

# **EMBRACING THE OTHER**

**PHILOSOPHICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND  
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ALTRUISM**

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## PREDICTING PROSOCIAL COMMITMENT IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL CONTEXTS

*Leo Montada*

Research on altruism is concerned with highly different predicaments and, consequently, with very different activities. Prosocial behavior may involve readiness to give away a small coin, donating bone marrow, helping a car driver with a flat tire, consoling people in pain and sorrow, or rescuing the politically persecuted. Schneider (1988) lists forty-four different actions used in empirical research on helping that are quite different with regard to costs incurred as well as riskiness.

It might be that all altruistic acts are based on a common facet of motivation and a common basic attitude toward other people in need. Some definitions of altruism state that the helper intends to benefit another; some add as constituents that the helper acts voluntarily and that he or she is not motivated to gain external rewards. However, we cannot expect that all the capabilities needed for effective helping, all motives, attitudes, and internal and external barriers against granting help, and all personal and social norms and responsibilities will be identical for all helping behaviors. Moreover, granting help as well as asking for and refusing help take place in social interactions and social contexts, making it necessary to consider the kind of relationship between the potential helper and the needy as well as the kind of social system both belong to, and so forth. Social contexts are very important in facilitating or preventing help. Experimental research on altruism in the laboratory rarely has taken the influence of social systems into account. Aspects of social systems such as role ex-

pectancies, status, norms, prejudices, solidarities, responsibilities, and so forth make it difficult to design experiments that are ecologically valid.

The studies reported in this chapter were concerned with two very different kinds of social relationships between potential helpers and the needy. In the first, the people needing help were not personally known to the subject; in the second, benefactor and recipient were involved in close relationships, namely that of adult daughters toward their mothers. The kind of relationship made a difference with respect to the motivation and structure of prosocial activities.

### STUDY I: MOTIVATION UNDERLYING PROSOCIAL COMMITMENTS TO THE DISADVANTAGED

There is poverty in all societies; there is child abuse and maltreatment of elderly people; there are seriously ill, bereaved, and handicapped people, battered women and crime victims, and politically persecuted refugees and emigrants seeking to escape economic privation. The reactions of people to the "fate" of those suffering such hardships range from prosocial commitment to indifference, derogation, and blame (Ryan 1971). Some individuals and groups fight for the entitlement of the disadvantaged; others oppose such prosocial overtures; and a rather passive majority assumedly believe it is a matter for the government, the churches, and so forth. The following questions were posed in this series of studies: What are the cognitive, emotional, and prosocial responses of relatively privileged subjects to the problems and needs of less fortunate people with whom the subjects are not personally acquainted? What are the predictors of prosocial commitment to various groups of disadvantaged people?

Data presented in this chapter were taken from a study concerned with unemployed people, poor people in developing countries, and foreign (Turkish) workers in Germany. These groups are only a small sample of people suffering hardships all over the world. We expected that emotional responses to the less fortunate would be a key to the analysis of motivations underlying prosocial (and nonprosocial) behavior. Among the various emotions people might experience when they confront individuals less fortunate than themselves, we assessed *sympathy for the needy, existential guilt, moral outrage, anger, fear of losing one's own advantages, con-*

tentment with one's own better life, and hopelessness concerning the fate of the needy. Three "prosocial" emotions expected to motivate prosocial actions—sympathy, existential guilt, and moral outrage—were contrasted with the four other emotions, which were expected to interfere with prosocial commitments.

As potential antecedents, we assessed a variety of variables, including *social attitudes* toward the less fortunate, *appraisals* of the causation and responsibility for the existence of disadvantages, appraisals of *injustice*, belief in a just world (Lerner 1980), and two principles of distributive justice—the equity principle and the need principle.

As potential consequences of the emotions, we assessed *attributions of responsibility to support the needy* to either oneself or to powerful others, and *readiness for prosocial commitment* to the disadvantaged. Several forms of prosocial commitment were distinguished: charitable ones, like spending money or joining a helping group, and more political ones, such as signing a petition demanding that political leaders do something to improve the lot of the disadvantaged, and participating in a demonstration for similar aims. We will first outline conceptualizations of these emotions on which we focused, and their expected differential impact on prosocial actions.

### Existential Guilt

Not everybody is able to feel happy about being the one who survived a disaster, was released from prison, was freed from repression, escaped persecutors, or lives on the sunny side of the world. Some of these "lucky" people experience feelings of guilt, as was observed, for example, in survivors from concentrations camps (Von Baeyer, Haefner, and Kisker 1964) and Hiroshima, and in those returning from Korean captivity (Lifton 1967).

Feelings of guilt are easy to understand in close relationships in which we consider the well-being of loved ones of equal or even greater importance than our own. Relative privilege is neither aimed at nor appreciated in these relationships. Sharing goods, or even giving more to loved ones is typical. To receive a relative privilege may be experienced as infringing on solidarity, love, or responsibility, and thus will not be enjoyed. We may well grant priority to a loved one if he or she were persecuted, helping even at the risk of our own life. But do we feel the same way toward

people outside close relationships? What was assessed as existential guilt toward strangers in this study is merely a pale reflection of the guilt feelings some people may experience when close relatives or friends suffer. However, with reference to Hoffman (1976), we expected people to experience existential guilt vis-à-vis socially distant individuals and even strangers, when they did not feel that their own advantages were not deserved compared to the disadvantages of others, provided the others were perceived as needy, and they were not excluded subjectively from the potential helper's own community of responsibility (Deutsch 1985), in which members' entitlements are acknowledged not only on the basis of equity but also on the basis of their needs. Finally, perceiving a causal relationship between one's own advantages and the disadvantages of others, and, therefore, a kind of responsibility for the existence of their needs, was expected to contribute to the arousal of guilt feelings.

