

California State University, Chico
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

PSY 136H / R S 136H
WHAT MOTIVATES ALTRUISM? -HONORS
FALL 2005

Time and Location TBA

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Description:

Ethics has traditionally been characterized as a process of bridging the gap between how we are and how we would ideally like to be, or, as it is sometimes put, a process of bridging the “is/ought” gap. One conspicuous example of moral improvement in this model is love of the neighbor. But there is some question as to how easily “love of the neighbor” comes to most human beings. Because we labor under the handicap of feeling the pull of self-interest, loving the neighbor is not a common thing to witness. In light of this truism, examples of altruism, when we encounter them in this world, cry out for an explanation. What motivates altruism? Is there even such a thing as “altruistic” behavior, or is it the case that when we help other people it is self-interest that is lurking behind our motivations? In our society, what accounts for the imperative that we *should* be altruistic?

This course explores answers to these fundamental questions about the phenomenon of helping others by looking at religious, philosophical, psychological, biological, economic, and sociological approaches to accounting for selfless behavior. It is distinctive in that you will be asked to address these questions theoretically *and* empirically. Thus, while you are gaining exposure to a variety of accounts for explaining altruistic conduct that span the disciplines, you will simultaneously be testing these theories by serving as “participant-observers” among real altruists in the larger Chico community. You will shadow a person directly engaged in social advocacy, welfare, or service, in the hopes of arriving at some tentative conclusions about what motivates his or her conduct. Over the course of the semester, you will spend on average 4-5 hours per week with this person outside of class.

Honors Upper Division Theme:

Honors Upper Division theme courses are designed to provide a highly rigorous, intellectually exciting, and integrated learning experience for a cohort of honors students. This course is not only no exception, it will be (at least) twice as rigorous as other honors courses because it is six units. In it, we emphasize the building of interdisciplinary learning communities that involve interaction between the student body and the larger Chico community, as well as promote conversations that incorporate several academic

fields into the discussion. In keeping with the goals of the upper division thematic, we intend to engage you in self-reflection and arrange venues for you to discuss and debate a variety of contemporary social issues. This course counts for two of the three courses required for your upper-division thematic, including the capstone experience.

Course Objectives:

- To assess the adequacy of competing definitions of altruism, paying close attention to such issues as personal cost; consequences versus intentions; relationship between the giver and the recipient; etc.
- To examine various examples of altruistic behavior through fictional and historical accounts, as well as empirically through experiences shadowing people in the Chico community known for their service activities.
- To analyze the moral status of altruistic acts. (Under what circumstances are they required versus supererogatory?)
- To promote conversations across the disciplines by examining a conspicuous human phenomenon from conceptually and methodologically distinct viewpoints.
- To encourage interaction between the student body and the community.
- To examine critically and integrate a variety of disciplinary explanations for what motivates altruism, such as:
 - social norms
 - family, religious affiliation, community, education, and other social variables
 - personality, history of reinforcement, empathy, and other psychological factors
 - cost-benefit analyses and game theoretic models
 - hedonism and psychological egoism
 - behavioral genetics, evolutionary biology, and evolutionary psychology
 - kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and group selection
 - Kantian, utilitarian, and Aristotelian models of moral action
 - theological and hagiographic accounts of benevolence
 - samaritanism based on scriptural narratives and love commandments
 - accounts of social justice in relation to religious and secular understandings of love.

Requirements and Protocol:

Since this is a six-unit honors course, the requirements for the course will be especially rigorous. The course will not only require you to become familiar with the various methodologies that have been employed in efforts to understand what motivates altruistic behavior (through readings and assignments); it will also require you to assume the role of advocate for different perspectives (in structured debates) and additionally call for you to interact with members of the community. You can expect about 250-300 pages of reading per week. Additionally, you will be “shadowing” a particular altruist assigned to you from the larger Chico community for approximately four to five hours per week, on average. You will have two major tests, two significant papers (9-10 pages each), and a final longer research paper (25 pages), in which you connect your in-class theoretical

knowledge to your field work observations deriving from shadowing your altruist over the course of the semester. In addition, you will be expected to keep a running journal of your fieldwork experience, which will be periodically inspected. At the end of the semester, you will have a final presentation in which you will report your findings. **We want to emphasize how important your active input is to succeeding in this course. This class is highly interactive. You must come prepared, with readings in hand (and head!), at the beginning of every class. You will be expected to be in attendance at every session. Missing class will constitute a significant deduction of your class participation grade. Thus, it is crucial that you (1) maintain stellar (i.e., perfect) attendance and (2) come prepared each session to discuss the reading.**

The reading is substantial and at times will be difficult. Do not despair. We will help you to understand the concepts and the authors' arguments, and we will go out of our way, in class and in office hours, to answer any questions you may have. Please consider, however, that adequately understanding these authors necessarily requires effort on both of our ends. We cannot stress strongly enough how important both preparation at home and attendance are.

