David A. Schroeder, Louis A. Penner, John F. Dovidio, Jane A. Piliavin

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HELPING AND ALTRUISM

Problems and Puzzles

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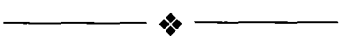
JANE A. PILIAVIN is Professor and Chair of the Sociology Department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She received her Ph.D. in Psychology from Stanford University in 1962, working with Leon Festinger. Although she has done work on prejudice, attitude change, gender roles, and delinquency, her primary research interest since the late 1960s has been altruism and helping behavior. In addition to many journal articles, she is coauthor of two previous books in this area: *Emergency Intervention* (with J. F. Dovidio, S. L. Gaertner, and R. D. Clark, III) and *Giving Blood: The Development of an Altruistic Identity* (with P. L. Callero). Her current research involves comparisons of different forms of helping (e.g., giving blood, time, and money), cross-cultural comparisons, international helping behavior, and helping and well-being, with a major focus on identities and commitment.

Foreword



The colloquium is about to start. I'm going to get a seat up front because I am already so tired from a long day's teaching that I might fall obviously asleep if I don't sit where I will feel social pressure to stay awake during this lecture. This room is awfully hot and stuffy, with the windows closed and blinds drawn so we can view the overheads and slides. Wow, notice that cool Harris tweed jacket on the speaker, reminds me of Ivy League faculty back in my Yale days, but in this weather it will be more like a furnace around him. Too bad I'm not that interested in the topic, and he is talking so fast, and his overheads are impossible to read even from my front aisle seat. Drifting off, head nodding, I'm trying to stay awake. It is getting near the end, hang on, there will be refreshments in the lounge. Just then a colleague interrupts to pose a difficult question. The speaker is flustered, regains composure, starts out saying, "That's an interesting question, but the data we are now getting do not support your position . . . [I'm feeling sick] . . . but we can discuss it later, if you wish, I have only about five minutes more and I'd like to finish up."

Wow! Wake up call! "Feeling sick?" Did he say that, or did I imagine it? No one else seems to have heard it, or if they did, they are not reacting to it in any way that I can discern. His rapid delivery is slowing down to a normal rpm. Hmm, could that be a sign that I heard him correctly, that his internal monologue slipped past the censor? Total attention now on his every word and gesture. Foolish me, he meant the question is making him feel sick, a metaphor for not liking the taste of it. Good, nothing to worry about, a few minutes more and he is done, get a cold drink and the world is refreshed.

Oh, oh! He seems to be paler. No one is sitting in the first row in front of the small stage. Suppose he fainted? No way, in thirty years of colloquiums, no one has ever fainted, so let's go with the base rate. But just in case, why don't I quietly move up to the front row (trying to be inconspicuous is not easy with my bulky frame). Yes, clearly slowing down—perhaps to emphasize his final points, or is he just running out of steam? Maybe he needs to sit down, get a drink, and then finish his talk. But how

can I tell him that without interrupting his finale, especially if I am reading the situation wrong—and then everyone will think I am a fool? But suppose I am right and he passes out before finishing, and falls off the stage? I will know that I could have prevented his accident and did not. More of his slow words, more of my thoughts about how to solve this decision dilemma, more words, but no action yet. OK, it's a GO if I get one more clear signal, then I will intervene—for better or for worse. There it is, he is perspiring, and look, his pants legs are getting wet from the sweat! Someone has to help him now no matter what the consequences. Who should? You should, of course. Yes, go now, take the risk.

I stand up in front of the speaker, put my arms up toward him; he looks down at me in total confusion. Imagine what my students and colleagues are thinking of this bizarre behavior as I continue to put my arms around him. The speaker goes limp, unconscious, falls dead weight on me; we crash back into the first row seats. Guess I was right. Much help all around, medics called. He comes to, insists upon finishing the final point in his presentation (that is true dedication to science), staggers back up on the stage. Stands erect, says he is sorry for the interruption. And then he collapses once more into my waiting arms.

