

**Voluntary Altruistic Action:
Its Symbolic Challenge against Sinecures of Vested Interests
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Background

In Turkey up to the 1980s hyperpoliticization of all issues in society and artificial divisions between people were prevalent. Extremist and ideological issues were raised around the partisanship between the rightist and leftist, around the sectarian division between Alevites and Sunnis, around the ethnic distinction between the Turkish and Kurdish, and later around differing definitions of secularism between the laicists and the religious; such issues have dominated society. Tensions, conflicts and fights started to undermine the security, stability and existence of society. Thousands of people were killed. After society had paid dearly, then came the military coup and later on a civil administration. During this civil administration attempts were made to modernize Turkey economically and politically. The system later widened the base of participation. That increased the circulation of information and the efficiency of some decision-making processes. The system started to recognize as legitimate previously excluded social and educational issues. The political system and all the people as a composite unit were said to have changed at different analytical levels.

Throughout this period, Gülen, as a scholar, writer, preacher and a civil society leader, acted to keep people away from societal tensions and conflicts. He appealed to the public not to become part of on-going partisan conflictual issues and ideological fights. During his speeches, lectures and series of sermons, he analyzed the prevalent conditions and the ideologies behind the societal violence, terror and clashes. He exerted all his scholarly, intellectual and practical efforts to convince individuals and university students that they did not need violence, terror and destruction to establish a progressive, prosperous and peaceful society. He maintained that violence, terrorism, death, ignorance, moral decay, and corruption could be avoided by conversation, interaction, compassion, education and collaboration.

Gülen addressed the masses through audio and video cassettes, public lectures and private meetings, reminding them that they ought not to expect everything from the system due to its backwardness in some respects, its stifling bureaucratic, partisan and procedural stagnation, and its lack of qualified personnel. He urged individuals and the public to use their constitutionally given rights to contribute to and serve society positively, constructively and altruistically. Such service is the result of being a human, citizen and believer.

Altruistic Educational Projects and Services

Gülen saw education as being at the center of social, economical and political modernization, progress and welfare. Individuals and society can only be respectful to the supremacy and rule of law, democratic and human rights, and respect for diversity and cultures if they receive sound education. Equity, social justice and peace in one's society, in particular, and in the world, in general, can only be achieved by intellectually enlightened people with sound morality and altruistic activism. Therefore, education is the sole remedy for all the ills and needs of society and humanity.

To accomplish such a project of course required believers in education, and financial and human resources. It would require dedicated and committed people who would work and volunteer in that field. It would require time, patience, permanence, regularity and legality. It required voluntary sacrifice, self-willed philanthropic contributions, and charitable trusts. Therefore, Gülen started to talk to people from all walks of life in Turkey. He visited individuals, groups, cafes, small villages, towns and metropolitan cities. From peddlers to industrialists and exporters, from secondary school students to postgraduates and faculty, from the common people to leading figures and elites, he always imparted the same message: sound education and institutionalization, and altruistic contribution and services.

What Gülen referred to, in fact, is not something very new. He turned to something which is in and which is also valued by all traditions and religions: duty, moral obligation, disinterested contribution, voluntary philanthropism and altruistic services. In this way, countless student hostels, accommodations, primary, secondary and high schools, universities, study centers, college-preparatory courses, press and media organs, publishing houses, student bursaries and research scholarships came into being. The Gülen movement performed a modernizing role within the educational field, while their behavior towards the outside world translated into institutional support or "alternative" entrepreneurship.

He [Gülen] emphasizes education arm-in-arm with development, and economic and cultural togetherness for the future. ...He recommends the dynamic of knowledge against ignorance, work against poverty, and solidarity and wealth.¹

Gülen's precise, concrete, unifying and constructive goals have made his projects and the institutions established by his inspiration visible at specific levels. The successes and accomplishments of the students and schools at national and international levels, at scientific and research contests in theory, practice and projects, has drawn positive attention from the authorities of other countries.

After the collapse of the Iron Curtain, economic and political interdependence between Western and Eastern Europe started to grow. The disintegration of the Soviet block revealed all the needs for such educational services in various areas and cultures. The rapprochement between Turkey and the Central Asian States resulted in the acknowledgment of the necessity of such educational understanding and institutions in Central Asia. Education would be the biggest and most meaningful contribution to their growth and development.

