

# Kognitionspsychologie II: Session 9

## Motivation: Cooperation

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Maximilian Theisen, FS 2026

April 28, 2026

# Semester Overview

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#	Date	Topic	Instructor
1	17.02.2026	Emotion: What is an emotion?	Mata
2	03.03.2026	Emotion: What is an emotion? (continued)	Mata
3	10.03.2026	Emotion: Neural bases	Tisdall
4	17.03.2026	Emotion: Regulation	Mata
5	24.03.2026	Emotion: Well-being	Mata
6	31.03.2026	Motivation: What is motivation?	Mata
7	07.04.2026	Motivation: Extrinsic vs intrinsic motivation	Mata
8	14.04.2026	Motivation: Neural bases	Tisdall
9	28.04.2026	Motivation: Cooperation	Theisen
10	05.05.2026	Motivation: Morality	Theisen
11	12.05.2026	Applications	Mata
12	19.05.2026	Wrap-up and Q&A	Mata
13	03.06.2026	Exam (DSBG Neubau)	
14	20.07.2026	Repeat Exam (Vesalianum)	

# Today's Session

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Psychological  
Egoism



Caring as a Trait

# Learning Objectives for This Session

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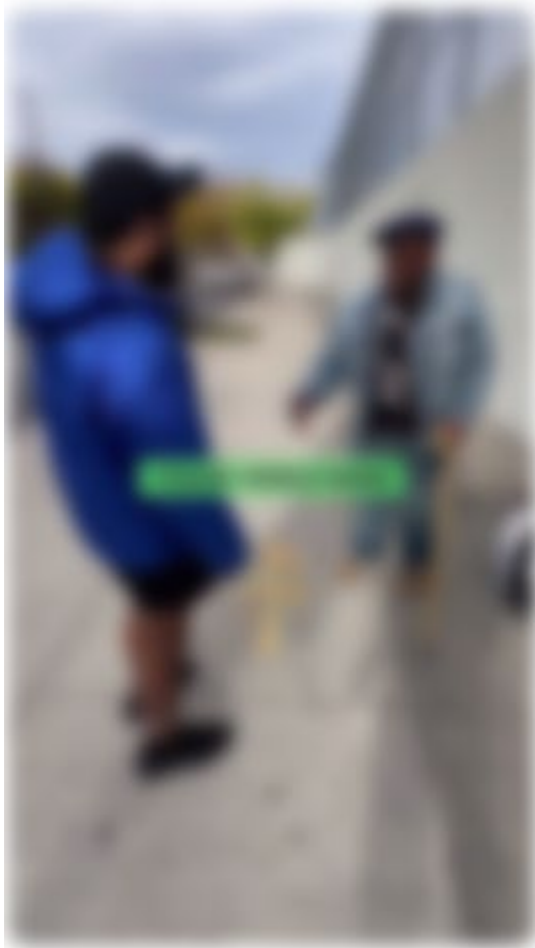
- Discuss how traditional motivational theories explain selfless behavior
- Discuss the empirical challenges in testing psychological egoism
- Understand the problem of the jangle-fallacy in the search for a trait that explains caring for others
- Describe how Hilbig et al. (2023) have addressed this problem



Psychological Egoism

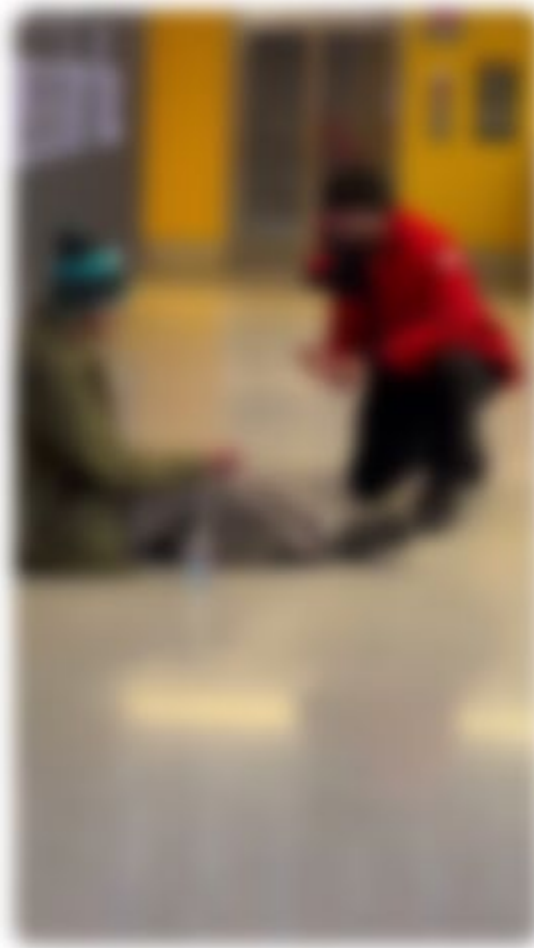
# Is Motivation Always About Oneself?

