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SURVIVING TYPHOON YOLANDA (HAIYAN) IN THE LENS OF COMTEAN ALTRUISM

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Abstract

Altruism for August Comte is a belief of disinterestedness and an unselfish concern for other people. It is a theory that postulates the generous side of a person even in times of difficulty and even death. The onslaught of the strongest typhoon ever recorded in history brought substantial damage to different spheres of a human life. Despair and unwillingness to live were evident. However, despite severe damage to both body and soul to almost everyone in the hardest-hit areas, the victims managed to survive, share, and assist even the minutest that they have to others. Supplies were depleted and people have nowhere to buy food and other necessary elements. This study collected narrative experiences from individuals who were caught up in the storm and its aftermath. The study utilized the philosophical and critical social type of qualitative research, which aims to provide knowledge, which involve the existing social structure. This described, evaluated, and interpreted the different personal experiences of Yolanda survivors anchored on the Comtean philosophy of altruism.

Keyword: Auguste comte, altruism, despair, solidarity, yolanda, haiyan

Introduction

Helping someone in a certain situation is not always automatic in a person. There are those who elect to help, while there are those who choose to ignore. There are reasons whether valid or invalid that an individual has and such reasons are at his disposal. The act of rendering support to another creates an admirable atmosphere between two or more parties. When a community is hit by a calamity and everyone dwelling in it is a victim causing shortage of food, no electricity, wanting of security, and many other inequities, the same survivors experiences a feeling of helplessness and despair. There were times when victims themselves opt to take advantage of the scenario, while there were those who wanted to help and even gave it an extra mile.

When Super typhoon Haiyan made history when it destroyed the localities that it directly hit, the victims were shocked. They literally did not know what to do, and they figuratively behaved like zombies because they were walking through the streets with all the debris with no direction looking for elements for

survival. As a victim myself who lost loved ones and even valuable properties, I noticed two sides of behavior shown by the victims. There were those who showed their undesirable side but there were those who showed their extraordinary part. The good side was extraordinary that even I myself was in disbelief of what I experienced. I was skeptical of the goodness of the victims that I was made to remember of the Comtean Altruism.

Theory

Comtean Altruism

Auguste Comte was a French philosopher responsible in the development of positive philosophy. The idea of his philosophy was to cure the sickness the French society was experiencing during its revolution. Further, Comte introduces the word altruisme in 1851, and two years later it entered the English language as altruism (Comte A. , 1973). Altruism or Ethical Altruism is an ethical doctrine that holds that individuals have a moral obligation to help, serve or benefit others, if necessary at the sacrifice of self interest. In his work *Catechisme Positiviste*, Comte wrote that altruism “*gives a direct sanction exclusively to our instincts of benevolence,*” and therefore “*cannot tolerate the notion of rights, for such a notion rests on individualism.*” (Comte A., 1852). More precisely, an action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable to everyone except the agent. The core of this teaching was a human person living for others. A person works and lives for the benefit of other people (Golub, 2014). He believed that a human person has the moral obligation to love and help another. To fulfill this responsibility would mean the total development of a person as a truly human person.

Altruists prefer to experience his success with other people to fulfill the same status. In other words, he feels happy when other people are happy and sad when they are otherwise. The ethical philosophy of altruism is an important tool in securing better relationships among men in all societies. For instance, a family needs to practice this philosophy in order to enhance and solidify the strong bond between husband and wife, among children and the family as a whole. It is given for a parent to teach within the family goodwill towards brothers and sisters and help each other solve problems and similar situations for each member to achieve and contented life. From a larger scale, by motivating cooperation rather than conflict, it promotes harmony within communities of any size. Of course, peace within communities does not necessarily herald peace between communities, and the two may even be inversely related - witness for example, the way in which social strife tends to decrease within countries at war.

Altruism is often seen as a form of consequentialism, as it indicates that an action is ethically right if it brings good consequences to others. Altruism may be seen as similar to utilitarianism, however an essential difference is that the latter prescribes acts that maximize good consequences for all of society, while altruism prescribes maximizing good consequences for everyone except the actor. Spencer argued that since the rest of society will almost always outnumber the utilitarian, a genuine utilitarian will inevitably end up practicing altruism or a form of altruism. Effective altruism is a philosophy and social movement that maintains that the consequences of our actions - for ourselves and others - are important, and seeks

to maximize the overall quality of these consequences (Comte, 1973a & Comte A., 1973b).