As he was being taken to the hospital for diagnosis and overnight observation and care, we all gave him ample applause for having almost finished under somewhat extraordinary circumstances. It turned out to be nothing serious, a combination of the onset of flu, being up late taking care of a sick child, the heat of the room, and anxiety about this critical audience. He was back in action the next day as if nothing had happened.

Since this experience took place last year at Stanford University, I have thought much about what had happened to me and about the deep psychological complexity of bystander intervention. I had never considered the simultaneous equations that must be solved by the bystander, often riddled with ambiguity and complex cost/benefit analyses that must be solved in a moment's time. Of course, I am well acquainted with the pioneering research on bystander intervention by my friends John Darley and Bibb Latané, but somehow my personal experience had aspects that were not captured in their model of individual and group response to emergent demands to act or to internal pressures not to act. Just then, a proposal appeared for a book in our McGraw-Hill Series in Social Psychology which would take a new look at the nature of prosocial behavior. Four active researchers were going to put their heads together to organize the body of knowledge in the broad field of helping and altruistic behavior, integrate what needed to be made more coherent, analyze divergent findings and curious results into a systematic framework that allowed for new theory to be developed and practical answers to be given to questions about the nature of this vital human activity. Perfect timing, for me, and now that this labor of love is completed, perfect timing for the field of social psychology.

My initial skepticism about the likely coherence of a four-authored text was dispelled as soon as this special team began working closely together and generating material that was more than the sum of its parts. Each of these social psychologists brought to the study of prosocial behavior a special vision, a slightly different research style, and an alternate perspective on the theoretical dynamics of helping and altruism. Through openly sharing their communalities and differences, and playing each individual contribution through the ensemble evaluation and refinements of the others, this unique quartet has given us the definitive reading on prosocial behavior.

This gifted team of authors—David Schroeder, Louis Penner, John Dovidio, and Jane Piliavin—has gone well beyond summarizing the available facts and views on the various dimensions of prosocial behavior; they have given us the integrative theoretical score that helps make sense of, and give a new rhythm to, the lyrics. In understanding the nature of prosocial behavior, we come to see the interplay between fundamental themes in psychology, how genetic and personality predispositions are modified by learning and experience, how affect and cognition interact to shape responding potentials, how self-interest and concerns for the well being of others get sorted out in given helping settings. We also become more aware of the differing psychological variables that influence the reciprocal relationship between help seeking and help giving. And finally, in a clear, fluid writing style, the authors provide a theoretical integration that fits together the many pieces of the puzzle of who helps, when, why, and with what effects. In doing so, this author team makes a valuable contribution to psychological knowledge that has significant relevance for the betterment of our daily lives.

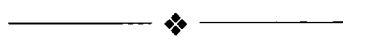
The *McGraw-Hill Series in Social Psychology* has been designed as a celebration of the fundamental contributions being made by researchers, theorists, and practitioners of social psychology to our understanding of human nature and to the potential for enriching the quality of our lives through wise applications of their knowledge. It has become a showcase for presenting new theories, original syntheses, analyses, and current methodologies by distinguished scholars and promising young writer-researchers. Our authors reveal a common commitment to sharing their vision with a broad audience—starting with their colleagues, but extending out to graduate students and especially to undergraduates interested in social psychology. Some of our titles, like this one on prosocial behavior, convey ideas that are of sufficient general interest that their messages need to be carried out into the world of practical application for translation into social action and public policy. Although each text in our series is created to stand alone as the best representative of its area of scholarship, taken as a whole they represent the core of social psychology. Some teachers may elect to use any of them as in-depth supplements to a basic, general textbook, but others may choose to organize their course entirely

around a set of these monographs. All our authors have been guided by the objective of conveying the essential lessons and principles of their area of expertise in an interesting style that informs without resorting to technical jargon. A related goal has been to write in ways that inspire others to utilize these ideas constructively—for some, to extend them conceptually, for others, to apply them practically.