Educational institutions established by charitable trusts inspired by Gülen offered solutions to areas with ethnic-territorial problems. The education given at such institutions accepts differences and renders them valuable, rich and negotiable. It invited students and people to exist peacefully in diversity in order to co-exist. It called for tolerance, dialogue between different walks of society and different nations of the world, peace and love, and firm commitment to openness of mind and heart. Schools started to achieve this through sound education and efforts which would have no return or expectation materially and politically. Endeavors in this regard have brought about hundreds of successful institutions in many different countries with the sponsorship of the supporters of this educational movement."²

¹ Nevval Sevindi, *Yeni Yüzyil*, 'The New York Interview with Fethullah Gülen', July 20-29, 1997; also at <http://en.fgulen.com/content/view/783/13/> and <http://www.nevvalsevindi.com/oku.php?id=347>

² *The Fountain*, 2002:2.

Gülen mobilized previous affiliations into a new system of relations in which the original elements have gained deeper meanings. He encouraged transfer of pre-existing dormant resources to the benefit of a new objective. At the same time, the GM has transformed itself into a new transnational social unit capable of creating new resources for education and societal peace through altruistic action.³

For over 50 years, Gülen has inspired generations “to achieve the right balance of social justice between the individual and community; to develop and advance in every individual and the whole nation feelings of love, respect, altruism, striving for the sake of others, sacrificing their own material and spiritual benefits, and aspirations for the sake of others.”⁴ While doing this, “Gülen has never had personal wealth to be able to sponsor educational projects. Instead, he has appeared at fund-raising dinners and visited wealthy individuals to convince them of the importance of sound and modern education.”⁵ Gülen says, “I have no power, capital, or army—only an unstoppable love and enthusiasm for service. All I can do is explain this, tell those who will listen, and suggest.”⁶

As Gülen himself has noted he has nothing. But his sincerity, clarity of aims, ascetic life and altruism have successfully motivated teachers as well as parents and sponsors for the common good of society. Gülen has no ambition for worldly wealth, and as a person of God, a preacher, a man of spirituality, asceticism and profound knowledge, he could have had a very satisfying career simply serving as a community leader and author. However, he has concentrated his effort on motivating the masses to invest in sound education and has led by example. Apart from encouraging people to donate money, Gülen has carefully remained distanced from the financial management of all the institutions and instead has encouraged their sponsors actively to oversee the use of their contributions. This has built enormous trust and confidence in Gülen’s honesty and integrity and also in the people employed at the Gülen-inspired institutions. Furthermore, the students he has educated and his family have acted in the same way. In addition to never having any personal wealth, he is reported to have prayed for his relatives to remain poor so as not to raise any suspicion of their having gained from his influence. His relatives reputedly laugh and say that “as long as Hocaefendi is alive, we have no hope of becoming wealthy!”⁷

One among many of his arguments was that he invited people to consider, live and act for not their own lives and days at present but their children’s days in the future. He maintained that both people in the present and future generations will pay dearly and will not live in comfort and happiness if people do not exert the necessary efforts for the coming days and generations from today. Giving examples of characters and events in the past, from Turkish and non-Turkish or from Muslim and non-Muslim history, he managed to inculcate a sense of moral duty and obligation, selfless concern for others, generosity and altruism. He has used the analogy of a candle, consuming itself but illuminating its surroundings. If people are not financially able to contribute, he asks them to give their time, thoughts, energy and moral support to collective services. Among the examples he frequently gave were the Biblical Prophets and the Messenger of Islam, their companions and disciples, saintly and scholarly

³ Cetin, 2005:X

⁴ Gülen, 2005a:50.

⁵ Aslandogan and Cetin, 2006:XX.

⁶ Ünal and Williams 2000:326.

⁷ Gündem 2005.

people from global communities, or scientists and community leaders. It is common to encounter names like Newton, Pascal, Sir James Jeans, Kant, Gandhi, Iqbal and Rumi in his writings and teachings.⁸

In this and similar ways Gülen steadfastly persuaded people to take part in altruistic services and educational projects. He presented the world as a market for humanity's and God's pleasure and approval and said people should compete in such righteous and beneficial services without ulterior motives. He urged people to combine their efforts, resources and energies into charitable trusts, in which no one benefits from what the institutions earn except the students themselves.

