name a few among many possible factors (Baumeister, 2005; Langford & Langford, 1974; Nesuner & Chilton, 2005). This finding is consistent with inductive or bottom-up investigation studies suggesting that constructs like love, happiness, gratitude, curiosity, hope or sacrifice manifest certain level of a-prior understanding across cultures (Schwartz, 1992; Sternberg, Conway, Ketron & Bernstein, 1981). In fact, this question generated the highest number of answers in the questionnaire, with 94 % of the participants providing more than one definition of altruism.

A content analysis of the answers indicated that participants referred to multiple features of altruism, highlighting that altruism is cross-culturally perceived more than just pro-social behaviour and other oriented emotions. Participants defined it also as a human and social value, a

psychological dimension, and a characteristic of interpersonal relationships, thus supporting our first hypothesis. In fact, only 20% of the answers referred to behaviours. These findings are actually consistent with the definitions of altruism that can be found in different languages (English (2011a), Italian (2011b) & Tamil (2011c) and in the conceptualizations developed in religions and ethics, which emphasize the relational and psychological features of altruism. In particular, selflessness was the prominent definition of altruism provided by the participants, in line with the definition proposed by Auguste Comte, who first coined the word *altruism* in 1852 from the Italian adjective *altrui*, meaning self-sacrifice for the benefit of others (Comte, 1891). Although closely connected to helping, pro-social behaviour, and compassion, altruism differs from them in this regard. Compassion, helping and pro-social behaviours may enhance the welfare of others with or without a willingness to sacrifice or a feature of selflessness. Compassion, for example, is defined as a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering (Weinstein, 2008). However, engagement to act is not an essential component of compassion. In this respect altruism is a more active form of compassion (Weintraub, 2011), that includes a strong motivation or urge to do something, involving even an act of sacrifice, for the object of compassion.

In addition, responses to other open-ended questions clarified certain contentious issues relevant to altruism conceptualization. First, participants evaluated altruism not from a binary mode of *self v/s other* but from an interconnected perspective of *self and/with other*. This was evident in the answers referring to perceived benefits of being altruistic. Participants referred to both self-related and other-related benefits, not manifesting any conceptual conflict or difficulty in reporting personal benefits as part of altruism benefits. Interestingly, self-related benefits (hedonic and eudaimonic) accounted for 61% of the global answers. This finding stands contrary to the academicians' effort to juxtapose self-benefits and benefits to others in order to ascertain altruism. In fact, such a high percentage of self-related benefits is consistent with various studies that have highlighted that altruistic behaviours are predominantly beneficial to the agent than the recipient (Post, 2005; Schwartz, & Sendor, 1999).

Second, in describing examples of altruistic behaviours participants did not refer to ideal or rare events, as often depicted in altruism role models. Moreover, participants did not just refer to behavioural aspects but to relational and psychological features as well, even though they were explicitly asked to describe behaviours. Answers in both conditions (agent & recipient) referred to ordinary situations at the behavioural (giving up a seat in the bus, praying for the other), relational (adjusting with co-workers, being with someone in need, treating others with dignity) and psychological levels (being a loving person, having an attitude to let go, forgiving the debt of others), to name a few. These results redeem altruism from being an ideal and daring act, as often highlighted in altruism models, and are consistent with the conception of altruism proposed by Sorokin (1950), who envisaged a continuum model based on progressive and varying levels of altruism (Monroe, 1996). Participants' answers also referred to varying levels of complexity in the description of enacted altruistic behaviours across different relational contexts; family, friends, neighborhood, and society. This finding presents a realistic picture of altruism and is consistent with inter-personal zones characterizing relationships. Individuals engage in relationships in varying relational zones, namely the intimate, personal, social, and public ones (Kennedy, 2009; Lauren, 1998). Similarly, individuals can behave altruistically within family as well, hence altruism is not necessarily a process restricted to strangers. Referring to varying levels of zone in altruistic interactions, answers present a progressive or inter-connected perspective of altruism. Within such a framework, individual differences are acknowledged at different levels or zones, and honored, allowing individuals to be altruistic in accordance with their resources and potentials, skills and competences, without forcing them to rise up to a one-size-fit-all model. These findings confirm the first hypothesis and call for newer ways of conceptualizing altruism. An attempt in this direction is made at the end of this chapter.

5. 2. Altruism and Cultural Diversity

Through the second hypothesis, we expected that altruism must entail different meanings and dynamics across cultures, strongly shaped by local norms and expectations. This hypothesis was supported by the differences in the answers provided by Indian and Italian participants.

The prominence of altruism definitions as a Value/Virtue and Love/Relationship among Indians fit well the participants' collectivistic cultural context, where individual identity is often viewed

through the prism of inter-connectedness, in terms of the role played by the person – what the person *is* – in the society/community. The Italians instead in their definition of altruism focused more on what an individual *feels* (care/concern) and *does* (helping/doing) for the others – a typical feature of an individualistic culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Masuda & Nisbett, 2001). For example, in defining altruism, Indians often used phrases like; “must possess”, “should follow”, “essential quality”, and “fundamental character”, in line with the characteristics of a collectivistic society where prioritizing the needs of the community over the self is not just expected (Value) and extolled (Virtue) but to certain extent mandated (Duty). Such phrases are not present in the Italian answers. This finding is in consistent with a cross-cultural investigation on interpersonal moral codes, showing that Indians exhibited a duty-based code in contrast to the individually centered one of Americans (Miller, 1994; Miller, Bersoff & Harwood, 1990). A similar world-view difference emerged in the perceived benefits of altruism. While Italians prominently referred to Personal growth and Satisfaction (what one gets as an individual), Indians referred to Improved Relationships, Harmony and Spirituality (what one gets in relation). These findings are not surprising, since cultural values greatly influence individual’s self-concepts, decision making and behaviours (Guss, 2004).