Grading:

Grading breakdowns are as follows:

Exam 1: 10% (Part I of course)

(20 multiple-choice questions and 1 essay question)

Exam 2: 20% (Part II of course)

(40 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions)

Paper 1: 15% (9-10 pages)

Paper 2: 15% (9-10 pages)

Final Paper: 20% (Part III of course 25 pages)

Participation: 20% (Attendance, Field Work Attendance, Journal, Presentation)

Academic Honesty:

Cheating/plagiarism constitutes the *worst* possible thing that you can do as a student. It is automatically grounds for failure of the course. When writing papers, any ideas that are not your own require acknowledgement. Thus, even if you are paraphrasing someone else's views you must always indicate the source. If you ever have any doubts, cite the source. If you still have doubts, contact one of us.

Cultural Events:

Because this fulfills part of your general education requirements for the honors program, you will be expected to attend four cultural events during the semester. These will most comprise forums sponsored by the Center for Applied and Professional Ethics, which Professor Flescher directs, and which will be highly relevant to the content of this course.

Books Required for Purchase:

- 1) Camus, Albert. (1991). *The Plague*. trans. Stuart Gilbert. (New York: Vintage Press).
- 2) Dawkins, Richard. (1976). *The Selfish Gene*. (New York: Oxford University Press).
- 3) Day, Dorothy. (1992). *Selected Writings: By Little and By Little*, ed. Robert Ellsberg. (New York: Orbis Books).
- 4) Hallie, Philip. (1979). *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There*. (New York: Harper and Row).
- 5) Kant, Immanuel. (2002). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited and translated by Allen Wood. (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- 6) Monroe, Kristen Renwick. (1996). *The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of a Common Humanity*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)
- 7) Oliner, Samuel P. (2003). *Do Unto Others: Extraordinary Acts of Ordinary People*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press).
- 8) Paul, Ellen Frankel, Miller, Fred D. Jr., Paul, Jeffrey (Eds.). (1993). *Altruism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- 9) Post, Stephen G., Underwood, Lynn G., Schloss, Jeffrey P., and Hurlbut, William B. (Eds.) (2002). *Altruism and Altruistic Love*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- 10) Singer, Peter. (1981). *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology*. (Toronto: McGraw Hill)
- 11) Course Packet, available at Mr. Kopy. (119 Main Street, Chico).

Part 1: What is Altruism? (4 weeks)

Day 1: Introduction to course: Other-Regard and Self-Interest

Day 2: Altruism and The Question of Costs

Readings:

J.O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes" (Course Packet)

Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, pp. xiii-115.

Samuel Oliner, *Do Unto Others*, pp. 1-90.

Day 3: Altruism: Towards a Definition of a Distinctive Human Phenomenon

Readings:

Kristen R. Monroe, *The Heart of Altruism*, Preface: "The Human Face of Altruism;" Introduction; and Chapter 1: "The Puzzle of Altruism"

Elliott Sober, "The ABCs of Altruism," *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 17-28.

Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, pp. 119-200.

Samuel Oliner, *Do Unto Others*, pp. 91-172.

Day 4: Embodied Love, "Surmenage," and the Ethics of Excess

Readings:

Edith Wyschogrod, "Pythagorean Bodies and the Body of Altruism," *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 29-39.

Jerome Kagan, "Morality, Altruism, and Love," *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 40-50.

Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, pp. 203-287.

Samuel Oliner, *Do Unto Others*, pp. 173-213.

Day 5: Altruism as Part of Self-Fulfillment?

Readings:

Neera Kapur Badhwar, "Altruism versus Self-Interest: Sometimes a False Dichotomy" in *Altruism*, eds. Paul, Miller and Paul, pp. 90-117.

Albert Camus, *The Plague*, Parts 1 and 2, pp. 1-164.

Day 6: Varieties of Altruists

Readings:

Monroe, *Heart of Altruism*, Chapter 2: "The Entrepreneur;" Chapter 3: "The Philanthropist;" Chapter 4: "The Heroine;" Chapter 5: "Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe"

Camus, *The Plague*, Part 3, pp. 167-185

Lynn Underwood, "The Human Experience of Compassionate Love: Conceptual Mapping and Data from Selected Studies," *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 72-88.

First Journal Inspection Due

Day 7: The Hero as Ordinary Mortal: A Close Look at Dr. Rieux

Readings:

Camus, *The Plague*, Parts 4 and 5, pp. 189-308

In Class Discussion on *The Plague*

Paper #1 to be announced

Day 8: Exam #1 on Part one of Course

Part 2: What Motivates Altruism? (10 weeks)

A. Social-scientific perspectives

Day 9: Sociological/Social Psychological Explanations for Altruism

Readings:

Monroe, *Heart of Altruism*, Chapter 6: "Sociocultural Attributes of Altruism"

Richard Lippa, "Altruism and Pro-Social Behavior" (Course Packet)

C. Daniel Batson, "Addressing the Altruism Question Experimentally," *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 89-105.