Those who perceive the differences between people as unjust acknowledge that the needy are entitled to receive support, and, consequently, are expected to favor reallocations of resources. But who considers the disadvantages of others unjust? Probably those who prefer the need principle. The nature of people's relationship to those who are needy partly determines which principle of distributive justice is perceived as adequate. As hypothesized by Deutsch (1985) and empirically corroborated in several studies (Schmitt and Montada 1982; for a review see Tornblom and Jonsen 1985), preferences for principles of justice depend on the social context: in a business context, competition is the dominant kind of relationship, and, therefore, the equity principle tends to be favored. In close relationships (friendship, family), the equality or the need principle is often considered more adequate. This way of thinking is not compatible with an illusionary belief in a just world that is defended by derogating victims and by blaming the disadvantaged for having self-inflicted their needs (Lerner 1980). As we know from several lines of research, responsibility for helping victims is warded off if their hardship is perceived as self-inflicted or deserved (Ryan 1971; Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin 1969; Ickes and Kidd 1976). Schwartz (1977) assumed that a tendency to deny responsibility arises when help is costly.

In a previous study (Montada, Schmitt, and Dalbert 1986), we demonstrated that existential guilt toward needy people is most prevalent in subjects who consider the need principle just, who

consider the equity principle unjust, and who believe that they have at least some potential to contribute to a redistribution. Belief in a just world and denial of responsibility for the needy reduce the probability of feeling guilty.

#### **Moral Outrage Because of Unjust Disadvantages**

Another emotion expected to motivate prosocial commitment is moral indignation or outrage. While existential guilt implies self-blame, moral outrage is directed toward someone else or to an institution perceived as having violated moral norms, human rights, or the entitlements of individuals. Many aggressive acts, many political protest movements, and many revolts and revolutions are motivated by moral outrage. Many of the riots by blacks were precipitated by a crime committed against a black by white people, a crime that was not prosecuted by the police and not brought to trial in a legal court (Lieberson and Silverman 1965). When open protest is dangerous because the adversary is powerful, moral outrage is combined with fear, which may result in (silent) hate (Montada and Boll 1988). When outrage overcomes fear, it may motivate the taking of risks. In totalitarian systems, it may motivate people to join resistance movements. Certainly, moral outrage motivates retaliation. Does it also motivate help and support to people who are unjustly in need?

Interpreting the observations by Keniston (1968) and Haan (1975) on the engagement of American youth in the civil rights movement and the movement to end the war in Vietnam during the 1960s, Hoffman (1976) suggested that many of the educated white students from middle-class families living in wealth and security were motivated by existential guilt feelings. If they were convinced that the majority culture or the government was to blame for the injustices toward the black population or the continuation of an unjust war in Vietnam, the motivation might also—or even more so—have been moral outrage.

Conceptually, the motivational impact of moral outrage on corrective helping is not unequivocal, because the focus of this emotion is less on the victim than on the perpetrator. Different categories of prosocial activity must be distinguished. Perhaps outrage primarily motivates retaliation, blame, or punishment toward the harmdoer, rather than support or help for the victim.

Yet, help has many faces. There is “downstream” helping, such

as charity or rescuing people; there is “upstream” helping, focusing on prevention, and sometimes including efforts to change the social system or, at least, established policies. The latter form may involve opposing and blaming those who are perceived as being responsible for the existence of need and hardship, and this form, at least, could be motivated by moral outrage.

Opposing a powerful adversary also may offer a motivational basis for helping and rescuing victims, especially if there is no actual behavioral choice between retaliation against the perpetrator and support for the victims. In the case of socially disadvantaged people, one may ask what is preferred: directly supporting the needy or blaming those who are responsible and demanding that they support the needy. Both kinds of prosocial activity were assessed in the present study.

The antecedents and correlates of moral outrage were expected to be much the same as those for existential guilt, with one major exception: whereas guilt implies the attribution of responsibility to oneself for the existence of and for the remedy of others' needs, outrage implies the attribution of responsibility to others.

#### **Sympathy for the Disadvantaged**

Conceptually, sympathy implies a concern for another person in which one shares his or her negative feelings. This concept and its operationalization correspond to Hoffman's concept of sympathetic distress and Batson's concept of empathy. Hoffman (1976) distinguished several levels in the development of empathy, ranging from an egocentric affection to a mature sympathetic distress, which is an other-centered concern based on a developed role-taking capacity enabling individuals to consider the problems and stressors of others within the framework of their life situation. Analyzing reactions to people in distress, Batson (e.g., Batson, Fultz, and Schoenrade 1987) distinguished between personal (unsympathetic) distress and empathy (distress resulting from a true concern for others) as two qualitatively distinct emotions with different motivational consequences.

Sympathy, as assessed in the present study, refers to compassionate perception of the needs or misery of others. However, sympathy does not seem to be “granted” to everybody in distress, and it does not seem to be granted in every situation. Again, as anticipated for existential guilt and moral outrage, social attitudes ex-

pressing social distance or closeness should be predictive; for example, it is not likely that we feel sympathy for adversaries or enemies.

In contrast to guilt and outrage, sympathy does not imply perceived injustice. However, if a bad fate were considered self-inflicted or deserved, this would interfere with the arousal of sympathy (see Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin 1969). Whether a character in a movie who is going to be hanged deserves this fate or not is crucial for our emotional response: we either react with sympathy for the "victim" and outrage toward his "murderers" or with moral satisfaction about the punishment of his crime. In the case of less fortunate people such as the unemployed, the perception of self-infliction may depend on beliefs and views of justice. The assumption of self-infliction may help defend an illusionary belief in a just world, and the equity principle may suggest that the misery is a just consequence of poor achievements. Thus, it was expected that sympathy would be less likely in subjects who score high on belief in a just world, on acceptance of the equity principle, and on appraisals of self-infliction, whereas perception of injustice and a positive view of the need principle might also be a breeding ground for sympathy just as for guilt and outrage.