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**Surprising Homeless Man With \$3,000!**

266.072 Aufrufe



**Surprising Homeless Man And He Said THIS...**

810.463 Aufrufe



**Surprising a Homeless Artist with Painting ...**

7,1 Mio. Aufrufe

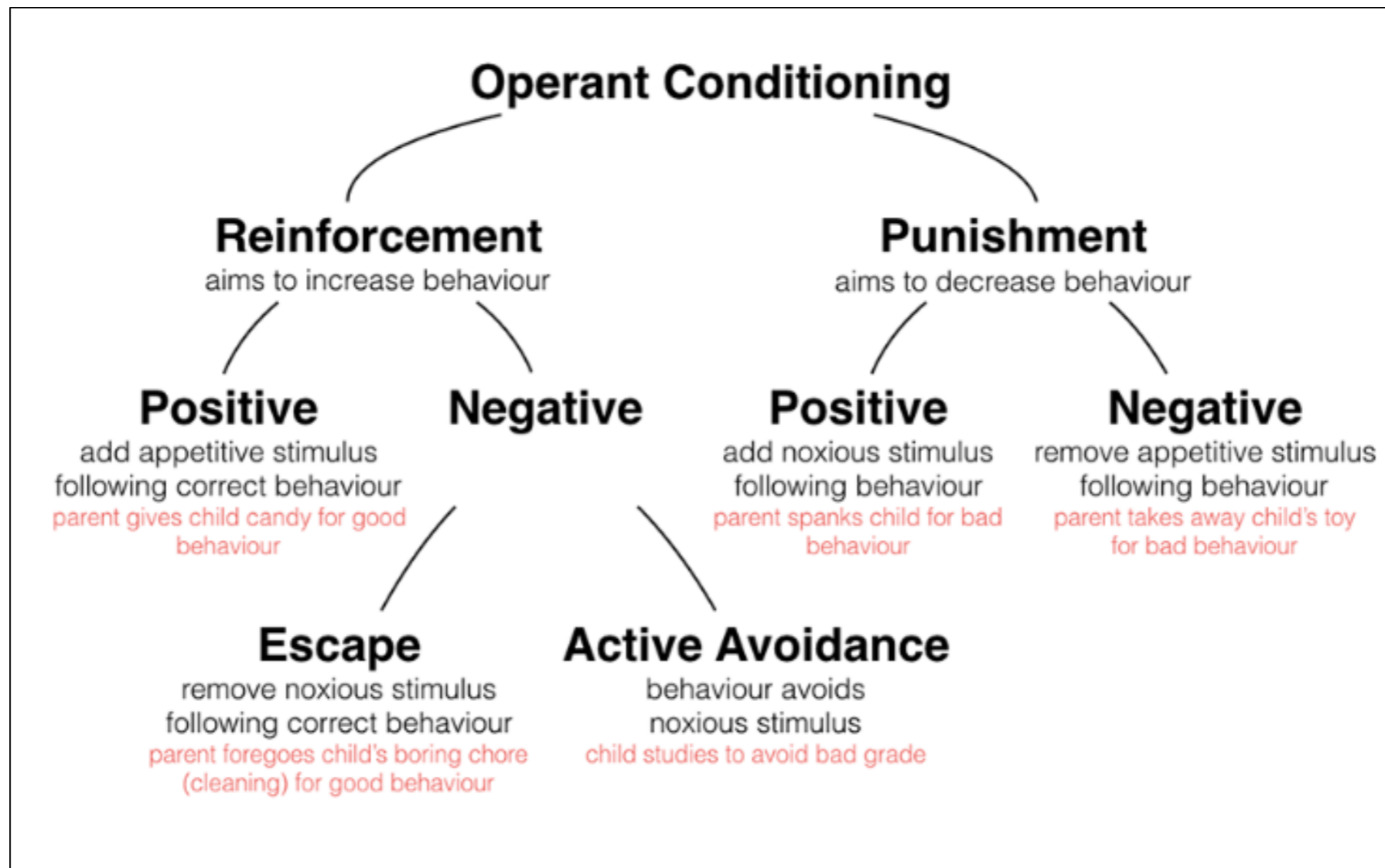


**homeless family selling rice on street gets ...**

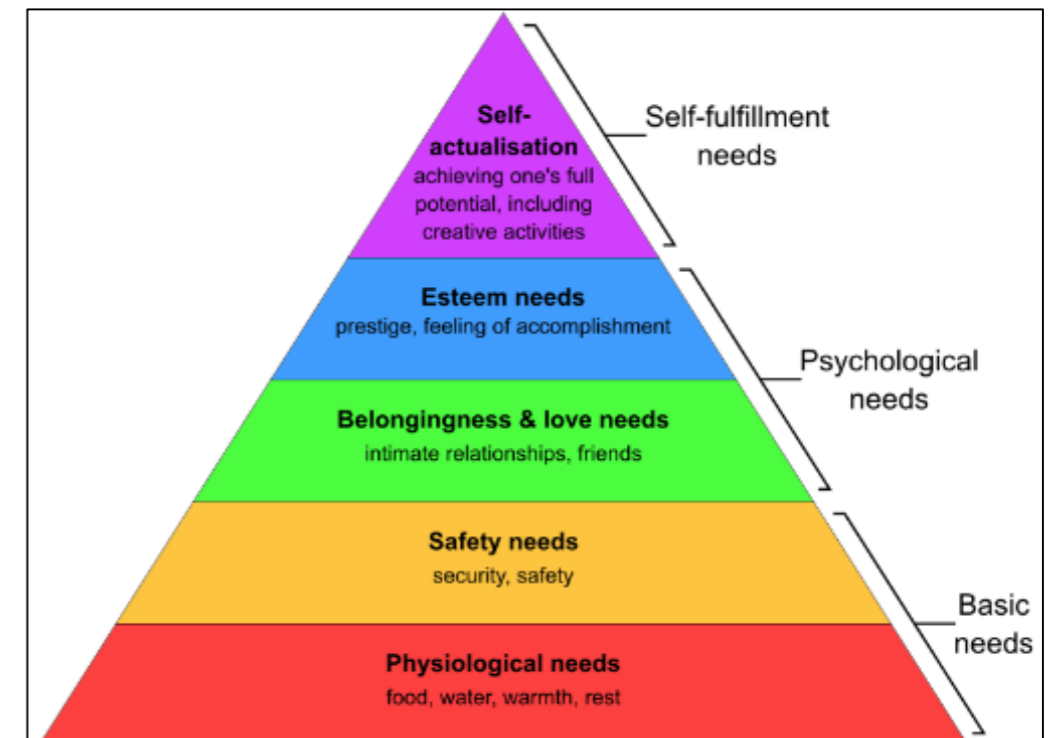
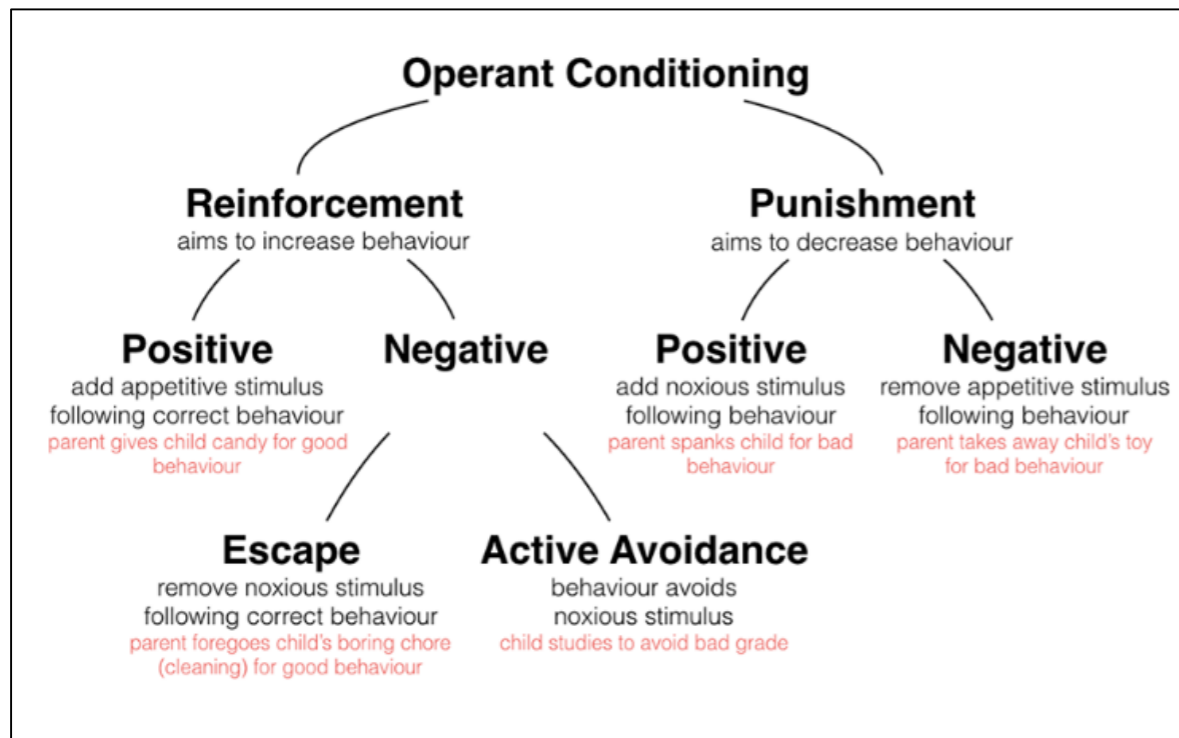
14 Mio. Aufrufe