Cross-cultural differences of self-concept were evident in the experiences associated with altruistic behaviours as well. In being an agent, Indians referred to categories of Personal growth, Competence, and Positive emotions. Italians, instead, referred to Satisfaction and Meaning/Value. This finding can be interpreted in terms of differences in goal pursuits. Dweck (1986) distinguished between goals based on ego involvement and task involvement. Nicholls (1984) focused on demonstrating competence versus developing competence. Ego involvement/demonstrating competence goals involve an external and self-evaluative focus in which individuals seek to demonstrate high ability. Task involvement/developing competence goals, instead, involve less concern with self-evaluation and own position relative to others. As Markus and Kitayama (1991) showed, individuals tend to give greater importance to the opinion of others in collectivistic cultures, resulting in ego-involvement. Given their desirability, altruistic behaviours can easily become opportunities for demonstrating competence for Indians living in a collectivistic context, where individuals are prominently concerned about their ‘good-image’ before others. Answers reported by the Italians, instead, prominently referred to task

involvement/developing competence – satisfaction, meaning/value (Triandis, 2001). In line with this perspective, Italians reported Negative emotions in association with being a recipient of an altruistic behaviour. This finding is not unusual, however, given the preferential importance individualistic cultures accord to independence and agency, leading individuals to find it hard to receive help (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

In a similar vein, answers describing altruistic behaviours highlighted individualistic and collectivistic features in both the conditions (agent & recipient). From the perspective of relational circles, individuals in collectivistic cultures adopt wider and diffusing boundaries, that become instead predominantly smaller and concise in the individualistic cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). In this line, privacy is comparatively a more important issue in individualistic cultures than collectivistic ones (Lauren, 1998; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Consistent with this perspective, in being an agent, Italians prominently referred to the intimate and personal context of friendship while Indians referred to the wider context of neighbors /acquaintances. Relational features specific to individualistic and collectivistic cultures were also evident in recipient context. Italians prominently referred to the more intimate relational contexts of family, friends and work/study context, while Indians referred to the more extended contexts of neighbors/acquaintances and society. This feature was also evident in the quantitative measures of happiness and meaningfulness in life domains, with Italians finding family, personal growth and leisure as domains of happiness and meaningfulness, while Indians scored high in community and society.

Individualistic and collectivistic differences were also evident in the sources of and reasons for altruism. By reporting society as the prominent source of altruism concept and family as the reason for being altruistic, Indians referred to an external and collective source. The answers of Italians, instead, underscored an internal and individual source by referring to psychological benefits and being involved in service/helping (Triandis, 1995, 2001). This feature was also evident in the perceived difficulties of being altruistic. Italians emphasized individualism/attachment, focusing on personal dispositions. Indians, instead, stressed the category Overload and related ones, such as commitments, and neglect of oneself. Overall, Indians referred to issues of high demands, commitments, sacrifices, and financial burden,

focusing on circumstances and contextual aspects. This finding is consistent with collectivistic cultural norms and expectations about individuals being at the service of the society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). In addition, it could be ascribed to the socio-economic status of a developing nation like India, where the volume of need is apparently higher than Italy.

Cultural differences were also detected as regards the role of spirituality/religion. Indians referred to it as a benefit of altruism and a reason for being altruistic. These findings fit the Indian cultural milieu that is deeply intertwined with spirituality. In particular, the Indian traditional value of *Dhānam* - a Sanskrit term meaning “giving” in the sense of benevolence or altruism in Western thought - is often understood within a religious and spiritual perspective, and it is one of the many actions prescribed for attaining the highest goal in life, namely, spiritual salvation (Krishnan & Manoj, 2008). This specific feature of Indian culture was further evident in the experiences associated with altruistic behaviours in both conditions; agent (fulfilling God’s commandments) and recipient (experiencing God). This feature was also evident in the quantitative measure of meaningfulness and happiness. Indians reported spirituality as a source of happiness and meaningfulness. In spite of the repeated reference to spirituality/religion by Indians, this category was not reported as a source of the altruism concept. On the contrary, Italians, who live in a highly secularized society and practice religion less often than Indians do, reported it as a source. This finding, however, is consistent with the cultural history of Italy, rooted in the Christian tradition that rests on the altruistic death of Jesus and articulates more explicitly the love of the neighbour as the core manifestation of loving God (Grant, 2001). Even though Christianity as an institutionalized religion may be dwindling in its influence, its imprints are claimed to be part of Italian and European art, architecture, literature, societal values and norms (Eugenio, 2007). This finding converges with previous studies highlighting a correlation between religion and pro-social behaviours (Batson, 1989). Religion not being a source of altruism concept among Indians could be ascribed to the lack of an organized structure and codified instruction system that instead characterizes Hinduism (Flood, 2003).

Finally, acknowledging oneself as an altruistic person showed significant cross-cultural difference, with Indians scoring higher. This finding differs from previous studies on self-

evaluation, self-enhancement and modesty values in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Cai, Brown, Deng & Oakes, 2007; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Kurman, 2003). For example, a cross-cultural study highlighted that Chinese children considered owning one's pro-social behaviours to be wrong, while Canadian children considered it stupid not to own and take credit for one's pro-social deeds. These results were interpreted from the perspective of collectivistic versus individualistic societies (Lee, Cameron, Xu, Fu & Board, 1997). As for the present sample, the higher scores of Indians could be related to the desirability of altruistic behaviours within collectivistic cultures, warranting further exploration on the role of desirability in moderating the cultural values of modesty and self-enhancement.

Overall, these differences and specificities highlight the importance of taking into account the cultural value systems in altruism investigations. The value system of a culture and the priorities it accords play an important role in enhancing any social behaviour (Baumeister, 2005; Schwartz, 1992; Kimmelmeier et al., 2006). Attention to cultural specificities can not only help maximize altruism through culture-specific values but also minimize difficulties that are context-specific (Kurman, 2003; Guss, 2004; Krishnan & Manoj, 2008). Further, measurement and intervention must take into account the position of participants' culture on the individualism-collectivism continuum as well as the independent versus interdependent self-concept (Watkins, Mortazavi & Trofimova, 2000). However, there are only a few studies on these topics. In this regard, this work initiates and calls for further explorations into this vast and unknown territory.

