

ALTRUISM & HAPPINESS

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Modern life confronts us with a number of unique challenges, each with its own temporality and priority. There is a vital thread that links the economy in the shortterm, life satisfaction in the mid-term, and the environment in the long-term. That thread is altruism.

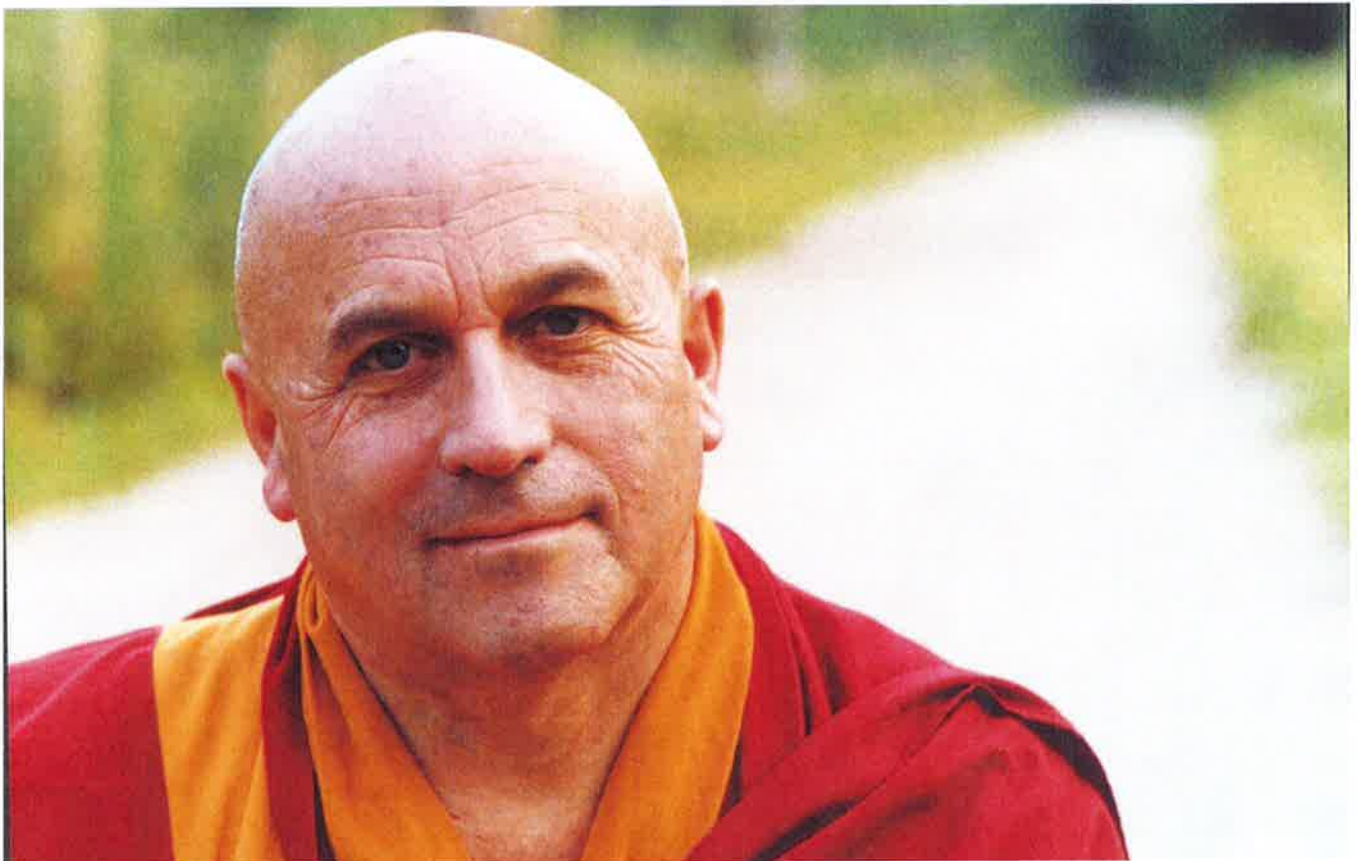
Altruism is not just a noble, somewhat naive ideal or a luxury only the affluent can afford. Now, more than ever, altruism is a necessity for the well-being of all.

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If we were more considerate of the quality of life of those around us, we would make sure that working conditions, family of life, and many other aspects of society were improved.

Finally, if we were more considerate of future generations, we would not blindly sacrifice the environment they are inheriting from us in favor of our short-lived wants and needs.



Matthieu Ricard. Source: TED.com

Economists have based their theories on the assumption that human beings exclusively follow their own personal interest. Although this hypothesis is mistaken, it has been for too long the foundation of the current economic systems. Modern economists are now increasingly calling for acknowledging the role altruistic propensities in every aspects of human life, including economy. For example, Dennis Snower, the founder of the GES (*Global Economic Symposium*) has stressed that along the "voice of reason," economists, politician, and individuals alike must now also speak with the "voice of care".

Evolutionists also remind us that we should not forget the emphasis placed by Darwin on the vital importance of cooperation in the world of living beings. Evolutionists and Harvard professor

Martin Nowak, among other, reminds us: "Cooperation is the architect of creativity throughout evolution. Without cooperation there can be neither construction nor complexity in evolution. Cooperation — not competition — underpins innovation."

Goodness is not a doctrine or a principle. It is a way of living. Biological altruism is inherited from evolution. It is based on the parental care and is inherent to our nature and needs no instruction. But it is limited and partial. At the opposite, extended altruism that is directed to all beings is free from such bias. However, for most of us, this is not instinctive and requires some instruction and training.

The research in neuroscience and psychology also indicates that loving-kind-

ness and compassion are among the most positive of all positive emotions or mental states and can be trained as skills.

Many studies have also highlighted the link that exists between altruism and well-being and have shown that the joy of undertaking an act of disinterested kindness provides profound satisfaction.

Altruism, thus, appears to be most direct way to accomplish both the happiness of other and ones own. It, therefore, seems that promoting altruism and compassion not only in one's personal life, but also within education and in society at large is a much needed and direct way to address the challenges of the modern world.

Let's remember the words of Albert Schweitzer: "Every person I have known who has been truly happy has learned how to serve others."



(From Left)

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CIFA's Secretary-General

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CIFA's President

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