# Is Motivation Always About Oneself?

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# Is Motivation Always About Oneself?



# Is Motivation Always About Oneself?

Some acts seem to be motivated by selfless desires. Acts that are motivated by such desires are called altruistic.

 <p>1.4 Tsd. Spenden</p> <p>Hjälp mig i kampen mot hjärncancer.</p> <p>560'029 kr sammelt</p>	 <p>1.3 Tsd. Spenden</p> <p>Hilfe für Kevin und Morris – Unterstützung nach dem Verlust</p> <p>25'085 € sammelt</p>
 <p>15.5 Tsd. Spenden</p> <p>Support Happy Cat Sanctuary After Tragic Fire</p> <p>781'235 \$ sammelt</p>	 <p>5.7 Tsd. Spenden</p> <p>Honoring Austin Metcalf: Help His Family Heal</p> <p>285'899 \$ sammelt</p>

## I Donated a Kidney to a Stranger. You Might Consider It Too.

The National Kidney Foundation says about 90,000 people in the U.S. need a kidney, and 12 people die every day while waiting for one.

MARCH 24, 2025 BY RYANN COULES



Photos courtesy: Ryann Noelani Coules



## I threw myself on to an exploding grenade

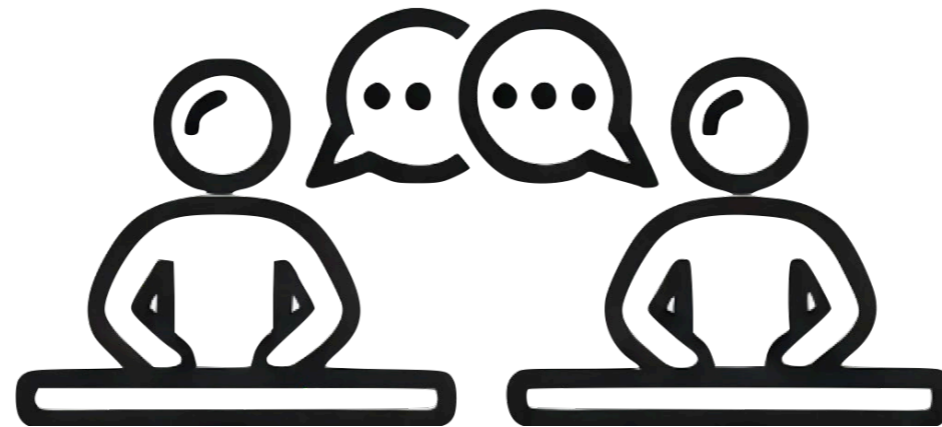
'There was a pinging noise, familiar to anyone who's ever pulled the pin from a grenade. I had walked into a tripwire'



'I had perhaps four or five seconds until detonation, and I counted them down in my head.'