5.3. Altruism and the Meaningful Life

5.3.1. A Life with Meaning

In the third hypothesis we proposed that higher levels of altruism may lead to higher levels of presence of meaning and correspondingly to lower levels of search for meaning. The findings confirmed the first half of the hypothesis, but not the second one. Higher levels of PLA predicted higher levels of perceived presence of meaning in life. The potential of altruism to enhance presence of meaning underscores its contribution to individual well-being promotion. Meaning in life has been acclaimed as a central and critical component of well-being from the eudaimonic perspective (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Deci & Ryan, 2000) as it represents an integrating factor in people's lives, drawing together the threads of their efforts to achieve happiness, withstand

distress, and attain transcendence beyond their solitary selves (Steger et al., 2009). It is considered an indicator of positive functioning (Diener & Seligman, 2004), psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998), and flourishing life (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Seligman, 2011). Given its cognitive (comprehension), motivational (purpose) and ontological (sense of ultimate) components, it enhances a broad range of quality-of-life related dimensions (Baumeister, 1991; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Emmons, 2005; Steger, 2012). Meaning in life not only enhances well-being but also provides resources to deal with existential hardships like loss, sickness, failure, and death (Wong, 2012). According to Frankl (1965), meaning in life provides a vital contribution to adaptation. “Growth is possible to the degree to which a person creates or finds meaning in suffering, pain, and adversity” (Emmons, 1999, p.144).

Given the vital role of meaning in life, meaning-making is a fundamental task in individual well-being, through the two processes of detecting and constructing meaning. Detecting meaning refers to perceiving meaning or making sense of one’s life in its unfolding through a deductive process, while constructing meaning refers to creating meaning in conditions of existential distress and difficulties through an inductive process (Wong, 2012). Self-determination theory (SDT) underscores that meaning-making process is intrinsic to human nature and is vital to a coherent life course (Wienstein, Ryan & Deci, 2012). Frankl (1965) claimed that every individual must undertake the life-long journey of meaning-making, as meaning is neither a given-reality nor universal (Frankl, 1965). Results from this work suggest that altruism is one of the potential pathways that provides individuals with a sense of meaning in life, in the light of some of the components of meaning itself. Self-transcendence (Emmons, 2005; Schnell, 2010), movement from self-preoccupation (Reker & Wong, 1998) and service/contribution to others (Leontieva, 2007) are marked as integral features of meaning. It can be therefore expected that altruism with its nature of moving away from self-preoccupation and involving service to others enhances meaning in life. .

5.3.2. A Life in Search for Meaning

Our findings did not confirm the second part of our hypothesis. Previous studies show that presence of meaning is distinct from search for meaning and is negatively correlated to it (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan & Lorents, 2008). Contrary to these studies, PLA was positively correlated to

presence of meaning but not negatively to search for meaning. This finding, however, is not strange as search for meaning is not an opposite pole of presence of meaning and involves complex features. First, it is not always correlated to neuroticism, depression, and negative emotions. From the perspective of life stages, for example, search for meaning represented a process of exploration among young people (Steger et al., 2009). Frankl (1963, 1965) considered man's search for meaning as a primary force of life and a crucial resource for promoting personal growth and purpose in negative conditions. Search for meaning could be also an enjoyable process as it involves new challenges and avenues of life exploration. A recent study detected that the search for *further* meaning by an individual with substantial meaning in life becomes a process of modification and expansion, contributing to well-being (Park et al., 2010). Second, the process of search is neither simple nor straightforward as it involves different stages and corresponding complexity of issues and tasks. Wong (2012) presents at least six different stages namely, inertia, exploratory, discovery, completion, emergency and stagnant, which have very different meanings and implications for well-being. A higher score in search for meaning can mean different things given the stage an individual may be in, thus underscoring the need to explore the *meaning* of the 'search for meaning' (Wong, 1995).

In light of the complex features of search for meaning, it seems consistent that PLA had no negative correlation to it. Given the presence of meaning, PLA's relation to search for meaning can be envisioned as a process of expanding/constructing *further* meaning (Park et al., 2010). As Maddi (2012) referred, the term 'quest for meaning' can be a better expression of than 'search for meaning' in relation to altruism. Altruism must entail not only presence of meaning but also expansion of such meaning- search for meaning – because of its salient feature of moving away from self-preoccupation and caring for the others. Qualitative answers referring to experiences associated to altruistic behaviours added clarity on this aspect. Participants referred prominently to categories of Personal growth, Meaning/value and Awareness, underscoring aspects of expanding horizons in the face of others' need and pain, and in the process of being involved in the lives of others. In light of the results of this study, it is plausible to claim that altruism promotes a meaningful life not only in terms of presence of meaning/meaning detection but also through a process of expanding search for meaning/meaning construction.

5.4. Altruism and the Happy Life

Various studies have shown that presence of meaning is positively correlated to positive affect and subjective well-being (Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994; King et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2006). Meaningful commitments and purpose in life were shown to promote opportunities for satisfaction and happiness (Baumeister, 1991; Emmons, 1999; Steger, 2012). A meta-analysis showed a .47 correlation between meaning in life and positive affect among older adults (Pinquart, 2002). Based on these studies, we assumed in our fourth hypothesis that higher PLA levels should predict higher levels of positive emotions and life satisfaction. Results of this work confirmed the above hypothesis, consistent with previous studies. In the qualitative results, happiness/positive emotions was reported as the most prominent experience associated with behaving altruistically. It was also reported as the second prominent experience while being a recipient of an altruistic gesture. Happiness/positive emotions ranked second - next only to improved relationships – among the perceived benefits of altruism. Quantitative results were consistent with the qualitative findings. PLA was related to positive affect when controlling for presence of meaning and SWLS. Findings showed that PLA had predictable power for positive affect. These findings suggest that even though altruism is a prominently eudaimonic feature, it is essentially related to hedonic outcomes. It is a path towards a happy life in line with a billboard claim, “the only side effect of altruism is happiness”. This is consistent with studies that have shown that altruistic behaviours lead to positive emotions (Frederickson, 2004; Luks, 1988; Moll et al., 2006; Oman, 2007).

