

Describe and evaluate one or more explanations relating to human

✓ Altruism or bystander behaviour. (24 marks)

Altruism can be defined as helping behaviour that is not seeking to benefit oneself either tangibly or intangibly.

Batson (1981) put forward the idea that people are capable of altruistic acts which benefit another person. He suggested the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which states that if a person feels sympathy, compassion and tenderness towards a victim they decide to help in order to reduce the victim's distress.

Batson (1981) conducted a study to test his hypothesis. He set up 4 different conditions. In all the conditions participants believed they were watching another student, called Elaine, receive electric shocks. They were asked if they would take Elaine's place and receive the shocks. The conditions are summarised as follows with the results.

CONDITION	ESCAPE	SIMILAR?	PERCENTAGE THAT HELPED
1	Easy	No	18%
2	Difficult	No	65%
3	Easy	Yes	90%
4	Difficult	Yes	84%

This experiment supports Batson's (1981) empathy-altruism hypothesis. The empathy condition (where participants believe they are similar) showed significantly higher percentages that took Elaine's place. Both empathic conditions showed similar percentages of helping which shows that the chance to escape made no difference; therefore we can say that helping was due to empathy.

However, it is difficult to separate egoist and empathic factors when investigating altruism. Also it has been suggested that empathic helping only emerges in social situations. Also it is hard to generalise as participants in this experiment were all female and students.

A strength of the empathy altruism hypothesis is that developmental evidence suggests that children do become more altruistic as empathy develops. It also has empirical support e.g. Eisenberg and Miller (1987).

Critics of this theory, however, counter these findings with the argument that the subjects were more motivated to avoid social disapproval or feelings of guilt. A weakness of this hypothesis is that the research is ethnocentric as participants are mainly from North America. There may be differences in helping behaviour across cultures. This hypothesis has been criticised by many researchers. Smith et al (1989) proposed the empathic joy hypothesis which states that we help because empathy leads to shared feelings of joy. Also Cialdini (1987) suggested the negative state relief model, based on results from his replication of Batson's 'Elaine' experiment (1981) but gave an unexpected reward to participants for taking Elaine's place. He found that helping decreased and his reason for this was that, the offer of money improved participant's mood and because their mood improved they didn't feel the need to help (egoist motives). This opposed Batson's hypothesis.

However, Darley argued that there is no such thing as true altruism and the true and basic motive for human behaviour is self interest. This led to the development of the egoist model which suggests that if a person feels discomfort, anxiety or are upset by seeing a victim in need, they help to reduce their own distress.

This theory is supported by various studies, including Cialdini (1987). It is also supported by Piliavin's Arousal: Cost-Reward Model of Bystander Behaviour. This is because when we are faced with a potential altruistic situation, we weigh up the costs and benefits and decide on the outcome which is best- for us.

The universal egoism model is supported by many studies. Cialdini et al (1982) found that people in a positive mood are open to all sorts of helping (to maintain positive mood), while people put in a negative mood are open to helping only when it will boost mood (benefits outweigh costs). The Socio-biological approach also sees helping as egoistic, but in terms of the individual maximising their inclusive fitness (increasing the chances of their genes being passed on), rather than their personal fitness. A reason for this could be this as close as possible they can get to immortality. This model could also help us to understand racism. Piliavin found that there is evidence of racism occurring in our decisions to help when he found that blacks were much more likely to help a black drunk, and whites a white drunk. This suggests that we are less likely to help those with the least genes in common with us.

A criticism of this model is that there is some evidence which suggests that people do not always act selfishly. Some people display impulsive helping, where they help even when costs are high and benefits are lower. Also we may only feel distress when we are attached to the victim, therefore this model cannot explain all altruistic behaviour. When looking at altruism research, the limitations of altruism research need to be considered. One limitation is that the situation often determines whether one is motivated by egoism or altruism. Even with altruism, helping may not occur if the costs are too high. But egoistic motivation can lead to greater dedication when the costs are high. Also altruistic and egoistic motivations are sometimes indistinguishable. I do think that empathy is more likely to result in helping and is more likely to lead to the type and amount of helping needed. Extrinsic motivation may result in over justification and reduced helping in the future.

The evidence seems to support the idea of universal egoism; in deciding whether to help or not, humans are fundamentally selfish, and altruism is impossibility. However, it is very difficult to separate altruistic and egoistic factors so the best explanation for the motives behind altruism may lie between the two hypotheses.