

RESEARCH ON  
*Altruism & Love*



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*An Annotated Bibliography of  
Major Studies in Psychology,  
Sociology, Evolutionary Biology,  
and Theology*

*Edited by Stephen G. Post,  
Byron Johnson,  
Michael E. McCullough, and  
Jeffrey P. Schloss*

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The man who foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my most ungrudging love.

—*Buddha*

Kind speech and forgiveness is better than alms followed by injury.

—*Qur'an*

Spread love everywhere you go: first of all in your own house. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next door neighbor. . . . Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.

—*Mother Teresa*

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

—*1 John*

Kindness in words creates confidence  
Kindness in thinking creates profoundness  
Kindness in giving creates love.

—*Lao-tzu*

To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

—*Micah*

Sooner or later, all the peoples of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. . . . The foundation of such a method is love.

—*Martin Luther King Jr.*

A coward is incapable of exhibiting love; it is the prerogative of the brave.

—*Mohandes K. Gandhi*



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## *Introduction*

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*Stephen G. Post, Byron Johnson,  
Michael E. McCullough, and Jeffrey P. Schloss*

The love on which we focus here is thankful for the very existence of others, shows concern for them, and attends to their various needs while seeking nothing in return. An unselfish, enduring, disinterested benevolence extending to all humanity, such love constitutes a perennial moral and spiritual ideal. This “pure unlimited love” is often said to be the sum of all virtue, and it is identified with the very essence of divine nature across the great religious cultures of the world.<sup>1</sup> While this ideal of love is indeed high and challenging, many everyday people act in remarkably compassionate ways and respond generously to the neediest as well as to those who are near and dear. Dostoyevsky, for example, found inspiration in the kind generosity of the Russian people. There are also those exemplars of unlimited love who inspire the world.

Selfishness, unfeeling arrogance, and hatred cause us to doubt the existence of this love, either in a rudimentary form within evolved human nature, or as a higher creative energy in which human participation is possible. We come to believe the saying, “Scratch an altruist, and watch an egoist bleed.” We read Sartre’s descriptions of “the look” of manipulation, which he saw as underlying every human interaction. We read the ethical egoists such as Ayn Rand and Friedrich Nietzsche, who tell us that even if there are genuinely altruistic motives in human nature, these should be entirely repressed lest the recipient of helping behavior become slothful. Much evolutionary biology places the strictest burden of proof on the proposition that humans are capable of any authentic benevolence toward humanity in general, and even parental love is deemed to be tainted by underlying “selfish genes.” The social sciences, too, have taught us not to believe the human narrative of remarkably helping behavior that we see and hear and read about daily.

So it is that we come to lose confidence in benevolent motivations and detect underneath every ostensible act of unrequited generosity the supposedly ubiquitous shadow of self-interest. But does science really support this pes-

simistic view of the base metal of human nature? Or are our benevolent impulses genuine, not just with regard to the nearest and dearest, but even to the neediest? Might it be the case that in the generous giving of self lies the unsought-for discovery of a more fulfilled self? These are questions of such importance that they deserve the most balanced and unbiased scientific analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Scientific skepticism regarding genuine love for others is in tension with the remarkable human narrative of benevolent behavior. This narrative of love is itself a source of empirical insight. While not amenable to the application of strict scientific methods, the many biographies and autobiographies of lives lived more for the sake of all humanity than for self (and its proximate interests) are themselves a form of data. In the broad terms of Aristotelian epistemology, we should remain connected to the narrative of human helping behavior, whether in the aftermath of 9/11 or in routine acts of good neighbors, or in the remarkable lives of great saints of love in our time and in history. And this narrative, taken at face value, indicates that we are often surprisingly generous creatures. After all, it may be impossible for science to absolutely prove the existence of an internal motivational state like genuine benevolence, and yet even a casual perusal of local, national, and international human events indicates that people do amazingly good and compassionate things for others without expecting or requiring anything in return. But there is probably something fashionable in academics about being systematically skeptical of genuine benevolence while easily accepting the proposition that all human action springs from egoism. Fashions come and go.

Scientific questions about the substrate of human nature and its evolved benevolent impulses, coupled with broad observations about the narrative of human experience, still leave the human scope of thought on unlimited love incomplete. From early in the history of human cultures, we have raised meta-physical—or “Big Picture”—questions about the meaning of love in the drama of human destiny. Is love for others the only lasting source of meaning and purpose in life? Does such love follow the grain of the universe? Is God love? Is love the ultimate ethical ideal? This third aspect of human reflection on unlimited love is often the least scientific, although “Big Picture” questions about love in the universe should, we believe, be scientifically informed.