On the other hand, findings did not support the second part of the hypothesis. Even though a positive correlation was shown between PLA and satisfaction with life, this correlation was not anymore significant when controlling for meaningfulness and positive affect. However, this finding is consistent with various studies that show that both hedonic (related to SWLS) and eudaimonic dimensions (related to meaning and altruism in the case here) are distinct components of well-being, notwithstanding their close relationships (Keyes & Annas, 2009; Linley, Maltby, Wood, Osborne, & Hurling, 2009). More specifically, the positivity bias in meaning is shown to yield the often found correlation between meaning and SWB despite their

psychological distinction (Keys, Shmotkin & Ryff, 2002). Moreover, this finding contributed to support the fifth hypothesis.

In line with the eudaimonic claim that following one's own daimon consists in pursuing meaningful endeavors, which are not always pleasurable, we hypothesized in the fifth hypothesis that positive emotions and satisfaction with life will be correlated to altruism prominently through the eudaimonic dimension of meaning in life than the merely hedonic dimension of happiness. The results indicated that PLA was not correlated to SWLS in the absence of presence of meaning and positive emotions, justifying our claims as far as SWLS is concerned. As regards positive emotions, a more focused analysis on the two-factor structure (positive and negative affect) of PANAS and the claim of its inversely proportional means provided further information on the relationship between positive emotions and PLA. PLA was positively correlated to positive affect but not negatively correlated to negative affect, contrary to claims of inversely proportional means. This finding can be related to the efforts, hardships, and sacrifices that are salient to altruism. A recent study found that helping others increased happiness through increasing meaningfulness (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, in press). In other words, when controlling for meaningfulness, helping others was associated with lower levels of happiness, leading to the claim that a highly meaningful life is relatively low in happiness. Givers were associated with high meaningfulness and low happiness in comparing with takers (Baumeister et., al, in press). In a similar vein, it could be claimed that altruism entails positive emotions prominently from a eudaimonic process of contribution to others, coupled with sacrifice of personal pleasures and difficulties rather than providing a self-serving or individualistic hedonic satisfaction.

Findings on the domain-related levels of happiness and meaningfulness further support the above claim. A considerable difference was evident in the number of life domains that were significant to PLA; eight for meaningfulness and four for happiness out of the ten life domains considered. More interestingly, all the four domains of happiness (Interpersonal relations, Community issues, Society issues and Spirituality/Religion) were characterized by eudaimonic or relational features. Studies have shown that happiness derived from interpersonal relations is not prominently hedonic but eudaimonic (Ryff & Singer, 2000). An individual focused hedonic pursuit, in the

long run, can sustain neither relationship nor the hedonic pursuit itself (Huta & Ryan, 2010). These findings suggest that altruism enhances a happy life predominantly characterized by eudaimonic features, leading to the final hypothesis.

5.5. Altruism and the Shared Life

In the last hypothesis, we expected that higher levels of altruism must correlate with higher levels of happiness and meaningfulness in life domains that are characterized by eudaimonic features and interaction with others, rather than hedonic features or individualistic focus. Findings showed that Interpersonal relations had the highest bivariate correlation with PLA in both happiness and meaningfulness levels. Community issues and Society issues highly correlated to PLA in meaningfulness and happiness levels, respectively. Eudaimonic or relational features were the prominent characteristics of all the three domains. PLA predicted as well higher levels of meaningfulness and happiness in the above domains, confirming the hypothesis. On the other hand, Health and Leisure, domains that prominently involve hedonic or individualistic features, did not correlate with PLA. Relationships play a crucial role from birth until old age in meeting basic needs that range from personal care to affiliation. The centrality of relationships was emphasized in various theories and models in psychology (Noller, 2005; Pöhlman, 2001), as well as in well-being research (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern & Seligman, 2011; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Baumeister (2012), for example, claims that participation in social groups is vital for human survival and reproduction. SDT considers relatedness as one of the foundational features of self-actualization (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Qualitative findings also confirmed the contribution of altruism to the life-long human task of building relationships and social connections. Participants referred to improved relationship as the most prominent benefit of altruism, and as the most prominent experience associated with being a recipient of an altruistic act. Interestingly, participants did not refer to it as a prominent experience while being an agent. This discrepancy between the two conditions suggest that altruistic behaviours may lead to improved social connections accompanied by feelings of gratitude and appreciation from the recipients, even though the agents did not primarily intend or expect it. In this regard, altruistic individuals stand to benefit from a life enriched with social connections and fulfilling relationships.

5.6. Altruism and the Full / Flourishing Life

The potential of altruism to promote both a meaningful life and a happy life is relevant to positive psychology in the context of the ongoing debate on ‘happy life’ versus ‘meaningful life’ (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Ryff & Singer, 1998). A growing number of researchers come to agree that neither one can be complete in itself, underscoring the need of integration. A full/flourishing life must be both happy and meaningful. Keyes’s (2002) model of flourishing is one such attempt. More recently, Seligman (2011) proposed another integrative model of full life encompassing happiness, engagement, and meaning. Full/flourishing life is desirable not only for its comprehensiveness but also for effectiveness. Shmotkin (2005), for example, showed that the combination of both hedonic (SWLS) and eudaimonic (meaning) components is more effective in dealing with the hostile-world scenario (HWS) - existential adversaries of daily life. Endorsing such integrated perspectives, researchers have also explored possible variables that may represent points of confluence or convergence between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Connectedness or interpersonal relations, for example, has been claimed as one such potential point of juncture, having positive links to both happiness and meaningfulness (Baumeister et al., in press; Delle Fave et al., 2011). In connectedness, happiness is linked with the benefits one receives from others whereas meaningfulness is related to the benefits that a self can offer to others (Baumeister et al., in press). In line with the findings and discussions of the previous pages, it is plausible to present altruism as another locus of confluence, given its potential to promote both meaning and happiness in life, coupled with an added benefit of a shared life that is rich in social connections.

