Prosocial behavior and sympathy

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Researchers have succeeded in attaining a lucid and clear account of prosocial behavior among humans and in the animal kingdom In spite of enormous difficulties faced by anthropologists and natural scientists. There has been considerable progress and extensive exploration in recent times in the pursuit of a thorough understanding of the processes of evolution, which have led to the emergence of social behaviors.

One such notable phenomenon that is momentous in connecting individuals and attracts the attention of many biological and anthropological researchers is empathy. The manifestations of this phenomenon from human infants and some species in animal groups have received wide recognition from general public. Prosocial behavior acts as a nuclear ingredient to the smooth running of the human societal life. This behavior is expressed as caring for others, sharing one's resources or the transfer of resources, helping others in harm, and comforting the wounded or injured.

In this article, it is established by multiple experimental studies that infants, as young as 12 months, have an altruistic nature, and their self-sacrificing tendencies are shaped by their social exchanges and associations in the subsequent years. It is also construed that the selfless behavior depicted by the children does not change; instead, it is fortified with increasing experiences and life circumstances (Hay 2007).

The grounds for such behavior have also been probed into, and the extant literature delineates that sympathy and empathy are the two main motivational factors that lead to the altruistic behavior in the children. Regulation of the otherwise complex and intricate social lives of humans is possible when people show these two emotions in their actions.

Mankind is inherently selfish by nature, but the expressions of compassion and altruism are considered as vital life skills and are present in young children and infants. Many studies have proved the caring nature of infants. One such noteworthy study involves children aging less than 18 months, and they have been reported to act prosocially to adults who showed signs of distress. The study deduced that infants substantially empathized with adults who had been harmed and showed no hesitation in sharing resources with them.

The appearance of prosocial behavior in the animal kingdom has been the focal point of debates in the biological and anthropological research centers for long, and the existing literature shows inconclusive results. To arrive at a congruous verdict, a lot of empirical investigation and analyses have been carried out where the subjects of the research were animals.

The subjects of a large number of studies were the non-human primates inclusive of great apes, New World monkeys, and the Old World monkeys, largely due to their pertinence and inter-connectedness with humans.

In this article, four species of great apes were tested, and the research was conducted at Wolfgang Ko¨hler Primate Research Centre at the Zoo Leipzig in Germany, whereby the ethics statement maintained that all the research procedures strictly adhered to the non-invasiveness regarding the animals.

The total count of the subjects was 60, comprising of 37 females and 23 males, and the sample included orangutans, Bornean Orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos ( varying gender in each dyad).

The most interesting thing in this study is the experimental setting, which was distributed in multiple phases. The first phase was a pre-test and its setting was nearly identical to the actual testing procedure.

The test was conducted by grouping the apes in pairs and randomized assignment was done to allocate roles to the apes. There were two categories of roles for the apes, victim, and helper. A human experimenter was also involved and was named E. Some of the subjects were assigned both the roles at different points in the experiment, but they were not allocated the same role in more than two consecutive sessions.

The procedure was unique to its kind, whereby two adjacent rooms were used. In one room, E and the victim were present, and in the adjacent room, the helper was accommodated. The helper was provided with sticks in the possibility of showing concern towards the victim. Sympathy and prosocial behavior could be concluded if the helper transferred the sticks to the victim at the end of the trail. The exchange of interactions between E and the victim was recorded through the lens of one camera, and interactions between victim and helper were also recorded from a second camera. Four conditions with different situations were employed in the trials, which are essentially central to the results of this study and are mentioned as follows:

1. 2 experimental conditions (both beginning with an observation phase and helper witnessing the interactions between E and victim)

* Take condition: E was positioned in front of the victim and pretended to give the victim one grape after the other only to pull his hand back when the victim advanced to take it.
* Give condition: In this condition, E handed over the grape to the victim.

1. 2 control conditions

* No food: This condition involved no food
* No victim: In this condition, no victim was present to procure the sticks from the helper in the adjacent room to obtain food

Coding of the video footage was done to arrive at sturdy conclusions, if any. The transfers of the sticks were identified along with any unusual vocal behaviors and arousals.

Results were conclusive of the fact that great apes did not and could not differentiate between and act according to the conditions, but it cannot be deduced from the findings of this study that great apes lack the distinct ability to show sympathy for others. Further research studies can focus on changing the experimental design to draw conclusions that are harmonious with the existing theories regarding prosocial behavior in the animals.

**Own thoughts regarding the relevancy of this article towards the course:**

After a comprehensive reading of this article (Liebal 2014), it can be postulated that in spite of the popular belief that nature is highly vicious and competitive, altruistic behavior is manifested in the behavior of many species other than humans. This article is relevant to the current section of the course because it analyses pieces of evidence of reciprocal altruism theories and prosocial behaviors, which form a significant portion of the theoretical framework of physical anthropology.

# Bibliography

Hay, Dale F., and Kaye V. Cook. 2007. "The transformation of prosocial behavior from infancy to childhood."." *Socioemotional Development in the toddler years: Transitions and transformations* 100-131.

Liebal, Katja, Amrisha Vaish, Daniel Haun, and Michael Tomasello. 2014. "Does sympathy motivate prosocial behavior in great apes?." *PloS one 9, no. 1* 1-9.