ALTRUISM ANDHELPING
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CARING
ABOUT AND FOR OTHERS
(C8014)
3rd Year Option (Level 6, 15 Credits)
Autumn Term/Teaching Block 1, 2015-16

Module Convenor and Tutor: Tom Farsides

Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty. (Albert Einstein)

Always do right -- this will gratify some and astonish the rest. (Mark Twain)

There's nothing more dangerous than a shallow-thinking compassionate person. God, he can cause a lot of trouble (Garrett Hardin)

Every major horror of history was committed in the name of an altruistic motive. (Ayn Rand)
On this module, **“altruism” is the phenomenon of people being concerned about the positive welfare of others.**

Module Tutor

Location: Pevensey 1, 1C7  
Telephone: 67 8886  
E-mail: T.L.Farsides@susx.ac.uk  
Twitter: @TomFarsides  
Office Hours Wednesday & Thursday, 12-1

**Timetable**

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Please see Sussex Direct for where and when your lectures and seminars will be.

**Assessment**

Autumn Term assessed presentation (30%) – See Appendix.  
One 3000-word essay (70%) – Titles will be announced by Week 5.

Please see Sussex Direct for assessment deadlines.

Information on the following can be found at the link below:

- submitting your work  
- missing a deadline  
- late penalties  
- MEC – mitigating evidence  
- Exams  
- Help with managing your studies and competing your work  
- Assessment Criteria

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment
Reading

Everyone should read as much as possible from the texts listed under each week’s “Everyone should read as much as possible from the following” sub-heading. You can read more if you want to, from anywhere. When doing assessed presentations or essays you will need to do a lot more reading, mainly from the academic literature. Some possible starting points for such reading are provided most weeks.

Please see end of this Handbook for further administrative and other details
**WEEK 1 LECTURE: ALTRUISM AS A CONCERN**

**Introduction**

This week (Week 1) there are no seminars. Instead, there is a single two-hour lecture. In that lecture I will provide some essential information about this module and execute some essential administrative roles, e.g., sorting out which week each student will do their assessed presentation. I will also go into a lot more detail about the sort of altruism that this module investigates and spell out some implications of conceptualising “altruism” in this way.

After Week 1, the tutor is likely to respond to many administrative questions with the answer, “We dealt with that in the first lecture”.

The central point made in the lecture is that the “altruism” studied during this module is the potential *phenomenon* of people being *concerned about the positive welfare of another*.

The module is *not* concerned with the word “altruism” as such, or with how others may have used it. Other uses of the word “altruism” will be of interest *only* to the extent that they might illuminate the putative phenomenon of people being concern about the positive welfare of others. This potential phenomenon (or things related to it) may at times be called something other than “altruism”, e.g., benevolence, caring, compassion, charity, generosity, love, responsibility, solidarity, etc. And not everything that others call “altruism” will necessarily be of relevance to *this* phenomenon.

**Everyone should read as much as possible from the following**


**Other media**

To hear a fascinating example of how words’ definitions can have life-or-death significance, listen to *Radiolab* Season 12, Episode 7: “60 words” [http://www.radiolab.org/story/60-words/](http://www.radiolab.org/story/60-words/)

**Further reading: Potential starting points**


WEEK 2: WHERE ALTRUISTIC CONCERN COMES FROM

Introduction

This week the key issue is “What might lead people to care about the positive welfare of others?” An incomplete list of candidates would include collectivism, compassion, empathy, habit, identification, instinct, learning, morality, pity, and self-interest. Because this is a long list, it is probably wise to initially focus on a limited number of contenders. The key readings this week will focus on compassion and morality.

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


Further reading: Potential starting points


Introduction

This module focuses mainly on human altruism. The two foci of this week’s topic are “To what extent do (or can) non-human animals manifest concern for the positive welfare of others?” and “What can animal psychology tell us about human altruism?” The list of animals claimed to show altruism is long but again it will probably be wise to initially focus on a limited number of contenders. This week’s key readings will focus on the possibility of altruism among rats.

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


Further reading: Potential starting points

WEEK 4: INFANT ALTRUISM

Introduction

Especially before they can speak, infant humans can be investigated only in similar ways as can any other animal. Accordingly, the two foci of this week’s topic are “To what extent do (or can) infant humans manifest concern for the positive welfare of others” and “What can infant psychology tell us about human altruism more generally?” At the same time, we will consider what evidence is presented (and needed) to claim that altruism is “innate”.

