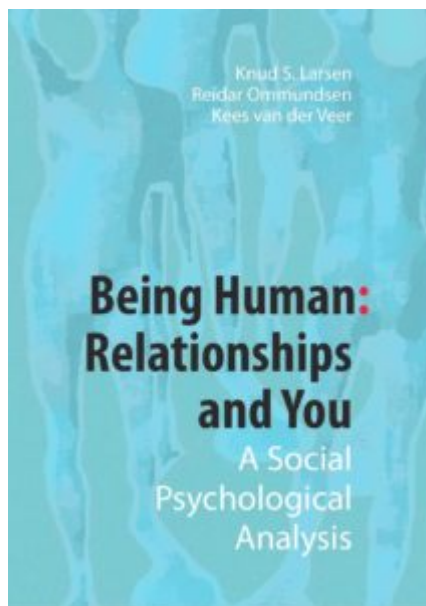


# Being Human. Chapter 11: Altruism And Prosocial Behavior



In 1964 a shocking incident occurred in New York City that caused distress and concern among social psychologists. A young woman, Kitty Genovese, was walking to her home when a stalker attacked her. What was especially distressing was that she was stabbed repeatedly over a 35-minute time span while crying out for help. It was not as if no one heard her cries. According to several news reports in the days that followed she died while 38 of her neighbors saw the attack and did nothing. They watched the attack unfold from windows above the street and the only intervention occurred when someone yelled, “leave

that girl alone”, at which point the attacker left temporarily. However, after a short interval the attacker returned and stabbed her 8 more times, sexually assaulted her, and left her for dead. When finally police were called, there was nothing that could be done as Kitty had died.

When the neighbors were later interviewed and asked why they did not intervene, some indicated that they felt no personal responsibility to help, whereas others misconstrued the situation as one that did not require intervention. Although recent research indicates that the news reports had not been quite correct about every detail of this incidence (Manning, Levine & Collins, 2007), more importantly social psychologists were motivated by the news stories about this crime to try to understand what caused such indifference to suffering. In a more positive sense it also led to the desire to know why on the other hand some bystanders in other situations do display concern and intervene in order to help (Darley & Latane, 1968). We will come back to this research later in this chapter.

When September 11, 2001 came to New York, we saw this different side of the human nature, a desire to help and intervene. That day close to 3,000 people died in a massive attack on the World Trade Center. However, there were also hundreds of people who died trying to help these victims and in the process sacrificed their own lives (Lee, 2001). Most of the people who displayed

extraordinary courage and selfless behavior on that day were ordinary people just like those who decided not to help Kitty Genovese. The helpers were average human beings who found themselves faced with an extraordinary situation that demanded their attention. Most of the workers in the building did the natural thing and fled to safety. However, there were some who stayed behind and helped the physically handicapped, there were those workers who saw to it that others were led to safety first, and there were hundreds of firefighters who lost their lives trying to save others (Stewart, 2002).

In both of these incidents the possibility of behaving in altruistic and helping ways presented itself. Why did those who watched Kitty Genovese die not help? Why did altruistic heroes arise out of the catastrophe at the World Trade Center? These and other issues dealing with altruistic and prosocial behavior will be addressed in this chapter. Human history shows the selfish and dark side of humanity, but also records people who are willing to sacrifice even their lives to help those in need. For social psychologists these anecdotal examples create questions as to whether willingness to help has a basic genetic component, or whether it is a consequence of learning. Is there such a thing as a pure altruistic motive in helping people or are all such behaviors at least partly motivated by self-interests?

### *1. What is altruistic and prosocial behavior?*

Altruistic behavior occurs when we perform a voluntary act to help someone, and there is no expectation of any reward. The motives of the helper are what matters in any definition of prosocial or altruistic behavior. A major criterion of altruistic behavior is that the same helping behavior is elicited whether performed anonymously or in the public eye. Altruistic motives are inferred from behavior and are not motivated by the desire for medals or other public recognition (Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995).

On the other hand prosocial behavior is more broadly defined than altruism since it includes all helping behavior regardless of motives. If rich corporations donate money to support AIDS research they are performing a prosocial act, even if the motives include the desire to achieve public recognition as a socially responsible entity. So prosocial behaviors define the whole range of beneficial acts, from those motivated entirely by self-interest to those that are selfless acts of sacrifice (Batson, 1998). Societies offer many forms of recognition for prosocial behavior ranging from community recognition as “young leader of the year” to national

honors bestowed by the government. In most societies prosocial behavior is easily identified and related to being considered a “good” person (McGuire, 1994). Many people are willing to help others with low cost behavior like providing telephone change after the recipient reported his wallet stolen (Berkowitz, 1972); or are willing to mail back a wallet that was “lost” by the researchers (Hornstein, Fisch, & Holmes, 1968). Life provides many opportunities to be helpful. The scout organization promotes “doing a good deed “ every day, and awards merit badges and rank for prosocial behavior. The military thrives on social recognition in the form of rank, and values the symbols of prosocial behavior such as medals for various categories of bravery.

At the end of the day what matters are the intentions of the actor, whether selfless or motivated by some form of self-interest. Altruistic behavior is defined by selfless motivation. When there are some egoistic motives, however remote in consciousness, we are describing prosocial behaviors. For the sake of a better society we should encourage prosocial behaviors, and also admire those people who act with complete selflessness.

## *2. The motivation to help*

Several theories have been developed in social psychology to explain why people help others. Social exchange theory argues that apparent unselfish behavior is really a form of disguised self-help. Evolutionary psychology asserts that altruism emerged out of our ancestral past because such behavior was useful to the survival of individuals and the species. Finally, some social psychologists believe that there are pure motives for altruism as an expression of empathy with the suffering of others.

### *2.1 Social exchange theory: We help when rewards are greater than costs*

Some social psychologists have relied on well-tried theories to explain altruistic behavior. Social exchange theory (see also chapter 3) hypothesizes that people help after weighing benefits and costs of the behavior. In deciding on whether to help or not, we employ in our psychological economy what might be called a minimax strategy. In other words we seek to maximize our rewards at the least cost. The weighing of outcomes is not necessarily done in a conscious way, but subconsciously we weigh the costs versus the benefits from any behavior (Homans, 1961; Lawler & Thye, 1999). In fact, helping behavior can be rewarding as well as costly in several ways. If we help someone perhaps they will help you in the future. A friend confided that she looked after old friends because “perhaps

someone would do that for me when I get old". Also, many people feel disturbed when observing suffering, so helping may be motivated by the desire to relieve distress as well as the wish to help the other person (Dovido, Piliavin, Gaertner, Schroeder, & Clark, 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1991). Keep in mind that not all rewards for prosocial behavior are external. At times we also feel better about ourselves when we help.

So social exchange theory argues that we help in order to gain some benefit. Are purely unselfish motives at play when rich people give away great amounts of money to ameliorate suffering? Perhaps, but at some level the donor may also be aware of the social approval that follows such acts. Prosocial behavior is supported by socialized norms in most if not all societies. Human motives are complex, and any behavior including prosocial behavior is the outcome of such complexity. Of course prosocial behavior should be lauded regardless of motives since helping is voluntary. Rich people could have chosen some other way to use their money (Dovido et. al. 1991).

Still intuitively many people feel dissatisfied with explanation of behavior as a function of market place ideology. This seems a too cynical explanation for many acts of bravery and other forms of unselfish behavior. As we shall see altruistic behavior is more complex, and some of us believe that people also respond with pure motives. Nevertheless, social approval may partly predict the willingness to intervene to help. In some research when approval followed helping (reinforcement), prosocial behavior increased (Staub, 1978).

## *2.2 Improving image and other rewards*

As suggested above helping others is highly valued behavior in most societies, and altruistic behaviors may be motivated by a desire for social recognition. Captains of industry with questionable reputations may seek to improve their image by volunteering or giving money to charities (Nowak, Page, & Sigmund, 2000). When we help others society takes notes, and the helper may be a candidate for titles and other forms of social recognition. Do some of us help because we like the attention it brings, and are attracted to having a positive image in our community? When Bill Gates gave away 500 billion dollars to a variety of worthwhile causes was that pure altruism? The establishment of his foundation did not occur anonymously, it bears his name, nor did the contributions of other high profile givers. Perhaps these powerful people enjoy being able to transform the life of people and nations, or perhaps they seek to

store up credit for the life that follows earthly existence. On the other hand since we have no direct evidence of motivation, these unselfish gifts may have been donated without regard to any social consequences.

Altruistic behavior can be a means of improving one's standing in the community, as it tends to be valued behavior in all cultures (Campbell, 1975). If the motive is to obtain social rewards that too may have an evolutionary advantage. People who are praised for their unselfish behavior often get rewards in terms of influence, higher pay, election to office, and improvement of their image. These advantages give greater possibilities also for their children and other kin. In the U.S., for example, giving a large donation to a university may assist in college applications for descendants of the generous donor. Improvement of image comes from having buildings or stadiums named after the beneficent donor. There are many ways in which social rewards assist natural selection by offering benefits directly to the donor and his offspring.

A number of studies have shown that children are more willing to help if they are rewarded gold stars, or given bubble gum to reinforce helping behavior (Fischer, 1963). Praise is also an effective vehicle to promote generosity in children (Mills & Grusec, 1989). Praise that aims at reinforcing the child's self-conception is very effective in promoting helping behavior. Directing praise to the child's personality "you are helpful, because that is really the nice person you are", is more effective than just general praise that helping "is a good thing to do for others". Dispositional praise helps the child develop a self-concept that includes altruistic behavior, and therefore is more likely to sustain helping behavior in the future.

Children of course also learn by modeling the behavior of others. In one study children watched a popular television show that either depicted helping behavior, or a neutral situation. Children who watched the prosocial modeling were more likely to help even giving up some personal benefits, compared to those children who watched the neutral show (Sprafkin, Liebert, & Poulos, 1975). Adult blood donors are also affected by the actions of models (Rushton & Campbell, 1977). In the aforementioned study potential donors volunteered at a higher rate when they observed a confederate first volunteer. More than two-thirds (67 %) pledged to give blood in the social learning condition, whereas only 25 percent of the participants were willing when they saw no model. The social learning effect persisted in the actual behavior. None of the participants who pledged to donate blood in the 'no model' condition actually gave blood subsequently, whereas 33

percent of those who observed the confederate model pledge eventually donated. We cannot overestimate the importance of good examples as people look to others to learn how to behave in a given situation.

### *2.3 Social norms and prosocial or altruistic behavior*

Society supports prosocial behavior in a variety of ways. The socialization process where norms are established makes such behavior largely automatic and unconscious. In the process of socialization children learn that it is good to help those who are vulnerable. Boy scouts learn to be helpful, the educational institutions support humanitarian projects, and children receive praise from their parents for helpful behavior. Social norms have developed over time, because they have some adaptive function related to the welfare of society. The norm of social responsibility urges us to look after those who depend on us. Parents should care for their children, and children should look after their parents in old age. The norm of social responsibility urges us to look after the vulnerable in society. Society prescribes social responsibility as a duty that might at times be written into law. The social security systems of many countries, the complete medical assistance in Cuba, or the educational systems of most countries, are all examples of the social responsibility norm.

