
How Social an Animal?

The Human Capacity for Caring

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ABSTRACT: *We live in a social arena. Yet, in our interactions with others do we ever really care about them, or is the real target of our concern always, exclusively ourselves? For many years psychology, including social psychology, has assumed that we are social egoists, caring exclusively for ourselves. Today, the computer analogy that underlies so much thinking in cognitive and social psychology overlooks the fact that we care altogether. Recent evidence in support of the empathy-altruism hypothesis suggests a very different view. It suggests that not only do we care but also that when we feel empathy for others in need, we are capable of caring for them for their sakes and not our own. Limits on the human capacity for altruistic caring are discussed.*

It has been said that we are social animals. Aristotle said it. Charles Darwin said it. Elliot Aronson said it. Given this lineup of expert witnesses, I am not about to suggest otherwise. We *are* social animals. We spend an incredible proportion of our waking hours with other people—in appointments, classes, and committee meetings; on highways or mass transportation; with family, friends, and lovers. And when we are alone, we are rarely really alone. We read, listen to the radio, or watch TV; others are still there. Even on a solitary walk, we almost always take others with us; our thoughts are on this or that social interaction: What did she mean by that? What should I say to him?

But how social are we really? We live in a social arena; virtually all of our actions are directed toward or are responses to others. Yet to what end? In our interactions with others do we ever really care about them, or is the real target of our concern always, exclusively ourselves?

If we really care about them—if we desire certain outcomes for others because of what these outcomes mean for them and not simply because of what they mean for us—then we are very social animals indeed. But if the real target of our concern is always, exclusively ourselves, then we are far less social. True, we operate in a social arena, with others almost always on our minds. They are on our minds because they are necessary for us to reach our goals, and they can be very hard to control. It can be a full-time job trying to bend the will of others, all seeking their own ends, so that they enable us to reach our ends. From this perspective other people, however dear, are

simply complex objects in our environment—important sources of stimulation and gratification, of facilitation and inhibition—as we each pursue self-interest. We care for them only insofar as their welfare affects ours.

Perhaps the clearest way to phrase the question I am raising is by borrowing Milton Rokeach's (1973) distinction between terminal and instrumental values. Each of us values at least some other people. But do we value these others for their own sake—a terminal value—or for ours—an instrumental value? This is what it means to ask how social we really are.

Psychology's Explicit Response: Discreet Silence

Psychology, especially in recent years, has shied away from directly confronting this rather fundamental question about human nature. In spite of Gordon Allport's (1968) claim that understanding our social nature is "the key problem of social psychology" (p. 1), this problem has become a taboo topic—like sex for the Victorians—that we social psychologists politely avoid, especially in public. Our strategy has been to stay closer to the surface and address more circumspect, specific issues, assuming perhaps that the embarrassing problem of our social nature will disappear. Yet, if Allport is right that understanding our social nature is the key problem, then if it disappears, does not social psychology also disappear?

Psychology's Implicit Response: Social Egoism

There is, however, another possibility. Perhaps the reason that social psychologists have spent little time on the question of our social nature is because they already know the answer. As Donald Campbell (1975) and the Wallachs (Wallach & Wallach, 1983) have pointed out, the question of whether we care for others or only for ourselves is one of the few to which psychologists of all stripes, researchers and practitioners, implicitly give a common answer.

Psychology's implicit answer is that the only persons we are capable of caring about, ultimately, are ourselves. We value others instrumentally; we care for their welfare only to the degree that it affects ours. Our behavior may be highly social; our thoughts may be highly social; but in our hearts, we live alone. *Altruism*, the view that we are capable of valuing and pursuing another person's welfare as an ultimate goal, is pure fantasy. We are *social egoists*.

Social Egoism in Early Psychology

This answer to the social nature question may seem harsh; yet it has the ring of truth. Furthermore, it has a long and illustrious history in psychology. As William James explained in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890),

We know how little it matters to us whether *some* man, a man taken at large and in the abstract, prove a failure or succeed in life,—he may be hanged for aught we care,—but we know the utter momentousness and terribleness of the alternative when the man is the one whose name we ourselves bear. *I* must not be a failure, is the very loudest of the voices that clamor in each of our breasts: Let fail who may, *I* at least must succeed. . . .

But what is this abstract numerical principle of identity, this “Number One” within me, for which, according to proverbial philosophy, I am to keep so constant a “lookout”? . . .

Each mind, to begin with, must have a certain minimum of selfishness . . . in order to exist. This minimum must be there as a basis for all further conscious acts, whether of self-negation or of a selfishness more subtle still. All minds must have come, by the way of survival of the fittest, if by no directer path, to take an intense interest in the bodies to which they are yoked. . . .

And similarly with the images of their person in the minds of others. I should not be existent now had I not become sensitive to looks of approval or disapproval on the faces among which my life is cast. Looks of contempt cast on other persons need affect me in no such peculiar way. Were my mental life dependent exclusively on some other person's welfare, either directly or in an indirect way, then natural selection would unquestioningly have brought it about that I should be as sensitive to the social vicissitudes of that other person as I now am to my own. Instead of being egoistic I should be spontaneously altruistic. (Chapter 10, Section 5, paragraphs 2, 12, and 13)

Equally strong egoist assumptions may, of course, be found in the psychoanalytic (Freud) and behaviorist (Holt, Skinner) traditions. As Donald Campbell summarized the situation in his 1975 APA Presidential Address, “Psychology and psychiatry . . . not only describe man as selfishly motivated, but implicitly or explicitly teach that he ought to be so” (1975, p. 1104).