So it is that this annotated bibliography moves from scientific studies to the stories of human generosity, and to works of philosophy and theology about the place of love in the drama of an unfolding universe. We begin with scientific presentations of the important studies on other-regarding love in positive psychology (Bono and McCullough), love and altruism from sociology (Johnson, Fantuzzo, and Siegel), and evolutionary biology of altruistic motives and behavior (Kniffin, Wilson, and Schloss). But because it is imprudent to lose sight of the narrative of human experience, we turn to the lives of people who have manifested the works of love, although none would be so presumptuous as to think that they were perfectly loving (Emma Post). These narratives point to the

traditions of perennial human reflection on unselfish love as essential to divine nature and as in mysterious ways available to us by participation. Thus, a final chapter focuses on theological, philosophical, and ethical speculation about divine and human love (Oord). Each chapter begins with an introduction on the significance of its content for the topic of unlimited love.

Such a highly integrative annotated bibliography will be reader-friendly in its tone and range. Whether the reader is primarily interested in science, biography, metaphysics, or ethics, we hope that he or she will work through this volume as a whole. If we succeed in encouraging such integrative learning and reflection, then we will have fulfilled our purpose.<sup>3</sup>

Before concluding this brief introduction, the reader deserves a broad definition of unlimited love, which is merely a creative linguistic transposition of *agape*, the ancient Greek word for love of all people and that is associated with God's exceptionless love for humanity:

The essence of love is to affectively affirm and to gratefully delight in the well-being of others; the essence of unlimited love is to extend this form of love to all others in an enduring fashion. In addition to being understood as the highest form of virtue, Unlimited Love is often deemed a Creative Presence underlying and integral to all reality. Participation in Unlimited Love is considered the fullest experience of spirituality, giving rise to inner peace and kindness, as well as to active works of love. Depending on the circumstances of others, unlimited love is expressed in a number of ways, including empathy and understanding, generosity and kindness, compassion and care, altruism and self-sacrifice, celebration and joy, and forgiveness and justice. In all these manifestations, unlimited love acknowledges for all others the absolutely full significance that, because of egoism or hatred, we otherwise acknowledge only for ourselves.

The reader also deserves a definition of *altruism*, a word different from love and yet related to it, which appears in this book title as well. It is a modern secular scientific concept whose sacred counterpart is *agape* love, although it lacks the emotional intonation of love. Both are other-regarding by definition and imply generous self-giving. Theologians' hesitancy to engage in dialogue with the science of altruism is understandable because altruism emerged as a decidedly secular concept within the nineteenth-century domain of scientific positivism, the view that science would eventually replace religion by substituting empirical reason for faith and superstition. Yet the positivist view has not withstood the facts of the twentieth century, which demonstrated that the influence of religion would rise rather than fall in a scientific world.

The term *altruism*, which derives from the Latin *alter* ("the other"), means literally "other-ism." It was created by the French sociologist Auguste Comte (1798–1857) to displace terms burdened by a theological history. It was suggested by a French legal expression, "le bien d'autrui" (the good of others). Comte viewed the subordination of altruism to egoism as the source of human evil, and he was neither a psychological nor an ethical egoist.

One need not endorse the secular humanistic tone of "altruism" to appreci-

ate the scientific studies indicating the extent to which human nature manifests altruistic motives and behaviors. If there are any continuities or, perhaps better said, any points of correspondence or convergence, between human nature and unlimited love, it is science that must describe the base material of evolved human nature; this will require exploration of the forms of “altruism” in the human repertoire. If Unlimited Love is the ultimate reality that underlies the universe, one would expect to find some hint of it in human nature, just as one would wish to better understand how it is that Unlimited Love seems to break into the lives of many people who have gone on to become servants of all humanity.

Scientific progress in our understanding of love and unlimited love is absolutely crucial to meaningful dialogue and sustained public interest. Just as human beings endeavor to understand and harness the power of the wind, the atom, and gravity, they can make progress in understanding and facilitating the energies of unlimited love. Before we can move forward in the science of unlimited love, it is necessary to have some inventory of existing knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

### *Notes*

1. Sir John Templeton, *Pure Unlimited Love* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000).
2. Stephen G. Post, Lynn G. Underwood, Jeffrey P. Schloss, and William B. Hurlbut, eds., *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Dialogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
3. For a model of integrated science on altruistic love, see Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation*, with a foreword by S. G. Post (1954; Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002).
4. For a fuller exposition on the meaning of unlimited love, see Stephen G. Post, *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003).