The norm of reciprocity contains the idea that we help those who help us. Reciprocity obviously has many advantages for the individual as societies cooperate to create better lives for their citizens, and to protect the society from those who would do harm. Regan (1968) showed the effectiveness of the reciprocity norm in an experimental study. Study pairs of university students worked on a judgment task, and after some time had passed were given a short break. During the break the confederate who was working as a member of the couple left the building, and after a while returned and gave the subject a coca cola. In a second condition the experimenters gave all the participants the drink. In the third and final condition no drinks were provided during the break. The participants then returned to the task and continued working. During a second break the confederate approached the subject and asked for his help in selling some raffle tickets for a good purpose (building a new gym). The results showed that the participants were more willing to help the confederate when the confederate had done the favor of providing a drink during the break. The reciprocity norm is strong in many cultures (Gergen, Ellsworth, Maslach, & Seipel, 1975).

The social justice (equity) norm supports the fair treatment of members of society. Equity is a common principle in many societies. For example equal work by men and women should yield equal pay. This is one of the reasons that strong labor unions emerged in Western Europe and in North America. These unions not only fought for fair standards at work, but also established procedures for equal treatment. In recent years we have seen many efforts to provide equity between the races, ethnic groups, and genders in Europe and the United States. Still the capitalist system creates inequity, and some people like Bill Gates benefit in truly unequal ways.

There is some evidence that those who are over-benefited in society try to restore some equity to those who are losers (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Is that why Bill Gates and other very rich (e.g. Warren Buffett) donate money to worthwhile causes? In a laboratory study (Berscheid and Walster, 1967) one person through no fault of his own lost a great deal. When given the possibility of restoring some equity at the end of the game, the winner (the actual subject) was more likely to give money to the loser whereas when both parties had approximately equal winnings they gave less (see also Schmitt & Marwell, 1972). These norms (social responsibility, reciprocity, equity) and other social prescriptions encourage those who grow up in a given society to help those in need.

#### *2.4 Evolutionary motives to act altruistically*

Scientists have long been aware of prosocial behavior among various animal species (Darwin, 1871). Dawkins (1976) noted for example that rabbits try to warn other rabbits of predators and approaching dangers. There is obviously a survival value for rabbits as a species (although not as individuals) if they are hard wired to warn of danger. Evolutionary theory presents a problem for altruism. If the most altruistic members of a species take risks to help others survive and in the process die, how can they pass the altruistic gene on to the next generation? In response evolutionary theory would argue that any gene that contributes to the survival of the species tends to be passed on to the next generation.

When helping others is motivated by our genetic inheritance it must contribute to survival of the gene, although not necessarily the survival of the individual (Bell, 2001; McAndrew, 2002). When the mother storms into a burning house to save her children, she may lose her life in the process, but still thereby contribute to

the survival of her genes by saving a child. Costly or self-sacrificing acts may be counterproductive for the individual, but still help children or other kin prosper and survive. The role of genes in contributing to survival is supported by animal studies (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994). Human parents have also been shown to be more helpful to healthy offspring rather than children that have less of a chance to survive (Webster, 2003). Further, mothers are commonly more attentive to their children's needs than fathers. The evolutionary argument is that mothers must be more attentive for their genes to survive as they produce only few offspring, whereas males can theoretically produce many children with different females. Many of you may resist this idea that altruism is hardwired selfishness. It is a sure thing that human behavior is not unidimensional, but the product of many factors among which genes may be one component. Genes may contribute to both selfish and altruistic behaviors, and we are far from understanding any gene-path to complex behaviors (Bell, 2001; Kottler, 2000).

#### *2.4.1 Kinship altruism*

Natural selection favors acts that increase the likelihood of survival and reproduction. Since altruism requires sacrifice and is costly, it would seem that altruistic people would not survive nor pass on offspring to the next generation. Natural selection however, encourages behaviors that lead to survival of those who are genetically related (Hamilton, 1964). Those who are closest genetically are therefore likely to be the recipients of our most beneficial acts. Children come first in the minds of parents. When we look after our children we are most likely to pass on our genes to the coming generations. Research confirms that the closer the genetic relationship the higher the level of helpful behavior. In studies of identical twins, Segal (1984) found that they were significantly more supportive of each other than fraternal twins.

Throughout history genetic survival value has increased when we identified those with whom we shared common genes. Our genes are responsible for apparent physical similarity, a marker for those we should help. Eye color, skin tone, facial features all help to identify those with whom we have a closer genetic relationship (Rushton, Russell, & Wells, 1984). We are also more likely to mate with neighbors than strangers. Being biologically biased toward neighbors occurs since historically living close to someone meant a genetic relationship. Only in modern times and especially with globalization is the genetic relationship of neighbors uncertain. However, even in these conditions immigrants gather into ethnic



communities of mutual support.

In natural disasters people help first close kin, then neighbors, and then strangers (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994). Is the motive favoring genetic survival the reason that most people favor their own ethnic group? Evolutionary psychologists would agree that genes determine prosocial behavior toward the closely related, and greater likelihood of violence toward the less genetically related. There are social psychologists that think that kinship preferences are the true enemies of civilization responsible for all the genocides, wars, and indifference to human suffering (Rushton, 1991). The ability to identify kin from smells or visual cues has been demonstrated in animal studies. Human mothers can recognize their newborn babies from photographs even after very little contact (Porter, Cernoch, & Balogh, 1984). Imagine a Dane having the experience of being in the presence of people traveling to York at the train station in London, England, who seemed to resemble the features of the Danish people from whom he descends. York was a center of the Danish Viking kingdom, and it is not surprising that there still exists a pool of shared ancestry and genes in people traveling to York. People with shared genes are probably more sensitive to visual cues that others might not notice.

If the idea that there is a genetic basis in motivating helping behavior holds true it should be demonstrable in different cultures. In a variety of ethnic groups people receive more help from close kin than from those more distant (Essock-Vitale & McGuire, 1985). Identical twins are twice as likely to cooperate than fraternal twins who share only half of their genes with each other (Burnstein, 2005). Survivors of a fire noted that they were more likely to search for family members rather than friends before escaping from the inferno (Sime, 1983). Genes of course do not operate at any level of consciousness, but are thought to be hardwired in our brains as predispositions. The essential argument is that those who follow the biological imperative to help close kin are more likely to have their genes survive across the many thousands of years of human history and evolution.

#### *2.4.2 Reciprocity derives from genetic self-interest*

The norm of reciprocity may also be a product of genetic self-interest. We help and in turn expect to be helped (Binham, 1980). Living in groups, human beings learned the advantage of cooperating since it directly contributed to survival. When a person is helped at one point in time there is also the expectation that the

favor will be returned at a later time. Evolutionary psychologists call this reciprocal altruism that we also discussed under the topic of social norms. We seemingly help strangers who do not have the benefit of kinship, some believe because of the expectation that the favor will be returned at some later point (Trivers, 1971). Drinking beer in Australia is a good example of reciprocity. Each person at the table takes his turn to pay, and if anyone tries to skip his turn a long silence will ensue until it becomes clear that there will be no more drinking unless reciprocity is respected. An experiment demonstrated this powerful principle of human conduct. A researcher mailed Christmas cards to complete strangers, and 20 percent mailed back a Christmas card greeting to a name and address they did not know (Gouldner, 1960). On a more serious scale of social behavior reciprocity helps people form alliances for mutual assistance, and counteracts the domination of would-be leaders (Preston & de Waal, 2002). In short reciprocity contributes directly to evolutionary advantages and survival, and evolutionary psychologists believe that the predisposition is hard wired into our brains.

#### *2.4.3 Genetic predisposition to learn social norms*

Simon (1990) suggested that learning social norms is also adaptive and helpful to survival. We learn social norms from parents, friends and social institutions in the process of socialization. Those who learn norms best are more likely to survive and leave offspring. This weeding out process over time leaves people in society with a predisposition to learn and follow social norms. Altruism or at least prosocial behavior is a norm in all societies, and evolutionary psychologists believe that people are hardwired to learn these norms because of their relationship to natural selection and survival. Learning how to cooperate and help others has adaptive functions for the individual, but also for society as a whole (Kameda, Takezawa, & Hasite, 2003).

#### *2.4.4 Critiques of evolutionary theory*

While evolutionary theory has produced provocative ideas about human behavior, it has not convinced everyone (Batson, 1998; Gould, 1997; Wood & Eagly, 2002). Where is the survival value in helping complete strangers, or assisting people whose physical appearances indicate low levels of kinship? Altruism and prosocial behavior can also be explained by psychological constructs. Helping close kin may be the consequence of modeling and rewards in the family for such behavior. Somehow it seems too cynical to attribute life-threatening interventions on behalf

of strangers to a genetic predisposition. Perhaps there are also other motives in helping behavior.

### *3. Distress at observing suffering*

When we observe suffering in others we may experience distress. For example it is distressful to see a victim of a traffic accident. The victim may be in great pain so you try to help by holding his hand, talking in soothing voice, and calling for an ambulance. Are these behaviors totally a consequence of your focus on the victim, or is your distress at seeing pain a contributing factor in helping behavior? Empathy obviously plays a role; i.e., we feel the suffering of the victim, and identify with the pain being experienced as we imagine how the other person feels. Perhaps we have experienced pain ourselves in a previous accident, or had a close relative that was injured. Such life experiences may make us more sensitive to suffering, and more likely to act in helpful ways.

We know from research that the ability to empathize is present at the very beginning of life. In one study (Martin & Clark, 1982) infants heard a tape of their own crying, the distress of another one-day old child, and the crying of an eleven-month infant. The infants cried most in response to another one-day old infant. We seem to be hardwired to understand the distress of others and feel it like our own. Gradually over time we learn to take the perspective of the other, which in turn produces altruistic behavior. However, do we respond to alleviate the distress of the other, or reduce our own discomfort? If we act without concern for our own distress perhaps our motives are purely unselfish, but if our motive is to reduce the distress we personally feel, then obviously the motive is at least partly egoistic.

### *4. Empathy and prosocial behavior*

Regardless, empathy has been related to helping behavior in a variety of situations and cultures (Batson 1998; Hoffman, 2000). We feel more empathy when we deal with victims that are similar to ourselves in some meaningful way. In the chapter on relationships and attraction (chapter 3) the importance of similarity in relationships was emphasized.