Social Egoism in Contemporary Psychology

In contemporary personality and social psychology, egoist assumptions remain strong. They are implicit in the profusion of self theories that have flowered during the “me generation” of the 1970s and 1980s. Think of self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Wicklund, 1975), self-monitoring (Snyder, 1979), self-presentation (Jones & Pittman, 1982), self-handicapping (Berglas & Jones, 1978), self-deception (Sackeim & Gur, 1985), self-eval-

uation maintenance (Tesser, 1988), symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), self-affirmation (Steele & Liu, 1983), self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987), self-expansion (Aron & Aron, 1986), and various self-esteem theories (Bowerman, 1978; Snyder, Higgins, & Stuckey, 1983; Wills, 1981). Each of these theories assumes motivation with an ultimate goal of maintaining or enhancing one's self-image; social encounters are instrumental to this self-serving end. Clearly, Tony Greenwald's call for increased self-interest fell on very fertile soil.

Even our explicitly social theories of interpersonal behavior and interpersonal relations, including long-term close relationships, do not question the fundamental assumption that we are, at heart, only out for ourselves. The driving force in social comparison (Festinger, 1954) is evaluation of our own opinions and abilities. The motivational premise of social exchange (Homans, 1961) and equity (Adams, 1965; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973) is, as Walster et al. (1973) pointed out, that “man is selfish” (p. 151). Interdependence models (Berscheid, 1983; Kelley, 1979) focus on the way each partner in the relationship depends on the other in order to meet his or her own needs, or on situations in which Partner A benefits Partner B because having B's needs met is personally rewarding to A. Social dilemmas are typically posed as conflicts in which one's immediate interests conflict with one's long-range interests, or one's opportunity to gain material rewards conflicts with one's opportunity to gain social or self-rewards (Beggan, Messick, & Allison, 1988; Dawes, 1980; Hardin, 1968). Rarely is the possibility even entertained that the conflict is between wanting to meet one's own needs and wanting to meet others' needs (but see Orbell, van de Kragt, & Dawes, 1988).

The concept of a communal as opposed to exchange relationship (Clark & Mills, 1979), a concept that at first glance seems social to the core, on closer inspection appears to be another expression of social egoism. Clark and her colleagues stated that in a communal relationship “members benefit one another in response to [the other's] needs” and that there is “a greater desire to meet the other's needs” (Williamson & Clark, 1989, p. 722). These statements certainly seem to suggest that in communal relationships we value not only our own but also our partner's welfare. Yet is this a terminal or an instrumental value? Clark and her colleagues have not been entirely clear, but they have implied that even in communal relationships our concern for our partner's welfare is instrumental to enhancing our own welfare. The feature that distinguishes a communal from an exchange relationship is said to be a different set of rules: In communal relationships we are bound by a “norm of mutual responsiveness” (Clark & Mills, 1979, p. 13; Williamson & Clark, 1989). Why do we comply with rules or norms? Presumably, because we feel good when we do (Williamson & Clark, 1989) and fear external or internal sanctions when we do not (Schwartz & Howard, 1984). Even in a communal relationship, then, it all seems to come back to looking out for Number One.

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Reprise

As a general statement, Campbell's assessment seems as apt in 1990 as it was in 1975. Contemporary personality and social psychology implicitly accepts the answer to the social nature question inherited from its functionalist, psychoanalytic, and behaviorist ancestors: We may be social in thought and action, but in motivation we are capable of caring only for ourselves.

Second Thoughts: The Case for Caring

There is, however, growing reason to believe that we are more social than psychology, including social psychology, would lead us to think. Considerable recent evidence suggests that, to some degree and under some circumstances, we are capable of caring for the welfare of others for their sakes and not simply as a more or less subtle way of caring for our own welfare. This evidence suggests that we are not simply social egoists; we have the capacity for altruism.

I will mention some of this evidence here, but first, I wish to highlight a fundamental assumption that the theorists who believe we can care for others share with the self, social, and interpersonal relations theorists who believe that we can care only for ourselves. That assumption is that we care. I highlight this assumption because, although I doubt anyone would deny it, I believe that in much of our current psychological thinking we have lost sight of its importance.

We Care

Analogies for human behavior: Are we rats or computers? As the passage from William James quoted earlier suggests, in its early days scientific psychology had a great love of Darwin's theory of natural selection. A major strategy for understanding human behavior was to look at the behavior of "lower" animals. It was assumed that because we and they share a common evolutionary heritage, our drives are like their drives; we learn in the same way they learn. Comparative psychology flourished. Today, the computer has replaced the rat as the analog for human behavior. Now it is assumed that we search, store, retrieve, and process information like a computer does, or at least that we should.