Day 10: Altruism as Reducible to Cost-Benefit Analysis

Readings:

Axelrod, Robert, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, chapters 1-4 (Course Packet)

Monroe, *Heart of Altruism*, Chapter 7: "Economic Approaches to Altruism"

David Schmitz, "Reasons for Altruism," in *Altruism*, pp. 52-68.

Robert Sugden, "Thinking as a Team: Towards an Explanation of Non-Selfish Behavior," in *Altruism*, pp. 69-89.

Day 11: Psychological Egoism

Readings:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*---selections (Course Packet)

Monroe, *Heart of Altruism*, Chapter 9: "Psychological Discussions of Altruism"

James Rachels, "Psychological Egoism" (Course Packet)

Day 12: Class Discussion on Social-scientific Perspectives

Paper #1 is due

B. Biological perspectives

Day 13: Darwin and Morality

Readings:

Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, pp. 1-122.

Kristen Monroe, *Heart of Altruism*, Chapter 8: “Explanations from Evolutionary Biology”

David Sloan Wilson and Elliot Sober, “The Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise and Fall and Rise of Altruism in Evolutionary Biology,” *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 182-191.

Day 14: Symbiosis and Reciprocal Altruism

Readings:

Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, pp. 123-188.

Axelrod, Robert, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, chapter 5 (Course Packet)

Day 15: Altruism and Natural Selection

Readings:

Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, pp. 189-266.

Day 16: Expanding Our Circle: From Kin to the Stranger

Readings:

Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle*

Day 17: Towards a Naturalist Account of Morality

Readings:

Steven Pinker, “I and Thou” (Course Packet)

Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, Preface, Chapter 14, and 15 (Course Packet)

Michael Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 151-167.

Day 18: Class Discussion on Biological Perspectives

Readings:

Begin Reading Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* (Wood, ed.)

Second Journal Inspection Due

C. Philosophical perspectives

Day 19: Duty Derived from Reason I: Kant and the Categorical Imperative (“The Right”)

Readings:

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* (Wood, ed.)

Thomas Hill, “Beneficence and Self-Love; A Kantian Perspective,” in *Altruism*, pp. 1-23.

Day 20: Altruism derived from Reason II: The Consequentialist Demand for Other-Regard (“The Good”)

Readings:

Iris Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts” (Course Packet)

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (Course Packet)

Day 21: Kantianism and Consequentialism Criticized on the Basis of Special Relations

William Galston, “Cosmopolitan Altruism,” in *Altruism*, pp. 118-134.

Jean Hampton, “Selflessness and the Loss of Self,” in *Altruism*, pp. 135-165.

Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints” (Course Packet)

Day 22: Exam #2 on Sociological/Social-psychological, Biological, and Philosophical Perspectives

D. Religious perspectives

Day 23: “Agape” and The Good Samaritan

Readings:

Luke 10: “The Good Samaritan Parable” (Course Packet)

Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings*, pp. xv-xli, 3-9, 9-15, 20-40, 51-90, 109-112

Paper #2 to be announced

Day 24: Dorothy Day and The Catholic Worker Movement

Readings:

Day, *Selected Writings*, pp. 114-119, 187-203, 235-241, 261-270

Day, “December,” *On Pilgrimage*, (Course Packet)

Day 25: Saints, Sainly Exhortations, and Sainly Admonishments

Readings:

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Speeches and Writings*, “An Experiment in Love;” “A Christmas Sermon on Peace;” and “The World House” (Course Packet)

Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, Chapter 1 (Course Packet)

Day 26: A Self Born in Debt

Readings:

Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, Chapter 2 and “The Indentured Subject” (Course Packet)

Don Browning, “Science and Religion on the Nature of Love,” Michael Ruse, “A Darwinian Naturalist’s Perspective on Altruism,” *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, eds. Post, et. al., pp. 335-345.

Day 27: Class Discussion on Religious Perspectives

Discussion of Final, 20-25 page Research Paper on Field Work (We will pass around a sign-up sheet for you to meet with us during office hours); Sign-ups for presentations.

Part 3: How Does Altruism Work? (2 weeks)

Day 28: The “Altruistic Perspective”

Readings:

Monroe, *Heart of Altruism*, Chapter 10: “The Altruistic Perspective: Perceptions of a Shared Humanity;” Chapter 11: “Perspective and Ethical Political Acts: Initial Thoughts.”

Paper #2 is due

Day 29: Presentations on Field Work Round One

Day 30: Presentations on Field Work Round Two

Final Research Paper (20-25 pages) due, with journal