Photograph: Mark Chilvers for the Guardian

# How do traditional motivational theories explain such acts?



# Psychological Egoism

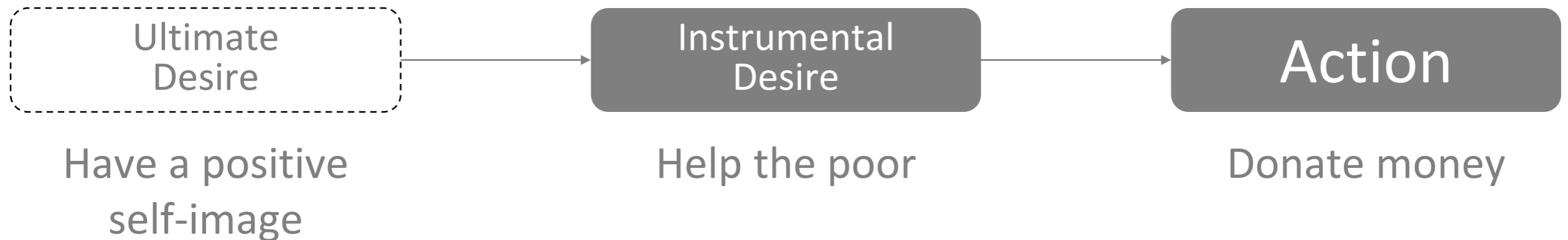
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“Psychological egoism [...] is the view that all voluntary action is motivated by self-interest, or, to put it another way: we always act selfishly. The opposing view [...] is the view that not all voluntary actions are motivated by self-interest.”

Tiberius, V. (2023), *Moral psychology. A contemporary introduction* (2).  
Routledge, p. 42.

# Psychological Egoism

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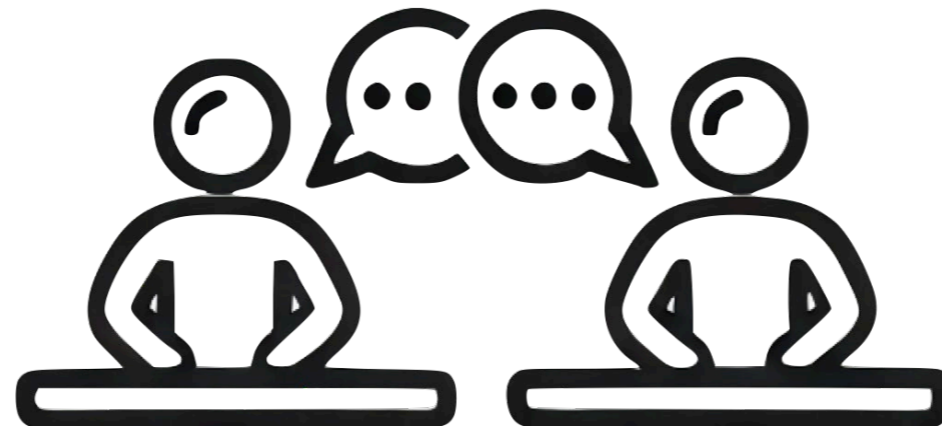


**Instrumental** desires: “An instrumental desire for x is a desire that depends on a further desire for something else to which x is a means.”

**Ultimate** desires: “An ultimate desire is a desire for something for its own sake, not because it is a means to anything else.”

# Are people ever motivated by ultimately selfless desires?

How could you test this?



# Psychological Egoism: Evidence for instrumental desires in helping

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Happy to help? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of performing acts of kindness on the well-being of the actor<sup>☆</sup>

Oliver Scott Curry<sup>a,\*</sup>, Lee A. Rowland<sup>b,e</sup>, Caspar J. Van Lissa<sup>c,f</sup>, Sally Zlotowitz<sup>d</sup>, John McAlaney<sup>b</sup>, Harvey Whitehouse<sup>a</sup>

## ABSTRACT

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Do acts of kindness improve the well-being of the actor? Recent advances in the behavioural sciences have provided a number of explanations of human social, cooperative and altruistic behaviour. These theories predict that people will be 'happy to help' family, friends, community members, spouses, and even strangers under some conditions. Here we conduct a systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence that kindness interventions (for example, performing 'random acts of kindness') boost subjective well-being. Our initial search of the literature identified 489 articles; of which 24 (27 studies) met the inclusion criteria (total  $N = 4045$ ). These 27 studies, some of which included multiple control conditions and dependent measures, yielded 52 effect sizes. Multi-level modeling revealed that the overall effect of kindness on the well-being of the actor is small-to-medium ( $\delta = 0.28$ ). The effect was not moderated by sex, age, type of participant, intervention, control condition or outcome measure. There was no indication of publication bias. We discuss the limitations of the current literature, and recommend that future research test more specific theories of kindness: taking kindness-specific individual differences into account; distinguishing between the effects of kindness to specific categories of people; and considering a wider range of proximal and distal outcomes. Such research will advance our understanding of the causes and consequences of kindness, and help practitioners to maximise the effectiveness of kindness interventions to improve well-being.