Each of these analogies has proved useful in helping us understand ourselves. Each also has its limitations and can be misleading if taken too literally. Limitations of the rat analogy are well known. We have language and we have ways of learning and thinking that go far beyond the rat's. Limitations of the currently popular computer analogy are less apparent, perhaps because we can only see the limitations of one analogy from the perspective of another. Fortunately, a new analogy for human behavior is emerging that provides some perspective on the computer analogy. The new analogy is based on the computer's step-child, the robot.

Implanting computers in rats: Robots. A recent article in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (December 11, 1988) by science writer James Gleick suggests that

the attempt to build a general-purpose robot is teaching us some important lessons about how we humans are not like the computer of the computer analogy. Like us, the computer processes information to solve problems; like us, the computer can use strategies and heuristics. However, unlike us (and the rat), computers do not move about in their environment. Robots do. According to Gleick, this is by no means a trivial difference.

Roboticians initially assumed that adding movement to a computer would not be too difficult. It would be necessary to install a sensory and a motor system of course—sonar and a TV camera, mechanical arms and hands, and motors to move them. It would also be necessary to program in strategies for determining behavioral responses under various stimulus conditions. These were not minor feats, but ones that seemed within reach. Indeed, this approach to building a robot works fine as long as all the robot is asked to do is weld this joint, sort these products, or attach this nut to that bolt. But, as Gleick explained, roboticians want more than specific repeated tasks; they want robots that can do general tasks such as "keep this area clean" or "roam around until you see something unusual" (p. 60).

The approach described has not proved sufficient to build a robot that will keep the house clean. It has not even proved sufficient to build a robot that can travel down a hall without bumping into people, furniture, and walls. Nor does it seem that the problem is to be solved by adding memory and information processing programming. There is more to it than that.

According to Gleick, and I am relying heavily on his report here, the current view among roboticians is that to build general-purpose robots, ones that can do a variety of tasks and react to a variety of environmental events, the robots need "motives" and "emotions," "a sense of time and a sense of self-awareness" (p. 54). Roboticians have, it seems, gained "a new appreciation for the soft and bloody machinery of real life" (Gleick, 1988, p. 60).

A general-purpose robot apparently does not need more head as much as, like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*, it needs a heart. It needs to be able to care. It needs to like one state of affairs better than another, to like a clean house better than a dirty one. In psychological terms, it needs *values* and *preferences*. These are necessary if the robot is to have *goals* and *motives* because motives are directed toward obtaining or maintaining valued states. In addition, as Simon (1967) has suggested, the robot needs the functional equivalent of *emotions*, differential reactions when its values are promoted or thwarted.

To build a general-purpose robot we must, it seems, implant the computer in the rat. Like the computer, robots must be capable of complex memory storage and retrieval, strategic problem solving, and high-level "thought." Like the rat, they must care.

Roboticians have not yet succeeded in building a general-purpose robot. They have, I think, succeeded in revealing a crucial limitation of the computer analogy on which so much of our current thinking in cognitive and

social psychology either explicitly or implicitly relies. We care what happens; our computers do not. If the house is messy, if we cannot complete a task, or if someone detaches one of our peripherals, we get upset. Our computers are totally unruffled by these events. They are equally uncaring about their successes. They can zip error-free in seconds through a complex multivariate problem that would take any of us several lifetimes to complete, but they are not elated, wagging a finger and chanting, "We're Number One." They just do not care.

So, to say that we care strikes a chord that, although by no means in discord with the themes of the cognitive revolution, lies outside its range. From the perspective of a robot analogy, the computer's marvelous high-level cognitive operations no longer appear as the alpha and omega of human functioning. They are extremely useful means, but only means, to achieve the noncognitive end of obtaining and maintaining valued states. Moreover, values, motives, and emotions are no longer, as they have been during various phases of the cognitive revolution, reduced to (a) types of cognition (e.g., affect-tagged cognitions), (b) sources of unfortunate noise distorting the cognitive signal (e.g., honest information-processing errors; the availability heuristic), or (c) mediators and moderators of cognitive processes (e.g., state-specific memory). Instead, values, motives, and emotions set the agenda that cognition follows. In the robot analogy, cognition serves motivational and emotional masters, even as our computers serve us. Whether this is the way matters should be, I cannot say, but in line with the robot analogy, I do believe this is the way matters are.

Personally, I hope that something like the robot analogy, which highlights the important and unique functions of motivation, emotion, and cognition, as well as the way these functions interrelate, will enable us to bridge the widening chasm between cognitive approaches and motivational-emotional approaches to understanding human behavior. We shall see. For now, all I can say is that the assumption that we care, the fundamental assumption shared by both those who say we can care only for ourselves and those who say we can care for others, is an assumption that—although not contrary to the computer analogy—lies outside its scope, and so does not easily fit with much of our current thinking about who we are. I believe this reveals a shortcoming of our current thinking, not of the assumption that we care. I believe we are more like general-purpose robots than like computers.

For Whom Do We Care?

But if we care, for whom do we care? As already noted, the most popular answer to this question by psychologists has long been social egoism: We care for others only to the degree that their welfare affects ours. The suggestion that we are in any degree capable of truly altruistic motives, of valuing and desiring another's welfare for his or her sake and not ours, has rarely even been entertained. Yet I believe that there is now considerable evidence that this latter view is right, that the human capacity for caring

is far greater than we have thought. The main arena for recent debate of this issue has been analysis of the nature of the motivation underlying the empathy-helping relationship.