The power of altruism in promoting a full/flourishing life is further bolstered from the perspective of balanced life envisioned by Sirgy and Wu (2009). One of the basic assumptions of this model is the contribution of multiple domains to the need satisfaction essential to cover the full spectrum of human development potentials (Alderfer, 1972; Maslow 1954, 1971). Findings highlight that PLA enhances both happiness and meaningfulness in multiple life domains, underscoring its potential in fostering a balanced life. Altruism fosters ‘balanced life’ not only at the individual but also at the collective level. Given its interpersonal feature, altruism could serve as a balancing locus where the tension between the traditional morality and the elevated self of

our modern society eases (Baumeister, 1991). Formulation of the self as the source of value with inherently authoritative claims is one of the important cultural changes of our modern world (Baumeister & Exline, 1999). People are exhorted to think of themselves first and are reminded, for example, “you have got to do what is best for you”. On the contrary, a central and explicit goal of morality throughout history has been to restrain the excessive sense of self and to override the human tendency to act out of self-interested motives. Elevation of self into a value has placed morality in a strange position, obscuring moral standards and generating lack of consensus around moral issues today. Moral diversity, more so than demographic diversity, may pose various kinds of problems at the community level (Haidt, Rosenberg & Hom, 2003), and this is a cause of concern for today’s societies. In our opinion, exploring altruism as selflessness that leads to self-actualization in relation with others could facilitate a balanced perspective joining both the traditional morality and the modern elevation of self (Shapiro & Gabbard, 1994).

In synthesis, altruism promotes a full/flourishing life that integrates and balances both Self (individual) and Other (community), hedonia (happy life) and eudaimonia (meaningful life), and that is filled with enriching inter-personal connections.

5.7. Promoting Altruism: Sources and Difficulties

5.7.1. Sources

Considering the promising potential of altruism, how can societies and individuals promote it? In other words, how can the potentials of altruism be optimized at the individual and collective level?

Families are claimed to be the early and vital source and imparter of values (Baumeister, 1991; Debats, 1999; Lambert et al., 2010). Family was reported by the participants in this study as the most prominent perceived source of altruism concept. This finding is consistent with an Indian study that detected the role of family in promoting altruism (Sanadhya, Sharma & Sushil, 2010). Moreover, this finding brings to light the role of family in altruism promotion even though the domain related values of happiness and meaningfulness were not predicted by PLA. Personal life experiences and Society were the other two prominent sources of altruism. Personal life experiences referred to one’s attitudes, values, beliefs, and life experiences, while Society

referred prominently to social teachings, welfare institutions, role models, and societal problems like injustice, poverty or a pressing issue. The prominence of these two sources is notable, highlighting the dynamics involved between individuals and society in promoting altruism.

One of the primary tasks of culture is to elicit from individuals acts that are best for the group, using mechanisms like morality, laws and values (Baumeister, 2005). Each culture develops specific values, expectations, rules, reward, and punishment dynamics to pursue this aim. Volunteering, community services, gift-giving seasons, tax-refunds for donations, curriculum adoption can be referred as few examples. For example, mandated volunteering in schools and universities is promoted in some countries (Krehbiel & MackKay, 1988; Sobus, 1995). Policy makers have propounded that volunteer work be made a prerequisite for grant rewards or loan forgiveness (Newman, et al., 1985; Robb & Swearer, 1985). Although such methods can succeed in promoting altruistic behaviours, their efficiency is called into question in the light of studies on motivation and its role in sustaining behaviours.

Programs founded on extrinsic motivation do not have lasting influence on individuals (Frey, 1997; Kunda & Schwartz, 1983). Extrinsic motivation is negatively associated with volunteer satisfaction and it negatively impacts subsequent pro-social engagement (Finkelstein et al., 2005; Frey & Jegen, 2001; Upton, 1974). In contrast, autonomously motivated altruistic behaviours are highly correlated to wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Hence, promoting intrinsic motivation seems to have higher success rates. One of the plausible reasons for the increase in volunteering in the United States is the claim that helping promotes intrinsic rewards such as health and happiness, rather than credit hours and money (Wuthnow, 1991). Role models are also beneficial to elicit autonomous motivations. The good Samaritan story, for example, has enormous influence in shaping people's attitudes and behaviours in volunteering (Wuthnow, 1991; Rushton, 1980; Allison, 1992). The media hike on the "giving pledge" of some of the richest people in the United States is justified on this claim of motivating others to follow suit.

The power of values in eliciting internalization and intrinsic motivations could be referred as another example. Some cultures support the socio-biological dimension of reciprocity by reinforcing the value of gratitude, characterized by the belief that someone has done a favor together with a sense of guilt or obligation to reciprocate (Hardin, 1982; Swidler, 1986).

Societies can offer various other means to elicit altruism and altruistic behaviours. The point in place is that those societies that succeed in promoting conditions for autonomous motivation (from external pressure to personal choice) stand to sustain altruistic behaviours and to optimize its benefits to individual and societal well-being. In this regard, it is worth noticing that the category Personal life experiences, referring to internalized sources of altruism, was prominent among both Indians and Italians, notwithstanding the collectivism/individualism differences between the two groups.

Nevertheless, this process must take into consideration the collectivistic/individualistic cultural mechanism in order to be effective. Studies have shown that altruism may easily be elicited in collectivistic cultures where fulfilling needs of the society over the self is considered a value, virtue, and a duty (Eckstein, 2001; Miller, Bersoff & Harwood, 1990). However, these premises run the risk of ending up with extrinsic motivations, which are counterproductive in the long run. In these contexts, it seems important to shift the focus on environmental factors that promote internalization and integration of values, leading individuals from passive compliance to active personal commitment and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). On the contrary, the voluntaristic stance of the individualistic societies (Kimmelmeier et al., 2006) may offer ambience for autonomous motivations to emerge, however running the risk of making altruism dependent on individual discretionary power. Individual freedom without any external pressure may lead to lack of responsibility, as studies on the “bystander effect” clearly point out (Darley & Latane, 1968). In individualistic cultures, it seems important to develop explicit structures and mechanisms that enkindle intrinsic motivations for altruism rather than solely depending on individual initiative (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zuckerman et al., 1978).

Surprisingly, education was only marginally reported among the sources of altruism concept and in the reasons for being altruistic. Media ranked least as a source of and reason for altruism. Considering the pervasive impact of these two domains on individual development and community life, these findings suggest that these powerful information channels could be more fruitfully used to convey models of co-operation and altruism, especially among children and adolescents (Stasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). In this regard, a deeper exploration of the Italian group difference in referring to education as a source than Indians, even though it is a few

persons, can be beneficial. This may be due to specific teaching modules, syllabus, or structures and, if identified, can be used for further intervention.