Comte's altruism urges man to prioritize the social perspective over personal that is, man should live for others. This belief has permeated modern philosophical thinking on morality. C.D. Broad characterizes altruism as "*the doctrine that each of us has a special obligation to benefit others.*" (Cheney, 1971) W.G. Maclagan considers altruism "*a duty to relieve the distress and promote the happiness of our fellows...Altruism is to...maintain quite simply that a man may and should discount altogether his own pleasure or happiness as such when he is deciding what course of action to pursue.*" (Maclagan, 1954) James Fieser states the altruist dictum as "*An action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable to everyone except the agent.*" (Fieser, 2009) B.A.O. Williams is a little bit more inclusive, defining altruism as referring "*to a general disposition to regard the interests of others, merely as such, as making some claim on one, and, in particular, as implying the possibility of limiting one's own projects*" (William, 2006). Another author posit that altruism is one ethical prospect that is based on solidarity and justice in catastrophes indicating the disturbance of nature such as the typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) (Kahambing, 2019)

To illustrate, an act of saving a drowning person is an example of altruistic tendency. Saving a drowning person is a serious matter for it may cause the loss of life of both the savior and the victim. When a person disregards danger to his life just to save another is a selfless and heroic act. This commendable act values the life of another person at the same time endangering the giver's own life. Helping a neighbor who is in great need whether financially or morally without expecting something in return is another showcase of altruistic approach. Just imagine how grateful can that neighbor be when an unexpected genuine assistance is imparted to him.

Theory Application

Comte and Victims of Haiyan (Yolanda)

When Haiyan, the strongest typhoon ever recorded in history made landfall, the people living in the hardest hit areas were all victims. There was lack of food and water. Many lost their clothing and livelihood. Some were desperate since help came late and politics was at its worst when some politicians became idiots rather than leaders. However, these victims even those who lost family members, relatives and friends tried their best to become resilient. Instead of resorting to despair and eventual insanity if not death, they stood up and tried to defy odds. There was spontaneous inclination from these people to stand by and embrace with other victims to survive another day and eventually the succeeding days.

The survivors were able to withstand the strongest typhoon ever recorded in history to make landfall. The terrible situation after it happened may have been an issue but the survivors view it as another opportunity. An opportunity to help specially their fellow calamity victims. Their being victim themselves did not hinder them from being resourceful. These things are characteristics of resiliency, a known attribute of Filipinos. Resiliency is the ability to be strong in the midst of adversity. Defined in the general sense as "*efforts to restore or maintain internal or external equilibrium under significant threat by means of human activities*

including thought and action” (Smith & Carlson, 1997 p. 236). Consistent with this view, resiliency is the capability to organize and make use all available resources not only to help oneself, family and community. It is also an attitude to help everyone out of the devastating impact of the traumatic experience brought by Yolanda. It played a very important task in the recovery, rebuilding and in motivating the survivors to move forward toward a secured future. One participant said, “*kon deri kita magtrahaho, deri liwat kita makaka-kaon. Gin testingan kita han Diyos kay maaram man gud Hiya nga kaya naton*” (Daisog, 2014) (If we will not work, we cannot eat. God gave us this trial because He believes that we can survive). Another participant also said, “*Mga buhi kita kay gin tagan kita hin bag-o nga higayon. Kinahanglan kita mabuhi. Aada naman ngani it mga kauropdan ngan mga kabarangay*” (De Paz, 2015) (We are alive so this gives us another chance. We have to survive. Besides, our families and community are there helping us). They persistently help each other to get back to their feet and move on.

Four years after the devastating typhoon, Leyte has already recovered and is in full gear in its rebuilding efforts. Although the whole experience is very hard to forget but the spirit of *pakikipagkapwa* (being one with the other) *pakikisama* (being along with) and *bayanihan* (Community spirit) binds them together to rise again. *Pakikipagkapwa*, *pakikisama* and *bayanihan* are sacred values that also define who the Filipinos are. *Kakikipagkapwa* is treating another person as a fellow human being. *Pakikisama* according to Fr. Frank Lynch, is a camaraderie that makes the Filipinos flexible and easy to be with. *Bayanihan* is also a form of camaraderie among the people in the community that connotes helping one another in time of need (Jocano 1999, Pe-pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, Reyes, 2018).

The above mention values were utilized by the survivor themselves to cope with their loss. It was also their tool used to survive the aftermath of the catastrophe. Through *pakikipagkapwa*, *pakikisama* and *bayanihan*, they help one another by providing food, shelter, jobs and even burying their dead in the absence of the government help. The said action can be likened to or is analogous to an act called pooling of resources. They put their acts, supply and resources together to be able to do greater things (Halstead, 1989). Such act helped them survive the calamity. One respondent shared that “*pagkatapos gud la han bagyo ngan pag hutos han tubig, kumadto kami han balay han amon uropod. Didto kami naki-serong kay na ruba man an amon balay*” (Espina, 2014) (after the storm and when the flood water subsided, we went to the house of our relatives. We stayed with them because our house was totally destroyed). Another participant quips, “*madali kami siguro nga naka recover han trauma han Yolanda tungod kay nakada man an supporta han amon mga kapamilya*” (Barantes, 2015) (the reason probably why we were able to recover easily from the trauma of Yolanda is because of the support of our families). All of them sustain wound either physically or emotionally, but it did not deter them from supporting one another. Nor the wounds sustained by the survivors, stop their aggressiveness to be of services to their fellow men.