The empathy-helping relationship. Obviously, we humans can and do help each other. Our helpful acts range from the numerous small kindnesses and favors that we do for each other every day, to the great acts of self-sacrifice of the Albert Schweitzers and Mother Tere-sas, acts that win Carnegie Hero Fund Commission awards. Moreover, considerable research suggests that we are more likely to help someone in need when we "feel for" that person, when we feel emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion, and tenderness (see Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). This relationship between feeling for and helping a person in need is what I mean by the empathy-helping relationship.¹ As far as I know, there is now no doubt or debate that this relationship exists. There is, however, considerable doubt and debate over why it exists and over what it tells us about our social nature.

Possible motives underlying the empathy-helping relationship: Egoism and altruism? Researchers approaching the evidence of an empathy-helping relationship from the perspective of social egoism have been quick to point out possible self-benefits of this helping. After all, when we feel empathy for someone in distress, does that not make us feel distress too? Maybe we act to relieve their distress simply as an instrumental means to the ultimate goal of relieving our own distress (Piliavin & Piliavin, 1973). Or maybe we anticipate feeling especially ashamed and guilty if we do not help someone for whom we feel empathy. Or maybe we anticipate feeling especially good about ourselves if we help such a person. Any of these three explanations—aversive-arousal reduction, punishment avoidance, or reward seeking—can account for the empathy-helping relationship within the context of social egoism. None requires that we care for anyone other than ourselves, except as instrumental means to our own self-serving ends.

But is any of these three egoistic explanations of the empathy-helping relationship correct? Rather than simply assuming one or more must be, we need to consider this question carefully. Admittedly, it is a difficult question, because it is not a question about behavior but about

¹ More generally and formally, by empathy I mean an other-oriented emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another. If the other is in a state of benefit—having achieved a goal or won a prize, or is playing gleefully—empathic feelings are likely to include pleasure, delight, satisfaction, and joy. If the other is in a state of need—having failed at a task or suffered a loss, or is enduring pain—empathic feelings are likely to include sympathy, compassion, sorrow, and pity. Some psychologists (e.g., Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Heider, 1958; Wispé, 1986) have called this other-oriented emotional response to another's need sympathy rather than empathy. Classically, it has variously been called compassion (Aquinas, 1270/1917; Hume, 1740/1896; Smith, 1759/1853), mercy (Aquinas, 1270/1917), pity (Aquinas, 1270/1917; Hume, 1740/1896; Smith, 1759/1853), and tenderness (McDougall, 1908). The specific label one applies to this emotional state is less important to me than understanding its behavioral and motivational consequences.

the motivation underlying behavior. At issue is the helper's ultimate goal. Social egoism claims that benefiting the person in need is an instrumental goal on the way to the ultimate goal of benefiting oneself. Altruism argues back that simply to show that self-benefits follow from benefiting the other does not prove that the self-benefits are the helper's goal. It is at least logically possible that the self-benefits are unintended consequences of the helper's reaching his or her ultimate goal of benefiting the other. If this is the case, then the motivation is altruistic, not egoistic.

Distinguishing Between Egoistic and Altruistic Motives

The formal structure of the problem is depicted in Table 1. To determine whether empathy broadens the scope of the human capacity to care so that it includes at least some others, we must determine whether the empathically aroused helper (a) benefits the other as an instrumental goal on the way to reaching some self-benefit as an ultimate goal (egoism) or (b) benefits the other as an ultimate goal, with any resulting self-benefits being unintended consequences (altruism).

But if helping benefits both the person in need and the helper, how are we to know which is the ultimate goal? More generally, if multiple goals are reached by the same behavior, how are we ever to know which goal is ultimate? This problem has led many researchers to give up on the altruism question, concluding that it cannot be answered empirically. I think this surrender is premature. I think we can empirically ascertain people's ultimate goals; indeed, I think we do it all the time. Consider the following example.

Ascertaining a person's ultimate goal. Suzie and Frank work together. One morning, music-loving Suzie is unusually attentive to homely but well-heeled Frank. Frank wonders, "Have my prayers been answered? Has Suzie finally discovered my charms? Or is she broke and wanting me to take her to the concert this weekend?" Frank is questioning Suzie's ultimate goal. As matters stand, he lacks the information to make a clear inference, although wishful thinking may provide one. But what if Suzie, returning from lunch, finds in her mail two concert tickets sent by her father? If she coolly passes Frank on her way to invite John, then Frank can infer with considerable confidence—and chagrin—the ultimate goal of her earlier attentions.

This simple example highlights three principles that are important when drawing inferences about a person's ultimate goal: First and most obviously, we do not observe another person's goals or intentions directly; we infer them from the person's behavior. Second, if we observe only a single behavior that has different potential ultimate goals, the true ultimate goal cannot be discerned. It is like having one equation with two unknowns; a clear answer is impossible. Third, we can draw reasonable inferences about a person's ultimate goal if we can observe the person's behavior in different situations that involve a change in the relation between the potential ultimate goals. Behavior should always be directed toward the true ultimate goal.

