

9. Benefactor versus volunteer

Egyptian Hellenism presents a rich tradition of benefaction, philanthropy, and volunteerism. These phenomena are outcomes of a common ideological base which represents the fulfillment of one's duty towards the human community on various scales and in different forms.

Volunteerism and benefaction have a common ideological background in three specific ways:

- a sense of the community of life;
- caring for one's fellow man being a duty, either on the personal or collective level, and
- the generous nature of the gesture.

However, from this common background two qualitatively distinctive branches emerge, namely volunteerism and benefaction, each one possessed of clearly different logic. In the first place, volunteerism consists of contributing time and effort for a collective purpose, rather than offering material goods and money as in benefaction and philanthropy. The basic element of volunteerism consists of a personal contribution and is expressed through people's readiness to identify

with a cause which, according to their opinion, is worthy of their time and effort. For instance, the contribution of volunteers to dealing with the negative results of wars and conflicts is significant. Other forms of volunteerism are common in times of peace, such as volunteer firemen, volunteer blood donors, volunteer escorts at the Olympics and other public games, volunteer traffic wardens outside school entrances etc. In post-crisis Greece, volunteerism has acquired very broad dimensions as a means of supporting both those in financial need and the refugees and immigrants pouring into the country.

Volunteerism is encountered systematically throughout history and illustrates the contribution of the many to the many through a necessary institutional framework. Volunteers joining the army and volunteer nurses in World War I and World War II are examples of civilians who individually and voluntarily joined a supra-personal cause which supported the national centre.

On the sociological level, a significant difference between benefaction and volunteerism can be identified. Benefaction substitutes or completes weak or insufficient institutions. That is, it acts where institutions cannot act. On the contrary, volunteerism as a rule is mediated by institutions which have the potential to direct personal contributions to a common and collective aim. In the case of volunteerism, individuals carry out institutional imperatives and collective initiatives, while in benefaction single individuals undertake functions belonging to institutions.

The contribution of personal time, human resources, and personal moral commitment defines volunteerism and characterises the volunteer as an individual who is willing to cooperate in a charitable initiative which others are institutionally bound to perform. Volunteerism springs from internal urges and procedures, and in this sense, it has an anthropological character. Persistence and devotion to the goal throughout the whole volunteer activity, the feeling of commitment to a certain moral responsibility, the ability of developing good human relations and their utilisation in the interest of the volunteer action, provides the expected satisfaction.

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Volunteer engagement in conflicts and wars symbolises the apogee of personal contribution, considering the risks involved. It represents a conscious choice between a natural death and putting one's life in danger for a cause. This existential dimension of volunteerism represents in an exemplary way that existing is a coincidence, but the way one exists is not so coincidental.