# Psychological Egoism: Empathy-Altruism-Hypothesis

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- Empathy-helping-relationship: Empathy boosts prosocial behavior (Yin & Wang, 2023)
- Empathy-altruism-hypothesis: (Batson, 1987)
  - Empathy should only increase other-concerned desires but not self-concerned desires
  - If empathy boosts prosocial behavior, then prosocial behavior is motivated by other-concerned/selfless desires
  - Psychological egoism is false

# Psychological Egoism: Empathy-Altruism-Hypothesis

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Alternative interpretation:

- Negative state relief model: (Cialdini et al., 1987)
  - Seeing someone suffer puts us in a negative state (distress, sadness, guilt, ...)
  - Empathy increases the intensity of these emotions, thereby increasing the ultimately selfish desire to relieve us of that state
  - The empathy-helping-relationship is explained by the increased selfish desire to reduce the distress of not helping
  - Psychological egoism might still be true

# Psychological Egoism: Empathy-Altruism-Hypothesis

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Emotion  
2018, Vol. 18, No. 4, 493–506

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1528-3542/18/\$12.00 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/emo0000375>

## Digital Altruists: Resolving Key Questions About the Empathy–Altruism Hypothesis in an Internet Sample

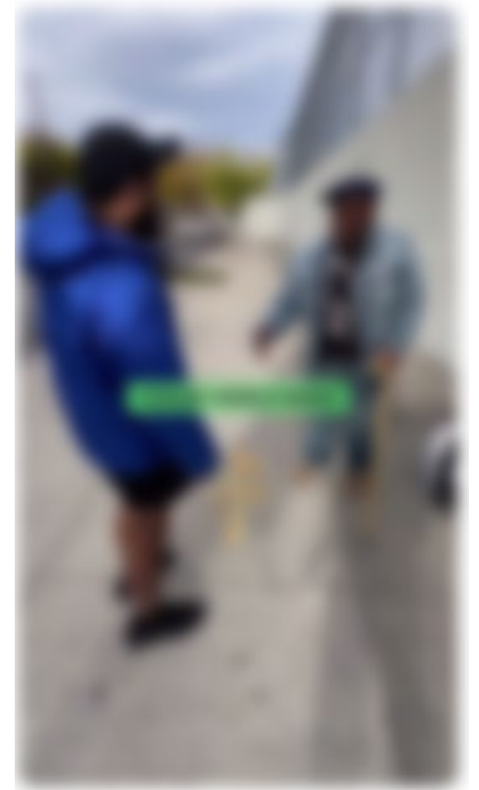
William H. B. McAuliffe, Daniel E. Forster, Joachner Philippe, and Michael E. McCullough  
University of Miami

Researchers have identified the capacity to take the perspective of others as a precursor to empathy-induced altruistic motivation. Consequently, investigators frequently use so-called perspective-taking instructions to manipulate empathic concern. However, most experiments using perspective-taking instructions have had modest sample sizes, undermining confidence in the replicability of results. In addition, it is unknown whether perspective-taking instructions work because they increase empathic concern or because comparison conditions reduce empathic concern (or both). Finally, some researchers have found that egoistic factors that do not involve empathic concern, including self-oriented emotions and self–other overlap, mediate the relationship between perspective-taking instructions and helping. The present investigation was a high-powered, preregistered effort that addressed methodological shortcomings of previous experiments to clarify how and when perspective-taking manipulations affect emotional arousal and prosocial motivation in a prototypical experimental paradigm administered over the Internet. Perspective-taking instructions did not clearly increase empathic concern; this null finding was not due to ceiling effects. Instructions to remain objective, on the other hand, unequivocally reduced empathic concern relative to a no-instructions control condition. Empathic concern was the most strongly felt emotion in all conditions, suggesting that distressed targets primarily elicit other-oriented concern. Empathic concern uniquely predicted the quality of social support provided to the target, which supports the empathy–altruism hypothesis and contradicts the role of self-oriented emotions and self–other overlap in explaining helping behavior. Empathy-induced altruism may be responsible for many prosocial acts that occur in everyday settings, including the increasing number of prosocial acts that occur online.