Table 1
Formal Structure of the Altruism Question

Explanations of why we help	Outcomes of helping	
	We relieve the other's suffering	And as a result we receive self-benefits
Egoistic account	Instrumental goal	Ultimate goal
Altruistic account	Ultimate goal	Unintended consequence

Everyday use of this strategy for inferring the motives underlying other people's behavior has been discussed in some detail by attribution theorists like Heider (1958) and Jones and Davis (1965). We use it to infer when a student is really interested or only seeking a better grade (e.g., what happens to the student's interest after the grades are turned in?), why a friend chose one job over another, and whether politicians mean what they say or are only seeking votes. This strategy also underlies much dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and reactance (Brehm, 1966) research.

Employing the example of Suzie and Frank as a model, two steps are necessary to infer the nature of a person's motivation from his or her behavior. First, we must conduct a conceptual analysis of the various potential alternative goals for the person's action. Unless we have some idea that a given goal may have been the person's aim, there is little likelihood of concluding that it was. Frank realized that Suzie actually might be interested in the concert and not in him. Second, we need to observe the person's behavior in systematically varying circumstances. Specifically, the circumstances need to be varied in a way that disentangles the relationship between potential ultimate goals, making it possible for the person to obtain one without having to obtain the other—just as after lunch Suzie could get to the concert without Frank. The person's behavioral choices in these situations should prove diagnostic, telling us which of the goals is ultimate, because the behavior should always be directed toward the ultimate goal. These two steps provide an empirical basis for inferring the nature of a person's motivation.

Possible egoistic goals of empathy-induced helping. My colleagues and I have applied this logic to the problem of the nature of the motivation underlying the empathy-helping relationship. We first sought to identify possible egoistic goals of empathically induced helping. The three we identified are the ones I have already mentioned: (a) reducing the aversive empathic arousal, (b) avoiding social and self-punishments such as shame and guilt, and (c) seeking social and self-rewards (see Batson, 1987). To account for the empathy-helping relationship, the arousal, punishments, or rewards must, of course, be empathy specific. They must exist, or at least exist to a greater degree, among individuals feeling a higher degree of empathy for the person in need.

Second, we sought techniques for systematically varying a helping situation so that for some individuals one or more of these possible egoistic goals could be obtained only by helping, whereas for others these goals could be obtained without having to endure the costs of helping. If this variation eliminated the empathy–helping relationship, then we would have evidence that the self-benefit—not benefit to the person in need—is the ultimate goal of the prosocial motivation associated with empathy. If this variation did not eliminate the empathy–helping relationship, then we would have evidence that the self-benefit is not the ultimate goal, suggesting that the motivation might be altruistic.

Using this strategy, we and other researchers have conducted over 20 experiments during the past decade to test one or more of the three proposed egoistic explanations of the empathy–helping relationship. In each experiment, the egoistic explanation(s) predicted a different pattern of results than did the *empathy–altruism hypothesis*, the hypothesis that empathy evokes truly altruistic motivation.² A sketch of the logic and results of these experiments will give you an idea of why I no longer believe that our capacity for caring is limited to ourselves. (For more complete reports, see Batson, 1987, in press; Batson et al., 1988, Batson et al., 1989.)

Testing the Egoistic Alternatives to the Empathy–Altruism Hypothesis

1. *Aversive-arousal reduction.* The most frequently proposed egoistic explanation of the empathy–helping relationship is aversive-arousal reduction. Martin Hoffman (1981b) put it in a nutshell: “Empathic distress is unpleasant and helping the victim is usually the best way to get rid of the source” (p. 52). According to this explanation, empathically aroused individuals help in order to benefit themselves by reducing their empathic arousal; benefiting the victim is simply a means to this self-serving end.

To test this aversive-arousal reduction explanation against the empathy–altruism hypothesis, experiments have been conducted varying the ease of escaping further exposure to a suffering victim without helping. Because empathic arousal is a result of witnessing the victim’s suffering, either terminating this suffering by helping or terminating exposure to it by escaping should serve to reduce the arousal. Escape is not, however, a viable means of reaching the altruistic goal of relieving the victim’s distress; it does nothing to promote that end.

The difference in viability of escape as a means to these two goals produces competing predictions in an Escape (easy vs. difficult) × Empathy (low vs. high) design. Among individuals experiencing low empathy for the person in need, both the aversive-arousal reduction explanation and the empathy–altruism hypothesis predict more helping when escape is difficult than when it is easy.

² In one form or another, this hypothesis has been proposed by Batson (1987), Hoffman (1976), Karylowski (1982), Krebs (1975), and much earlier, by McDougall (1908), and even earlier, by Adam Smith (1759/1853).

This is because both assume that the motivation of individuals feeling low empathy will be egoistic. Among individuals feeling high empathy, the aversive-arousal reduction explanation predicts a similar (perhaps even greater) difference; it assumes that empathically induced motivation is also egoistic. But the empathy–altruism hypothesis predicts high helping even when escape is easy among individuals feeling high empathy. Across the four cells of an Escape × Empathy design, then, the aversive-arousal reduction explanation predicts less helping under easy escape in each empathy condition; the empathy–altruism hypothesis predicts a 1 versus 3 pattern: relatively low helping in the easy-escape/low-empathy cell and high helping in the other three cells. These competing predictions are presented in Table 2.