There lie humanitarian, social, and religious dimensions in Gülen's understanding of voluntary altruistic projects and services. Citing what 'Ali, the fourth Caliph after Muhammed, the Messenger of Islam, said, Gülen holds that all human beings are one's brothers and sisters. Muslims are one's brothers and sisters in religion, while non-Muslims are one's brothers and sisters in humanity. "Human beings are the most honorable of creatures. Those who want to increase their honor should serve this honorable creature." Gülen strongly holds that a higher sense of identity, social justice for all, sufficient understanding and tolerance to secure respect for the rights of others are all dependent on the provision of an adequate and appropriate universal education.⁹ As so many people are unable to afford such an education, they ought to be supported by altruistic services and charitable trusts.

Altruism

The word "altruism" (French, *altruisme*, from *autrui*: "other people", derived from Latin *alter*: "other") was coined by Auguste Comte, the French founder of positivism. Comte argued that individuals had a moral obligation to renounce self-interest and live for others. Altruism is an ethical doctrine that holds that individuals have an ethical obligation to help, serve, or benefit others, if necessary at the sacrifice of self interest. Comte's version of altruism calls for living for the sake of others. The ethical doctrine of altruism has also been called the ethic of altruism, moralistic altruism, and ethical altruism.¹⁰

That the word altruism was coined by Comte does not mean that altruism was not known and practiced before. Most of the world's religions promote altruism as a very important religious or moral value. Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and many other traditions also promote altruistic morality and behavior. However, psychologists, sociologists, evolutionary biologists, and ethologists have their own and different perspectives on altruism. On the other hand, Gülen's approach to altruism is mainly formed by the perspective of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an and the Sunna. However, unless we examine how Islamic teaching affects the understanding and practice of charity, philanthropy or altruism in Gülen and among Muslims, discussing the subject according to some modern philosophers, most notably those in western countries, who claim that altruism may have yet another purpose will not contribute much to our subject matter here.

⁸ Ünal and Williams, 2000:29-45.

⁹ Woodhall and Çetin 2005:viii.

¹⁰ Wikipedia

Charity, Philanthropy or Altruism: an Islamic Perspective

Gülen approaches altruism from a perspective of Islamic teachings so it is useful to consider how Muslims have traditionally interpreted their religious obligations with regard to charity and charitable acts.

There are two types of Islamic charity. The first is zakat, which is obligatory and amounts to 2.5% of the year's savings. The word "zakat" itself means "purification," and the purpose for paying zakat is to purify one's lawfully earned wealth. Zakat is the right of the poor over the wealth of the rich. The other type of charity is sadaqa, or voluntary charity, and depends on the amount of an individual's needs and their excess wealth.

Islam is based on five principles, one of which is to pay zakat (obligatory charity). This concept of charity and generosity is central to Islam. In the Qur'an, the believers are described as "...those who spend (of that which Allah hath given them) in ease and in adversity" (3:134).

And be steadfast in your prayer and pay charity; whatever good you send forth for your future, you shall find it with Allah, for Allah is well aware of what you do. (2:110)

So establish regular prayer and give regular charity; and obey the Apostle; that ye may receive mercy. (24:56)

It is important to highlight the meaning and virtues, and also some of the Islamic etiquettes and manners of philanthropy or giving charity. The Prophet Muhammed said:

The upper hand is better than the lower hand. The upper hand is the one that gives, and the lower hand is the one that takes.

The Qur'an says:

The likeness of those who spend their money for Allah's sake is as the likeness of a grain (of corn), it grows seven ears, every single ear has a hundred grains, and Allah multiplies (increases the reward) for whom He wills, and Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures needs, All Knower. (2:261)

Whoever works righteousness, whether a male or a female, while he (or she) is a true believer, verily to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do. (16:97)

So fear Allah as much as you can; listen and obey and spend in charity for the benefit of your own soul and those saved from the covetousness of their own souls; they are the ones that achieve prosperity. (64:16)

Allah has praised those who make a constant right in their wealth for the poor and has promised them multiplied rewards for their charity. In this life, charity enlarges the blessing in one's fortune.

Keep your duty to Allah as best as you can, and listen and obey and spend. That is better for your soul, and whosoever is saved from his own greed is the one

who is successful. If you lend to Allah a goodly loan, He will double it for you and will forgive you, for Allah is the Responsive, Clement. (64:15-17)

For those who give in charity, men and women, and loan to Allah a beautiful loan, it shall be increased manifold (to their credit) and they shall have (besides) a liberal reward. (57:18)

Who is he that will loan to Allah a beautiful loan which Allah will double unto his credit and multiply it many times? (2:245).