What are the conceptual differences between sympathy and the other two prosocial emotions, and what are the differences in terms of their antecedents? Unlike existential guilt, sympathy neither implies a sense of responsibility to support the needy, nor does it presuppose the cognition of having violated a moral rule. Consequently, it was not expected that sympathy would be predicted by the variable perception of a (causal) relationship between one's own advantages and the needs of others. Unlike moral outrage, sympathy neither presupposes the acknowledgment that the needy are entitled to get support, nor does it involve blaming an agent or an agency for the existence and the remedy of needs. Unfortunately, neither of these variables was directly represented in the antecedents assessed in this study.

#### Emotions Expected to Interfere with Prosocial Commitment

The other four emotions assessed were not expected to motivate prosocial or altruistic actions. Anger at the disadvantaged should occur when they are blamed for either having self-inflicted their fate or for not having tried hard enough to improve their situation.

Angry blame interferes with readiness to support and help. Expressions of contentment vis-à-vis people living in misery represent an egocentric view of one's own situation, made positive by downward comparison, not a concern for the needy. Fear of losing one's own advantages as a consequence of the misery of others also represents an egocentric concern. Although this kind of fear may motivate prosocial activities, such activities cannot be considered altruistically motivated. In the case of hopelessness concerning the future of the disadvantaged, any prosocial activity would be considered futile.

#### Method

Methodological aspects are described very briefly. More comprehensive descriptions can be found in Montada and Schneider (1988, 1989).

*Subjects.* Eight hundred and sixty-five subjects took part in this study. The sample contained several subsamples who were privileged by education (university students), by wealth (people from wealthy neighborhoods and employers), or by social security (civil servants in tenured positions). Ages of subjects ranged from eighteen to eighty-six ( $M = 36$ ). Fifty-nine percent of the sample was male, 41 percent female. Subjects with higher education were somewhat overrepresented (68 percent graduated from high school).

*Operationalization of Concepts.* Many of the core variables were assessed with the Existential Guilt Inventory (ESI) (Montada, Schmitt, and Dalbert 1986). In this inventory, respondents are confronted with written scenarios describing problems and needs of disadvantaged people. There are three scenarios for each of three groups of disadvantaged people (unemployed, foreign workers, poor people in the developing countries). The constructs assessed by the ESI include the following: (1) emotions: sympathy for the disadvantaged, existential guilt, outrage because of unjust differences, anger about the disadvantaged, contentment with one's own advantages, and hopelessness regarding an improvement in the lot of the needy; (2) cognitive appraisals of justice and responsibility: perceived injustice of differences, perception of a causal interrelatedness between one's own advantages and the disadvantages of

the needy, perception of disadvantages as self-inflicted, perception of one's own advantages as justified and deserved, feelings of responsibility to act prosocially, and attribution of responsibility to act prosocially to powerful others or institutions.

Constructs were represented by statements that were rated on six-point scales expressing the degree to which the statements corresponded to the respondents' own feelings or cognitions. A nine-item scale was formulated for each construct (one item for each of the three scenarios for each of the three groups of disadvantaged people). Subjects' scores were their mean scores on these nine items. Usual procedures for testing homogeneity and reliability were applied to evaluate the quality of the scales. Further concepts were assessed with several newly developed scales, including a scale to measure Lerner's belief in a just world (Dalbert, Montada, and Schmitt 1987), scales to assess views on principles of distributive justice (especially the equity principle and the need principle), and two scales to measure attitudes toward the three groups of disadvantaged people in terms of attributing positive or negative traits to them. All scales had adequate homogeneity and consistency according to usual psychometric criteria.

Readiness for prosocial commitment also was assessed by items asking about willingness (1) to spend money, (2) to sign a petition addressed to the government, (3) to participate in a demonstration, and (4) to join an activity group. Each of these four types of prosocial activities was represented by two items for each of the three groups of disadvantaged people.

*Validity of Self-Report Data.* The validity of a subset of responses given by the subjects was tested by sampling external ratings of friends, acquaintances, or relatives. These external ratings correlated fairly highly with the subjects' answers (the self-reports) (e.g., correlations for six tested variables of the ESI varied between  $r = .39$  and  $r = .52$ ;  $M = 46.7$ ), indicating that these answers indeed reflected a core of truth (Schneider et al. 1987).

*Longitudinal Replication.* The study was replicated with about half of the sample several months after the first wave of data collection. The replication was performed to explore (a) the stability of interindividual differences, (b) the stability of the relationships among variables, and (c) systematic changes. Overall, the stability of interindividual differences and relationships among variables

**Table 10.1**

Multiple Regression from Readiness to Prosocial Activities on Emotions, Existential Guilt, Moral Outrage, Sympathy, Anger, Fear, Contentment, and Hopelessness, Aggregated Across All Nine Situations for All Three Groups of Disadvantaged People ( $N = 807$ )

| Predictors   | rcrit | beta | b    | Fb     |
|--|-------|------|------|--------|
| Moral outrage  | .53   | .41  | .36  | 135.99 |
| Existential guilt  | .44   | .24  | .20  | 47.97  |
| Contentment  | -.06  | -.10 | -.10 | 10.60  |
| Hopelessness   | -.01  | -.10 | -.10 | 10.53  |
| (intercept)  |       | 2.57 |      |        |
| multiple $R = .57$ ; $R^2 = .33$ ; $F_{total} = 98.71$ ; $pF = .001$ |       |      |      |        |

Adapted from Table V in Montada and Schneider (1989).

was high. Most of the correlations (zero-order as well as multiple) were higher in the replication study. Data reported here, however, were taken from the first wave.

#### **Results and Discussion: Motivation for Prosocial Commitment to the Disadvantaged—Sympathy or Morality?**

The results of the study are presented and discussed mainly with respect to the motivation underlying prosocial commitment as it is indicated by emotional responses. Further aspects, such as the prediction of emotional responses and differences between groups with different demographic characteristics or political orientations, are mentioned only for the purpose of clarifying the meaning and the motivational impact of emotions.