We are also more likely to feel empathy if we construe the situation as one that is beyond the control of the victim (Miller, Koza, & Davis, 2001). If a person approaches you with a plea for some pocket change your desire to help may be determined by whether you construe the beggar as an alcoholic trying to wing his

next drink, or a person out of luck who lost his job. Finally, we can increase empathy if we direct the attention toward the person in need. In one study (Toi & Batson, 1982) participants were asked whether they would be willing to help a fellow student who had been in a car accident and broken both her legs. In one condition the participants were asked to take the perspective of the victim and how she felt about her misfortune. In the second condition the participants were asked to be as “objective” as possible, paying attention to the information, but not concerning themselves with the feelings of the victim. In the condition where students were primed with empathy instructions 71 percent of the participants volunteered to help, whereas in the objective condition only 33 percent offered help. So taking the position of the other by being empathetic can result in greater levels of helpful behavior.

#### *4.1 Empathic or pure altruism*

Perhaps you now wonder is there any behavior which can be described as purely selfless, where the motive focuses on the other person, and where the concern is only for the welfare of other people? We can see from the evolutionary as well as from the social exchange perspective that selfish motives cannot be separated from selflessness. There are those researchers however, who would claim a role for altruism in human behavior (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Batson and his colleagues would acknowledge the difficulty of separating motives in complex social interaction, but nevertheless designed a series of experiments to understand motives for unselfish or altruistic behavior (Batson, 2002; Batson & Powell, 2003).

Batson argued that when we feel empathy for another person we help for purely altruistic reasons, regardless of whether we gain something for ourselves in the process. In the Toi & Batson study (1982) the investigators varied both cost and empathy. High cost was manipulated by telling the participants that the student who had the accident would be returning to class, and therefore they would have a daily reminder of whether they helped or not. In the low-cost condition the participants were told that the accident victim would be doing her class work at home, and therefore they would not have to face her sitting in a wheel chair reminding them of their guilt if they did not help.

If purely altruistic motives were at play, helping behavior would be extended regardless of costs once empathy had been manipulated. In fact that was the result. When people were provided with empathy instructions they were about equally likely to volunteer regardless of the costs. However, when told to be

objective (low empathy) the participants were more likely to help when it was not costly. Seeing the accident victim in class is psychologically costly since there might be issues related to the disapproval by the victim if the participants did not volunteer. The results for the low empathy condition were interpreted from the perspective of social exchange theory. When empathy was low people are more likely to be concerned with costs and benefits of helping the victim.

Another study involved the willingness to take electrical shocks in place of a confederate of the experimenter (Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983). The confederate pleaded feeling unwell, and the experimenter turned to the actual subject to see if they were willing to replace the confederate. Based on a self-report measure the researchers divided subjects into those who felt egoistic distress at the potential of watching someone else getting the shocks, and those who felt empathy. In fact those who felt empathy were more likely to volunteer to take the unpleasant shocks.

If empathy is a distinct emotional state can we observe its signature in the respondents physiological responses? Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller, Fultz, Shell, & Mathy, (1989) conducted an experiment with children and college students who watched a video of a woman and her children who had been in an accident. Measures were taken of facial expressions and heart rates. Later the participants were given an opportunity to help by taking homework to the victims during recess thereby also sacrificing playtime. The results showed that those who felt sympathy or empathy had distinct facial responses, heart deceleration, and were more likely to help. This study would suggest that empathy has a discernable physiological concomitant.

#### *4.2 Theories of altruism and prosocial behavior offer different levels of explanation*

In the scholarly contest a theory is presented as if it is the one and only true explanation for human behavior. In fact all theories are but windows into reality through which we may perceive some of the landscape, but by no means all of human behavior. Different windows provide different views, and social psychological theories provide different levels of explanation.

Social exchange theory offers explanations at the psychological level with prosocial behavior seen as a function of external rewards. We engage in prosocial behavior to get something in return including praise, promotions, one's name on a

building, or medals for achievements. Many people aspire to good works for these external rewards. Social exchange theory also explains what we have called “pure” altruism from still a reward perspective. For example if we feel bad at the suffering of others, removing that distress causes a restoration of tranquility and provides some inner reward for our unselfish behavior.

The social norm theory suggests we learn prosocial and altruistic behavior through socialization in our society. Norm theory is therefore primarily a sociological theory. Prosocial behavior is initiated and sustained by expected responses as defined by the reciprocity norm. If you help me now I expect to help you at a later point. Help me build my house now and I will help you build your house at a later date, a common practice among the Amish religious communities in the United States.

The reason we engage in helping strangers with whom we have no reciprocal relationship is that we have incorporated norms of social responsibility. Society over the course of history has encouraged us to look after those who are vulnerable, and so we feel a responsibility to help the beggar, to donate money to cancer research, or help with the problems of hunger and the AIDS epidemic. All these activities on behalf of people we will never know and never meet are in response to feelings and thoughts of social responsibility.

The evolutionary perspective discussed in 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 explain prosocial and altruistic behavior from fundamental biological imperatives. Evolutionary psychologists argue that prosocial behavior such as reciprocity in helping has evolutionary advantages, and therefore became hardwired in our brains in the course of evolution. Those who cooperate have a much greater chance to survive and pass on their genes to the next generation. Why is it then that we are more likely to help close kin as compared to strangers? Again the biological imperative ensures in that situation that while we may not survive as individuals, our genes survive if we help our children. That is perhaps why parents are more altruistic toward their children, than children are toward their parents.

Each of these theories explains altruistic and prosocial behavior to some degree after the fact, and therefore is open to the charge of speculative nominalism. However, as we have seen these theories have also proven to be scientific theories by generating hypotheses that test propositions emerging from each theory. Although some experiments may seem contrived and open to

experimenter's effects (where good students infer the meaning of the study and try to comply with the expected behavior), the three approaches possess validity emerging from both common sense and every day experience. At the end of the day complex behaviors cannot be understood by looking through one or two windows, only by taking in the whole panorama. In other words prosocial and altruistic behavior are a function of all these approaches and much else, as we shall see in the coming paragraphs.

### *5. Personality and other individual differences*

One of the important lessons learnt in social psychology is that the power of the situation may overcome individual differences making these irrelevant to the prediction of behavior (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Remember the Milgram and Larsen experiments in chapter 7. In the Larsen, Coleman, Forbes, & Johnson (1972) experiments no relationships were found between personality measures and laboratory aggression. The work on conformity by Asch (1954) and others (e.g. Larsen, 1974a,b; Larsen, Triplet, Brant, & Langenberg, 1979; Larsen, 1982; Larsen, 1990) also showed that pressures from others overwrite any scruples a person might have in conforming to illogical behavior.

The power of the situation was observed in a classical study on prosocial behavior (Hartshorne & May, 1929). These scholars investigated the prosocial responses of tens of thousands of elementary and high school students in a variety of situations. The results showed that being prosocial in one situation did not necessarily predict helpful behavior in another context. Others (Batson, 1998) have shown that scoring high on personality measures of altruism do not lead to more helpful behavior compared to those scoring low. There are obviously factors other than personality that also matter in prosocial behavior.

Nevertheless, personality matters if we know the connection between the personality and the situation in which the behavior occurs. There are individual differences in prosocial behavior that are stable over long periods (Hampton, 1984). Gradually, researchers have teased out from the data some personality traits that are likely to lead the individual to being more helpful to others. These traits include empathy, self-efficacy (competence), and emotionality (Bierhoff, Klein, & Kramp, 1991; Tice & Baumeister, 1985). Also, we are beginning to understand that particular personality traits are important in particular situations. Therefore it is the particular combination of personality and the context that matters (Romer, Gruder, & Lizzadro, 1986; Wilson & Petruska,

1984). Studies on the social self (see chapter 2) show that those who are self-monitoring and staying in tune with a given situation are more likely to be helpful if prosocial behavior leads to some reward. Those who are more internally guided pay less attention to the situation and opinions of others (White & Gerstein, 1987). In review studies of gender and helping it is also the interaction between personality and context that matters (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Other studies likewise point to the interaction factor as the critical component (Knight, Johnson, Carlo, & Eisenberg, 1994). For example people who have a high need for approval will donate money when they believe their prosocial behavior is being observed (Satow, 1975).

There are of course many ways to help, ranging from donating blood to the Red Cross to risking life and limb trying to save someone. Social learning is important in the background of blood donors who often had a parent modeling prosocial behavior (Piliavin & Callero, 1991). From these studies they also noted that blood donation reflected personal identity, that often people donated because of their feelings that they were the type of person who would and should engage in prosocial behavior. Self-identity as a prosocial person is important for long time contributions in various areas including working for cancer causes or other volunteer work (Grube & Piliavin, 2000).

Those who intervened on behalf of the victims in the holocaust in Europe during the Second World War have also been investigated (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). What would cause a person to risk everything for complete strangers who in turn were threatened with persecution and death? When later interviewed these altruistic people would refer to the influence of family and community, and the prosocial norms they grew up with encouraging them to be helpful, as critical in deciding to help. Others who intervened noted that they felt compelled to help because they empathized with the suffering of the victims and felt compassion. Feelings about justice and social responsibility also played a role. From these studies we recognize that there are nevertheless individual differences that consistently cause people to be helpful across a variety of situations (Eisenberg, Guthrie, Cumberland, Murphy, Shepard, Zhou, & Carlo, 2002; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998).

### *5.1 Gender differences*

The type of altruistic behavior a person will engage in depends to some extent on gender. Who would be more likely to behave heroically in saving someone's life,



like jumping in the water to save a drowning person, or running into a building on fire to rescue victims? On the other hand who would be more likely to help the infirm and provide long term care to those in need? If you answered men to the first example, and women to the second your opinion would be consistent with the data. It stands to reason that the genders having experienced gender-based socialization, would behave differently in these situations, as they do in so many other fields of life. Men are socialized to take on the role of protector. Since 1904, 8,706 persons have been recipients of the Carnegie Hero Fund Medal, an annual recognition of a US citizen who risked all to save another person. Of these thousands of individuals only 9 percent were women (Becker & Eagly, 2004). Women on the other hand excel in the nurturance and commitment required to help others (George, Carroll, Kersnick, & Calderon, 1998). This pattern of greater willingness to do volunteer work by girls and women is also demonstrated cross-culturally (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998). The greater upper body strength and athletic training in men and boys contribute to this gender difference, as does the nurturing behavior norms encouraged in females in all cultures.

Does the Carnegie recognition reflect a true difference in heroism between men and women? When it came to risking their lives during the holocaust women were more likely to intervene. Nearly 63 percent of those who rescued the Jews were women (Becker & Eagly, 2004). This outcome reflects perhaps gender differences in empathy and compassion with women feeling more of both traits.

It is not an easy decision to give up an organ to another person. Among those who donated a kidney, 57 percent were women. Other helping challenges including serving in the Peace Corps also produces more women volunteer, as 60 percent of these are also women. Like mentioned before women also outshine men when it comes to nurturing assistance to others. Women are more likely than men to look after children, aging parents, and provide social support for others (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Shumaker & Hill, 1991; Crawford & Unger, 2000).