The Prophet Muhammed stated:

Charity does not lessen one's wealth.

However, for an act of charity to be accepted and to achieve its goals, the Believer must consider some essential manners when giving the charity. First of all, the charity must be given from money that is earned in a lawful way. There is no concept of Robin Hood-like acts in Islam. In Islam, for an action to be regarded as pure and for it to be accepted by Allah, not only does the intention have to be pure, but the means of achieving that intention has to be pure as well.

O ye who believe, spend from what you (lawfully) earned. (2:267)

The prophet said: "God is Tayyib, and He only accepts what is Tayyib" (the word Tayyib means lawful, pure, clean, good, etc.).

If one gives in charity that which equals one date-fruit from money that is earned in lawful way, and Allah only accepts what is lawful, Allah shall take it in His right (hand) and then enlarges its reward for that person (who has given it), just like any of you who brings up his foal, so much so that it (i.e. the charity) becomes as big as a mountain.

When giving charity, the believer must purify his intention and make his purpose just for the sake of gaining Allah's pleasure and reward with this charity, not anything else (such as worldly benefits, fame, good reputation, etc.).

There is nothing that you spend for Allah's sake but you will be rewarded for it, even the food that you raise up to your wife's mouth.

God praised those who give for His sake without expecting any benefit from the people who receive the charity.

And they give food (in spite of their love for it) to the poor, the orphan and the captive. Saying; we feed you seeking Allah's countenance only, we wish for no reward nor thanks from you. (76:8-9)

It is also much better for the Muslim to give alms during his life than to wait until death comes to him, then command his inheritors to give the charity on his behalf. The Prophet said:

The best charity is what you give during your life while you are in need of it.

It is more fitting for Muslims to give the charity from their best possessions that they love most. Not from their old, rusty possessions as if they are trying to get rid of them!

By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give (freely as a charity) from that which you love; and whatever you spend Allah knows it well. (3:92)

However, this does not mean that one should lessen the value of one's charity if one only has little to give. Whatever you do, big or small, will be put in your account, even if it is as tiny as the weight of an atom.

Whoever does an atom's weight of good he shall see it (in his book), and whoever does an atom's weight of evil he shall see it. (99:7-8)

The basic concepts of Islamic philanthropy are:

The concept of ownership of wealth in Islam is that all wealth belongs to Allah. It is up to an individual to decide how much of their excess wealth (after necessary personal and family expenses) they should give back to the cause of Allah.

Charity should not be given so that it can be used as a tax shelter or to win personal recognition; rather, it should be given simply for the love and the pleasure of God alone.

To spend of your substance out of love for Him – to your kin, orphans, the needy, the wayfarer, those who ask, and for freeing slaves. (2:177)

Islamic charity or zakat means the giving of a specific share of one's wealth and savings to persons or causes that God mentions in the Qur'an. The normal share to be paid is two and a half percent of one's savings. Giving charity saves one from greed and selfishness and encourages him to be truthful and God-conscious in his financial dealings. Another purpose is to help the poor and the needy and to assist other causes in the way of God. It will establish economic balance and social justice, and at the same time earn an immense reward in the Hereafter.

From the Islamic point of view, wealth belongs to God and is held by human beings in trust; so for those whom Allah has blessed with wealth, it is a test; and Muslims should strive to pass this test by not becoming worshipers of hoarded wealth. They should rather use the wealth only in ways God has permitted and realize that the amount to be given is not really their money but, rather, it belongs to those who have less than they do.

Islamic charity is one of those unique forms of worship that bring out both the individual and the social aspects of ibada – worship. Consider its socio-political effects: it frees society from the ill feelings arising out of class hatred. It opposes an individualism that is blind to the travails of one's neighbors and stands against a socialism that shackles individual freedom. It fosters neither selfishness nor renunciation. It also strengthens a sense of brotherhood and establishes social cohesion. Islamic charity represents the unbreakable bond between members of the community, whom Prophet Mohammed described as "like the organs of the body, if one suffers then all others rally in response."

A pious person may also give as much as he or she pleases as sadaqa, and does so preferably in secret. Although this word can be translated as "voluntary charity" it has a wider meaning. The Prophet Muhammed said "even meeting your brother with a cheerful face is charity."