Overall, 33 percent of the variance in prosocial commitment was accounted for by the emotions assessed (in the replication study, the quota was 40 percent). Table 10.1 shows the results for subjects over all four forms of prosocial commitment. Table 10.2 shows the results for each of these four forms separately. A closer look at the results reveals a somewhat surprising fact that may offer some new perspectives on prosocial commitment. The best predictor was not sympathy for the needy (only reaching significance for "spending money"), but, rather, moral outrage about the unjustness of differences between the privileged (the social stratum the subjects themselves belonged to) and the disadvantaged, followed by existential guilt because of one's own relative advantages.



**Table 10.2**

Multiple Regression from Different Forms of Prosocial Activities on the Emotions Guilt, Moral Outrage, Sympathy, Anger, Fear, Contentment, and Hopelessness Aggregated Across All Nine Items for All Three Groups of Disadvantaged People ( $791 \leq N \leq 799$ , Accepted Models  $pFb \leq .05$ )

| Criterion                               | Predictors   | rcrit | beta | b    | Fb     |
|---|--|-------|------|------|--------|
| <b>Spending money</b>                   | Moral outrage  | .42   | .26  | .26  | 34.84  |
|   | Existential guilt  | .39   | .25  | .22  | 40.52  |
|   | Hopelessness   | -.04  | -.11 | -.13 | 10.71  |
|   | Fear   | -.05  | -.09 | -.10 | 7.20   |
|   | Sympathy   | .35   | .09  | .11  | 4.30   |
|   | (intercept)  |       |      | 2.80 |        |
|   | multiple $R = .49$ ; $R^2 = .24$ ; $F_{total} = 49.36$ ; $pF_{total} < .01$  |       |      |      |        |
| <b>Signing a petition</b>               | Moral outrage  | .50   | .39  | .44  | 114.79 |
|   | Anger  | -.28  | -.14 | -.15 | 18.67  |
|   | Existential guilt  | .38   | .15  | .15  | 16.31  |
|   | Contentment  | -.09  | -.08 | -.11 | 6.78   |
|   | (intercept)  |       |      | 2.43 |        |
|   | multiple $R = .54$ ; $R^2 = .30$ ; $F_{total} = 83.39$ ; $pF_{total} < .001$ |       |      |      |        |
| <b>Participation in a demonstration</b> | Moral outrage  | .44   | .35  | .39  | 84.02  |
|   | Contentment  | -.13  | -.16 | -.21 | 26.54  |
|   | Existential guilt  | .33   | .14  | .15  | 13.18  |
|   | Fear   | .20   | .07  | .09  | 4.00   |
|   | (intercept)  |       |      | 2.67 |        |
|   | multiple $R = .48$ ; $R^2 = .23$ ; $F_{total} = 60.55$ ; $pF_{total} < .001$ |       |      |      |        |
| <b>Activity within a group</b>          | Moral outrage  | .38   | .26  | .28  | 45.24  |
|   | Existential guilt  | .35   | .20  | .20  | 25.21  |
|   | Hopelessness   | .01   | -.09 | -.12 | 6.93   |
|   | Fear   | .19   | .08  | .09  | 4.64   |
|   | (intercept)  |       |      | 2.27 |        |
|   | multiple $R = .43$ ; $R^2 = .19$ ; $F_{total} = 44.91$ ; $pF_{total} < .01$  |       |      |      |        |

Adapted from Table VI in Montada and Schneider (1989).

Negative contributions to the variance in prosocial commitment came from contentment with one's own advantages and hopelessness concerning the future fate of the needy (see table 10.1). When specific forms were used as criteria (table 10.2), fear of losing one's own advantages and anger about the disadvantaged also were among the significant predictors.

The negative effects of these emotions are easy to understand. Anger implies blaming the disadvantaged for having self-inflicted their problems, or for failing to exert enough effort to reduce them. Attributing responsibility to the disadvantaged for the existence and remedy of their needs interferes with assuming responsibility. Hopelessness concerning the future of the disadvantaged should paralyze any activity aimed at improving their lot. Contentment with one's own situation and fear of losing one's own advantages frequently reflects an egocentric justification of one's own advantages that interferes with acknowledging the needy's entitlement to support.

Fear of losing one's own advantages had a significant negative effect on spending money, but was positively related to two other forms of prosocial activity (table 10.2). This seemingly contradictory result may mean—as argued above—that fear of losing one's own advantages is not unambiguous with respect to the motivation underlying prosocial activities. While it basically represents an egocentric concern and not a concern for needy others, it may motivate activities in support of the needy with the ultimate goal of reducing the danger that huge disadvantages of others may lead to a destabilization of the social structure and thus jeopardize the subject's own situation.

Overall, the impact of the prosocial emotions was relatively high. The theoretically and practically most interesting finding was that moral outrage and guilt had much more impact than sympathy. This was a stable result, replicated longitudinally, and bivariate correlations between sympathy and readiness to prosocial commitment were strong, significant, and positive. This does not contradict the results of the multivariate analyses in which sympathy had low or insignificant effects (in the longitudinal replication, even negative effects) because both guilt ( $r = .45$ ) and moral outrage ( $r = .53$ ) were correlated with sympathy. Conceptually, it makes sense to assume that sympathy is a fertile soil, if not a prerequisite, for both of these emotions: it is doubtful we may feel existential guilt or outrage when we do not feel empathy for people suffering hardships. For instance, if our enemies suffer, we neither feel guilty nor outraged, but, rather, morally satisfied.

But guilt and outrage have other components. Conceptually, both imply (1) the perception that disadvantages are unjust and (2) attributions of responsibility for their existence and remedy. In the case of guilt, attributions are made to the subjects themselves;

in the case of outrage they are made to others who are held responsible. Conceptually, sympathy does not imply perceiving the needy to be entitled to obtain support, which does not contradict the assumption that perceiving injustice makes sympathy for the needy more likely. If acknowledging these entitlements contributes to the motivation underlying prosocial activities, this might explain why the predictive impact of guilt and outrage (1) included that of sympathy and (2) exceeded it. This also might be why sympathy did not contribute independently to the prediction of prosocial activities.