We are at a critical crossroad in our civilization, a time when the world desperately needs to replace its exploding hostility with helping, its pervasive indifference or insensitivity to violence with altruism. Anarchy and chaos are at the doorsteps of many poorer nations, while crime and violence tear at the fabric of human relationships in our own country. These social evils have multiple causes that need to be understood at many different levels of analysis. But the bottom line of defense against them is the creation of a sense of civility within a caring community. That lofty goal is not easily accomplished when our sons are engaged in "Mortal Kombat" or "Total Carnage" video games and national leaders teach citizens that real war is also an acceptable means for resolving conflicts with the "enemy." It is my hope that *The Psychology of Helping and Altruism* will serve as a beacon of wisdom for those young people who want to make a difference in how their world functions. It is essential that reading its vital messages makes us all the more mindful of why we do not intervene when we could and should, and how we can resist the pressures to act in self-interest or in disinterest. If we can, then we will reach out more readily to those in need of our help, giving it willingly, not as an heroic deed, but simply because that is what the social contract calls for. In doing unto others, we create the interactional context in which they may be more likely to do for us—when that time comes that we need to be helped.

Philip G. Zimbardo
Consulting Editor

Preface



Although we began work on this book in 1991, its true origin can be traced back to the mid-1960s. At that time helping or prosocial behavior was not a particularly hot topic among social psychologists. But a single event changed that. A young woman, Kitty Genovese, was attacked and murdered in New York City while thirty-eight of her neighbors watched from their apartment windows. This horrifying event led some social psychologists (most notably Bibb Latané and John Darley) to examine the causes of the bystanders' inaction. And a few years later, the first articles on bystander intervention in emergencies began to appear. Interest in bystander intervention spread rapidly among social psychologists and social scientists in a number of related areas, and the research floodgates were opened. In the last thirty years, well over 1500 articles on the topic of helping and altruism have appeared in scientific and professional journals.

The 1960s were significant personally as well. Chronologically, philosophically, or professionally, the authors of this book are all in some ways "children of the 60s" and the political activism and idealism that flourished at the time. In the 1960s, Jane Piliavin had already embarked on her academic career. But it was during this time that she began a career-long program of research on prosocial behavior, including long-term prosocial actions such as blood donations. The other authors were students in the 1960s who read the early research on helping and were excited by it. Of course, being independent-minded psychologists, we approached the topic of helping and altruism from different directions. Lou Penner studied prosocial behavior from an individual-difference perspective, asking questions about what personal characteristics differentiate helpers from nonhelpers; Jack Dovidio conducted research on prosocial behavior, at least in part, because it provided a means to study racial and ethnic prejudice; and David Schroeder studied how to make individuals and members of groups more cooperative and helpful even when it might be to their immediate benefit to be selfish. We did not know one another and were literally spread from coast to coast. Despite these differences and distances, all of us shared one very important thing in common. We all

saw studying helping and other prosocial actions as a way to combine our social interests and concerns with the research that we conducted. It was this common research interest that eventually brought us together, first as professional acquaintances, then as friends, and now as coauthors of this book.

The book is primarily intended for upper-level undergraduate classes and graduate courses in psychology, sociology, and related disciplines. This is not the only book on helping and altruism that is available to people interested in these topics. There are several edited volumes in which scholars in this area describe their own research work on a particular aspect of prosocial behavior. There are also some excellent books written on specific topics related to prosocial behavior, such as those on the characteristics of the Christians who rescued Jews from the Nazis and on the role of empathy in altruistic actions. The importance of these books to the understanding of prosocial behavior cannot be overstated. Indeed, we cite them extensively in this book. However, these books are often not accessible to students just becoming interested in helping behavior, and their focus may be too narrow for students who want a comprehensive overview of the theories and research concerned with why people offer (or do not offer) to help others. As a result, the sources most readily available to someone interested in learning about the general topic of helping and altruism are usually the brief descriptions that appear in introductory social psychology textbooks. Thus, our goal was to write a book that provides students with a comprehensive review of research literature on helping and altruism and gives the reader a sense of how individual studies fit into the big picture of prosocial behavior. We also hope to stimulate the next generation of students to study the causes and consequences of helping and altruism. We believe this is a very worthwhile goal, because helping and altruism are as important in the 1990s as they were in the 1960s.

