



Altruism in Cross-Cultural Perspective (International and Cultural Psychology)

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Altruism in Cross-Cultural Perspective provides such a scholarly overview, examining the intersection of culture and such topics as evolutionary accounts of altruism and the importance of altruism in ritual and religion. ??The past decade has seen a proliferation of research on altruism, made possible in part by significant funding from organizations such as the John Templeton Foundation. While significant research has been conducted on biological, social, and individual dimensions of altruism, there has been no attempt to provide an overview of the ways that altruistic behavior and attitudes vary across cultures. The book addresses the methodological challenges of researching altruism across cultures, as well as the ways that altruism is manifest in difficult circumstances. A particular strength of the book is its attention to multiple disciplinary approaches to understanding altruism, with contributors from fields including psychology, anthropology, sociology, biology, communication, philosophy, religious studies, gender studies, and bioethics.?

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Editorial Review

Review

"Based on a symposium on the same theme held in connection with the 34th Annual Conference of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research, February 23–27, 2005, at Santa Fe, NM, and convened by the volume's editor, the book contains contributions by 21 authors of different nationalities in 13 chapters, 7 of which are based on papers originally presented at this conference. While a "Foreword" by senior cross-cultural psychologist Harry C. Triandis (vii–xi) aptly leads into the subject matter, the "Afterword" (chapter 13, pp. 159–63), by Steven G. Post and Matthew T. Lee, concludes that "other-regarding behaviors are without exception endorsed in all major world religions and in the world cultures that have grown up around them" (p. 159) which allows us to assume that altruism is "a universal value" indeed (p. 163). (Post is a physician and Lee a sociologist, and both are engaged in the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, Stony Brook, NY.)...Short biographical notes about the contributors (pp. 165–71) and the editor (p. 173) as well as a general index (pp. 175–80) conclude this book, which is a high-quality tool for cross-cultural studies of altruism and beyond."

Christopher H. Grundmann

Zygon, vol. 49, no. 1, March 2014

"*Altruism in Cross-Cultural Perspective* provides a multidisciplinary effort to examine human altruism cross-culturally. The authors of the 11 chapters plus epilogue and afterword come from a variety of disciplines: Psychology and anthropology are well represented, with additional contributions from social work, philosophy, theology, and education. Other chapter authors come from communication, folklore studies, English literature, public health, recreation and tourism, and ecology and environmental sciences. The multidisciplinary breadth of this volume results from its origination as a symposium conducted at the 34th Annual Conference of the Society for Cross Cultural Research convened in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in February 2005. The pioneering work of Daniel Batson on altruism provides a foundation for the book and a common thread running through many of the chapters (Batson, 2011, 2012)...This book should be of interest to both students and professionals concerned with gaining a broader understanding of altruism in cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary perspectives. As noted above, it builds on the pioneering work of Batson and complements other recent work on altruism (Knafo & Israel, 2012; Midlarsky, Mullin, & Barkin, 2012; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005; Snyder & Dwyer, 2013)."

John M. Davis

PsycCRITIQUES

April 28, 2014, Vol. 59, No. 17, Article 8

From the Back Cover

Doing for others--altruism--is arguably one of the most human of our activities. Arguable too are the origins

of altruism: biology, psychology, culture, all of the above? Researchers have been exploring all three in intriguing lines of inquiry. But as the world grows smaller, culture grows as a major dimension in how, and why, people help others.

The contributors to *Altruism in Cross-Cultural Perspective* employ a wealth of methods to examine selfless acts on a global scale. Extensive discussions help to define this elusive concept, in some cases expanding it to include empathy, cooperation, generosity, and Eastern and Western spirituality. Considerations of gender, urban/rural life, family relationships, and other key variables are included, as are relevant findings from evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. And inroads are made in answering such longstanding questions as why altruistic acts in one culture may not be perceived as such in others, and the costs of altruism to those who give. Among the topics featured:

- Cultural values and volunteering: A cross-cultural perspective.
- Embracing the biosphere: Altruism in Indian religions.
- Cultural variations: Traditional parental manipulation and ancestor-descendant conflict.
- Do we really like the kind girls and animals?: Altruism in folktales.
- Daoism and altruism: A China-USA perspective.
- Mesoamerican religious festivals: Altruism in human ritual.
- To give or not to give?: Confessions of a humanitarian aid worker.

Altruism in Cross-Cultural Perspective is timely reading for cross-cultural scholars and researchers of altruism and other pro-social behavior. Researchers from various disciplines will be especially interested in the book, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, biology, communication, philosophy, religious studies, gender studies, and bioethics.

About the Author

Douglas A. Vakoch is Professor of Clinical Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, as well as Director of Interstellar Message Composition at the SETI Institute. His research spans the fields of psychology, anthropology, and space sciences, and his books include *Psychology of Space Exploration: Contemporary Research in Historical Perspective* (NASA, 2011), *On Orbit and Beyond: Psychological Perspectives on Human Spaceflight* (Springer, 2012), *Archaeology, Anthropology, and Interstellar Communication* (NASA, 2012), *Astrobiology, History, and Society: Extraterrestrial Life and the Impact of Discovery* (Springer, 2013), and *Between Worlds: The Art and Science of Interstellar Message Composition* (MIT Press, 2013). Dr. Vakoch chaired the symposium "Altruism in Cross-Cultural Perspective" at the 34th Annual Conference of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research, which brought together researchers from anthropology, psychology, sociology, medicine, and public health for the first in-depth discussion of altruism across cultures. He has been a faculty participant in two separate month-long summer seminars sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation: "Biology and Purpose: Altruism, Morality, and Human Nature in Evolutionary Theory" and "Works of Love: Scientific and Theological Perspectives on Altruism." Dr. Vakoch has served on the Executive Committee of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research, which brings together psychologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and research. He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Ecopsychology*, and he serves as general editor for Berghahn Books' *Ecofeminist Theory and Practice Series*, which includes his own book, *Ecofeminism and Rhetoric: Critical Perspectives on Sex, Technology, and Discourse* (2011).

Users Review

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