The Prophet Muhammed said: "Charity is a necessity for every Muslim." He was asked: "What if a person has nothing?" The Prophet replied: "He should work with his own hands for his benefit and then give something out of such earnings in charity." The Companions asked: "What if he is not able to work?" The Prophet said: "He should help poor and needy persons." The Companions further asked "What if he cannot do even that?" The Prophet said "He should urge others to do good." The Companions said "What if he lacks that also?" The Prophet said "He should check himself from doing evil. That is also charity."

Philosophers' Perspectives and Egoism

What Islam teaches is quite different from that which is argued by some western philosophers who support egoism. In this section, within the light of the foregoing section, "Charity, Philanthropy or Altruism: An Islamic Perspective", this essay will briefly touch upon the various perspectives from the fields of psychology, sociology, evolutionary biology and ethology. The arguments and the names of the philosophers and theories will not be covered in detail, because the purpose and the scope of this essay, and time and space too, do not allow going into such depth. Any reader who may wish to learn more about the various perspectives of the philosophers from the branches of sciences stated above may kindly refer to the relevant fields and topics elsewhere. When we look at the perspectives which motivate the Gülen movement, which is a faith-based civil-society initiative for altruistic educational projects and services, the source, origin, consequences and implications of the ideational and social praxis of the Gülen movement are quite different.

In sharp contrast to Islamic perspectives, philosophers like Nietzsche and Ayn Rand have argued that altruism is predicated on false assumptions and is the reversal of morality and not virtuous. They assert that the assumption that others are more important than one's self is degrading and demeaning to the individual and that no moral obligation to help others actually exists.

In the Islamic perspective altruism is not for mutual or behavioral manipulation as by certain parasites that can alter the behavior of the others. It should be carried out as a part of faith and its practice in daily life is for the sake of God only. Islamic understanding does not allow reciprocal altruism, or indirect reciprocity, which yield the mentality and attitude that "I do not believe in altruism but anyway it is good for my name and reputation."

By altruism we do not mean a tactic used in the competition for limited resources within society, as is seen in sexual or evolutionary selection. It is not something that is conveyed only by cultural or evolutionary accumulations for individuals to survive, without any interference of the Divine, Divine Messages and Messengers sent by the Divine. It is not a mathematical equation, part of a selfish gene, derived from the genetic evolution of slime moulds, protists or parasites.

Altruism does not occur because people are hyper-rational or because they would never do anything to violate their preferences. It is not a resort for the inability to process and compute all alternatives such that economically minded agents employ heuristically profitable decisions rather than a strict rigid rule of optimization.

Altruism is not a form of consequentialism, which posits that an action is ethically right if it brings good consequences to others. That means consequences are more important than any other normative criteria. Not the consequences but the intentions and God's approval count in Islam. Altruism does not prescribe acts that maximize good consequences for all like utilitarianism. Maximizing good consequences is for everyone except the actor in altruism.

Altruism does not hinder the individual's pursuit of self-development, excellence, and creativity, and it is not an ideological fabrication by the weak for the weak or by the weak to sponge off the strong, as Nietzsche describes altruistic love. Furthermore, altruism is voluntary and cannot be enforced by the state as a moral ideal, as Kelly anticipates, which would ultimately result in the state forcing everyone into a collectivist political system.

Altruism is not like game theory which prescribes the optimal strategy or strategies for each individual and which predicts the average, or expected, outcome. Altruism is not only for certain situations in which there is an interplay between parties that may have similar, opposed, or mixed interests. In altruism, the altruist's intention counts, not the ulterior motives of a free rider, that is an agent who draws a favor or who benefits from a co-operative society without contributing. Altruism does not allow reciprocal arrangements nor a tit-for-tat strategy (repayment in kind) with free riders either.

Sociological Perspective

Bar-Tal (1985-1986:5)¹¹ notes that altruism is a kind of behavior which a) benefit[s] another person, b) must be performed intentionally, c) the benefit must be the goal itself, and e) must be performed without expecting any external reward.¹²

Ergun Çapan holds that altruistic service outweighs the other dimensions of the Gülen movement and thus gives a particular character to it. Altruistic projects and services provided by the Gülen movement, Çapan adds, have never combined with or become the confluence of marginal and deviant groups present in the societies where the schools are, nor have any aggregate behaviors formed and coagulated within it. He maintains that the educational services have never dissolved into mere claimant behavior or violent rupture nor lost capacity to tackle educational issues for the common good.¹³

Why has such a widespread willingness to engage in altruistic action arisen in the GM? What could be the moral dimension of such educational services and voluntary forms of action?