## *Research on Other-Regarding Virtues, 1998–2002*

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*Giacomo Bono and Michael E. McCullough*

In 2002, Shelley Kilpatrick and Mike McCullough's annotated bibliography of over seventy peer-reviewed articles on altruistic and prosocial behavior was published in *Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Dialogue*. Kilpatrick and McCullough provided summaries of and commentaries upon articles—mostly from the 1980s and 1990s, but also including some classics from previous decades—in which investigators explored altruism and prosocial behavior in many different forms, involving many different types of people from all walks of life.

Kilpatrick and McCullough's (2002) annotated bibliography included articles that had been published as recently as 1998. As 1998 was not that long ago, perhaps it seems too early to be revising their recent effort. However, the literature has grown so substantially in this short time that it seems worthwhile to offer a brief update. Science progresses most rapidly when the existing knowledge base is disseminated to innovators who can take that knowledge to the next step. And in light of the goal of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love (IRUL) to stimulate high-quality scientific research, an update seems warranted. Herein we summarize more than three dozen exciting studies of other-regarding virtues and behavior that have appeared in the psychological literature between 1998 and 2002. The present annotated bibliography is noticeably slimmer than was Kirkpatrick and McCullough's, but the goals and focus are similar.

Our approach for locating these studies was straightforward: We performed a series of electronic searches of the PsycInfo database for research articles that were published from 1998 to 2002. These electronic searches led us to published research articles in psychology and related social sciences that touch on a broad range of other-regarding virtues (e.g., cooperation, altruism, forgiveness, generosity, kindness, and humility). We included only empirical articles, omitting review articles and conceptual articles.

To imply that our selection process was scientific, or even very systematic, would perhaps be disingenuous. Although we tried to concentrate on what we thought were the most exciting recent developments in the social-scientific study of other-regarding virtues, we also followed our noses, selecting studies that drew us in. No doubt, our noses led us away from many good studies. We gravitated toward studies, to mention only a handful of categories, that addressed: the evolutionary and genetic substrates of altruistic behavior (Korchmaros & Kenny, 2001; Krueger, Hicks, & McGue, 2001); the personality traits and psychological processes that are involved in choosing among social strategies that are cooperative rather than self-serving (e.g., Boone, et al., 2002; De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999a, 1999b; De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001; Koole, Jager, van de Berg, Vlek, & Hofstee, 2001), developmental studies examining the manifestations of other-regarding sentiments and prosocial behavior at specific points in the life course (e.g., Eisenberg, et al., 2002; Kakavoulis, 1998; Midlarsky, Kahana, Corley, Nemeroff, & Schonbar, 1999; Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarusso, & Bengtson, 2002); social-psychological studies on processes related to love and commitment (Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002), studies on factors that diminish prejudice (Gaertner, et al., 1999); even studies that offer direction for designing interventions in the “real world” that can help to encourage other-regarding virtues and behavior (e.g., Kim & Webster, 2001; Perrine & Heather, 2000). The studies included herein varied in objectives from the most basic and theoretical (e.g., Macy & Skvoretz, 1998) to the utterly practical (Perrine & Heather, 2000).

Some of the studies that interested us the most demonstrate the occasional folly of selfishness and the ironically self-serving value of some of the other-regarding virtues. Witvliet, Ludwig, and Vander Laan’s (2001) demonstration of the physiological strain that results from entertaining grudges and thoughts of revenge toward transgressors is a warning that overindulging the dark appetite for “balancing the scales” can exact a toll on the person who keeps the books and tries to collect the debts. By focusing on thoughts of empathy and forgiveness for the transgressor, one can avoid these physiological surcharges. Sheldon, Sheldon, and Osbaldiston (2000) explored the notion that people who make a priority of humanistic values—cooperation, self-acceptance, and community contribution—tend to form friendships with each other in the real world, whereas people who value individual materialistic advancement, attractiveness, and fame also tend to aggregate. Without “suckers to exploit,” Sheldon and colleagues show us, groups composed of people who are oriented toward the self-serving values flounder in tasks that require teamwork, whereas groups composed of people who prioritize the more humanistic values speed ahead. By cooperating with their own kind, groups of cooperators compete better against other groups. By competing with their own kind, groups of competitors compete much worse against other groups (cf. Macy & Skvoretz, 1998).