These conceptual differentiations between sympathy, existential guilt, and moral outrage could be tested only partially in this study. The predictor variables assessed and the zero-order correlations between the emotions were similar for all three prosocial emotions. However, since the predictors were correlated, multivariate analyses were more appropriate for identifying the differential associations. A comprehensive presentation of the results of these analyses would require considerable space. Only one table is presented showing the partial correlations of the three prosocial emotions with three responsibility-related variables (table 10.4). The interpretation, however, is based on an extended series of multivariate analyses (Montada and Schneider 1988, 1989).

In a path analysis with eleven predictors, controlling for social desirability (table 10.3), existential guilt was consistently related to (1) perceived injustice of the discrepancies between one's own advantages and the disadvantages of others, and (2) perception of a (causal) relationship between one's own advantages and the disadvantages of others (e.g., the poverty in the developing countries is also caused by the imbalances in prices for raw products and industrial products; or job sharing or giving up a second job would provide employment opportunities for others). This second variable represents the appraisal of one's responsibility for the existence of the unjust disadvantages of others. There were indirect effects mediated by these two predictors: endorsing the need principle in allocations was positively related to attitudes toward the disadvantaged, endorsing the equity principle and "belief in a just world" was negatively related. Existential guilt was strongly related to a sense of responsibility to support the needy.

It is easy to grasp the psychological meaning of existential guilt feelings suggested by this pattern of correlations: respondents reporting existential guilt perceive both the disadvantages of the

Table 10.3

Partial Correlations ( $p < .01$ ), Social Desirability Partialled Out, between Emotional Responses and Several Categories of Predictors<sup>1</sup> ( $N = 765$ )

| Predictors   | Existential<br>Guilt | Moral<br>Outrage | Sympathy | Emotions |                 |             | Hopelessness |
|--|----------------------|------------------|----------|----------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|
|  |                      |                  |          | Anger    | Fear<br>of loss | Contentment |              |
| <i>Appraisals of justice and responsibility</i>                          |                      |                  |          |          |                 |             |              |
| Perceived injustice of differences                                       | .50                  | .63              | .57      | -.40     | .13             | .12         | .06*         |
| Perceived self-infliction of disadvantages                               | -.26                 | -.34             | -.27     | .79      | .08*            | .29         | .09          |
| Justification of own advantages  | -.23                 | -.27             | -.22     | .71      | .07*            | .38         | .12          |
| Perceived interrelatedness of own advantages and disadvantages of others | .50                  | .56              | .43      | -.36     | .31             | -.01**      | .14          |
| Perceived own responsibility for help                                    | .61                  | .55              | .52      | -.02**   | .15             | .13         | -.03**       |
| Attribution of responsibility for help to powerful others                | .23                  | .43              | .39      | .04**    | .26             | .19         | .21          |
| <i>Background variables</i>  |                      |                  |          |          |                 |             |              |
| Belief in a just world, general  | -.07                 | -.15             | -.08*    | .34      | -.04**          | .18         | -.15         |
| Belief in a just world, specific   | -.30                 | -.40             | -.35     | .67      | -.04**          | .16         | .02**        |
| View of the equity principle   | -.25                 | -.36             | -.23     | .69      | -.01**          | .28         | .10          |
| View of the need principle   | .44                  | .58              | .55      | -.33     | .17             | .00*        | .09          |
| Positive attitudes toward the disadvantaged                              | .31                  | .41              | .36      | -.35     | .05**           | -.05**      | -.02**       |
| Negative attitudes toward the disadvantaged                              | -.20                 | -.28             | -.28     | .51      | .08*            | .15         | .07*         |

\*.01 <  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p > .05$

<sup>1</sup>Scale with items related to the three groups of disadvantaged addressed in this study.



**Table 10.4**  
Partial Correlation Coefficients of the Three Prosocial Emotions  
Existential Guilt, Sympathy, and Moral Outrage with Three  
Responsibility Variables ( $N = 818$ )

|                     | Causal Interrelatedness<br>of Fates | Attribution of Responsibility<br>for Supporting the Needy: |                    |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
|                     |                                     | To oneself   | To powerful others |
| Existential guilt** | .26                                 | .43  | -.04*              |
| Moral outrage**     | .32                                 | .26  | .20                |
| Sympathy**          | .02*                                | .16  | .20                |

\*  $p > .01$

\*\*The other two prosocial emotions are partialled out.

Adapted from Table VIII in Montada and Schneider (1989).

needy and their own relative advantages as being related and as unjust. They tend to think that goods (wealth, security, jobs, and so forth) should be distributed according to the needs of the recipients, instead of merely following the equity principle, which means proportional to achievements and merits.

Invoking the need principle when confronted with disadvantaged people or victims means that these people are included in the community of those with whom the respondent is concerned and for whom he or she feels responsible. Enjoying huge advantages oneself is not without problems. The fact that positive attitudes toward the disadvantaged were included in the pattern of predictors of existential guilt supports this interpretation. Those who experience existential guilt feel responsible for supporting the needy.

The predictor pattern for moral outrage was very similar to that of existential guilt. The differences between the two emotions became obvious when the subjects were asked, "Who is responsible for improving the fate of the disadvantaged: the respondents themselves or powerful others?" While existential guilt was related only to the first alternative (subjects themselves felt responsible), moral outrage was related to both alternatives (see table 10.4), but much more weakly than guilt was to the first one. This corroborates the abovementioned view that outrage implies blaming others.

There was also considerable overlap between sympathy and the two other prosocial emotions in the pattern of predictors. In the conceptual analysis, sympathy was not assumed to be based on the acknowledgment of the entitlements of the needy, while both

moral outrage and existential guilt were. Using the set of predictors assessed in this study, acknowledgment of the entitlements of the needy can be derived from (1) perceived injustice of disadvantages, (2) the need principle of justice, and (3) the perception of a (causal) relationship between one's own advantages and the disadvantages of others. While, empirically, sympathy was significantly related to the first and the second of these cognitive appraisals, it was not related to the third when partial correlations were considered (see table 10.4). This pattern supports the conceptual analysis.