In terms of political structure and social policies, voluntary forms of action emerge alternatively as result of shortcomings, deficiency or crisis in the governmental or welfare system in a society. Whether in man-made crises or natural disasters, excesses or absence of welfare provisions and services leave people to their own devices. People act to provide adequate public goods or services when a system is unable to overcome structural shortcomings by means of governmental institutions. Such conjuncture or opportunities create a feeling that individuals are bound by duty and morality to work towards the common good and common goals. Forms of action then concentrate especially on the issues and fields relating to health, caring, religion and education. (DiMaggio and Anheier, 1990:137, 153; Piliavin and Charng, 1990:55, 58)

Cahit Tuzcu, a sponsor of the educational and interfaith dialog efforts of the GM, a chemicals wholesaler in Istanbul, asserts that religious teaching and inspiration inculcated a characteristic of philanthropy in Turkish people:

¹¹ Bar-Tal, D. (1985-1986) Altruistic motivation to help: Definition, utility and operationalization. *The Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 13:3-14) p.5

¹² In Piliavin, Jane Allyn and Hong-Wen Charng. "Altruism: A Review of Recent Theory and Research," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16, 1990, 27-65. (p.30).

¹³ Interview with Çapan in January 2006.

The belief that to act for the benefit of others is right and good and the moral duty to treat others fairly justify voluntary action in the GM. This moral or philanthropic feature comes from religious inspiration, "serving people, serving God" or "The best amongst you is the most beneficial to human beings." Being charitable is a way of life, a way to purify one's intentions, wealth and life. It fills the gaps between classes and prevents such gaps from appearing in and menacing society.¹⁴

In the same vein, another sponsor and knitwear producer in Istanbul, Bahaddin Eker argues as follows:

It is undoubtedly the faith that inspired in people and implemented in Turkish society philanthropy and paternalism through sadaqa (charity) and zakat (the prescribed annual alms) and the vaqifs (endowments). Helping others and providing resources are the duty of the well-off, the affluent, towards the weak, unfortunate, under-privileged, wayfarers, orphans, widows and students. The rich person must concern himself or herself with the poor because he or she is responsible for them before God. Apart from being a religious duty, this is an act of generosity, an innate feature of being a true human.¹⁵

Eker adds that philanthropy may assume a number of forms, whether "one's allocation of time, energy, money, property or a simple smile, care or prayers." He sees such provision as "an alternative and barrier to egoistic interests at the expense of the others, and as "a remedy for societal discord, conflicts and violence."

In fact both Tuzcu and Eker echo Gülen. Gülen (2004:201) says that to earn eternal life and gain the approval of the Giver of Life

passes through the inescapable dimension of servanthood to God by means of serving, first of all, our families, relatives, and neighbors, and then our country and nation, with finally humanity and creation being the object of our efforts. This service is our right; conveying it to others is our responsibility.

Another aspect of altruistic action is that an actor ought voluntarily to support and contribute to such services. Faced with the immensity of the problem and services to tackle, a single voluntary individual joins a form of collective solidarity of her/his own free will. He or she in this way belongs to a network of relations because of personal choice.

Yet such an act is marked by unselfish concern for the welfare of others. Altruistic action ought to be grounded in the gratuitous nature of the work supplied. Gratuitousness requires no obligation, benefit or compensation in return. In order for an action to count as altruistic action, its gratuitousness must concern the relation that ties the actors involved together in the collective action.¹⁶

There are two noteworthy points here: first, gratuitousness, or no direct benefit from participation in altruistic action; second, voluntary collectiveness, or voluntary participation in the collectively organized action; or as Melucci (1999:167) put it, "a voluntary bond of

¹⁴ Personal interview, January 2005.

¹⁵ Personal interview, January 2005

¹⁶ Melucci, 199:167.

solidarity" in collective action. These two features are very important to understand the nature of the collective altruistic social services provided by the Gülen movement.