## *5.2 Religious differences*

One might expect that religious beliefs would make a difference in people's willingness to intervene and help other. After all, the Golden Rule is common to all religions. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," reflects the reciprocity norm that good things follow prosocial behavior. For example the Christians' Bible urges us to "store up things in heaven" since these eternal

rewards do not perish with individual life. These prescriptions emphasize the motivation of the social exchange model at least for some religious people. So to be religious may not be so different from other forms of prosocial behavior, only the rewards expected are in the life that follows earthly existence. That is not to say that religious people are not capable of true altruism, or in making selfless sacrifices for others, but probably not at rates greater than people who utilize a different ethical model for life except as noted below.

When it comes to helping in minor emergency situations, religious people do not help more than others (Batson, Schoenrade, & Pych, 1985). However, when it comes to planned helping, which requires long-term commitment, religious devotion makes a difference. Having a religious outlook would logically impact planning one's life, including a life of service. Those who are religious are more likely to help with AIDS victims, and the homeless (Amato, 1990; Snyder & Omoto, 1991). Students in a university who were religiously committed were also more likely to campaign for social justice, and work among the needy in society (Gallup, 1984; Colasanto, 1989). Religious people are also more willing to share their income and contribute to a variety of charities (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1990). We can speculate as to the underlying motives, but that seems less important than the outcome that show that sincerely religious people are more prosocial in planning their life and their activities than those who are not religious.

### *5.3 Differences in mood*

If you are in a good mood you are more likely to let that feeling spill over and engage you in prosocial behavior (Isen & Simmonds, 1978). Another study showed that mood enhancing using soothing music results in prosocial behaviors (Fried & Berkowitz, 1979). Who would have guessed it, even the presence of pleasant odors such as freshly baked cookies also increases the positiveness you feel toward others (Batson, 1998). Some of you may remember the odors of Christmas baking and how that helped put you in a good mood for the holidays. Perhaps organizations would be more harmonious if the participants could listen to music and eat fresh cookies each day, it may even affect work habits?

Of course when in a good mood you would like to maintain the feeling, and helping others promotes the continuation of these positive feelings. Giving a helping hand to someone may simply be a way of maintaining the positive feelings (Carlson, Charlin, & Miller, 1988). Happy people tend to help others, regardless

of the origin of the happy thoughts (Salovey, Mayer, & Rosenhan, 1991). Unfortunately moods do not last, so helping behavior derived from moods tends to be short-lived (Isen, Clark, & Schwartz, 1976). Nevertheless, helping others may improve one's bad mood, and therefore lead to more helping behavior (Berkowitz, 1987).

Whether bad moods lead to helping depends on whether the mood is self-focused or focused on the needs of the other person. We are more likely to help if assisting others leads to a more positive mood and therefore gives us relief from our own negative feelings (Cialdini, Schaller, Houlihan, Arps, Fultz, & Beaman, 1987; Schaller & Cialdini, 1988). From this perspective prosocial behavior responds to ego based needs, to relieve bad feelings or discomfort. Is there actually a relationship between helpful behavior and positive moods? Several studies have supported this contention, and have shown that by providing help one develops more elevated feelings about the self (Williamson & Clark, 1992). A good mood helps us see the positive of life, and the good side of others. Helping others prolongs these feelings of good mood, whereas walking away is a sure way to feel bad (Clark & Isen, 1982). Good moods also seem to increase the focus on the self, and on our altruistic ideals. This attention to self-identity in turn increases helping behavior (Berkowitz, 1987).

#### *5.4 Guilt: a long lasting emotion*

Probably all people have experienced situations where they violated their conscience, transgressed against their better selves, and subsequently felt guilt. Guilt is typically not a passing mood, but may be long lasting and painful. We observe from the collective history of mankind various ways of dealing with guilt, and efforts we make to reduce negative feelings. The concept of "scapegoat" (where we seek to blame others for our misdeeds) has a historical origin, where an animal was required to bear the burden of a whole society's guilt (de Vaux, 1965). Throughout the history people have sought to placate the gods by offering various forms of sacrifice, typically something valuable. The sacrifice could include the best of the harvest, but the gods were not easy to placate, and eventually in some societies it included human sacrifice of virgins and children. In modern times people have sought to placate their own conscience by doing good deeds in order to remove guilt and to feel better about themselves. The role of guilt in prosocial behavior has been examined experimentally by inducing guilt in respondents by encouraging them to lie or to commit other moral transgressions,

and then afterwards offering opportunities for helpful behavior. In one experiment (McMillen & Austin, 1971) where students were induced to lie, they were subsequently more helpful in a totally unrelated activity.

Confessing guilt is a means by which people may restore their self-image. Recently in Tromsø (Norway) a young thief wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper apologizing for his criminal behavior. Others have shown that publicly confessing to misdeeds elicits sympathy and forgiveness of transgressions. The Catholic Church recognizes the importance of confessions in restoring self-image and self-esteem. In one experiment (Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991) women in a store were led to think they had broken a valuable camera. Subsequently when given the opportunity these women were much more likely to help in a different situation when compared to those who did not experience guilt. Long lasting guilt is not a healthy emotion, but helping others is positive behavior and may benefit both the person in need and also relieve guilt at the same time.

### *5.5 Cultural differences*

Is culture a factor affecting prosocial behavior? Some research would answer in the affirmative. Perhaps because of the kinship selection all cultures are more likely to help members of the in-group than those who belong to out-groups (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Yet we observe in groups like Save the Children, or Aid programs for Africa, efforts to reach outside cultural barriers and assist those in need who are not related. As might be expected this stream of assistance comes from those who are relatively well off in material goods.

Culture plays an important role in societies described as interdependent versus independent. In interdependent cultures the needs of people belonging to the in-group are considered more important than helping people from the out-group. Members of more independent cultures in the Western countries are more likely to help out-groups (Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993; Triandis, 1994). However, as we have seen elsewhere there is also a positive bias toward members of one's own group in competitive Western societies, even when based on nonsensical categories (Doise, Csepele, Dann, Gouge, Larsen, & Ostell, 1972). Helping behavior is more likely when people can see you as part of their own society and thus empathize with your plight (Ting & Piliavin, 2000).

One major study investigated the cultural value called "simpatia" in Spanish

speaking countries that include traits like being polite, friendly, and helpful toward others. The investigators staged incidents in major cities of 23 countries and observed how frequently people were helpful. The Spanish speaking countries that valued *simpatia* all ranked relatively high in helpfulness. However, so did other countries that did not possess that unique social value, but perhaps possessed other cultural attributes requiring people to be helpful. For example Denmark ranked number 7 out of the 23 countries, and higher than 2 of the Spanish speaking countries. Cultural norms that support prosocial behavior are likely to encourage people to intervene and help when they see a need (Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001; Janoff-Bulman, & Leggatt, 2002).

### *6. The power of the situational context in determining prosocial behavior*

We have seen in other studies on conformity and aggression discussed above that the situation is often more powerful than personality, or may overcome a person's best intentions. Prosocial behavior is determined not solely by altruistic personal characteristics, but even more by the situational context a person finds himself in, and to which he is compelled to take note and respond. Among these situational contexts are the effects of rural versus urban environments, the number of people observing the event also called the bystander effect, environmental conditions, time pressures, and the nature of the relationships.

#### *6.1 The culture of rural versus urban communities*

You will recall from our discussion of aggression (see chapter 10) that geographical regions made a difference in the U.S. Southern regions with their culture of politeness and honor were much more likely to be aggressive in response to perceived insults or slights. Does it also make a difference to helping behavior if you live in different locations? The answer appears to be yes, as the difference between urban and rural life has an effect on prosocial behavior. Steblay (1987) examined 35 studies that investigated helping behavior in rural and urban environments and found that strangers were more likely to be helped in rural or small communities. A direct relationship existed between size of town and helping until the community got larger than 50,000, after which size did not matter.

Is it the socialization in the rural versus urban contexts that matter? Do children receive training that leads to more concern for others that lasts over the lifespan? Or is it the location that matters whether one is born and raised in this or another context? Some people are raised in big cities, but then move to small

communities. Yet others were raised in small communities, but found a niche in the big city. As it turns out, it is not where you are born and socialized that matters, but where you live currently. The current social context is what contributes to helping behavior. As we shall see these situational determinants are powerful factors in prosocial behavior.

Milgram (1970) attributed lack of helping behavior in the urban context to stimulus overload. There are so many pressures in the urban environment that it is impossible to attend to all the stimuli. People living in cities learn to attend to the happenings that are most personally relevant, and respond to situations important for their individual survival. When we live in cities we narrow our focus and attend to the most personally relevant situations. Another plausible explanation focuses on the diversity that exists in modern cities. We know from other research that people help those who are similar in some significant way. In cities we find much more diversity in race, religion, education, and other significant variables, variables on which people are not similar. In the rural areas people are more likely to encounter similar people in educational achievement, income, and ethnic identity. In small communities people know each other, and may experience less diffusion of responsibility. You will recall that diffusion of responsibility occurs when there are more people present. In the diffusion of responsibility each individual feels less personally involved. In smaller communities it is not easy to avoid the call for help as one might encounter the needy person on a regular basis and feel guilt if not helping when needed.

Population density is even more important than size of population (Levine, Martinez, Brase, Sorenson, 1994). The more densely packed the population the less likely people are to help one another. Population density may also contribute to stimulus overload and the stress experienced in densely packed communities. All people need private space. When the situation does not provide that essential living condition we experience stress. We also know that criminality increases in high-density areas, a factor that interacts with stress, alienation, and hostile behavior. Remember when people do not feel good they are less likely to help. Stress by definition is an adverse experience, and therefore help explain the lower levels of help offered where the population density is higher. Population density also contributes to the bystander effect, the more people present the lower the sense of personal responsibility to intervene and help.

## *6.2 Intimate versus social exchange relationships*

Most of the aforementioned research on prosocial behavior investigated the likelihood of people helping strangers. As we all know however, most helping occurs within family or friendship circles. Although social exchange theory suggests we help only those who provide benefits to us, when people are in intimate relationships there is a greater concern about long-term beneficial outcomes (Salovey et al, 1991). Close friends and parents know how to delay personal satisfaction in favor of helping someone who is close and intimate. Helping children succeed does not bring immediate benefits except internal satisfaction, and often at a great cost psychologically and financially. What parents look for is children's long-term development, and the satisfaction of seeing the child succeed. In fact parents may be unconcerned about the benefits children bring since the focus is on the child and his welfare, and not personal outcomes.

Where there are some rewards in intimate relationships they tend to be long-term benefits in exchange for short-term costs (Batson, 1993). Some researchers believe that people in intimate relationships are not concerned at all with outcomes, but more with satisfying the needs of the other person (Clark & Grote, 1998; Mills & Clark, 2001). We tend to self-identify through intimate relationships, and it stands to reason that we are more likely to help those who are close to us in kinship or friendship.

