

ALTRUISM AND COOPERATION

This is a new course, initiated in 2004. It is being offered at a time when deadly conflicts rage in many parts of the world. Competition and rivalry are endemic. Hostility and fear are common experiences. Mass media depict much greed and violence. In such a time, what is the place of altruism, of giving and helping? How does cooperation develop and how is it maintained? The course examines data, theories, and empirical analyses of “prosocial” behavior. The basic educational objective is to explore basic questions about the kinds of human behavior we call altruism and cooperation. It therefore draws upon analyses that are being presented in sociobiology game theory, economics, social psychology, anthropology, political science, and sociology.

Lectures will use illustrative materials from contemporary events and interpretations.

OUTLINE

- I. The problem
 - Selfish genes and rational egoists
 - How could cooperation, helping, caring, and altruistic actions ever arise?
 - And then be maintained?
- II. Clues from sociobiology and biosociology and game theory
 - Trivers – Social Evolution
 - Wright – The Moral Animal
 - Simon – A mechanism for social selection and successful altruism
- III. Further evidence and wider explorations
 - Hinde & Groebel, eds.
 - Axelrod – The Evolution of Cooperation
 - Williams – The Wars Within
 - Monroe – The Heart of Altruism
 - Oliner – Do Unto Others, Chapter 5
- IV. Extensions of the concepts and theories: Societal and Political applications
 - Williams – Mutual Accommodation
 - Taylor – Community, Anarchy and Liberty
 - Terry – Condemned to Repeat?
 - Williams – The Wars Within, pp. 172-76 and 280-89
- V. Philanthropy
 - Oliner – Do Unto Others, Chapter 8
 - (References to be added)
- VI. Trans-utopianism
 - John Brown Childs – Transcommunalism
 - Deep ecology

Spring 2004

Sociology 159
Schedule of Topics

April 5	Introduction: The range of human behavior
7	Problems of selfish action & universal love
9	Selfish genes and rational choice? Are human societies basically cooperative or conflictual?
12	Sociobiological Theories of evolution
14	"Being nice"; costs and benefits
15	Mutual aid - classic formulations
19	Cooperation: definitions and problems of explanation
21	Does culture matter? If so, how?
23	Socialization - "docility" and learning. Communal sharing, authority-ranking, equality-matching, market-pricing
26	Kinship, ethnicity, and group cooperation
28	Experimental evidence concerning cooperation
30	Cooperation and the inherent security dilemma; hard and soft negotiations
May 3	"The heart of altruism"?
5	"Do Unto Others... saints and ordinary people
7	MIDTERM EXAM
10	Societal and political applications; modes of influence
12	Eliciting prosocial behavior
14	Anarchy and community
17	Humanitarian activities; paradoxes and tragic choices
19	Giving, sharing, helping, volunteering: how and why
21	Individual welfare and collective dilemmas

Schedule

May

24

Politics and accommodation: who gets what, when, and how? welfare and public choice

26

Cooperation under anarchy - the interstate arena

28

Markets and hierarchies; economic cooperatives, patronage, regulation...and so on...

31

Memorial Day holiday

June

2

Philanthropy: "virtuous giving and tax benefits"

4

Organized donations

7

Utopias and beyond: deep ecology and the varieties of realism.

9

Reviews

11

Hopes, doubts, and prospects

Final Exam; June 18