5.7.2. Difficulties and Dangers

Promoting altruism entails also addressing difficulties and dangers. As concerns difficulties, the Social Evaluation category was prominently reported by both Indian and Italian participants, notwithstanding the different dynamics of criticism in individualistic and collectivistic societies (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). It seems paradoxical that altruism, a highly praised dimension of human life, encounters criticism and misunderstanding (Sorokin, 1950). This ambivalence can be ascribed to the possible moral evaluation in altruism because of its value/virtue perspective. Notwithstanding its desirability, it is possible that individuals in society may feel uncomfortable with the altruistic people as their presence and behaviour can challenge them to follow suit or may evoke a sense of guilt (Sorokin, 1950). Further, it is possible that societies may sustain practices and systems intrinsically not fair, and they can even fight to defend them. In this context, an altruistic individual may become a threat to the social system and its status quo. In these views, it is not unlikely that a socially desirable value like altruism is also a criticized one. This finding adds new dimensions to earlier studies that highlighted the feeling of pressure and being overwhelmed as the major problems in behaving pro-socially (Figley, 1995; Hoffman, 2008). Perceived criticism and exploitation can prevent people from being altruistic. The nature and dynamics of social evaluation and its effects on altruism cannot be ignored in intervention programs and needs to be explored further.

Consistent with previous studies, participants reported Neglect of oneself as the second prominent difficulty. How much good is actually good? Neglecting self-care in trying to meet the needs of others may lead to altruism burnout (Figley, 1995). In addition, over-doing negatively influences future altruism. Individuals tend to avoid and suppress empathic concern when they perceive the demands are too high, with an overall reduction in their willingness to be altruistic (Shaw et al., 1994; Bernheim & Stark, 1998). A balance of self-love and love-for-others is important, without which altruism can become pathological. Behaving altruistically in zero-sum competitive situations, for example, will result in harm to the self (Pearson, 1998; Batson, et al., 2003), again prompting “pathological altruism” (Oakley et al., 2011).

Altruism could be dangerous at the societal level as well, in terms of exploitation and cheating. Coate (1995) showed that the certainty of altruistic helping (government security system, in his study), led the beneficiaries to shake off their personal responsibility for insurance and become dependent individuals. Further studies in this line highlighted that individuals impoverished themselves through extravagance, hoping that an altruistic individual or the system would provide for them in future (Bernheim & Stark 1988). Consistent with these evidences, participants in this study referred to exploitation and cheating as one of the prominent difficulties, often underscoring negative emotions or reduction of altruism as responses related to it. On the other hand, altruism could lead to dysfunctional behaviours in benefactors. Studies on perspective taking indicated that benefactors manifested unfair partiality towards the beneficiaries, to the extent that they broke norms and violated justice in order to help others (Batson, et al., 1995). Finally, altruism can be used to exploit people. Fundraisers, for example, can manage to exploit the compassion of people to donate for causes that are not true or worthy (Shelton & Rogers, 1981). The most dangerous case, in this regard, is manipulation of people's goodness for wrong ideologies. The effectiveness of Hitler's propaganda laid in the ability to tap people's best traits such as faith, hope and readiness to sacrifice towards an inherently evil ideology (Waite, 1977). During the Rwandan genocide, many Hutus killed Tutsis because they believed it to be altruistically helping their society (Oakley et al., 2011). The same dynamics is used to motivate individuals in terrorist and suicidal attacks. These potential dangers have to be addressed for altruism promotion to be effective.

5.8. The Altruism Spiral – An Integrated Perspective

The findings discussed above and more particularly the lay conceptions and perceptions call for revisiting altruism conceptualization. An attempt is made by incorporating various insights emerging from this work, guided by an interconnected world-view (Soosai-Nathan & Delle Fave, in press). Based on these insights, we propose to define altruism as a

mindset characterized by a concern for others' welfare, that implies a readiness to engage even to the point of sacrifice, and that can bring welfare to the agent as well.

Four specific aspects of this definition require thorough clarification. First, altruism is not just behaviour. In the effort to scientifically investigate altruism, evolutionary biology, and social

psychology reduced it to pro-social behaviour that enhances the fitness/welfare of the other at the cost of oneself. We instead propose to consider altruism as a mindset that is a habitual or characteristic mental attitude that determines how one will interpret and respond to situations. It refers to general assumptions, methods, or notations that guide an individual (Gollwitzer & Brandstaetter, 1997; Gollwitzer, 1999). A mindset is a comprehensive and sustainable feature and could be the source of a behaviour. Altruism as a mindset refers to one's willingness to acknowledge the "other" and to care for their well-being. The prominent motivating force in altruism, at least in the deliberative phase (Puca & Schmalt, 2001; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995), is the benefit of the other. In the subsequent phase of implementation of intentions, outcomes can differ according to individual differences and context specificities, while mindset serves as a general pattern that guides individuals. In this regard, altruism differs significantly from helping and pro-social behaviours, that can enhance the well-being of the other with or without having it as primary focus.

The second aspect concerns the term "other". In contrast to the binary model, other is perceived within the perspective of inter-connectedness. It refers to a model of interaction involving a wide range of entities, characterized by different levels of structural and relational complexity. This model can be effectively depicted as a spiral that is a single continuous entity of circles with different levels (Figure 5.1). The single individual, located at the core of the spiral, is in connection to the "other" at different levels. In this model, connections should not be understood in physical and quantitative terms, especially considering the variety of virtual connections existing in today's globalized and internet-based world. Within the altruism model, connections are understood as manifestations of willingness to value others and to enhance their well-being. The inner circle is the simplest level of complexity, including family and beloved ones; the outer most circle encompasses the entire cosmos and represents the most complex level of the model. In this spiral of connections, individuals can develop growing awareness of interconnectedness and cultivation of connections along a centrifugal direction, from a smaller circle to a bigger circle, from a low level of complexity to higher ones. However, such a centrifugal movement is not necessarily progressive across continuous levels of complexity. An individual can altruistically reach out to a needy person in another continent, while not doing so with neighbors living next door.