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


Further reading: Potential starting points


Smith, C. E., Blake, P. R., & Harris, P. L. (2013). I should but I won’t: Why young children endorse norms of fair sharing but do not follow them. *PloS one, 8*(3), e59510.


Introduction

The term “empathy” has been used to mean so many things that I literally usually do not know what is being referred to when I see the word in a paper’s title. Accordingly, the key question this week is ‘What is or are the best ways to understand relationships between “empathy” and “altruism”? ’

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


Further reading: Potential starting points


WEEK 6: THE NEUROSCIENCE OF ALTRUISM

Introduction

Neuroscience has various important strands but this week we will concentrate only on that one that is sometimes known as “blobology”. Blobology investigates which bits of the brain “light up” when people are given some sort of stimulus potentially related to concern for the positive welfare of others. The key issue this week is, “What does (can) blobology tell us about the phenomenon of people caring about the positive welfare of others?” Please pay attention to the specifics of this question. It does not ask, “What does (can) altruism tell us about the brain?”

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


Further reading: Potential starting points


**WEEK 7: THE EVOLUTION OF ALTRUISM**

**Introduction**

They key issue this week is “To what extent can the theory of evolution help us understand people caring about the positive welfare of others?” To make any progress on this issue, you must have a clear view on the relationship between “biological (or evolutionary) altruism” and “concern for the positive welfare for others”. You must also be as clear as you can about what evolves, e.g., a particular behaviour, a capability, or whatever. Unless you are confident that you can obtain clarity on both these points, I strongly recommend that you do not do your assessed presentation or essay on this week’s topic!

**Everyone should read as much as possible from the following**


**Further reading: Potential starting points**


**WEEK 8: THE ALTRUISTIC GENE**

**Introduction**

The key issues this week are ‘Are there one or more genes that influence the extent to which people are concerned about the positive welfare of others?’ and ‘To what extent is concern for the positive welfare of others “genetic”? ’

**Everyone should read as much as possible from the following**


**Further reading: Potential starting point**

WEEK 9: ENHANCERS OF ALTRUISM

Introduction

The key issue this week is “What sorts of things increase the likelihood that people will show various forms of concern for the positive welfare of others?” Because there are many such things, it is probably wise to focus attention initially on one or a few particular candidate facilitators. Accordingly, this week’s key readings focus on (potentially altruism enhancing) ‘norms’.

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


**Further reading: Potential starting points**


WEEK 10: IMPEDIMENTS TO ALTRUISM

Introduction

The key issue this week is “What sorts of things decrease the likelihood that people will show various forms of concern for the positive welfare of others?” Because there are many such things, it is probably wise to focus attention initially on one or a few particular candidate impediments. This week’s key readings focus on (potentially inhibiting) ‘primes’.

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


Further reading: Potential starting points


WEEK 11: CHOOSING ALTRUISM

Introduction

The key issue this week is “What can be done to enhance the extent to which people are concerned about the positive welfare of others?”

Everyone should read as much as possible from the following


Further reading: Potential starting points


Introduction

This week (Week 1) there are no seminars. Instead, there is a single two-hour lecture. In that lecture I will reiterate advice on how to do well in assessed assignments (see also Appendix), try to answer any remaining questions anyone might have, facilitate any discussions that arise, and wish you well for the future. Thank you for your participation in this module.
Seminars will be held in Weeks 2 – 11. Each lasts 1 hour and 50 minutes. See Sussex Direct for details of when and where your seminars are timetabled.

All students should have done adequate preparation to contribute positively to each week’s seminar. This includes (a) doing any advance reading or preparation suggested by the tutor or by the student(s) doing their assessed ‘presentation’; (b) having done a reasonable amount of further reading of relevant sources; and (c) being able to summarise and critically evaluate that reading. Students appearing not to have prepared suitably may be invited by the tutor to leave the seminar and work independently.

Seminars are largely facilitated by the student(s) doing their assessed ‘presentation’ that week. Each student will be scheduled to give an assessed ‘presentation’ during an Autumn Term seminar. Thirty per cent (30%) of the mark students get for this module will be determined by the mark they get for their assessed ‘presentations’.