In contrast to guilt and outrage, multiple regression analyses revealed that sympathy also was positively correlated with the equity principle. That seems somewhat contradictory, because arguments based on the equity principle may deny the entitlements of the needy, and this may interfere with prosocial commitment. With respect to responsibility for supporting the disadvantaged, sympathy was similar to outrage: both differed from guilt insofar as they were less strongly related to self-attributions of responsibility, and more strongly related to perceived responsibility of powerful others.

Moral outrage due to the unjust differences within and between societies was by far the best single predictor of prosocial commitments. This was especially true for political activities such as participation in a demonstration, signing a petition aimed at drawing attention to the fate of the disadvantaged, and blaming government and society for unjust policies. For the remaining two forms of political activity, the predictor weights were lower (table 10.2). In line with this evidence, members and supporters of the "Greens" in Germany—a left-wing protest party with a rather radical program of equality that supports needy and socially deprived people—scored significantly higher on moral outrage and readiness for political activities in favor of the disadvantaged than members and supporters of conservative parties.

The patterns of correlation among the three prosocial emotions within the network of variables included in this study do not offer a completely convincing explanation of why sympathy was less predictive of prosocial commitment than outrage. Yet, there are hints that sympathy does not imply the acknowledgment of entitlements of the needy.

On a conceptual level, it is easy to see how the three prosocial emotions differ in their impact on prosocial commitment. While guilt and outrage reflect the morality of a person, this is not nec-

essarily the case for sympathy. Guilt and outrage are based on the notion that individuals feel that moral norms, which they experience as mandatory oughts, are being violated. Guilt is experienced when respondents themselves feel they have neglected their moral norms (at least by doing nothing to reduce injustice); outrage is experienced when another person or institution is blamed. Neglect of a moral ought is not a prerequisite for sympathy, even if blaming the needy and perceiving their hardship as deserved may interfere with the arousal of sympathy (Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin 1969).

The best interpretation of the findings in this study might be that prosocial commitment toward the disadvantaged was motivated primarily by the "moral" emotions outrage and guilt, which were more compelling than sympathy in motivating readiness to reduce injustice. Overall, justice-related variables (emotions, appraisals, need and equity principles, and belief in a just world) exert stronger effects on prosocial commitment than general positive and negative attitudes toward the needy.

These results will not necessarily generalize to other situations and contexts, such as when people have personal contact or are acquainted with the needy. One has to be especially cautious when generalizing to prosocial behavior in close relationships. In relationships that Melvin Lerner calls "identity relationships" (Lerner and Whitehead 1980), justice is not a salient issue. The well-being of a loved one is aimed at or appreciated without considering whether or not justice is maintained. Indeed, when justice becomes an issue in close relationships, the relationship may no longer be "very close." We have data on prosocial behavior in families showing that sympathy and love are significant motivators. We turn to this study now.

## **STUDY II: PROSOCIAL COMMITMENTS IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

This study investigated prosocial activities of adult children toward their parents (Cicirelli 1991; Schneewind forthcoming). To assure homogeneity of the sample, only adult daughters were included. We chose adult daughters because when a mother is living alone and needs care, her daughter usually assumes responsibility. This type of caretaking was one main interest in the study.

Although we were primarily interested in the analysis of care-

taking for disabled mothers, we also included younger cohorts of daughters in the study whose mothers were not disabled, and who, consequently, were faced with quite different needs. Actually, a variety of prosocial activities in addition to caring and nursing a disabled mother were observed and analyzed. This was done to explore whether different needs and prosocial activities require different patterns of predictors. We can state in advance that although the dominant needs and desires of the old and young mothers varied quite considerably, the pattern of predictors was remarkably consistent across the age periods and across different categories of need-related activities. This makes it possible to present the results for the entire sample of respondents.

## **Predictor Variables of Prosocial Commitment**

A wide range of variables was assessed as predictors, including several known in social psychology as "determinants" of prosocial behavior, either in general (Bierhoff 1980) or within the context of the family (Schmitt and Gehle 1983). They belonged to the following categories:

1. traitlike variables: generalized empathy (Schmitt 1982), denial of responsibility (Schwartz 1977) (two scales assessing the tendency to refuse responsibility for elderly people in general);
2. social relations in the family: cohesion, control, and the quality of the daughter-mother dyad in the sense of mutual love (Cicirelli 1983);
3. past habitual prosocial activities toward the mother (Harris 1972; Bentler and Speckart 1979);
4. general attitudes toward prosocial behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Benninghaus 1976);
5. normative beliefs, meaning personal norms, as understood by Schwartz (1977), of complying with specific desires and needs (Cicirelli 1983);
6. cognitive appraisals of the situation with respect to specific desires and needs: costs of complying (e.g., Lang and Brody 1983), legitimacy of the wishes of the mother (Langer and Abelson 1972), the subjective strength of a desire or a need, mother's costs when a daughter does not help or comply with specific desires (Piliavin, Piliavin, and Rodin 1975), the degree of perceived self-infliction of current needs by the mother herself

- (Meyer and Mulherin 1980), and ability and opportunity to help and comply with mother's desires (Midlarsky 1971; Kuhl 1986);
7. anticipated costs, that is, costs the daughter expects in the case of noncompliance: anticipated guilt feelings (Rawlings 1970), anticipated blame or critique by significant others, and anticipated blame and critique by the mother.

### Method

*Subjects.* The sample consisted of 673 respondents taken from three birth cohorts of adult daughters twenty to twenty-five years, thirty to thirty-five years, forty-eight to fifty-three years) whose mothers were an average of twenty-seven years older than the daughters. The educational level of the sample was roughly representative of the population, and this was true for many other demographic attributes (e.g., married/not married, employed/not employed, rural/urban).