It is uncommon for four people to coauthor a book. Indeed, if we had thought about why it is so uncommon before we began this effort, we probably would have never done it. Remarkably, because of the intensity of this endeavor, we are closer friends now than we were when we began writing the book. In addition to theoretical disputes and unprovoked assaults on one another's writing styles, our friendship had to endure the one thing that can turn academics who are close friends into bitter enemies—order of authorship. We resolved this issue with relatively few bruises, but it is important for those who read this book to know that all of the authors contributed roughly equivalent amounts to this project. The most accurate way to represent the authorship of this book would be to create a sign on the cover of the book that would change every three months like a billboard, so that at various times, each of us would be listed as first author. Unfortunately, McGraw-Hill lacks the equipment to do this. But readers should know the following facts: Without the fourth

author, Jane, the first author, Dave, would have written a book with two fewer chapters and the remaining seven chapters would have been much poorer in quality; and the reasons why Lou rather than Jack is the second author are: (1) Jack is a nicer person than Lou, and (2) Lou is better at guessing the outcome of coin tosses that Jack.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have already alluded to the professional debt that we owe Bibb Latané for conducting the research that first made some of us interested in helping behavior. But Bibb has contributed more directly to this project by serving as the organizer and host of the First Nags Head Conference on Altruism and Prosocial Behavior. It was at that conference in 1982 that the four of us met for the first time and began our long personal friendships and professional associations that resulted in the decision to write this book. If we had not met at Nags Head, it is very unlikely that this book would have been written. Bibb has our sincere thanks and gratitude for providing us, and other social psychologists, with the kind of stimulating environment that fosters and promotes the formation of such associations.

In a project of this sort there are always many people who have contributed in a number of different ways. Although it may sound like a cliché, it really is hard to know where to start. We were helped immeasurably by students at each of our universities who did library research, read drafts of our chapters, and stimulated our thinking with their thoughtful and perceptive questions about what we had written. We thank the following students: Neleen Eisenger, Paula Guerra, Adaiah Howard, Stacy Taylor, and Ana Validzic (Colgate University); Linda Matthews, Molly Jensen, Vanessa Nehus-Huber, and Karen Stauffacher (University of Arkansas); and Barbara Fritzsche, Shanker Menon, Tamara Freifeld, and Shelia Rioux (University of South Florida). We are also grateful to Ann Parkhurst, Debra Linneman, and Kim Barnes for their administrative assistance. In addition, we express our appreciation to our friends and other colleagues who helped us locate needed articles, reviewed chapter drafts, and did as much as they could to prevent us from making embarrassing mistakes. (We hope they were successful. If errors do exist, it is probably because we were not paying attention.) Among these people are Peter Callero, Hong-Wen Charng, Jeff Stripling, Doug Behrend, Judith Becker, Eric Knowles, Mike Hoffman, Chris Hill, Rick Condon, and especially the late Roberta Simmons. We want to express our sincere appreciation for the preparation of the test bank by Mark Sibicky from Marietta College and the compilation of the indexes by Sydney Schultz. We are particularly indebted to Michael Cunningham, University of Louisville; Nancy Eisenberg, Arizona State University;

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Last but certainly most importantly, we want to thank those closest to us. Our spouses (Susie, Kathy, Linda, and Irv) supported us and tolerated the time we spent away from them to work on the book. Our children (Dave: Lisa and Kevin; Lou: Charlie; Jack: Alison and Michael; and Jane: Allyn and Libby) helped as well; they gave us encouragement and kept us focused on what is really important about life.

David A. Schroeder

Louis A. Penner

John F. Dovidio

Jane A. Piliavin

Contents

1

An Introduction to Helping and Altruism

It was about 3 A.M. on a September morning, and the Sunset Limited Amtrak train was speeding through the bayous of rural Alabama on its way from Los Angeles to Miami. As the passengers slept, the train hit an obstruction on a bridge and derailed, plunging several railroad cars into the dark waters of the Big Bayou Canot. It was one of the worst rail disasters in American history. A young lawyer, Michael Dopheide, was one of the people on the train. He was thrown from his seat, and water and smoke began to fill the car in which he rode. Mr. Dopheide was among the first passengers to escape from the train by climbing through a broken window and dropping into the water below the window. He was worried about the diesel fuel in the water around him igniting and about poisonous snakes and alligators that inhabit these bayous. But he did not swim to safety. He returned to the partially submerged railroad car and pulled about thirty passengers out through the broken window. The passengers had to jump 6 feet into the water and swim to a piling about 10 feet away. But some of them could not swim, so Mr. Dopheide remained in the water, placed their arms around his neck, and pulled them to safety. As one passenger who survived this disaster said, "The only thing that kept me going was his calm voice. I just followed his voice to safety" (*The New York Times*, September 26, 1993).