In relationships based on social exchange people keep a close tally, you scratch my back and I will scratch yours. In social exchange relationships if I did you a favor by donating money to your campaign, I expect you to pursue my welfare by passing the law I want enacted.

### *6.3 The bystander effect: People who observe the event*

Recall the case of Kitty Genovese who was murdered while some 38 neighbors observed and did nothing? Her case is sadly just one of many examples of the bystander effect. The murder was shocking to many, since it would have taken only a phone to call to police and get help for Kitty. Why did none of the neighbors step forward and take responsibility? Two young psychologists were touched by the crime and began to investigate the effect of the number of bystanders observing an event requiring assistance on helping behavior. They designed experiments in both naturalistic and laboratory settings to examine the bystander effect, i.e. the number of observers in situations requiring assistance (Latane & Darley, 1970; Latane & Darley, 1975; Latane & Darley, 1981).

In one study the experimenters staged a robbery in front of a salesclerk and two confederates acting as criminals. The criminals would come into the store while the clerk was in the back, pick up a case of beer or other merchandise, and then leave without paying. As expected when the customer was alone in the store they reported the crime to the clerk more frequently, than when several other customers were present. In another study reported by Latane and Darley the participants sat in individual cubicles when suddenly they heard a confederate calling out for help as if he was having a seizure. The confederate kept calling out for help while choking, and eventually fell silent. In fact the “other” participants were recorded voices kept standard for all the real subjects. In one condition the real participant was led to believe that he or she was alone with the other “participant”, in another condition that he/she was one of several others. When the participants thought they were alone in confronting the emergency 85 percent tried to help within 60 seconds, and 100 percent within 2 1/2 minutes. That number that assisted dropped to 62 percent when the participant believed one other person was present, and to 31 percent (within the first minute) when the participant thought that four other individuals were present in the experiment.

The bystander effect occurs the more people who witness an event requiring assistance are present and results in a lower likelihood that anyone will intervene. Latane and Darley concluded that when a large number of bystanders were present, the bystanders were less likely to notice the event requiring assistance, were less likely to assess the event as an emergency requiring intervention, and finally were less likely to assume personal responsibility for helping. Overall, across several studies investigating the bystander effect, 75 percent helped when alone, and only 53 percent when in the presence of other participants (Latane & Nida, 1981).

### *6.3.1 Noticing that something is happening*

One of the reasons that people help less in urban environments is the sheer number of event requiring their attention, and therefore the need to focus on the most pertinent. Perhaps multidimensional demands for attention have the effect of habituation where a person learns to attend only to that which is narrowly and personally relevant, and to disregard anything else. In modern life people are in a hurry to make a buck and get ahead.

Some of you may remember the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan who stopped to help a wounded man when others were too busy to notice. Darley &



Batson (1973) observed that even trivial factors like being in a hurry had an effect on helping behavior. The irony of this experiment was that it was conducted with students at Princeton University who were studying for the ministry and a life of service to others. One would think that these students were more altruistic than average, and had certainly studied the parable of the Good Samaritan. From that religious background one might draw the conclusion that the students would be likely to intervene and help a man slumped in a doorway and groaning with pain.

The students were told to go to an adjoining building to make a short speech. In one condition the students were advised that there was no rush as others were running late in performing the task in the other building. In the second condition the participants were told that they were late and should hurry to the assignment. As they walked to the nearby building they encountered the man in the doorway who obviously needed help. Whether they stopped to help however depended on the situation. When told that there was no rush 63 percent stopped to assist, whereas only 10 percent did when told they were in a hurry.

The investigators produced further irony in the experiment by varying the topic of the supposed speech that the students were required to give. Some participants were asked to discuss the type of work they would prefer, others were asked to discuss the parable of the Good Samaritan. As it turned out the topic made little difference as the students in a hurry were no more likely to help if the speech was to address the parable of the Good Samaritan or if the speech was on work preferences.

Noticing that something is happening is obviously a function of the ambiguity of the situation. When the emergency is clear cut, a man has fallen off a ladder and injured himself, most people would act and call the emergency services. In one study it was the verbalization of the injury that got assistance. When the victim did not ask for help or otherwise did not react to his injuries assistance was only provided 30 percent of the time (Clark & Wood, 1972). Clear cues of the emergency helps the bystander decide whether to help or not (Shotland & Huston, 1979). Cues that lead to intervention include the suddenness of the event, the clear threat to the victim, the likelihood that more harm would result from lack of intervention, and whether the victim is helpless. Of course it is also critical that you know how to help. If someone is drowning in your presence you may want to intervene, but can do little if you do not know how to swim or cannot call for other assistance. Other emergencies however require just a phone call as in

the case of Kitty Genovese

### *6.3.2 Interpretation of the event as an emergency and pluralistic ignorance*

How can we know an event is an emergency that requires us to intervene? The man slumped in the doorway could have been a habitual drunk whom we could not help, or on the other hand he might be really ill and we should call for emergency medical assistance. Remember we often look to others for assistance in interpreting what is happening. However, what if everyone is looking to others and seeing no one responding, assume that there is no emergency? When people observe an apparent lack of concern on the part of other bystanders, many assume that the event does not constitute an emergency.

In another experiment by Darley & Latane (1970) the participants completed a survey on attitudes toward problems of urban life. As they begin filling out the questionnaire the participants noticed white smoke coming into the room through a vent in the wall. Eventually the room was completely filled with smoke. You would think everyone participating would jump up and inquire of the experimenters or others what is happening? Perhaps the building was on fire and should be evacuated? What would you do in this situation? Well if you were alone chances are that you would respond in some way, 50 percent did within two minutes, and 75 percent within six minutes. However, in the other condition when there were three participants (including two confederates) the results were starkly different. Only 12 percent intervened within two minutes, and only 38 percent within the six-minute limit when at that time the room was filled with smoke. The investigators attributed these findings to pluralistic ignorance. When the smoke began to fill the room the participants looked to each other to interpret the event. When the confederates appeared to be untroubled by the smoke the actual participant assumed that nothing was wrong and stayed in the room (Solomon, Solomon, & Stone, 1978).

### *6.3.3 Assuming responsibility for helping*

A major problem for the bystander is noticing that a real emergency exists requiring intervention. In the case of Kitty Genovese the emergency was obvious, since killing her took considerable time, and was watched intently by all (Rosenthal, 1964). Evidently the neighbors however did not see the emergency as a personal responsibility to intervene. In the case of the man slumped in the doorway there was some ambiguity, as the participants could not be sure of the cause of the man's distress. Solomon, Solomon, & Stone (1978) investigated the

ambiguity of the situational context in helping others among New York participants. When the situation was ambiguous the bystanders who were among others were less likely to help than when alone. Another experiment examined the effect of confederate responses as a source of ambiguity (Darley, Teger, & Lewis, 1973). The investigators required participants to either sit back to back or facing each other when an event was staged. Suddenly they heard a crash in the adjoining room as metal frames fell on the person working. When the participant noted the reaction or startle of another person they interpreted the crash as an emergency and interceded to help. The back-to-back condition allowed for more ambiguity since it was not possible to see the other person's response.

Responsibility for assisting is also more likely when people feel competent to help (Cramer, McMaster, Bartell, & Dragna, 1988). We are not all trained in emergency procedures, but perhaps we should be as the evidence shows that the competent person intervenes more often to help others. A person is also more likely to help if he/she has some responsibility as a leader in the group (Baumeister, Chesner, Senders, & Tice, 1988). So anything that contributes to feelings of personal responsibility is likely to contribute to prosocial behavior (Markey, 2000). Of course diffusion of responsibility remains an important factor even when people are acting alone. When participants in one experiment were asked to think about the possibility of going to dinner with ten intimate friends, they were less likely to volunteer help or donate money, than when they were asked to think about going out with just one friend (Garcia, Weaver, Moskowitz, & Darley, 2002).

In a naturalistic study at the beach, the confederate neighbor of the actual subject goes for a swim while leaving behind her radio. After a short interval a thief comes by and takes the radio away. Would you intervene at that point? You could confront the thief and ask him about the radio, and ask him to put it back until the swimmer returns. In this study however only 20 percent felt it their personal responsibility to intervene (Moriarity, 1975). However, in the second condition when the owner of the radio asked the person to look after her things 95 percent intervened, so just asking someone to help increases feelings of personal responsibility. The greater care we show for intimate partners has to do with the personal responsibility we feel, and is an expression of the norm of social responsibility (Maruyama, Fraser, & Miller, 1982).

## *7. Weighing whether to help*

As we saw above, different rules apply when we are helping a child or close friend as compared to a stranger or acquaintance. In helping non-intimate persons we are likely to weigh carefully the costs and benefits of intervening (Dovidio, Piliavin, Gaertner, Schroeder, & Clark, 1991). Social exchange theory would predict that the greater the costs of helping the less likely you are in assisting someone. Practically anyone will give you the time, or directions to some location. These forms of assistance are low in cost. Trying to rescue someone from a burning building, or from drowning are high-risk situations where the helper may be putting his life in play.

Of course there are also benefits in helping other. The gratefulness of the person being helped, an award from the city or state, your name in the newspapers, all are recognitions experienced as rewards. This is not an argument for cold social exchange calculation by the numbers, but rather evidence of an intuitive and automatic calculation that occurs prior to any interaction with others. However, we have also argued for pure altruism. The act of saving someone does not allow time for reflection, and may occur impulsively. When a soldier jumps on top of a grenade about to explode to save his fellow soldiers there is no time to calculate. Such an act must be considered motivated by pure altruism.

### *7.1 Construal of the situation: The victim's responses*

The victim's responses to an emergency are also vital to whether people will be motivated to help. Many situations are ambiguous and the emergency is not clear-cut. A Dutchman witnessing a street argument in Vietnam may not lead to any conclusion about any impending emergency. The language barrier of course is the most critical factor. Did someone who needed help cause the commotion? Facial features associated with emotion are universal, but was it possible to mistake the feeling communicated? In another well-traveled country, Cuba, people habitually speak loudly and even yell to each other in the street, yet without anger. Was it just two neighbors angry at each other for some imagined or real cause? There was no apparent victim who could be assisted so the experience remained ambiguous.

When a victim vocalizes his/her distress by cries of agony, and direct request for assistance to a specific person among the bystanders, they are more likely to get help (Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995). Often we are bystanders to only a part of the unfolding drama and see only part of the picture. In one study (Piliavin, Piliavin, & Broll, 1976) the bystander observed a confederate slowly

faint and regain consciousness, whereas in the second less clear-cut situation the bystander observed the aftermath of an accident where the confederate was regaining consciousness. When the participants observed the entire drama of first fainting and then regaining consciousness they were much more likely to provide aid (89 percent of the time) compared to only 13 percent in the ambiguous situation. So help is more likely for the victim, if he/she can reduce ambiguity and make the need for help very clear, for instance by directing the request to a specific individual. A direct request such as "Hey you with the red hair, can you give me a hand I am having a heart attack" might get some response. If possible we need to make it clear to bystanders that the emergency is real, and be specific in asking for help from one bystander to counteract diffusion of responsibility.