Grades for the assessed ‘presentation’ will mostly reflect the extent to which the seminar was engaging and educational for everyone prepared and motivated to learn – however this is achieved. This is why ‘presentation’ is in ‘scare quotes’ - giving a formal (e.g., Powerpoint) presentation will be neither necessary nor sufficient to get a good grade.

Presenters do not have to cover every aspect of the week’s topic. Indeed, they would be unwise to attempt to do so. Instead, they should choose any relevant content that they think they can deal with in such a way as to engage and educate everyone prepared and motivated to learn. In general, I (Tom) advise them to “say a lot about a little” rather than “a little about a lot”. In particular, they need to demonstrate and encourage critical thinking if they want higher grades.

Similarly, class members do not have to read everything on a week’s reading list. Again, they would be unwise to attempt to do so. Rather, they should find and critically read anything relevant that they think will be engaging and educational if they bring it to the attention of others in their class. If everyone does this, we can collaboratively learn broadly and ‘deeply’.

Before or on the day of an assessed ‘presentation’, the student being assessed must send the tutor a copy of all materials used in the presentation, via email wherever possible. This should include things like any recommended reading or ‘homework’ set for other class members; Power Point Slides (if used); handouts; descriptions of in-class exercises; descriptions of and/or links to video-clips used; details of questionnaires, stories, or other ‘stimuli’ used; a narrative plan for the seminar, e.g., what is planned to happen and in what sequence. This will be used to help the tutor mark and give feedback for the ‘presentation’. It may also be used for auditing the tutor’s marking.

Each student being assessed must produce a handout and send or give a copy of this to each class member.

Each student being assessed must submit to the Psychology Office a sheet of paper
documenting the day that their assessed presentation occurred, and its title.

Presenters must get advance permission from the module tutor for any planned presentation content or activities that might reasonably be expected to unduly upset class members.

Formal criteria for assessment presentations:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment

A presentation guide – written by the module tutor...

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/ssfd0/presgood.html

This presentation guide is slightly out of date (use APA rather than Harvard style, for example) and is geared mainly towards giving ‘traditional’ presentations. Nevertheless, it is strongly recommended that you read it.

Each week’s topic is broad and presenters should not try to cover everything that could be said. Instead, they should base their presentation on one or more sub-topics from that week that they find particularly important or interesting. The aim should be to “say a lot about a little, rather than a little about a lot”: to ‘go deep’ rather than to ‘skim a lot of surface’.

A copy of the tutor’s presentation assessment aid can be found at the end of this course document. It is strongly recommended that you use this to evaluate your own presentation, ideally both before and after its delivery.

Also at the end of this document is a list of comments the module tutor has made over the years in response to assessed presentations he has witnessed. It would be wise for students to read this prior to giving their own presentations.

The module tutor will aim to provide feedback to each presenter as soon as possible after its delivery, most often well within a few days.

Tom’s reflections on some particularly good past presentations

When presenters planned to include any ethically sensitive material, they checked them with me first and went on to employ appropriate practices. E.g., If material was presented or discussed that was justifiable but potentially upsetting for audience members, audience members were warned in advance that this would occur and were given dignified alternatives to participating in that part of the seminar.

Any equipment and materials used were prepared and made ready prior to the presentation ‘proper’ beginning. Handouts were prepared so that they could be distributed with a minimum of fuss (e.g., multiple-pages were stapled into booklets).

Handouts were given out early in presentations. These contained information helpful to the audience. Often, they presented extended quotes or complicated diagrams that helped the audience focus on the topic without fear of failing to write down something of interest or importance. Sometimes, handouts contained information potentially useful to students and relevant to the week’s topic but not directly dealt with during the seminar itself. Sometimes
they included reference to web pages and other resources. Sometimes they included exercises for audience members to complete during class. Sometimes these encouraged audience members to critique, apply, or otherwise counter the material being presented. Handouts for good presentations always contained a full References section. They were also always tidy, easy to use, and engaging. Audience members were clearly grateful to have these handouts.

Presenters made clear how their handouts related to their presentations, especially any ‘lecturing’ part of it. Where handouts were to be used during the seminar, their content mirrored or otherwise clearly complemented what was going on in class. Audience members were never confused about how the handout content ‘fit’ into what was happening in class.