Over half a dozen experiments have now been run using this Escape × Empathy design. In a typical procedure, participants observe a “worker” whom they believe is reacting badly to a series of uncomfortable electric shocks; they are then given a chance to help the worker by taking the shocks themselves. To manipulate ease of escape, some participants are informed that if they do not help, they will continue observing the worker take the shocks (difficult escape); others are informed that they will observe no more (easy escape). Empathy has been both manipulated and measured.

Results of these experiments have consistently conformed to the pattern in the bottom half of Table 2 predicted by the empathy–altruism hypothesis, not to the pattern in the top half predicted by the aversive-arousal reduction explanation. Only among individuals experiencing a predominance of personal distress rather than empathy (i.e., feeling relatively anxious, upset, distressed, and the like) does the chance for easy escape reduce helping. In spite of the popularity of the aversive-arousal reduction explanation of the empathy–helping relationship, a popularity that continues in a number of social psychology textbooks, this explanation appears to be wrong.

2. *Empathy-specific punishment.* The second egoistic explanation of the empathy–helping relationship claims that we have learned through socialization that an

Table 2
Predictions From Aversive-Arousal Reduction Explanation and Empathy–Altruism Hypothesis for Rate of Helping in Escape × Empathy Design

Escape	Empathy	
	Low	High
Aversive-arousal reduction explanation		
Easy	Low	Low
Difficult	High	High/very high
Empathy–altruism hypothesis		
Easy	Low	High
Difficult	High	High

additional obligation to help, and so additional shame and guilt for failure to help, is attendant on feeling empathy for someone in need. As a result, when we feel empathy, we are faced with impending social or self-censure above and beyond any general punishment associated with not helping. We say to ourselves, "What will others think—or what will I think of myself—if I don't help when I feel like this?" and we help out of an egoistic desire to avoid these empathy-specific punishments. Eighteenth-century British social philosopher Bernard Mandeville (1714/1732) summarized this explanation prosaically:

There is no merit in saving an innocent babe ready to drop into the fire: The action is neither good nor bad, and what benefit soever the infant received, we only obliged our selves; for to have seen it fall, and not strove to hinder it, would have caused a pain, which self-preservation compelled us to prevent. (p. 42)

Several different techniques have been used to test this empathy-specific punishment explanation against the empathy-altruism hypothesis. Let me discuss just one: providing justification for not helping. The logic behind this technique is that if a person is helping to avoid shame and guilt, then if we provide information that increases the justification for not helping, the rate of helping should drop. But if a person is helping out of an altruistic desire to reduce the other's suffering, then even with increased justification, the rate of helping should remain high. Therefore, the empathy-specific punishment explanation and the empathy-altruism hypothesis predict a different pattern of helping across the four cells of a Justification for Not Helping (low vs. high) \times Empathy (low vs. high) design. These different predictions are presented in Table 3.

In the last five years, my colleagues and I have conducted three studies employing different versions of this Justification \times Empathy design (Batson et al., 1988, Studies 2–4). In the first, justification was provided by information about the inaction of other potential helpers. We reasoned that if most people asked have said no to a request for help, then one should feel more justified in

saying no as well. Individuals feeling either low or high empathy for a young women in need were given an opportunity to pledge time to help her. Information on the pledge form about the responses of previously asked peers indicated that either 5 of 7 had pledged (low justification for not helping) or 2 of 7 had pledged (high justification). The young woman's plight was such that others' responses did not affect her need for help. As depicted in Table 3, the empathy-specific punishment explanation predicted more helping in the low-justification condition than in the high by individuals feeling high empathy. In contrast, the empathy-altruism hypothesis predicted high helping by these individuals in both justification conditions. The latter pattern was found. Only among individuals feeling low empathy were those in the high-justification condition less likely to help than those in the low-justification condition.

In the second study, justification was provided by attributional ambiguity. We reasoned that if individuals can attribute a decision not to help to helping-irrelevant features of the decision, then they should be less likely to anticipate social or self-punishment. Individuals feeling either low or high empathy for a peer they thought was about to receive electric shocks were given a chance to work on either or both of two task options. For each correct response on Option A, they would receive one raffle ticket for a \$30 prize for themselves; for each correct response on Option B, they would reduce by one the shocks the peer was to receive. Information about helping-irrelevant attributes of the two task options indicated either that the two tasks were quite similar and neither was preferred (low justification for not helping) or that one task involved numbers, the other letters, and most people preferred to work on the number (letters), whichever was paired with the non-helpful Option A (high justification). Once again, competing predictions were those in Table 3, and once again, results patterned as predicted by the empathy-altruism hypothesis, not as predicted by the empathy-specific punishment explanation.

In the third study, justification for not helping was provided by information about the difficulty of the performance standard on a qualifying task. We reasoned that if potential helpers knew that even if they volunteered to help they would only be allowed to do so if they met the performance standard on a qualifying task, then performance on the qualifying task would provide a behavioral measure of motivation to reduce the victim's suffering (which requires qualifying) or to avoid social and self-punishment (which does not). This should be true, however, only if poor performance could be justified. Poor performance could be justified if the performance standard on the qualifying task was so difficult that most people fail. If the standard was this difficult, a person could not be blamed for not qualifying—either by the self or others. In this case, individuals motivated to avoid self-punishment should either (a) decline to help because of the low probability of qualifying or (b) offer to help but not try very hard on the qualifying task, ensuring that they did not qualify. Bluntly put, they should take a dive.