# Psychological Egoism: Summary

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- Psychological egoism is the empirical claim that all voluntary action is ultimately selfish
- Difficulty: How do we know a desire is ultimate?
- Relationship between empathy and helping suggests motivating role of other-concerned emotions



**Surprising Homeless  
Man With \$3,000!**

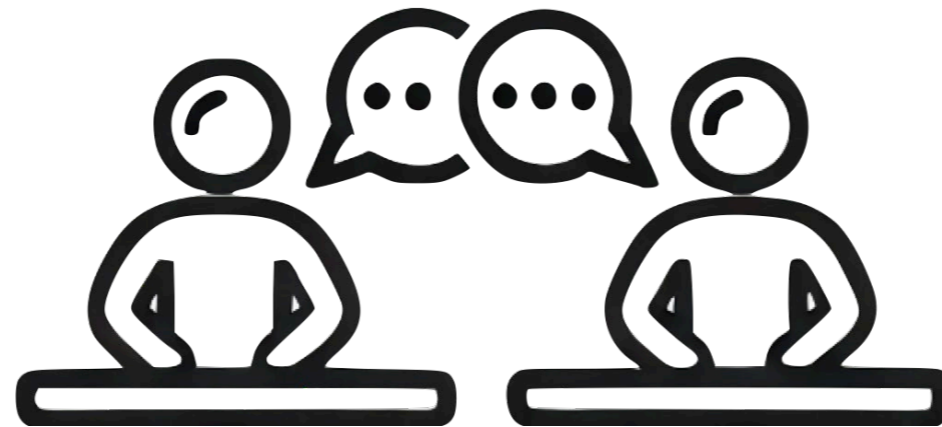
266.072 Aufrufe



Caring as a Trait

# Do people differ in how much they care about others?

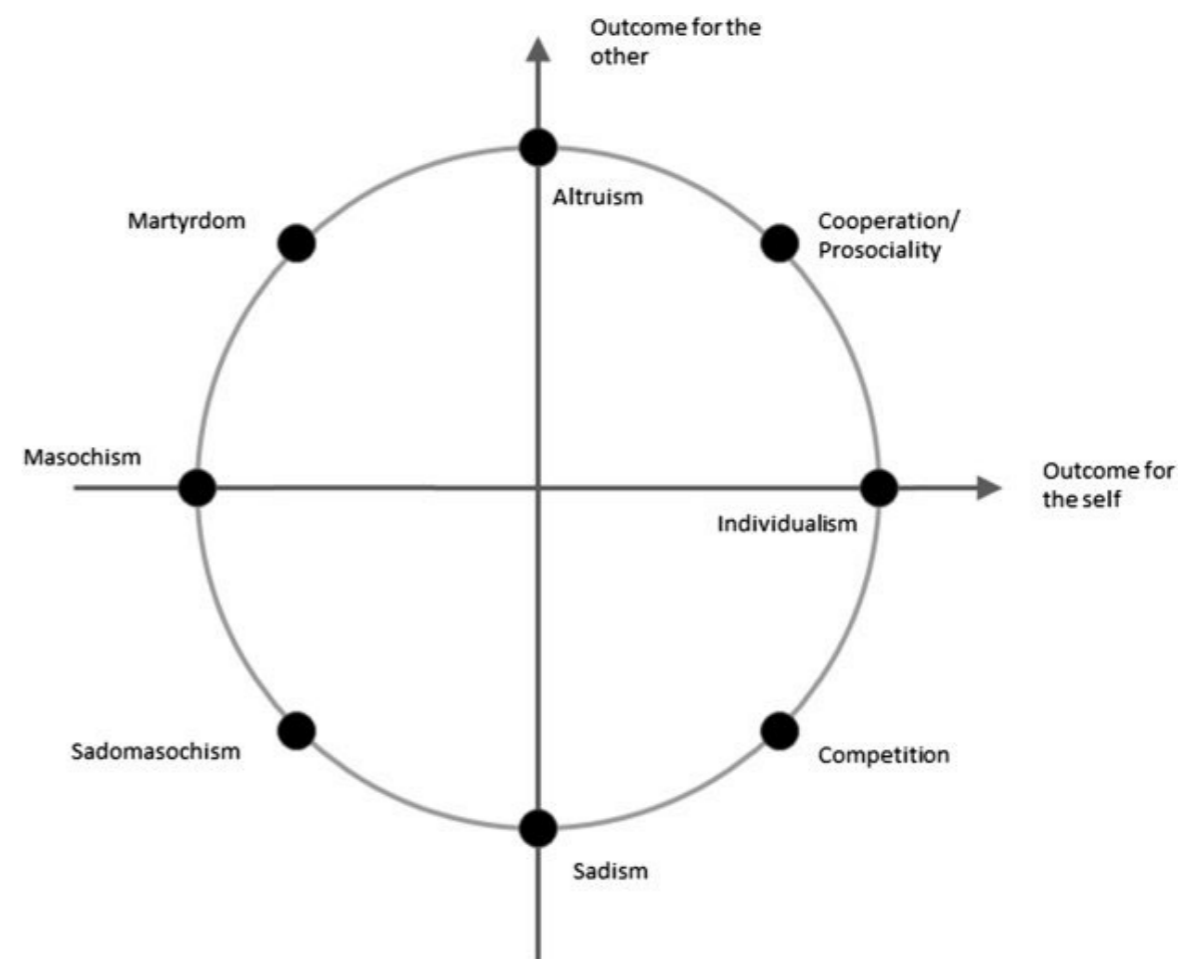
How could we measure this?