As presenters started their presentations, they gave the audience instructions about whether and when questions and other possible interruptions would be welcomed (e.g., at any time, only at the end of the presentation section, or whatever).

Early on in the presentation, if not right at the start, presenters gave a formal Introduction. This stated such things as (i) what presenters intended to cover during the presentation (sometimes in the form of aims and objectives, sometimes in the form of an ‘agenda’); (ii) what main critical points they intended to make; and (iii) what conclusion(s) they intended to reach. Such Introductions made clear both the structure of the presentation and the main argument(s) to be made.

Soon after the Introduction, and if it was relevant or useful to do so, presenters explained why they had chosen their topic and/or their method of presenting that topic. Some also highlighted existing (i.e., in the literature) or anticipated (i.e., in the presentation) areas of controversy, contention, or disagreement.

Presentations took the form of arguments, at least in part. The main body of the presentations presented evidence to move linearly and effectively from the stated intentions in the Introduction to justify promised Conclusions. At the very least, the “presenter’s talk” part of presentations ended with a Summary. Thus, presentations were more like conference presentations (making and justifying claims) than they were like lectures (often merely reporting others’ thoughts and findings).

Expositions in presentations were always there for a clear (and sometimes explicitly stated) purpose.

Presentations contained exercises and activities to engage and enthuse the audience. Often these were pairwise, small-group, and/or whole-group exercises. Sometimes there was an exercise or activity before the “presenter’s talk” part of the presentation. Sometimes the “presenter’s talk” part of the presentation was interspersed with one or more exercises or activities. The “presenter’s talk” part of the presentation was always followed by one or more exercises or activities.

The very best presentations included a variety of exercises and activities that generated inclusive, engaged, relevant, and high-level discussion. They avoided techniques that may have been effective earlier in the term but which had become jaded through overuse. Such exercises included having audience members complete questionnaires or apply their knowledge (e.g., from the essential readings) to some real-world issue.
A particular exercise is not employed simply because it has been used successfully in earlier presentations. There is a sense of enjoyment and interest among the class rather than, “Oh no, not this again.”

Example exercises and activities have included guided discussion of film or literature excerpts, discussion or reflection questions, self-completion or interviewer-completed questionnaires, reminiscences or speculations, dramatic reconstructions, debates, “devil’s advocacy,” and quizzes.

Material generated during an exercise contributes, or is made to contribute, to the academic purpose of the presentation. Thus, exercises form part of the integral whole of a presentation. For example, if a presenter asks for feedback about what was discussed during a small group exercise, the presenter listens hard to that feedback and ‘uses’ it in some constructive way. In short, there is an academic rationale for and purpose to presentations.

Presentations have integrated psychological theory and research with ‘real-world’ issues and occurrences. Often, presentations have made use of personal stories: in print, the presenter’s own, and/or ones volunteered or elicited from members of the audience. These stories have been engaging but have also been used to make, illustrate, or challenge academic points.

The audience will appear pleased or excited about their experience in the seminar room. They will appear likely to continue thinking and talking about the content of the presentation after they have left the seminar room.
Words and phrases underlined below (perhaps in black) indicate particular strengths: words or phrases circled (perhaps in red) indicate areas where particular opportunities for improvement exist.

1. **Understanding**
   
   Class-ish ________
   
   Own. Conveyed.

2. **Evaluation (Critical thinking)**
   
   Class-ish ________
   
   

3. **Engaging**
   
   Class-ish ________
   
   

4. **Materials (A-V Aids, handouts, exercises)**
   
   Class-ish ________
   
   

5. **Delivery**
   
   Class-ish ________
   
   Clear, appropriate volume, appropriate pace, confident, engaging, audience-concerned.
   
   NOT: Mumbling, whispering, shouting, hesitant, rushed, boring, unengaged with audience.

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**Provisional Grade**

% (Subject to Exam Board ratification).

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*There may be additional comments overleaf*
Week 1 - Lecture: Altruism as a concern

Week 2: Where altruistic concern comes from

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Week 3: Animal altruism

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Week 4: Infant altruism

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Week 5: ‘Empathy’

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### Week 7: The evolution of altruism

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### Week 8: The altruistic gene

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### Week 11: Choosing altruism

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### Week 12: Moving on

Unallocated