There are other ironic stories to be told from the articles reviewed herein. Kelln and Ellard's (1999) study shows that forgiving someone for a transgression, instead of being "selfless," has a gift-like quality that, rather than working against the forgiver's self-interest, actually works for the forgiver by creating bonds of indebtedness. Put plainly, forgiven people want to do a good turn to those who have forgiven them. In a similar vein, Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarusso, and Bengtson (2002) demonstrated that parents who make major investments of time, affection, and even money in their children get returns on these investments later in life in the form of emotional and tangible social support. By caring for others—whether the "others" are strangers or the closest of kin—we actually build bonds of indebtedness and fidelity.

Are these bonds of indebtedness and fidelity the fibers out of which true community can be fashioned, or are they chains? Or both? The answer to this question may be, in part, a matter for more empirical work, but it may also be a matter of taste, or a matter of one's *vision* for how society *should be* constructed and how people *should* relate to one another—matters that science cannot arbitrate. If choosing how to improve social relations and society is a matter of taste or vision, then which vision should we prefer? After all, every social structure has its pathologies. Feudal systems have no lack of indebtedness and fidelity, but would any of us choose for ourselves a feudal societal system without knowing in advance who our lord would be? And who has not had the experience of being forced by a teacher or supervisor to work in a group that clearly performed worse, not better, than the sum of its individual parts?

Clearly, neither a return to a feudal system of obligation and correlated prerogatives, nor a headlong plunge into warm-and-fuzzy but uncritical groupishness, is a wise way forward for human society. Still, for the social critic who thinks we need more cooperation, indebtedness, and fidelity, discoveries like those in the studies we review here may seem like a tonic from which our society could benefit.

 Ashton, M. C., Paunonen, S. V., Helmes, E., & Jackson D. N. (1998). Kin altruism, reciprocal altruism, and the Big Five personality factors. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 19(4), 243–255.

**Objective:** Identify personality characteristics associated with kin altruism and reciprocal altruism, and relate those characteristics to the Big Five personality dimensions.

**Design:** Nonexperimental questionnaire.

**Setting:** University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.

**Participants:** A total of 118 (69 female, 49 men; median age = 19) introductory psychology students volunteered to participate for course credit.

**Assessment of Predictor Variables:** Participants completed a questionnaire containing forty adjective minimarkers of the Big Five personality factors

(Saucier, 1994), which represent the four quadrants of the Agreeableness and Emotional Stability factor plane (e.g., patient, peaceful, tolerant and critical, demanding and irritable, respectively).

**Assessment of Outcome Variables:** Altruism was measured in several ways. Participants completed two self-report measures, the Jackson Personality Inventory-Revised (JPI-R; Jackson, 1994), which measures general altruistic behavior, and a questionnaire that measures four positive personality characteristics (e.g., feeling sorry for, worrying about, being closely attached to one's relatives, and being closely attached to one's friends) and four negative ones (e.g., tendency to suspect deceit from, become angry at, retaliate against, and hesitate to forgive other people) that are presumed to be related to both kin and reciprocal altruism. These items were aggregated into an Empathy/Attachment scale and Forgiveness/Nonretaliation scale (alphas = .73 and .75, respectively). Two versions of a money allocation task similar to a decomposed game procedure used by Kramer, McClintock, and Messick (1986) were used to measure kin and reciprocal altruism. Participants were to choose between two combinations (\$125 for the participant and \$75 for the other or \$150 for the participant and \$50 for the other) that would be hypothetically allotted to themselves and to a person who was described as uncooperative toward them (in the reciprocal version) and to someone with whom they had a long friendship and much in common (in the kin version).

**Main Results:** The personality traits involving empathy and attachment facilitated kin altruism, and personality traits involving forgiveness and nonretaliation facilitated reciprocal altruism. Moreover, the Empathy/Attachment and Forgiveness/Nonretaliation dimensions were found to be nearly orthogonal to each other. While the first traits fell roughly in the middle of the high Agreeableness/low Emotional Stability quadrant, the second traits fell roughly in the middle of the high Agreeableness/high Emotional quadrant.

**Conclusion:** Empathy and Attachment personality traits are related to kin altruism, while Forgiveness and Nonretaliatory traits are related to reciprocal (nonkin) altruism. The former appear to be related to high Agreeableness and low Emotional Stability, while the latter appear to be related to high Agreeableness and high Emotional. The importance of Agreeableness, the authors contend, lies in the interpersonal communication skills required for people to assess how another person (related or not) is likely to treat them. Moreover, negative emotions may energize kin altruism by facilitating feelings of empathy and attachment toward kin or they may discourage reciprocal altruism by facilitating anger and resentment toward exploitative individuals.

**Commentary:** This research found important relationships between personality and the two types of altruism recognized by ethologists and behavioral ecologists, altruism toward kin and toward nonkin.

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