The sharing happens not only with-in the family and friends but with-in the community. In the community a very strong bond of friendship was developed. The bond formed between these people was a consequence of their smooth

interpersonal relationship rooted in their blood ties. Together with their strong faith in God, their “*formidable armor against suffering caused by disaster*” (Bankoff, 2003), they eventually arose from the rumbles. As a former seminary professor, Fr. Isagani Petilos, said, “*Even if we have this kind of situation, there is still hope. Yes, we may have been damaged and devastated, but we are not dead*” (Petilos, 2016). The survivors were challenged by the good pastor to continue to live and be of help to others.

Help came from ordinary people, most of them from other unaffected places from within and outside the Philippines. The volunteer “Panday” (Carpenters) from Pagadian City, Mindanao, for instance are one of them. They were ordinary individuals who belong to the so-called “Basic Ecclesial Communities” (BEC) of the Island of Mindanao. They came in to help clean the debris and built the destroyed houses of the victims. Most of them belong to poor families of Pagadian City. Despite of the fact that they also need financial help, this did not deter them to travel to the devastated areas in Leyte to help. Notwithstanding what would happen to their respective families if they left to venture on volunteer work, they proceed to help those who need help. When asked they responded that “*Mas manginahanglan ug tabang ang mga taga deri kaysa sa amo. Ang among pamilya ngadto sa amoa, tabangan man pud sa among mga silingan. Deli mi magproblema sa ilaha ngadto ngan kasabot man to sila nga gikinahang mi deri. Ang mga taga Leyte, silingan pud mamo sila.*” (Anonymous, 2014) (The people from this place need our help more than us. Our individual families we left behind will be taken good cared by our neighbors. We are not worried about them, and besides they knew the very reason why we came here. The people of Leyte are our neighbors too.) They believe that man has a duty not only to himself, but likewise to his fellow men. If people needs help one is obliged to extend a hand on them. There were many unsung heroes who did volunteer work after typhoon Haiyan, Doctors, linemen, construction worker, soldiers both from within the country and abroad. They all came to help the people of Leyte raise back from the rumble.

In the lens of August Comte, this is what altruism is, to be a person for others. Every individuals have a moral obligation to serve, help, or benefit others. If necessary one has to sacrifice his own self-interest for others. One author posits that Comte's system is viewed as both ethical and religious. Happiness is not only found in living for others as the supreme end of an act, “but regulative supremacy of social sympathy over the self-regarding instincts” (Moran, 2009). His ethical theory may be summarized in this proposition. The dominion of feeling over thought is the normative principle of human conduct, for it is the affective impulses that govern the individual and the race.

While it is true that man is under the influence of two affective impulses. Which are the egoistic or personal, and the altruistic or social impulses. The egoistic impulse of man refers to an action “*which makes any good of the ego the end and motive of action*” (Fox, 1909). The altruistic or social impulse on the other hand refers to the willingness of man to do things for others (Graham, 2010). However, a just balance is impossible between these two existing impulses, one or other must preponderate.

This was evident during the aftermath of the said super typhoon. Survivors helping each other cope with their loss. There were stories of heroism wherein individuals risk their lives to save others. This particular act of helping, clearly

manifest the two affective impulses mentioned by August Comte. As to the kind of impulse affected the agent doing the act, depends on the one acting. But if the social or altruistic impulse preponderate, is what Comte believe to be morally right because the consequence of that action was more favorable than unfavorable to others except the agent (Steiner, 2014 & Bykov, 2016). This the first principle of morality according to Comte, the regulative supremacy of social sympathy over self-regarding instinct or the subordination of self-love to the benevolent impulses.

Conclusion

Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) may have been the strongest typhoon in history to make landfall, but the survivors were stronger to have overcome the adversities and painful effects of it. It may have been hurting and insurmountable for a number of survivors but the ability to cope positively was illustrated no matter what, by the victims. The idealistic standpoint of Comte's altruism was evidently displayed by the survivors as well as non-victims from neighboring town and provinces. First, the victims themselves helped each other by sharing what they had and what was left of them. It is true that the major rule in life is self-preservation, but not so much with the case of the victims of Haiyan. Sharing the smallest things they had was spontaneous. Many lost their loved ones and properties yet they still managed to give to their fellow survivors. Secondly, it was obviously dangerous to enter the severely damaged areas because there were no police forces and other authorities right after the typhoon since they were also victims, but many of these responders from other regions proceeded to the ravaged places to comfort the victims and give anything of great value. These valuable acts are immeasurable and priceless for the giver deliberately neglected the dangers to themselves all for the good of the victims.

There are valuable lessons that people can get out of certain tragic episodes in life. The intensity may vary from one experience to another. Every human person will have to experience sad moments in life. Nobody is spared from such unwanted scenes, nevertheless, he should overcome it and the ability to heal the hurt should be utilized. Comte's altruism is a benevolent doctrine. More so, it is a gem in times of adversities. Helping a person is excellent, but helping another in times of great difficulty is exceptional.

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