Table 3
Predictions From Empathy-Specific Punishment Explanation and Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis for Rate of Helping in Justification \times Empathy Design

Justification for not helping	Empathy	
	Low	High
Empathy-Specific Punishment Explanation		
Low	Moderate	High
High	Low	Low
Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis		
Low	Moderate	High
High	Low	High

In the study, then, individuals feeling either low or high empathy for a peer who they believed was reacting badly to a series of uncomfortable electric shocks were given a chance to help the peer by taking the remaining shocks themselves. But even if they volunteered, they had to meet the performance standard on the qualifying task to be eligible to help. Information about the difficulty of the standard indicated either that most college students qualify (low justification for not helping) or most do not (high justification).

Once more, results supported the empathy-altruism hypothesis. Helping again followed the pattern predicted in the bottom half of Table 3. The performance measure also followed the pattern predicted by the empathy-altruism hypothesis: Performance of low-empathy individuals was lower when the qualifying standard was difficult than when it was easy; performance of high-empathy individuals was higher when the qualifying standard was difficult. This interaction pattern suggested that the motivation of low-empathy individuals was at least in part directed toward avoiding self-punishment; whereas, contrary to the empathy-specific punishment explanation, the motivation of high-empathy individuals was not. The motivation of high-empathy individuals appeared to be directed toward the altruistic goal of relieving the other's suffering.

In all three studies, results conformed to the pattern predicted by the empathy-altruism hypothesis, not to the pattern predicted by the empathy-specific punishment explanation. Results of these studies, as well as highly consistent results from other studies using different techniques to test the empathy-specific punishment explanation, converge to suggest that this second egoistic explanation of the empathy-helping relationship is also wrong.

3. Empathy-specific reward explanation. The last major egoistic explanation of the empathy-helping relationship is empathy-specific rewards. Actually, there are several different versions of this explanation. I shall discuss only the one that has received the most attention to date, the negative-state relief version proposed by Cialdini et al. (1987). Cialdini and his colleagues have argued that it is the need for the rewards of helping, not the rewards themselves, that is empathy-specific: Feeling empathy for a person who is suffering involves a state of temporary sadness, and the empathically aroused individual is motivated to relieve this negative affective state. Relief can be obtained through any rewarding, mood-enhancing experience, including but not limited to the social and self-rewards that accompany helping.

There has been some disagreement about the truth of this explanation of the empathy-helping relationship. Cialdini and his colleagues have claimed support (Cialdini et al., 1987; Schaller & Cialdini, 1988); Schroeder and his colleagues (Schroeder, Dovidio, Sibicky, Matthews, & Allen, 1988) have not. Part of the disagreement seems to be due to the inadvertent presence of a distraction confound in the original Cialdini et al. (1987) experiments.

In order to avoid this confound, the technique that seems best suited to testing the negative-state relief ex-

planation is to confront individuals with an opportunity to help and lead some to believe that even if they do not help, they can anticipate a cost-free mood-enhancing experience. The negative-state relief explanation predicts that anticipating such an experience will eliminate the empathy-helping relationship; the empathy-altruism hypothesis predicts that it will not. These competing predictions across the four cells of an Anticipated Mood Enhancement (no vs. yes) \times Empathy (low vs. high) design are presented in Table 4.

Schaller and Cialdini (1988) conducted an experiment using this design and claimed support for the negative-state relief explanation. They admitted, however, that the evidence was rather weak. On a scaled measure of helping (amount of help offered), their results were more consistent with the negative-state relief explanation but were not statistically reliable except when using an uncorrected post hoc analysis including time of semester as a variable. On a dichotomous measure (proportion of participants helping), their results were at least as consistent with the empathy-altruism hypothesis.

In an independent effort to assess the relative merits of the negative-state relief explanation and the empathy-altruism hypothesis, Batson et al. (1989) conducted two studies using an Anticipated Mood Enhancement \times Empathy design much like the one used by Schaller and Cialdini (1988). In the first, participants were given an opportunity to help a same-sex peer by taking electric shocks in his or her stead; in the second, participants could volunteer to spend time helping a young woman struggling to support her younger brother and sister after the tragic death of her parents.

Results of these two studies both conformed to the pattern in the bottom half of Table 4 predicted by the empathy-altruism hypothesis, not the pattern predicted by the negative-state relief explanation. Attempts to test other versions of the empathy-specific reward explanation have also tended to support the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson, et al., 1988; but see Smith, Keating, & Stotland, 1989).

Table 4
Predictions From Negative-State Relief Version of Empathy-Specific Reward Explanation and Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis in Anticipated Mood Enhancement \times Empathy Design

Anticipated mood enhancement	Empathy	
	Low	High
Negative-State Relief Explanation		
No	Low	High
Yes	Low	Low
Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis		
No	Low	High
Yes	Low	High

Given the disagreement and contradictory results, it is probably too soon to draw a firm conclusion regarding the truth of the empathy-specific reward explanation. I believe that an objective assessment of the evidence to date suggests that this explanation is probably wrong, but of course I may be the one who is wrong.