*Operationalization of Constructs.* The predictor variables listed above for Categories 1 and 2 were assessed by questionnaire scales that were newly developed with the exception of familial cohesion and familial control, which were measured with the German adaptation of the Moos scales (Engfer, Schneewind, and Hinderer 1977). The usual procedures of testing the homogeneity and internal consistency of the scales were applied. All scales mentioned in this chapter had adequate psychometric qualities. The predictor variables in Categories 3 to 7 were constructed as follows: from a list of thirty-four needs and desires a mother might have, subjects were required to select those five that were currently dominant. If an urgent desire or a strong need of her mother was not mentioned in the list, a daughter could include this within the five she was supposed to select as a replacement for one of the items on the list.

All scales in Categories 3 to 7 had five items, each of which was formulated individually with respect to each one of the five needs or desires of a mother selected by her daughter. These constructs were represented by stems of statements that were completed individually with reference to the selected needs and desires. These statements had to be rated on six-point scales. For instance, the construct "habitual prosocial activities in the past" (Category 3) was represented by five items, each one addressed to one of the five needs or desires selected individually. All items started with

the introductory phrase: "In the past—meaning up to today—I . . ." This phrase was completed with one of the five selected needs or desires—for example, ". . . have complied with my mother's desire that I care for her when she is sick"—and had to be rated on a scale with the poles frequently (1) and never (6).

One item for the variable "legitimacy of a need or desire" (Category 6) is given as a second example: "My mother's desire or need for me to—e.g., take notice of her political views—is legitimate in my eyes." This item had to be rated on a scale with the poles absolutely (1) and not at all (6).

A last example represents anticipated guilt: "If I did not comply with my mother's desire that I—e.g., help her with heavy chores (like cleaning the house)—my conscience would bother me," rated from extremely (1) to not at all (6).

Two measures of prosocial commitment were constructed in the same way as the scales of Categories 3 to 7. First, respondents had to rate their intention to act within the next few weeks with regard to each of five needs and desires of the mothers that the daughters had selected as the currently most urgent ones. Second, some weeks later, the daughters had to rate the degree to which they actually acted on each of the five needs or desires of the mother. Ratings were made on six-point scales.

*Validity of the Self-Report Data.* The validity of the self-reports of the respondents was tested via external ratings. Some of the mothers were asked to rate some key variables, including the actual prosocial commitment of the daughter during the same time period in which the daughter reported her behavior. The correlation between the self-reports of the daughters and the mothers on each of the need-related activities concerning the behavior of the daughter ( $r = .58$ ) seemed to justify confidence in the validity of self-report data.

*Longitudinal Replication.* The questionnaire was given three times at one-year intervals. This longitudinal replication is not reported here. We point out only that the two longitudinal replications of the data collection resulted in the same pattern of relationships between variables as in the first data collection. This confirms the reliability of the procedure.

**Table 10.5**

Regression from Prosocial Activities on Twenty-one Predictors (Including Aspects of Relationship, Traits, Habitual Behavior, Norms, Attitudes, Appraisals of the Predicament, Anticipated Guilt Feelings, and Critique in Case of Noncompliance) ( $N = 496$ ;  $pFb < .01$ )

| Predictors                     | r   | beta | b    | Fb   | R <sup>2</sup> |
|--------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|----------------|
| Habitual pros. behavior        | .52 | .32  | .36  | 61.9 |                |
| Abilities and opportunities    | .43 | .24  | .33  | 42.1 |                |
| Attitudes to pros. behavior    | .46 | .18  | .20  | 19.9 |                |
| Quality of relationship (love) | .31 | .13  | .14  | 12.7 |                |
| Denial of responsibility       | .11 | .10  | .12  | 8.9  | .41            |
| (intercept)                    |     |      | -.14 |      |                |

Adapted from Table I in Montada, Dalbert, and Schmitt (1988).

#### Results and Discussion: Predicting Activities for the Benefit of the Mother—Oughts, Love, or a Matter of Course?

The psychological predictors accounted for a significant portion of the variance in prosocial commitment for the benefit of the mother (tables 10.5 and 10.6). Since a large number of potential predictors was assessed, multivariate analyses (multiple regression and path analyses) were chosen. Some of the relevant results may be summed up as follows.

For predicting prosocial behavior, anticipated costs (in terms of time, money, interpersonal conflicts, postponing one's own interests) turned out to be unimportant in this familial context. This is in contrast to the results of experimental research on altruism toward needy people with whom helpers are not personally acquainted (Bierhoff 1980).

Normative orientations (subjects' moral norms) did not play an important, independent role: neither felt obligations (personal norms) to support the mother (or to comply with her wishes) nor anticipated guilt feelings for not acting prosocially contributed significantly to the prediction of actual prosocial actions.

The same was true for justice-related appraisals: neither the legitimacy of the mother's needs entitling her or not entitling her to receive the daughter's support (or to have the daughter comply with her desires), nor the mother's responsibility for the existence of her needs (their self-infliction) proved to be significant predictors.

**Table 10.6**

Regression from Intention to Act Prosocially on Twenty-one Predictors (see head of table 10.5) ( $N = 522$ ;  $pFb < .01$ )

| Predictors                  | r    | beta | b   | Fb   | R <sup>2</sup> |
|-----------------------------|------|------|-----|------|----------------|
| Desires are justified       | .67  | .28  | .28 | 56.2 |                |
| Personal norms              | .59  | .16  | .11 | 16.7 |                |
| Abilities and opportunities | .43  | .17  | .17 | 34.0 |                |
| Anticipated guilt           | .57  | .20  | .16 | 38.2 |                |
| Attitudes to pros. behavior | .65  | .20  | .17 | 23.1 |                |
| Needs are self-inflicted    | -.43 | -.11 | .07 | 12.6 | .64            |
| (intercept)                 |      |      | .39 |      |                |

Adapted from Table III in Montada, Dalbert, and Schmitt (1988).