Absence of direct benefit or direct economic rewards does not mean that the workers for the voluntary action do not receive any payment in a work relationship. However, it means that economic interests do not constitute the basis of the relationship among those involved. Also economic benefit is neither the cause nor the effect between the voluntary actor and the recipients in the performed action. The voluntary action specifically aims at producing benefits or advantages for subjects other than the volunteers or workers. Therefore, its gratuitous nature lies in the free fruition of its product by the recipients. That is why the Gülen movement is acknowledged generally with the form and the name of *hizmet*, services provided for others.

However, beyond the immediate interest of the actor or workers, other kinds of reward (symbolic advantages, prestige, self-esteem, power) are present in altruistic action, just as much as they are in any other form of social exchange. Altruistic action may also yield indirect economic benefits, insofar as the voluntary worker acquires special abilities, establishes networks of influence, or acquires leadership skills (for example, the volunteer may learn professional skills in a certain field, or establish professionally advantageous relationships¹⁷). Moreover, with such services and with the nature of objectives, there may also be a multiplicity of secondary or tertiary objectives pursued by individuals. Yet these sorts of instances are rather infrequent and do not invalidate the altruistic services undertaken and the collective objectives shared by all those involved to achieve the common good. After all, the inner contentment or prestige attached to individuals after such services is not what they aim and work for. They are also regarded as extra blessings of doing such altruistic work.

Another feature of the altruistic action is that the action requires some form of organization for its prosecution. This organization ought by no means to coincide with an institutionalized, formal, associative structure and hierarchy. Its ends can only be achieved by informal, diffused, decentralized, permeable networks of friends, business associates or philanthropically like-minded people gathered around a single project. It is the reason that so many projects, services, institutions and initiatives of the Gülen movement are supported by a wide range of individuals, people, institutions and entities.

Journalist Abdullah Aymaz points out another equally important feature of voluntary forms of altruistic action, which is its civic aspect along with faith-based and humanitarian aspects. He argues that this action provides far more opportunities for participation than political activities. Altruistic action expresses membership in a far larger civil community than a political party. It provides people with a purpose and with a sense of belonging, responsibility, commitment, accountability, with incentives and inner contentment of being useful and beneficent. People have to arrive at a consensus on all details of a new social, cultural or educational project. Altruistic action therefore performs and establishes a distinct

¹⁷ These kind of developments can be illustrated from the history of the Christian Churches in the West. For example, Methodist Christianity has often been seen as the "training ground" for early Labour Party politicians in that it had a tradition of a small meetings, and of lay preaching etc, all of which developed skills in the context of a faith community group that could then also be deployed in the arena of the wider civic society. Similar things have also been observed to be the case in some of the mainly Black-led Church traditions, in both the USA and the UK.....Revd. Jesse Jackson, Revd. Dr. Martin Luther King etc.

civic and democratizing function. People learn how to negotiate, to provide convincing arguments, to reach a consensus, and to be flexible and accommodate differences.¹⁸

Aymaz (2006) strongly believes that the GM provides all with such attributes and offers new cultural, organizational, and relational models to a larger society. Aymaz therefore, in general terms, tend to call the Gülen movement a form of collective, purposive, and organized social altruism that has arisen from civic society.¹⁹

What Aymaz points out is supported by DiMaggio and Anheier (1990:151). They discuss how such non-profit services are sources of diversity and innovation, which provide vehicles, models and solutions to people and policymakers for social ills.

Finally, there are orientations of altruistic action and their very presence reveals and announces the hidden existence of the great dilemmas ingrained in the constitution and operation of complex societies. This fact signals the persistence of human needs and demands which cannot be reduced to routines and politics. Altruistic action invites us to seek change and to assume responsibility. It brings to light issues and gives individuals a voice in society. It endows both the individual and the public with the ability to accommodate a space for difference and to reinforce solidarity. And, for this reason, altruistic action becomes a vital component in the renewal process towards a civil, pluralist and democratic society.

Gülen's understanding of duty, to serve humanity especially in the field of education, "permits no expectation of material or political gain. Sincerity and purity of intention should never be harmed or contaminated."²⁰ Woodhall (2005:2, 14) maintains:

It must be remembered, however, that his philosophy of education is not utilitarian, nor a social and political activity which can be divorced from the rest of his philosophy or faith, but a firmly integrated and well-developed component of his world view. ...He indicates that the means must be as valid as the end, apparent or material success is not the only measure...

In the same vein, Tekalan (2005:3, 7-8) agrees with the previous remark:

The basic purpose is to ensure respect for objective and universal human values, to never have ulterior motives to seek material interests nor to impose any ideology or to seize power through politics in any country.

