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**Prosocial Motivation
and Help-Giving Behavior**

Experimental Studies on Help-Giving Behavior
toward Individuals and Organizations



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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM AND OVERVIEW

There is abundant evidence that people have been interested in understanding the nature of prosocial behavior for a long time (Goldberg, 1993). Folktales, legends, and parables provide insights into the issues that are of common concern to members of a culture. Because prosocial behavior may have an adaptive value that will increase the chance of survival of an individual, group, or culture (Campbell, 1975), it is not surprising that the stories and folklore of many cultures stress the value of helping one another. The New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) serves as an example of this. In this well-known tale, a man who has been beaten and robbed on his way to Jericho received no assistance from two passing men of strong religious convictions, a priest and a Levite. However, a Samaritan, who was considered to be something of a religious outcast, stopped to help the victim, bandaging his wounds and taking him to an inn for further treatment. The message for those listening to this parable was to be concerned about the well-being of others and to follow the Samaritan's model.

Help-Giving Research Tradition

The lessons that can be learned from folktales and parables are represented and have been formalized in many academic disciplines (e.g., anthropology, religion, philosophy) among which social psychology has taken the lead in the study of prosocial behavior. The literature in social psychology on helping behavior is vast: more than thousand studies have been conducted and articles published that investigate the determinants of prosocial actions (Batson, 1998; Fiske, 2004; Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995). A variety of criteria has been proposed in an attempt to show who is most likely to receive help, who is most likely to give help, and what criteria determine this. To name just a few, social and personal norms about what is appropriate or acceptable behavior may motivate people to help (Berkowitz, 1972; Schwartz, 1992, 1994). In this tradition, people

are motivated to help because they feel external or internal pressure to comply with these norms, such as cooperative and benevolent behavior or personal responsibility-taking when noticing that something is wrong. Some researchers have suggested that the problem with social norms lies in norm salience and focus of attention. Only when attention is focused on the norm as a standard of behavior concern about violating it is likely to affect behavior (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). People's emotions and feelings also motivate helping. People typically experience empathic arousal when they see someone in distress. Usually, but not invariably, this arousal increases the motivation to help. This motivation may be egoistic and self-serving or purely altruistic (Batson, 1987; Batson et al., 1991). Furthermore, people are motivated to help because they have learned through direct experiences and by observing others that helping will produce both tangible and intangible benefits for them. Benefits include social recognition, enhanced self-esteem, self-efficacy, positive mood, and material benefits (Dovidio, Piliavin, Gaertner, Schroeder, & Clark, 1991; Warren & Walker, 1991; Wegener & Petty, 1994).

Perhaps the most direct extension of social learning principles into personal relations is exchange or equity theory. According to social exchange theory, people weigh the costs and benefits, when presented with a potential helping opportunity. They do so to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs (Homans, 1961; Lawer & Thye, 1999; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). Costs of helping include monetary, moral, and emotional costs such as feelings of annoyance about the recipient's plight. Such economic concerns may be particularly relevant to long-term helping behavior as opposed to more immediate assistance (Fiske, 2004). Volunteering for a charity can be one form of long-term helping. Regardless of whether the primary motivation to volunteer is altruistic or egoistic, volunteering can satisfy personal needs. This personal benefit can even outweigh the costs associated with charitable activities that involve considerable time, effort, and money, and sometimes require a long-term commitment (Snyder & Omoto's work on volunteerism, 1992a).

The range of behaviors that has been studied is impressive, and would seem to allow a good deal of confidence that the meaning of helping behavior has not been confined to a very few specific operationalizations. Yet, this is not the case. While psychologists have mainly considered one-on-one helping, little attention has been paid to the societal context in which helping takes place (Foss, 1986). With rare exceptions, massive outpourings of help, such as those that commonly follow natural disasters (Kaniasty, & Norris, 1995; Skitka, 1999; Taormina, & Messick, 1983; Wayment, 2004), have been almost totally ignored by social psychologists studying helping behavior. Many, if not most, of the studies have involved either minimal, fairly routine everyday behaviors that require little effort or inconvenience for the helper (Foss, 1986, see also Pearce & Amato, 1980). The research is oriented around hypothesis testing and theory building, often examining helping behaviors atypical of real-life helping acts, and tends not to accumulate knowledge about particular forms of helping behavior. Only in recent years, have social psychologists begun to examine the determinants of more socially courageous, or risky behaviors requiring real sacrifices such as *Zivilcourage* (Fischer et al., 2004; Jonas & Brandstätter, 2004). The concern of the first research line presented in this dissertation (see Chapter 2) yields high-cost prosocial behavior and how it can be explained. More specifically, it refers to the deficits of mood related research questions, the social context of helping behavior studied, its limits to explain non-trivial prosocial behavior and additional mechanisms such as norm salience that could potentially lead to the desired outcome. The second limit addressed in the present dissertation targets the very few integrative approaches that have been offered to explain helping in various contexts such as donating to individuals as compared to groups. In fact, most of the help-giving research is not applicable to the practices of charity organizations and only recently has such research emerged in the literature (Frey, Greitemeyer, Fischer, & Niesta, 2005; Jonas & Niesta, 2004). Two characteristics of helping research that limit its utility for understanding donating behavior appear to result from the historical roots of this research in the study of intervention in “emergency” situations. Many studies

have focused either on characteristics of the recipient of help or factors that influence an observer's interpretation of a novel situation. Because the recipient of the donation is almost always anonymous, his or her characteristics are not as predominant to obtaining donations, whereas the donation agency itself might be considered as the recipient by some potential donors. Research on situational factors indicates that one of the primary explanatory variables in helping is the ambiguity of the situation (Latané, & Darley, 1970; Shotland & Straw, 1976; Sigelman, 1977). Anything that increases the difficulty people experience in determining whether help is needed, or appropriate, decreases help-giving. The types of situational factors studied so far probably are fairly unimportant in donations. There is generally not much ambiguity surrounding a poster, media announcement, or real live person requesting donations. Being asked to donate is a far different kind of situation from finding someone slumped in a doorway, then having to figure out what has happened, and what to do about it. A direct request, whether it comes from a poster, a radio announcement, or a blood-agency recruiter, leaves little doubt that help is needed or about the appropriate form of help to give. A number of important structural and situational factors in donating money to a nonprofit organization differ significantly from factors that have been examined in studies of helping. Past donation experience, familiarity with the agency, effectiveness of advertising, perceived fairness of resource allocation, as well as the nature of an agency soliciting help and its policies (accountability, trustworthiness) all may be important to an understanding of donating behavior. The theories that are available are tied too closely to experimentation on minimal forms of helping or "emergency" helping to provide much generality. The dominant theoretical models dealing with helping (Latané & Darley, 1970; Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981) are both narrowly focused on helping in emergency situations: both deal primarily with factors in the immediate physical and social situation in their attempts to explain helping. The models that have been proposed have not comprehensively captured to predict donating behavior. The reason for this lack of inclusiveness in the helping domain is the voluminous