

## The Downside of Altruism

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

*When you give love, a lot of times, people are going to take advantage [of you.]  
But you still gotta give it – Rapper Snoop Dogg/Lion*

Great moral teachers, religionists and teachings from “sacred” texts have long promoted altruism, sympathy and empathy as some of humanity’s greatest virtues. But there has been very little said or written by great moral teachers about the many ways in which people exploit kindness as a weakness.

Many people are eager to show kindness and generosity to their fellow human beings. They give large sums of money and give much of their time to their favorite charities.

However, they are blissfully unaware of what often goes on behind closed doors in their favorite charities, human rights organizations, churches, humanist groups, etc. In his book *Lay Bare the Heart*, famed humanist and civil rights leader James Farmer discussed what it was like growing up as a Preacher’s Kid (PK.) He said that, among other things, the cut-throat nature of behind-the-scenes church politics was as vicious as anything that occurred in the world of governmental politics. (The same could be said of not a few humanist organizations.)

The same could also be said of the civil rights movement of which Farmer was a major part. The movie *Selma* showed a little about the bitterness and competition among the various civil rights groups that many people assumed were working close together for a higher purpose.

The fact of the matter is that many – if not most – charitable, social justice and human rights organizations are mainly concerned with their own survival, first and foremost, and by any means necessary. Helping others is simply their way of earning a living, and in many cases, thriving financially. What is worse, there are more than a few charitable organizations that are nothing but scams to take the money of good-hearted, well-intentioned people.

Kindness and generosity often fail on the individual level. There are numerous instances of people showering their lovers with kindness, generosity and affection, only to have their lovers use them for sex, money, material things, and so forth.

In many families, there are leeches who take but never give. They feel entitled by blood to their family members' money, housing, cars, and so on. Some of them never even show up unless they want something, and they think nothing of bleeding their family members dry.

When many people are the recipients of generosity, they come to believe that their benefactor is forever obligated to take care of them. As the saying goes, "do it once and it's a favor. Do it twice, and it becomes your duty."

There is a far more sinister side effect of altruism. Many people take advantage of people's kindness to rob them, rape them, kill them, and so on. People have stopped to help people with car problems, or invited people into their homes to help them, only to be harmed or killed.

Some people feign kindness to get what they want. They pretend to love people they simply want to use. They use generosity to lure people into prostitution, terrorism, and so forth. They are not altruistic at all, but they are incredibly *charming*.

Liberals, progressives and radicals believe in big government to aid the poor. However, some poor people do abuse the system. Some poor people get used to welfare and other social programs and become pathologically dependent upon them. Yet many proponents of big government object to programs like workfare in which welfare recipients have to do at least a little bit of work to earn their way.

Despite all of this, Snoop is correct, up to a point. You still have to give love even if someone has exploited your kindness. (But do not give it again to the exploiter.) Just imagine a world in which large numbers of people became completely embittered after someone exploited their kindness. They would deny help to good, richly deserving people that truly need it.

Sadly, some people do become thus embittered. They refuse to help their fellow human beings because of their fear of once again having dishonest people exploit their kindness. However, when this occurs, it is an example of selfishness triumphing over goodness. Good people must not allow this to happen.

The bottom line is that people have to be more careful about the people and organizations they help. They can request annual reports from their favorite charities and check with other organizations that specialize in examining charities, such as [charitynavigator.com](http://charitynavigator.com) or [charitywatch.org](http://charitywatch.org). On an individual level, they can take more time to get to know friends and lovers, and pay closer attention to the comings and goings of predatory family members. They can also use better judgement when they are approached by strangers for assistance.

After all is said and done, the great moral teachers were correct. We must be kind and generous to our fellow human beings (as well as other animals). However, they should have added that there are some people who see kindness and generosity as weaknesses to exploit, and these people should be identified, denied help and avoided like the plague.