If this third egoistic alternative does turn out to be wrong, then I believe the evidence is very strong indeed that the ultimate goal of empathically aroused helpers is to increase the welfare of the person for whom they feel empathy, as the empathy-altruism hypothesis claims. If the empathy-altruism hypothesis is true, then I think we must radically revise our views of the human capacity for caring. For to say that we are capable of being altruistically motivated is to say that we can care about others' welfare as a terminal not just an instrumental value. We can seek their welfare for their sakes and not simply for our own. If this is true, then we are far more social animals than our psychological theories, including our most social social-psychological theories, would lead us to believe.

Limits on Our Caring for Others

Having mentioned the evidence that leads me now to think we are capable of caring for others for their sake and not just our own, let me add two important qualifiers. One involves the scope of empathy; the other, competing concerns.

1. *The Scope of Empathy*

All the research I have mentioned suggests that our capacity for altruistic caring is limited to those for whom we feel empathy. In study after study, when empathy for the person in need is low, the pattern of helping suggests underlying egoistic motivation. It is not that we never help people for whom we feel little empathy; we often do. However, the research to date suggests that we only do so when it is in our own best interest. We care for them instrumentally rather than terminally.

Other sources of altruistic caring besides empathic feeling for the person in need have been proposed. These potential sources include an "altruistic personality" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Rushton, 1980; Staub, 1974), principled moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1976; Staub, 1974), and internalized prosocial values (Batson, 1989; Schwartz & Howard, 1984; Staub, 1989). Although there is some evidence that these potential sources are associated with increased prosocial behavior, there is, as yet, no clear evidence that the underlying motivation is altruistic. Instead, what little experimental evidence exists suggests that the care for others associated with these sources is instrumental not terminal (see Batson, Bolen, Cross, & Neuringer-Benefiel, 1986). So, if there are sources of altruistic caring other than empathy, they are yet to be found.

Given this first qualifier, a question immediately arises: How easy is it for us to become empathically aroused by another person's plight? As far as I know, we have no clear answer to this question. But if empathy is a source (perhaps *the* source) of altruistic motivation, then

we need a careful and extensive investigation to provide an answer.

On reflection, there certainly seem to be strong forces working against the arousal of empathy. These include anything and everything that makes it difficult for us to attend to or value another person's welfare: self-preoccupation or absorption in an ongoing task; seeing the other as an object or "thing," as a statistic and not a person who cares about his or her own welfare; seeing the other as a person but as different from ourselves, as one of "them" not "us," as Black not White, a man not a woman, Arab not Jew, Catholic not Protestant. Under the influence of such forces we can find ourselves, like Rousseau's (1788/1945) princess, responding to those who have no bread by coolly suggesting that they eat cake instead. As James (1890) said, they "can be hanged for aught we care." The Holocaust reminds us how true these words can be.

Yet, in spite of these pressures against empathy, we seem to have a remarkable capacity to get involved and invested in the welfare of others. In our studies, simply exposing undergraduates facing no other pressing demands to a peer's suffering, a peer whom they have not seen before and need never see again, seems sufficient to evoke considerable empathy. More generally, think about our capacity to feel for characters in novels, movies, and on TV. We may have known these characters only for minutes, and we know they are fictitious. Still, we find ourselves churning inside when they are in danger, yearning when they are in need, and weeping over their losses and successes. If we are general-purpose robots, then we are ones who are quite susceptible to value reprogramming to the welfare of others.

Some psychologists have suggested that our empathic emotions and caring responses have a genetic base in the response of mammalian parents to their helpless offspring (e.g., Hoffman, 1981a; MacLean, 1973; McDougall, 1908). If this is true, then it is apparently also true that we can cognitively "adopt" a wide range of nonkin, bringing them under our umbrella of care. Indeed, often it seems that we must take steps to avoid feeling empathy, whether for the homeless, those starving in Africa and Cambodia, or refugees from Central America. Lest we feel too much, we turn the corner, switch channels, flip the page, or think of something else. Could this apparent necessity to defend ourselves against feeling empathy be a clue to the magnitude of our capacity to care?

2. *Competing Concerns*

The second qualifier is that, although we seem to have a sizable capacity to care for others, we clearly also care for ourselves. In one study, my colleagues and I found that if the cost of helping was high (taking high-level shocks that are "clearly painful but of course not harmful"), the motivation even of individuals who had previously reported high empathy for the person in need appeared to be egoistic (Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983, Study 3). This finding led us to suggest that concern for others is "a fragile flower, easily crushed

by self-concern" (p. 718). There seems little doubt that even if we have concern for others, we often do not act on it. It is overridden by other, more pressing concerns.

Of course, this is not all bad. Our lives would be decidedly awkward if we were looking out only for others' concerns and not our own. It would be, as I believe one philosopher suggested, like a community in which everyone tried to do each others' washing. No one's washing would get done.

I do not think we need to worry too much that our concern for others will override self-concern to this degree. It seems more likely that we need to worry about protecting and nurturing the fragile flower of altruistic caring. Before we can do this, however, we need to know the flower is there. Psychology, including social psychology, has assumed that it is not. I hope I have convinced you that it does exist or, at a minimum, that it is worth taking a careful look to see whether it exists.

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