Although you may have never done anything as dramatic as the heroic actions of Michael Dopheide, you certainly have performed numerous helpful acts for others. For example, today you may have done something as simple as opening the door for another student loaded down with books, served as a volunteer for a local service organization, or just listened to a friend who needed to talk to someone about a personal problem. Perhaps in the past week, you came upon an automobile accident and stopped to help in the emergency, helped a

Rescuers and salvage workers go through the wreckage of the Amtrak "Sunset Limited" looking for the bodies of victims who were not as fortunate as the passengers who were saved by Michael Dopheide. (AP/Wide World Photos)

classmate with a homework assignment, or participated in a fund-raising drive for some charity. Each of these actions is an example of a helpful behavior.

By the same token, someone probably helped *you* today. You may have asked a friend for change so that you could buy a soft drink. One of your classmates may have explained a difficult concept discussed in one of your classes at school. Perhaps you were feeling down and called on some friends whom you thought would help boost your spirits. In each of these situations, you would have been the recipient of a helpful act.

This is a book about people contributing to the well-being of others—how, when, and why they do it. As the first set of examples suggests, help may be given under many different guises, and one may offer assistance to others for many different reasons. Our goal in this book is to explore the variety of ways that help is given and the many reasons why people help each other. As shown in the second set of examples, helping involves an interaction between a helper and someone being helped, so we must also consider helping from the point of view of the person receiving the help. When will a person ask for help, and what are the psychological consequences of receiving that help? Is being helped always helpful?

At first glance, it may appear that the answers to these questions are quite obvious; it may seem that common sense is all that is needed to understand prosocial behavior. However, common sense does not always

provide correct answers to questions about helping and being helped. Consider the following situation. It's early evening and you are on your way home from class; as you round the corner while walking down the street, you twist your ankle on the uneven pavement. You go down in a heap on the empty sidewalk and cannot get up! You are in intense pain; your ankle is badly sprained or even broken. As you lie there, you hear the voices of people in an apartment building across the street. If you hope to be helped, would you rather have a single person or three people know about your plight? It seems so clear that when there are more people available to help there should be a better chance of being helped. After all, conventional wisdom tell us that "there's safety in numbers." Social psychologists, however, often find that such conventional wisdom lets us down. In situations such as this one, help is usually more likely to be given when only a single individual is present than when there are several people available. (More about this in Chapter 2.)

Consider another situation. A new friend of yours is doing very poorly in a course that you are also taking. You are doing extremely well in the course and, because you like your new friend, you decide to offer him (or her) help with the course. You enter your friend's room and announce that you can spend the next few hours tutoring him or her in the course. Will your friend be grateful and appreciate this favor? Research on receiving help suggests the response may surprise you. Your friend may become angry and resent the offer of help! (More about this in Chapter 7.)

Not all the correct answers to questions about prosocial actions are counterintuitive, but we often find that our basic assumptions about prosocial behavior will rarely be correct in all circumstances. By recognizing the limits of common sense and conventional wisdom and the value of empirical research findings, we can understand prosocial behavior more fully.

UNDERSTANDING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR: A COMMON CONCERN

Why should we be concerned with prosocial behavior in the first place? Are people interested in this topic? One indirect, but valid way of determining what is important to members of a society or culture is to simply look at what they talk and write about (Goldberg, 1993). Using this approach, there is abundant evidence that people have been interested in trying to understand the nature of prosocial behavior for a long time. Furthermore, this interest has not been restricted to just one culture or to just one period in the history of humanity. The multiple perspectives that have been used by others to understand prosocial behavior may