### *7.2 Attribution of need and worthiness*

Since charity is at times sought by unworthy people, bystanders seek to attribute the reasons that people ask for help. If the request is one that stimulates our sense of social responsibility, then the victim is attributed as worthy of assistance. For example people are more willing to help someone who appears sick and falls to the ground on a New York subway, than someone who also fell but appeared to be drunk (Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969). To be worthy of help the emergency situation must be attributed to forces outside the individual's personal control and responsibility. For example students are more likely to help classmates with their lecture notes if the reason for the need is that the professor is a poor lecturer rather than if the student is a poor note taker (Meyer & Mulherin, 1980; Weiner, 1980). In general we have more sympathy for those people who are unfortunate victims of circumstance rather than for those who are perceived as responsible for their own problems (George, 1992).

Often people do not know what to do when confronted with a situation requiring helping behavior. To reduce ambiguity the victim, when possible, must directly address the spectators with words like "I don't know this person", "he is attacking me, help", and these words should be directed personally to someone in the crowd. Intervention is more likely if you address your need for help to a specific person. In studies on shop lifting bystanders were more likely to intervene if the ambiguity of the situation was reduced (Bickman, 1979). Keep in mind that help just requires one person to act; once that happens others are likely to follow. People are looking to others present to interpret what is going on, and decisive action by one person may lead to support from others.

### *7.3 The social modeling of prosocial behavior*

We have already observed that modeling or social learning produces more aggression. Could social learning have the same effect on prosocial behavior? In a classic study (Bryan & Test, 1967) the investigators placed a male confederate on the highway seemingly in the process of helping a stranded woman change the tire on her car, and then observed whether that exposure had an effect on helping behavior for another woman stranded a quarter mile down the road. In the control condition only the second stranded car was present. Would drivers who observed a helping model try to help the second woman more frequently than those who had not observed the model? The answer is yes, modeling prosocial behavior works. In another study people were more likely to donate blood if they had observed another (confederate) give consent to also donate blood (Rushton & Campbell, 1977).

We have so much evidence from the literature on social learning that there is little doubt that positive modeling of helping behavior encourages more prosocial intervention. Why cannot television or the movies provide more modeling of altruistic behavior rather than frequently presenting the dark side of human nature? When positive models are presented like in the current movie Spiderman, it is in the context of cartoon like characters and gratuitous violence that offer little hope for prosocial influence. If we worry about the state of society we have only to look at the modeling that occurs in the visual and printed media, and the culture of egoism it promotes.

### *7.4 Time pressures: When we are in a hurry*

Keeping in mind the study by Darley and Batson (1973) we can see that being in a hurry prevents us from seeing an emergency and from taking personal responsibility. The seminarians that were late for the appointment seldom stopped to help much like the busy people in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Time pressure keeps many people from being involved in the life of others as such pressures are directed toward feelings of personal survival. When in a hurry we tend to be more narrowly focused, and unable to appreciate the gravity of other people's emergencies.

Once personal motivation takes over, and the focus is on the self, other problems have lower priority. We live in a busy world where speed and efficiency is highly valued. Every year computers increase their power and speed, and economic growth is a function of such efficiencies. Independent societies with a focus on

individual achievement do not encourage attention to the plights of others. Perhaps that is why money donations are popular in Western countries. Such donations do alleviate some of the guilt from not being more personally involved in the lives of our neighbors, or the suffering that occurs in other countries.

### *7.5 Reading or hearing about bystander effects lead to more helping*

In one study participants heard a lecture or saw a movie that discussed how bystander effect inhibits helping behavior (Beaman, Barnes, Klentz, & McQuirk, 1978). After an interval of two weeks the participants were faced with a situation that required their intervention. A fellow student was found lying on the floor obviously in need of help. The experiment contained two conditions. In one situation the participants were with a confederate who did nothing to help. In the other experimental condition the participant was alone. Regardless of the condition, the students who had learned about bystander effects were more likely to intervene. This suggests the important practical utility of social psychological knowledge also found in the Milgram/Larsen experiments on laboratory aggression. When people learn the meaning of these aggression experiments, they were inoculated somehow, and therefore less likely to be manipulated in the future.

Likewise discussing the bystander effect in the classroom or in the larger society may increase concern for others and reduce the bystander effect. Recently, the U.S. news television CNN had a report (CNN, June 4, 2007) during the "Anderson hour" discussing the bystander effect. The case involved the hijacking of the car of a 94-year old man. As in the Kitty Genovese case a group of people observed the attack by the 22-year-old thug, and did nothing to intervene. To the credit of CNN, social psychologists were interviewed and given an opportunity to review the research on the bystander effect to the public. There is hope that such society wide education may have some impact and reduce the bystander effect. We will have more to say about this in section 8.1.

### *7.6 The stranger we help*

The characteristics of the stranger in crisis and in need of help are also significant to whether help is offered. We are more likely to give change for a euro or dollar than intervene in a violent crime so the cost of helping matters. For example, in one study (Piliavin & Piliavin, 1972) a victim staggers out of a subway train and collapses on the ground. In one condition the victim has a small amount of blood on his chin, in the other condition there is no blood. What condition is

more likely to receive help do you think? The victim with blood could possibly need more help since at least there is a sign of some injury. However, the opposite is what happened, the person who did not show blood was helped 95 percent of the time, whereas the victim with blood was helped only 65 percent of the time. How do we explain this discrepancy? The researchers suggested that the presence of blood indicated to the bystander that it might be more costly to assist, perhaps an ambulance had to be called, or first aid of some kind provided for which some of the bystanders had no preparation.

### *7.6.1 Similarity to the victim*

Other studies show that we are also more likely to help those who are similar to ourselves, from the same ethnic or national group (Latane & Nida, 1981). Bystanders are more likely to help similar others in a variety of studies (Dovidio, 1984) perhaps for reasons of kinship, or empathy with those of the same background. Only few people intervene as Good Samaritans and help the true stranger. Other species show similar behavior, being willing to help members of their own species. Some studies have shown that primates will even be willing to starve if it prevents electrical shock from being administered to other members of their group (Preston & De Waal, 2002).

How we dress conveys our values, so similarity also works in how we overtly manifest our beliefs. The large majority of those approached by similarly dressed others asking for a dime to make a telephone call were helped (Emswiller et al, 1971). However, if someone dropped a political opponent's posters or leaflets in front of you would you help pick them up from the ground? In one study conducted during the Nixon versus McGovern presidential contest in the U.S., the majority would stoop to help the person who campaigned for the favorite candidate, but only a minority would help the campaigner for the opposition candidate (Karabenick, Lerner, & Beecher, 1973).

### *7.6.2 Gender and the vulnerable*

The perception of need also interacts with the desire to help. Those who are vulnerable in our society are more likely to receive help. Eagly & Crowley (1986) summarized the results of 35 studies of strangers receiving help. Their results showed that female victims were more likely to receive help from male bystanders than males needing assistance. Again that outcome must be based on the protector norms that exist in most societies in prescribing proper male behavior toward females. As we saw previously, if a female has a flat tire, men are more



likely stop and help, than if the victim needing help is male (Penner, Dertke, & Achenbach, 1973; West, Whitney, & Schnedler, 1975). In most societies men are expected to know how to change car or motorcycle tires, so perhaps that is the major motivation for not helping other males.

Likewise female hitchhikers are more likely to get a ride (Snyder, Grether, & Keller, 1974). That might be explained by the lower threat presented by female riders since attacks on drivers are not unknown these days. On the other hand men may also be attracted to the woman, and perhaps hope for an opportunity to get to know her better. In general attractive females are more likely to get help than those less attractive (Stroufe, Chaikin, Cook, & Freeman, 1977; West and Brown, 1975).

One of the reasons that women get more help is that they are willing to ask for assistance. In our society we have the stereotype of the male driver who is lost in the city and drives for hours without asking for assistance. He can manage to find it by himself, he reasons, and he does not need or want any help. Women by contrast will if lost behave in a more sensible manner, and stop at the first safe opportunity to ask for directions (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). These gender differences seem to reflect the general difference in independence in males versus interdependence in females (Nadler, 1991). Men worry that they might appear incompetent, and often will rather suffer than seek help (Schneider, Major, Luhtanen, & Crocker, 1996).

Men are more likely to suffer from drug or alcohol abuse problems, but are less likely to seek help. Likewise men are less likely to seek help for medical or psychiatric problems. Typically men in our society try to live up to a veneer of toughness, and rely on their own resources to solve problems. Sadly, some men wait too long with medical issues, which may explain partly the longer lifespan of women. Men want to be independent, whereas women's interdependence promotes her willingness to seek help.

### *7.6.3 Attributions of the victim and helper*

Being willing to help depends on the attribution of a person needing assistance. We may want to help those in need, but are wary of helping those we attribute unworthy motives for wanting help. Many charity scams have been revealed in the media, so wealthy people find a readymade excuse for not helping by attributing selfish motives to those requesting assistance. Many people find it

easy to refuse help by insisting that there is no real emergency, or the situation is blown all out of proportion to any “real” need. Only when we are convinced that the victim is not responsible for his/her plight, that the emergency is a consequence of forces the victim could not control, do most people feel sympathy and are willing help the individual (Schmidt & Weiner, 1988).

There may also be psychological barriers present that prevent a needy person from seeking help (Vogel & Wester, 2003). Here the outcome depends on the attributions by the victim. If he can attribute his misfortune to forces beyond his control he is more likely to feel good in asking for help. None of us like to feel that our difficulties or problems are a result of personal inadequacy or poor decision-making. It helps our self-esteem if we can attribute our unemployment for example to the economy or heartless companies rather than to the lack of personal preparation (Fisher, Nadler, & Whitcher-Alagna, 1982).

#### *7.6.4 Culture and the acceptance of help*

Since self-esteem is important people will also want to assess the motives of those who want to help. If others genuinely care about us we are likely to accept help (Ames, Flyn, & Weber, 2004). However, if we perceive condescension in the prosocial behavior of others, we may feel that accepting help reflects poorly on our person and that undermines our self-identity. In independent societies many people will not seek needed help because they believe it reflects inadequacy on their part and produces poor self-esteem.

Since the norm of reciprocity is strong in our society, accepting help is more acceptable if it involves some exchange. The need for reciprocity might be observed in the free meal provided at Salvation Army, exchanged by the needy person in listening to a religious message. In another, typical American, example, a needy person might accept a welfare check from society, and feel better if in turn he can perform some service or labor for the community. People are more likely to seek help if they can provide some compensation. Nearly all help between intimate people involves some form of exchange. At Christmas time in the Western world we exchange gifts, and if we help a friend we feel better about asking for his help in the future (Wills, 1992). In our independent societies we do not like to be dependent on others.