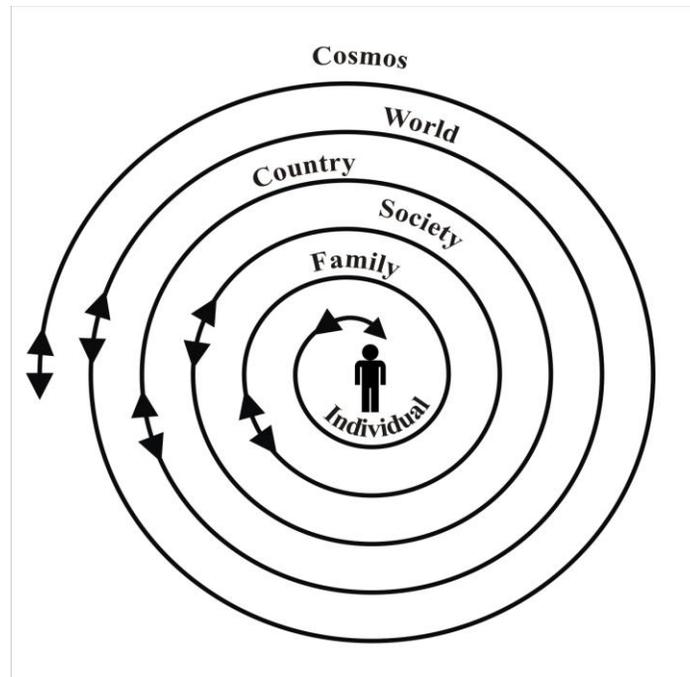


Figure 5.1. The Altruism Spiral

A potential danger has to be clarified in this process of connection development, related to the in-group/out-group dynamics. Establishing connections with in-group members can take place at the cost of severing connections with out-groups. In this condition, the process of moving away from the narrowly self-centred focus to connect with the other paradoxically ends up in another form of narrow-mindedness, expressed as nationalism, racism, religious hate, genocide, and suicidal cults. Suicide bombing, for example, can be perceived as a higher form of altruism and self-sacrifice within a particular group, at the cost of overlooking the pain caused to the out-group. Studies on moral circles clearly highlight such danger of exclusion in the process of inclusion (Laham, 2009). The perspective of inter-connectedness and the model of altruism proposed here allow for a conceptual solution and mitigation of the above danger. Within a spiral model of interconnectedness, establishing connections at a particular level at the cost of severing connections at another level becomes impossible. To actualize the altruistic motivation of building a Disney world for poor children by destroying a forest inhabited by a particular human community requires breaking the spiral continuity. To clarify this point, we also propose the following definition of altruistic behaviour:

An altruistic behaviour is any other-oriented act that promotes and nourishes connections at a certain level without violating connections at other levels.

The spiral analogy further underscores that altruism is neither a crystallized ideal nor a static concept. It is rather related to individual characteristics and contextual features, especially as concerns its behavioural outcomes. At the individual level, resources and potentials, skills and competences, meanings and beliefs, goals and expectations greatly influence the actualization of the altruistic mindset. At the contextual level, tragedies like tsunami or earthquakes strongly elicit altruistic behaviour, while a strongly competitive and consumerist environment may reduce it. In addition, the same person can fluctuate across various levels of connectedness complexity in different periods, life stages, and contexts. Building on the works of Sorokin (1941, 1948, 1950), Monroe proposed an altruism continuum, classifying individuals and their behaviours in three categories: entrepreneurs, philanthropists and heroes (Monroe, 1996). Entrepreneurs express the simplest level of altruism, while heroes endorse the most complex one. While the terms selected to indicate these three levels of altruism might be contentious, this perspective points to the possibility of distinguishing between different levels of complexity in the actualization of altruism. It redeems altruism from being an ideal act of giving of one's life, as often depicted in altruism role models. Altruism need not be identified with such extremes.

The third aspect of the proposed definition of altruism that requires further clarification is the "readiness to engage even to the point of sacrifice". This dimension distinguishes altruism from compassion, helping and pro-social behaviours. The word 'sacrifice' is used here from a psychological perspective and not in relation to morality. It is rather related to a personal choice of placing others need before one's own, and can derive from the human capacity for ego-control and letting-go. Jung proposed that ego has the power to relinquish its power to claim (Jung, 1975). Therefore, though sacrifice implies placing others over oneself, it is not denial of oneself. Jung underscored that without a sense of "me" sacrifice is not possible (Jung, 1975). The act of making a sacrifice primarily consists in giving away something that belongs to the individual. Sacrifice can thus be comprised within the capacity for self-transcendence. Nevertheless, while sacrifice is a distinctive component of altruism, it is not a structural aspect of it. Altruistic

engagement in its various forms does not necessarily demand a sacrifice. In addition, individuals can manifest different levels of complexity - from lower to greater ones - in sacrifice as well.

The fourth and last aspect of the proposed definition of altruism that requires clarification refers to the benefits derived by the agent as an outcome of being altruistic. Differently from other existing definitions of altruism, a definition grounded into interconnectedness does not exclude such benefits; on the contrary, it explicitly endorses them. According to Emerson “it is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can try to help another without helping himself” (2001, p. 65). Analogously, Victor Frankl (1988) stated that the more one helps others the more one actually helps himself. Due to the natural condition of interconnectedness, the centrifugal movement of enhancing other’s welfare actually leads to a feedback loop of one’s own welfare enhancement, through a dialectical exchange process. Within the cultural evolution framework, individuals maximize their benefits in the long run by helping others than themselves (Baumeister, 2005). Aristotle claimed that true human happiness, which he described as eudaimonia, was furthered more “by loving rather than in being loved” (350 B.C/1985, p.1159). It is perhaps paradoxical that altruism often associated with going “outside” of oneself is actually highly involving the self (Davis et al., 2004; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Such an apparently paradoxical outcome seems a unique characteristic of altruism.