This understanding of service is geared primarily to "offering" in Turkey and abroad. Simply, it presents alternative models which state systems cannot replicate. Hence, it has attracted broad attention, in favor and against, within a short period of time.²¹

Such "offering," represents a breakdown in the rules of the game, for it is a symbolic challenge against the dominant cultural codes and the customary basis of strategic and instrumental logic in complex societies. The unilateral power of giving and thus generating and providing cultural models, constantly results in a movement's predominance in societies, as

¹⁸ Interview with Abdullah Aymaz.

¹⁹ Abdullah Aymaz, 'Onların 24 Saati Hizmet' ('Their 24 Hours are service', The Daily *Zaman*, 21.03.2006, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/?bl=yazarlar&andandandalt=&andandandandtrh=20060321&andandandandhn=267583&andandandandyn=2>; Personal interview.

²⁰ Ünal and Williams, 2000:22.

²¹ Ünal and Williams, 2000:22.

the autonomous and gratuitous production of cultural models is not governed by cost-benefit calculations.²²

In the eyes of those who have exploited and usurped Turkey's wealth and resources for years, among generations raised and those yet to be raised, the GM will be a challenge to their rationality. Those exploiters and usurpers will find their logic upset, as they seek to siphon money and resources illegally from the state and people's pocket, while others instead begin to construct alternative meanings and modes of conduct. This offers a symbolic challenge set against the rationality of calculation, routines, and the means-end relationship. The challenge arises from the gratuitousness of the gift and direct personal commitment, and indicates that sharing with the "other" is not reducible to instrumental logic. In essence, it reminds us of a system's limited power over people and events while it calls into question a system's power and glory, inviting us to assume responsibility. And in so doing, it becomes a vital component in the renewal of a "civil society" and in the reinforcement of social cohesion.²³

For over fifty years, Gülen has inspired generations "to achieve the right balance of social justice between the individual and community; to develop and advance in every individual and the whole nation feelings of love, respect, altruism, striving for the sake of others, sacrificing their own material and spiritual benefits, and aspirations for the sake of others."²⁴ However, this definitely has offended some in Turkey. Tarcan (1998) expresses his difficulty in comprehending why some are disturbed by such altruistic actions and services, and so vehemently opposed to them:

Who can object to raising youth who use science and the technology it gave birth to for the good of humanity, scientists respectful of moral principles, administrators who serve people sincerely, and officials and managers who do not steal and abuse their position but rather understand administration to mean serving the people?²⁵

Conclusion

We are fortunate to have sufficient means to live a quality life, but there are millions of people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Many millions of children, women and men live in abject poverty. Things that we take for granted—regular meals, housing, education and healthcare—are considered luxuries in some of the world's poorest countries. It is our duty to help them—because helping the poor and destitute is emphasized again and again in the Qur'an and in the other Holy Scriptures and traditions. By working together we can help make a real difference and bring about positive change to many people's lives. The rewards for being charitable are also manifold: charity purifies our wealth and God has promised us a great reward for being charitable towards our fellow human beings.

²² Melucci, 1999: 359.

²³ For a lengthy and an excellent discussion of altruistic action, see Melucci (1999: 166-171) and also Chapter 4.

²⁴ Gülen, 2005a: 50.

²⁵ Short and full texts of the same article available at <http://en.fgulen.com/content/view/826/13/> ; Ünal and Williams, 2000: 162-65; Webb, 2000: 78-89.

Altruism involves putting the interests of others above one's own interests. It is altruism that forms the basis of the meaning of life itself, which is to live for others. People are not inevitably driven by apparent, immediate or even long-term self-interest. This is seen every day when people risk their lives to rescue others. That is what makes us as human beings so special—we are willing to die for other members of our species, and many of us recognize that just one human life is worth more than all the material possessions in the world. People in the Gülen movement feel that altruism should inform all of our thinking and actions. We do first need to care about others before we can be motivated to help them out of problems. If we are to care about other people, it follows from this that we must be open-minded and receptive to other people and their experiences. We cannot maintain insularity amongst a few people while closing ourselves off to others, as understanding is only generated by being open to different people and their discourse and experiences. We need to be open-minded if we want to understand this world, and do something to change it for the benefit of us all. And that is exactly what the Gülen movement is altruistically trying to achieve.