Reactance theory (Brehm, 1966) suggests that when we perceive a threat to our sense of personal freedom we react with annoyance and anger. However, the

nature of our existence shows that all people need help sometime in their lives. As we age we need help in a variety of ways, getting dressed or simply being fed, are small but necessary ways of helping the aging population. Few people manage to go through life without assistance at some point. We have accidents that require surgery, or may be otherwise disabled. In recent years researchers have studied the reactions of older people needing help (Newsom, 1999). Unfortunately, as predicted by reactance theory older people often feel that the help attributes weakness and dependency to them, without being able to give anything in return. Helplessness in old age negatively impact on self-esteem.

It would seem reasonable to believe that people in interdependent and collectivist societies do not feel the same way about receiving help as those living in Western countries. The difficulty of men in Western societies in seeking assistance emerges from strong social norms of independence and self-sufficiency. In independent societies needing help may be seen as a weakness, whereas in other cultural environments it may be a natural request that makes it incumbent on other members of society to provide the needed help.

### *8. How to increase helping behavior in society and the world*

In this chapter we have learned something about the altruistic personality, the type of person who might help a stranger in need. Anything we can do to raise people with these characteristics would also increase helping behavior in the world (Snyder, 1993). We also know from social psychology that powerful situational forces can overrule even the best intentions of people. We know that people are more likely to overcome these situational effects if they know about them in advance, and have been educated as to the likely behavior of people watching an emergency.

#### *8.1. Education and the bystander effect*

Examples that learning about social psychology does matter in people's behavior are emerging from a number of parallel studies. In one case a student led an effort to prevent another student from committing suicide. Later she said that what caused her to intervene was having heard in class a discussion on bystander intervention a few days earlier, and the sure knowledge that it was up to her to take action (Savitsky, 1998). In another incident a student was being mugged in front of other students. One of the bystanders however decided to call the police as she saw the similarity between that current situation and what happens in other bystander cases like the Kitty Genovese (Coats, 1998). If discussion on the

bystander effect was universally required in elementary and high schools, might it change people's willingness to help?

In one study (Beaman, Barnes, Klentz, & McQuirk, 1978) the effect of education was addressed experimentally. Among the participants who had heard the bystander lecture 43 percent stopped to help in the experiment, whereas only 25 percent of those who had not previously listened to the information on bystander intervention, did it. It would appear that the world would be a better place with more education on intervening to help victims occurring at all levels of education. Consider the problem of bullying discussed in an earlier chapter. With information on bystander inaction, would more students be likely to intervene or to help the victim? Only an experimental study on the direct effect of education on bullying would answer that important question.

### *8.2 The personal approach and helping behavior*

Anything we can do to make helping personal (see 7.1) will activate the sense of social responsibility that most of us experience as normative requirements. For example, if we ask someone personally to donate blood they are more likely to help (Jason, Rose, Ferrari & Barone, 1984). Hitchhikers have long known the effectiveness of the personal appeal. The successful hitchhiker often looks the driver directly in the eyes as a way of establishing contact (Solomon & Solomon, 1978). Anything we do to make ourselves known to others by way of personal introduction, or recognition is likely to increase helping behavior at a later point. If we anticipate meeting the person needing help again at a later time, that too increases our sense of responsibility and our willingness to help (Gottlieb & Carver, 1980). In general anything that reduces anonymity and increases self-awareness is likely to contribute to prosocial behavior (Duval, Duval, & Neely, 1979).

Sometimes feelings of guilt at not helping in one situation can be induced with the consequence of increasing willingness to help at another time. When students were asked to chaperon delinquent children on an excursion to the zoo, only 32 percent agreed. However, when they were first asked to help with a very large request such as committing to help delinquent youth for two years (which got universal refusal), and then were asked to chaperone for the zoo trip, 56 percent agreed. The initial refusal produced guilt that in turn was reduced by agreeing to the smaller request. The reverse of that also works. If you ask for a contribution that no one can refuse, chances are that many more will contribute, and when

they do they will contribute at least the average (Weyant & Smith, 1987).

### *8.3 Helping others on a long-term basis*

The above discussion refers primarily to helping others in an emergency. However, there are many situations that require the steadiness of helping over the long run. For example the hospice movement in the U.S. and in Europe helping dying people is built upon volunteer assistance. Many other organizations like the Salvation Army, Red Cross, Cancer Prevention organizations, Heart Associations, Humane Societies for protection of Animals, Organizations for the Protection of the Environment, all rely greatly on people's willingness to contribute over the long haul (Penner, 2002). It is curious that in the most independent of all countries, the United States, one also finds the largest number of volunteers (Ting & Paliavin, 2000). Perhaps it is because other advanced countries have social safety networks built into their societies so less volunteer labor is required? In developing countries so much effort is required to survive that few people have time or energy to volunteer for others.

### *8.4 Making prosocial behavior more central to our culture*

We know that bigotry derives at least in part from the desire to exclude certain categories from human fellowship (Opatow, 1990; Tyler & Lind, 1990). The Ku Klux Klan does not consider those of different races, religions, or political convictions to be fully human. They seek a society that would only include whites, Protestants, with a bias toward conservatism in their political outlook. Those who are willing to kill or maim others solely on the basis of such differences practice social exclusion and we can see their handiwork from Darfur to Iraq. Think how often very minor differences in religion (Shite versus Sunni, Catholic versus Protestants), or politics (Stalinists versus Trotskyites), or race (White versus Black) have caused immense injury to humankind. There is a lesson from that, to practice moral inclusion, to express the willingness to see all people as part of the same human race. People who are inclusive view all humanity as derived from a common heritage. From the biological perspective of course, it cannot be any other way. We all derive from common ancestors, and ethnic or racial differences have emerged over time from environmental conditions and relative geographical isolation.

Again people can learn something from social psychology, keeping in mind the research on ingroup favoritism, even when the group categorization is nonsensical (Doise, Csepele, Dann, Gouge, Larsen, & Ostell, 1972). We are seeing

good examples of inclusiveness from people known in the entertainment industry helping greatly with the AIDS crisis in Africa. More people today have a concern for the well-being of strangers living far away. Many religions teach the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind, but alas also define narrowly that salvation comes from inclusion among the select. Likewise Marxism took the red flag as a symbol of the universal kinship of humanity, but we still saw societies evolving in Eastern Europe that had little concern for others beyond narrow national and political camp interests. Yet, any world worth living in must inculcate prosocial behavior and inclusion must become a universal value in the cultures of the future.

### *8.5 Shifting from social to selfless motivation*

From previous studies on the jigsaw puzzle we know that the overjustification effect undermines intrinsic motivation. This is also true for altruistic behavior. Whereas people may be flattered by praise over the short run, only when the person feels genuinely selfless will he have the motivation to sustain helping behavior. Although some companies more or less require their employees to volunteer, research shows that such external incentives are counterproductive. The more we require people to “volunteer”, the less they are likely to do it when away from external constraints (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999). Making long term contributions are best sustained when they derive from a genuine desire to make a difference, and to contribute to the betterment of the world. In the jigsaw puzzle studies we saw that some encouragement may be useful, but if reward continues it leads to lower motivation, the student will be less interested in solving math problems.

Batson, Cochran, Biederman, Blosser, Ryan, & Vogt (1978) and Batson, Coke, Jasnoski, & Hanson (1978) investigated the effect of compliance or compassion on subsequent altruistic feelings. They found initially that students felt most altruistic when they performed services without implied or real reward or social pressure. In a second experiment attributions were manipulated so some participants attributed their helpfulness to compliance, and others to compassion. Subsequently when asked to volunteer for a local service organization, 25 percent did so if they thought they had complied, whereas 60 percent volunteered if they attributed their previous helpfulness to compassion. These studies show that what we think about our helpful behavior and ourselves has behavioral consequences.

To sustain prosocial behavior in the long run it is most effective to shift motives

from social bases to internal self-motivation. In one study Batson, Fultz, Schoenrade, & Paduano (1987) asked students to think of some act that they did for others at great cost to themselves. When the participants began to reflect on the complex reasons for helping it decreased the feelings of altruism. Although many people engage in prosocial behavior because of social encouragement, these behaviors will only be sustained if the helper shifts away from these initial rewards. For example American Churches often encourage their members to donate blood, and most people can do that once or twice with little encouragement. But what causes people to donate again and again over the course of many years? Only those who develop an altruistic self-image will continue to contribute, when they come to believe "that I am the kind of person that helps" (Callero & Piliavin, 1983; Goleman, 1985).

### *8.6 The social learning of inclusion*

Prosocial behavior is learned in the course of socialization. Parents have the most power in developing the self-image of their children. It is therefore not surprising that those willing to risk all to save victims of persecution, or fight for civil rights of Black people, have at least one parent with whom they had a close and warm relationship and who became a moral model for behavior (London, 1970; Oliner & Oliner, 1988). In certain families socialization includes the social responsibility norm that we have a responsibility to be inclusive and care for others. Having altruism modeled by parents is a powerful contribution to the next generation and to what must be hoped an increasingly kind world.

What caused relatively wealthy white students in the US to join the Peace Corps? One important factor is that they had internalized these altruistic behaviors by watching someone they admired engaging in helping behavior. At the same time exclusion of others on the basis of arbitrary criterion justifies a whole range of inhuman behaviors from discriminating in the work place to annihilation of entire peoples (Opatow, 1990; Staub, 1990). The prisoners at Guantanamo are not given the normal rights of the Geneva Convention, because they do not belong to the category of enemy combatants, but to an arbitrarily selected category of "unlawful combatants". That exclusion by the U.S. government in turn allows for torture, secret trials, and disregarding rules of evidence.

### *8.7 Helping self, helping others*

In recent years we have observed the growth of self-help groups in a variety of areas. Many of these groups were modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous, and base

their organizations on similar ideas of confronting the self with the dysfunctional behavior, and providing the social support necessary to change. Today self-help groups combat drug addictions, help people reduce weight to healthy proportions, support coping with gambling addictions, help patients deal with terminal illness, and much more (Medvene, 1992). Self-help groups are successful because they are conducted by people who have empathy, who have themselves been victims of addictions, or are going through the crisis of illness. When you have walked part of the journey of addictions you also create credibility in helping other victims, and the message conveyed is more likely to be convincing resulting in needed attitude and behavioral change. Self-help groups are also cost efficient since volunteers run many of these programs. Some of the volunteers have also become professionals who make a living from helping others. In fact it is an important aspect of staying away from drugs and from abusing alcohol to continue to be involved in helping others. Alcoholics Anonymous urges those in recovery to seek social support and give support by sponsoring others and attending sobriety meetings over the life span.