Religious traditions often have underscored this process as a “paradoxical giving”, a model of self-actualization through self-transcendence. Buddha, for example, taught that in negating the ‘self’ one actually attains Nirvana (Morgan, 2010). Self-abnegation and selflessness represent pathways towards self-actualization proposed by most world religions (Neusner & Chilton, 2005; Pande & Naidu, 1992; The Bible, Luke. 17:33). Selflessness does not need to be just a religious issue. A dialectic process of self-actualization through self-transcendence is consistent with the eudaimonic well-being perspective (Delle Fave et al., 2011), and this unique dialectical process can be easily reconciled only within the perspective of interconnectedness and of “autonomous-relational self”. Considering altruism as a human value and potentiality, and exploring it in the perspective of selflessness and self-actualization within psychology could add new dimensions to the branches of the discipline that prominently focus on human interactions and well-being.

5.9. Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

A major strength of this study is its innovativeness as it is one among the very few attempts to investigate the psychological and conceptual aspects of altruism. In addition, the cross-cultural perspective can be considered as its characteristic uniqueness. Adopting an integrative approach to explore altruism along both hedonic and eudaimonic components is another distinctive feature of this study. The use of mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative) is an additional unique strength of this study, allowing for counter-checks between qualitative and quantitative results, a more refined analytical procedure, and a more articulated interpretation of results. Finally, this work is informative, given the dearth of literature review or explorations of altruism per se.

One of the most prominent limitations of this study is its exploratory nature. Exploratory studies by nature are initial steps and require further explorations. In particular, the mind-set model of altruism has to be further developed. Second, AQ is prominently qualitative, and this feature limits its validation potential. In order to cope with the related problems, as concerns reliability the procedures followed in data collection and analysis were systematically documented. To support validity, a broader theoretical background was combined with a research design and an assessment instrument appropriate to the study purposes. In particular, the specificity of the questions allowed for evaluating connection and consistency across answers (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2001; Shenton, 2004). Third, the cross-cultural exploration was limited to two cultures. From these strengths and limitations, this work raises various new questions, opening further research avenues.

In particular, undertaking a similar investigation in more than two cultures may be a useful way to validate the questionnaire and to improve the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the results. This remains the primary goal of future direction. Moreover, this study highlighted the need for a comprehensive quantitative instrument for altruism measurements. Instrument development on socially desirable variables, as altruism in the case here, needs repeated pilot studies to cope with desirability factors. Developing an instrument and further validating it is the second major goal. Finally, this work has highlighted much useful information that is to be

translated in intervention strategies and techniques, involving the other side of research – application.

5.10. Conclusions

This work explored altruism in its conceptual, psychological, and cultural features, as well as its potential for individual and community well-being, using a mixed-method approach. Findings suggest that altruism is not a mere behaviour that emerges occasionally and accidentally but a human, social, and cultural value that is integral to human development and well-being. The findings emphasize that altruism must be conceptualized and explored from value-based perspectives, taking into account the cultural variants so as to optimize its potentials. Moreover, altruism is not a mere value/virtue, restricted to religious commandments and pulpits but a promising factor for health, happiness and well-being, relevant across varied disciplines. Findings of this work, in particular, show that altruism contributes to a meaningful life. More interestingly, it promotes a meaningful life (eudaimonic) that is as well a happy one (hedonic), that in addition stands to gain fulfilling inter-personal connections, promoting a balanced/flourishing life. Humans share with many other creatures the striving for happiness as it refers to needs and wants, but the quest for meaning - given its relation to culture and human capacities of expression of oneself - is a key part of what makes us human (Baumeister, 1991). Findings of this study suggest that altruism plays a vital role in our efforts to self-actualize and become fully human.

“It is in giving that we receive,” said Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. This work resonates this statement underscoring the paradoxical potential of altruism for both individuals and communities. Within the world-view of inter-connectedness, altruism remains a locus of confluence where both individual and collective well-being converge, without competing or contradicting each other. It is good news for both societies and individuals. Consequently, promotion of altruism remains an essential and urgent task for individuals and communities. The altruism spiral model suggests that altruism could be more easily actualized if a mindset of universal interconnectedness is promoted, consistently with in-depth studies conducted by Monroe (1996): “To my surprise, most analysts since Hume appear to be wrong: group ties and group membership do not appear to be critical predictors of altruism” (Monroe, 1996, p.199).

Considering the whole world as one establishes a wider kinship of humanity. This inner-representation of connectedness allows individuals to transcend a narrow self-centered focus, gaining to establish relationships not only within one's family, race, and species but also with the entire living world. In such a perspective, individuals and communities are motivated to enhance other's wellbeing not by occasional impulses, reciprocity, or obligation, but by intentional choice. It leads individuals and communities from self-preservation to eudaimonic growth where it is no more laws but a voluntary stance of morality that animates the interactions even among strangers, as happened with the Good Samaritan (Lk, 10: 25-37).

Perceived this way, altruism can mitigate if not solve many of the social problems encountered today, including controversial issues such as religious and ethnic intolerance, family crisis, inequality in health care and homelessness. On the contrary, individuals who fail to nurture inter-connectedness end up in a narrow self-focus. Given the inter-connected human nature, resisting or severing connections can be compared to the dynamics of a cancer cell that gets disconnected from the other cells and undergoes uncontrolled multiplication, endangering the entire organism. A narrow self-focused inward movement can lead individuals towards a bottomless pit of constant need without satisfaction.

Martin Luther King said, "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness." Nurturing a mind-set of inter-connectedness that blooms an awareness of our common origin and destiny as human species is the mark of civilization. "It seems harder to care about the broader community of humanity than about one's tribe. But if we do not learn to do so, we will destroy not just the competing tribes but also all of civilization – our own selves" (Snyder & Lopez, 2007, p.494). The dynamic force of the altruism spiral reminds individuals and communities of that embarking on a journey from mere self-preservation to self-realization and eudaimonic well-being is not an extravagance but a necessity (Weinstein, 2008).

The role of education at the level of families and societies must consider this urgent task of promoting a mind-set of interconnectedness, and that of sustaining the dynamics of altruism spiral. Positive psychology can play an active role in this process, as a catalyst of potentials and abilities within individuals and societies for positive communities and cultures – its third pillar.

In fact, keeping alive the force of altruism spiral is a way to create flourishing individuals, communities and a positive world, which stand as a dream of humanity in the 21st century. If we do not care to keep alive the spiral of altruism, we will miss not only what we can gain – flourishing individuals and communities - but what we even have – our world itself.

For, “it is in giving that we receive”.

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