The variance of prosocial behavior was due mainly to the following five predictors:

1. the habitual prosocial activity of a daughter in favor of her mother in the past with respect to the five needs or desires selected;
2. the ability or opportunity of a daughter to act prosocially, again with respect to the five selected needs;
3. the general attitude of the daughter about whether or not it is generally right for a daughter to support her mother or to comply with her wishes (with respect to the five selected needs), reflecting a more general social norm of adequacy rather than a personally felt moral ought;
4. the quality of the relationship between mother and daughter, with the positive pole of the dimension simply meaning mutual love;
5. the absence of a general disposition to deny responsibility (for the elderly in general).

What does this pattern of predictors mean? The first three predictors may be interpreted as typical aspects of the daughter's social role in the dyad with her mother. Role-bound behavior is performed repeatedly over time (habitual prosocial behavior), the role holder is able to perform it (perceived own abilities and opportunities), and he or she believes that it is right to perform it (attitudes toward prosocial behavior). It is open to question whether this social role is imposed by social norms or whether it develops within the mother-daughter dyad. In the latter case, one could call it a "personal role."

The further two predictors were more motivational: the quality of the relationship (loving the mother) and the absence of a dispositional barrier in terms of a general traitlike tendency to deny responsibility.

These predictors outweighed the consideration of costs, own obligations, and just entitlements of the mother. The pattern of predictors does not seem to represent moral- or justice-related decision making, but rather a spontaneous expression of love as a matter of course resulting from the personal role of the daughters in relationship with their mothers. The assumption that the prosocial behavior of the daughters was not a matter of planful decision making may be corroborated by looking at the formation of "intentions" to act prosocially in the future. As mentioned above, some weeks before the subjects were asked what they actually had done for the benefit of their mothers, they were asked what they intended to do. Though uttered intentions were rather good predictors of actual actions—when "intention to act prosocially" was added to the predictor set it gained the highest weight of all predictors, increasing the explained variance from .41 to .47 (Montada, Schneider, and Reichle 1988)—they were far from being perfect. Thus, daughters did on occasion change their intentions.

Interestingly, intentions were predicted by a different set of variables than actual prosocial behavior, as can be seen by comparing table 10.6 and table 10.7. Prediction of intentions was best based on the following variables:

1. the rating of the legitimacy of the desires of the mother, implying that the mothers are entitled to receive support or to have their daughters comply;
2. (negatively) the perception that mothers' needs are self-inflicted, implying that the mothers are not entitled to support;
3. felt obligation (representing personal norms) and anticipated guilt feelings in case of not acting prosocially.

These justice- and morality-related predictors were supplemented by the following two predictors that also predicted actual prosocial behavior: the appraisal of having abilities and opportunities to support the mother and the attitude that, in general, it is all right for a daughter to act that way.

In summary, compared to actual prosocial activities, intentions to behave prosocially seem to be more a matter of reasoned decision making in which personal norms and justice-related ap-

praisals of the situation are considered. Actual behavior may follow the intentions, but it does not necessarily have to. It is often a "matter of course," not a consequence of moral decision making, when daughters—and we tend to generalize to all people—behave prosocially in close relationships.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis of this chapter—that the motivation underlying prosocial activities varies with the social context and the relationships between the potential helper and the needy—was empirically corroborated by two studies, one of them on prosocial activities in behalf of different groups of disadvantaged people who are not personally known, and the other on prosocial commitments in the family. In the first case, moral norms of justice played an important role: perceived injustice and perceived responsibilities for injustice led to feelings of either guilt or moral outrage. Both of these emotions disposed individuals to prosocial action, whereas sympathy for the needy did not contribute much to this disposition.

In the second case, considerations of justice and entitlements and personally experienced moral oughts and responsibilities (personal norms in the sense of Schwartz 1977) were largely irrelevant to the prediction of actual prosocial commitment. They were predictive only of the intention to act prosocially. Actual prosocial behavior seemed to be motivated by love (sympathy) alone, and it seems to be realized in terms of an individual's role in the relationship to the needy person (the mother)—a role the helper (the daughter) endorses.

The cases presented here indicate how cautious we must be with generalizations from one situation to another, in which different helpers act in different social systems, in which different excuses and justifications for refusing help are offered, in which help requires different abilities, and so forth.

In conclusion, I would like to note that these studies suggest that focusing emotional responses on victims or on the needy may be useful in understanding and predicting prosocial actions. From a philosophical point of view, Blum (1980) makes this point very convincingly. Many different emotions dispose individuals or interfere with prosocial activities. This is well known, and there is a lot of empirical support for it (Rosenhan et al. 1982). This study features two relatively neglected emotions—existential guilt and



moral outrage. Both are key concepts in ethics as well as in the psychology of morality. These emotions seemed to be based authentically on subjectively important oughts from which a subject does not tolerate deviations. Turning to the second study, I would like to note that prosocial activities not only require motives or oughts but also abilities and opportunities. Perceived abilities and habitual prosocial behavior turn out to be better predictors than moral oughts or moral motives in some situations (e.g., Kuhl 1986). Consequently, promoting prosocial activities requires not only the development of altruistic attitudes and motives and norms, but also the cultivation of ability to act correspondingly.

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## HELPING IN LATE LIFE

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### INTRODUCTION

This is a chapter about altruism and helping in late life. Helping is used here as a general term referring to all instances in which one individual comes to the aid of another. Altruism, on the other hand, is viewed as a subcategory of helping, in which the behavior is voluntary—and is motivated by concern for others rather than by the anticipation of rewards.

What do we know about altruism and helping in older adults? In the literature of gerontology, burgeoning in response to the recent, dramatic increases in longevity, the importance of helping is often cited. Pairing of the two terms "aging" and "helping" typically evokes the image of help giving that flows from the young to the old. Indeed, the proportion of aged persons is often represented by the dependency ratio, defined as the "ratio of the combination of persons over 65 plus children under 15 to those in the working age population" (Hendricks and Hendricks 1981, 61). This ratio is generally interpreted as an objective means for expressing "numerical relationships between the 'productive' and dependent components of a population" (Adamchak and Friedmann 1983, 321).

It is therefore not surprising, perhaps, that the predominant

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