Today we can also observe the Internet being used to offer help via chat rooms. The Internet is becoming an important source for information and self-help. Victims of disease can now go on the Internet to learn about causes as well as treatments offered. In 2003 there were already more than 100,000 websites that provide patient information (Kalichman, Benotsh, Austin, Luke, & Chauncey, 2003) and that number has increased exponentially. It is easier to get advise from the computer than asking doctors or other people. The information is readily available in seconds on a variety of topics. Asking a computer for help is less costly and does not involve any norms of reciprocity for helping. In one study (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988) participants were required to complete a very difficult and complex computer task. Half of the participants were told they could get help from a human assistant, the other half that they could find the answers on the computer. The results showed that only 36 percent asked for help from the assistant, whereas 86 percent requested help from the computer and more than once. One interpretation is that it is less psychologically costly to obtain information from the computer than asking a person for help. This is of course just the beginning of the computer age. What developments we may see in the future are only limited by our imagination.

### *9. The focus on positive behavior*



Seligman (2002) noted the obvious when he said that much of psychology has focused on the dark side of humankind. Clinical psychology has concentrated its efforts on understanding mental disorders, but has paid little attention to how we can promote psychological health. Social psychology's major efforts have concentrated on the dark human attributes of prejudice, discrimination, hostility and aggression, and less on the positive aspects of life. It can of course be argued that the dark topics are those that demand attention because of the damage to individuals, families, and society. However, not all social psychology has focused on the dark areas of human existence. For example in this book we have also discussed the importance of high self-esteem, how to develop lasting and joyful relationships with others, and how intrinsic motivation provides for sustained helpful behavior. This chapter has had a focus on how to make the world a more helpful place. The bystander effect research, that shows peoples' indifference to the suffering of strangers when in the presence of others, has a silver lining. As we have shown learning about the bystander effect has caused participants to take action to help that they may not have done so without that information. Likewise those who participated in laboratory studies on aggression may have been inoculated against harmful manipulations in the future. So even if the focus of the research has been on the dark aspects of behavior, the outcome may provide encouragement for more compassionate and helpful behavior.

Although many psychologists believe that all behavior is motivated by selfish motives, there are social psychologists who believe otherwise. Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, & Tsang, (2002) have argued for the presence of pure altruism in human behavior. At least some people are willing to help others even when it entails great personal costs, and some are willing to give their all to help the persecuted. Feeling empathy toward others seems a critical variable in whether such pure altruism occurs to support helping behavior.

Having empathy not only promotes more positive attitudes toward the victim, but also more broadly toward the group to which she or he belongs (Batson et al, 1997). Participants listened to tapes of a woman who had been infected with the AIDS virus, or they listened to a homeless man. Half of the participants were asked to take an empathic perspective trying to imagine the feelings and the situation of the person they listened to on the tape. The other half was told to be objective, to remain detached and not to be involved in the emotions of the victim. The important issue in this study was not whether they would be more likely to

help the victim being part of the empathic condition, but rather did they change their attitude toward the group of people (AIDS victims and the homeless) being depicted in the interviews. In fact the results showed that participants in the emphatic condition developed more positive attitudes toward all people with AIDS as well as homeless people.

The important lesson is to promote activities that produce empathy beyond just helping the individual. What does it feel like to be an AIDS victim, or a discriminated person, or being someone suffering with cancer or serious illness? When we create empathy for these people as a group, we socialize others who are willing to volunteer over the long run, and who vote for policies that are humanitarian. In an ultimate sense we need to create empathy for all people who suffer in the world, to create sufficient motivation to move governments to end policies creating war, genocide, or large scale suffering in remote parts of the world. We all come from common ancestors; we all face the same human conditions of mortality. People love their children in all societies, and culture has evolved to help people survive and cope with the challenges of both life and dying. With that common empathetic base should come not only the recognition of our relatedness, but also a desire to help.

### *Summary*

The Kitty Genovese case and the September 11 attacks showed different aspects of bystander intervention and altruistic behavior. In the first case apparent indifference to the suffering of a neighbor, in the second crisis people moved beyond prosocial behavior, and intervened at great cost even giving their lives to help others. To understand these events we must first understand the definition of altruistic and prosocial behavior. We can determine the nature of helping behaviors by examining the motives for helping. Altruistic behavior focuses on the other person, and is engaged in for selfless motives. On the other hand prosocial behavior is more broadly defined as helping behavior that may include ego-based motives like social recognition, or the expectation of social exchange.

The question of why we help others points to several theories. Social exchange theory proposes that before we help someone we weigh the cost and benefits of intervening. We help others because we believe we gain some benefit from doing so. Social norms point to the socialization process during which norms of social responsibility, reciprocity and social justice are inculcated and internalized. Evolutionary motives derive from the role played by helping behavior in survival

of the relevant gene pool. From an evolutionary perspective internalized behavior derives from the predisposition to engage in behavior that has utility for survival of kinship and closely related others. The evolutionary perspective does not require that genes make a contribution to individual survival, but rather to those closely related who carry the genes to the next generation. Research shows that we have visual cues of kinship, and that altruistic behaviors have distinct physiological concomitants. From the evolutionary perspective even social motives like social exchange and reciprocity exist because they too contribute to cooperation and survival. Those who learn the norms best are likely to be among those who pass their genes onward. Critiques of evolutionary theory point out that there is no survival value in helping complete strangers (except we do share 99 plus percent in genetic inheritance with all humanity), and at any rate helping behavior can be understood from the perspective of psychological constructs.

The cases for pure altruism come from studies manipulating empathy for victims. Some research suggests that empathy is related to similarity between the needy person and the helper. Batson and his colleagues have however shown that empathy produces pure selfless behavior. These theories of altruism can be understood as offering explanation at different levels of constructs. Social exchange theory understands helping at the psychological level as the individual weighting outcomes. Social norms explain helping behavior at the sociological level where it is seen as a consequence of the internalization of social norms. Evolutionary theory offers an explanation at the biological level as the individual responds to genetic predisposition to help kinfolk. Eventually social psychology must creatively combine these viewpoints in an overall eclectic theory of altruism.

While the power of the situation has been demonstrated in many social psychological studies there is research pointing to lasting altruistic personality traits. Some relevant individual differences that are stable over time include empathy, self-efficacy, and emotionality. These traits interact with powerful situational factors in producing altruistic behavior. Self-identification as a helping person is important. Likewise social learning from altruistic models is also crucial to the development of individuals willing to sacrifice all to save the persecuted. Gender differences have an impact on all social behavior including altruism. Men's roles as protectors, greater athletic training, and upper body strength make it more likely that they will engage in heroic acts to save someone. On the other hand women excel in nurturing and long-term commitment, and in

displaying the moral courage to save the persecuted. Religious persuasion makes little difference in small case emergencies, but does contribute to long-term commitment as part of the religious person's ethical outlook. A religious person is likely to volunteer to help the poor, AIDS victims, or help alleviate suffering in various parts of the world.

Mood differences may also contribute to prosocial behavior. Good moods lead to more helping. Social psychologists have enhanced moods by means of music and pleasant odors and observed the increase in consequent helping behavior. Guilt is a lasting emotion experienced as psychological pain. The place of guilt in human history can be observed from the use of scapegoats on which the guilt of the people was placed. Mankind may also escape the burden of guilt by engaging in prosocial behavior. Our cultural upbringing also makes a contribution to our individual differences. Kinship selection may be responsible for why people help close kin in all cultures. However, as we have seen throughout this book the socialization in interdependent and independent cultures makes for behavioral differences. In interdependent cultures the needs of the people in the ingroup are of foremost importance. In independent cultures people are more likely to donate time and money to help people in outgroups. Some societies also cultivate helping norms and behavior.

However, we cannot underestimate the power of the situational context. The research points for example to reliable differences between rural and urban communities. Rural people are likely to experience less diffusion of responsibility, less stimulus overload, more kinship and less diversity, and more personal relationships, all characteristics that sustain helping behavior. It is important to note that it is not where you are socialized that matters most, but rather the current context, rural or urban, that determines helping behavior.

Although most research in prosocial behavior has focused on helping strangers, in fact most helping behavior occurs within intimate circles of family and friends. Parents typically put their children first, and in any event are willing to wait for any return of their investment for the long run.

The bystander effect is the most frequently studied situational factor. These studies have reliably shown that help is less likely in the presence of others and suggests some specific steps need to occur before helping becomes likely. Intervention depends firstly on noting that something is happening that requires

intervention. In urban areas people suffer from stimulus overload that leads to a narrow focus on personally relevant events. Other factors in urban life, like being in a hurry, or the ambiguity of the situation make it less likely that intervention will occur. Further the event has to be construed to be an emergency. Since we look to others for clues on how to behave, pluralistic ignorance may prevent intervention. If other people react as if the event is of little importance you may decide it is not an emergency that requires help. Finally, someone has to assume responsibility and lead by example. That in turn depends on feelings of self-efficacy, internalized social responsibility, and diffusion of responsibility.

In weighing whether to help strangers we are more concerned about the costs and benefits. However, the construal of the situation also matters. How does the victim respond may be an important clue as to whether help is required. Likewise attribution of need and the worthiness of the victim to receive aid determine intervention. We help when we see that the misfortune is not a consequence of individual responsibility and is outside the victim's control. Social modeling also contributes to prosocial behavior. Those who have positive contributing models are more likely to help in donating or other prosocial activities. Time pressures matter as they relate to motives of enhancement and survival. We can observe inoculation effects, as those who hear or read about bystander effects are more likely to help in subsequent situations. Characteristics of the person we are helping also play a role including similarity, gender, and vulnerability. Attributions of the victim by the helper, and of the helper on the part of the victim also matter. In independent societies people guard their sense of self-esteem, and will often not seek help unless it comes from a genuine desire to help. On the other hand in interdependent societies the social self is more broadly defined as inclusive of others, and people are therefore more likely to accept help from others.

How can we improve on helping behavior in the world? Research supports the idea of educating people on such issues as the bystander effect. Likewise where the victim can reduce ambiguity, and the helper is aware of pluralistic ignorance, more help can be expected. A personal approach in asking for help is a most powerful variable. On the other hand long-term helping is most likely when the potential helper has internalized prosocial behavior as part of self-identification. Other suggestions point to the need to make prosocial behavior more central to the culture in which we live, and promote more inclusiveness in how we define

those who need our help. Such a society would also require us to move from selfish to more selfless motivation. Important to altruistic behavior is the presence of at least one significant and admired other who models inclusion and with whom the helper has a warm and close relationship. Self-help groups such as alcoholics anonymous are part of most Western societies, as are other organizations now responding to the needs to control other addictions. The Internet also offers services for example in understanding illnesses, and chat rooms for social support.

Social psychology has invested many resources in understanding the dark aspects of human existence. In recent years we have seen more an emphasis on positive psychology focusing on the health of the individual and society. In this book we have highlighted some important aspects of a positive psychology including promotion of high self-esteem, joyful relationships, and intrinsic motivation. A positive psychology must help make people aware to move from a focus on individual suffering to the entire category of sufferers. That is a difficult leap for some people.