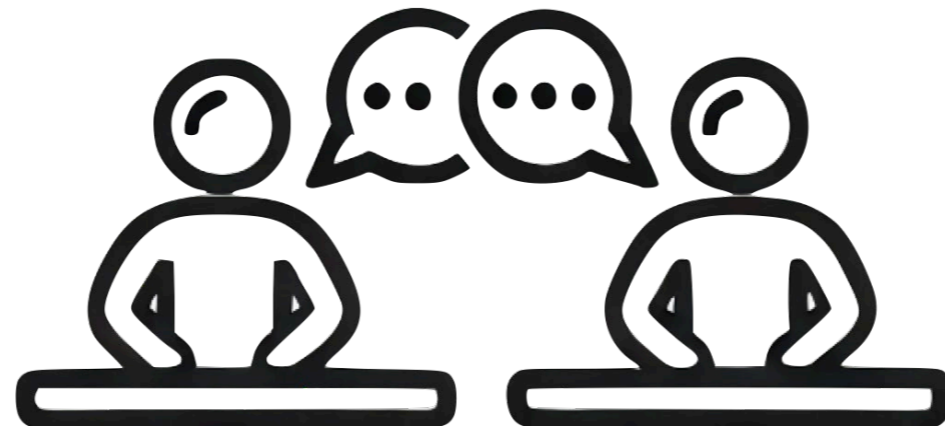
# Measuring Concern for Others

Self- versus other-oriented concerns are often captured as **Social Value Orientation (SVO)** using slider scales (left) and a ring conceptualization (right).

Item 1	self	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
	other	85	76	68	59	50	41	33	24	15
Item 2	self	85	87	89	91	93	94	96	98	100
	other	15	19	24	28	33	37	41	46	50
Item 3	self	50	54	59	63	68	72	76	81	85
	other	100	98	96	94	93	91	89	87	85
Item 4	self	50	54	59	63	68	72	76	81	85
	other	100	89	79	68	58	47	36	26	15
Item 5	self	100	94	88	81	75	69	63	56	50
	other	50	56	63	69	75	81	88	94	100
Item 6	self	100	98	96	94	93	91	89	87	85
	other	50	54	59	63	68	72	76	81	85



Which psychological traits could explain how much people care about others?



# Caring as a Trait: Some Candidates

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## Positive:

- Agreeableness
- Altruism
- Compassion
- Empathy
- Moral identity

## Negative:

- Egoism
- Competitiveness
- Machiavellianism

# Caring as a Trait: Some More Candidates...

**Table 1.** Candidate Traits Along With Their Definitions, Operationalizations, and Measurement Occasion, and Whether They Were Also Assigned to the Strict Set of Traits Involving Unequivocal Conceptual Overlap With the Criterion

Construct	Definition	Questionnaire	Number of items ( $\omega$ )	Example item	Measurement occasion	Strict set
Basic/broad traits						
Antagonism	Behaviors that put the individual at odds with other people, including an exaggerated sense of self-importance and a concomitant expectation of special treatment, as well as a callous antipathy toward others, encompassing both unawareness of others' needs and feelings, and a readiness to use others in the service of self-enhancement (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)	PID-5 (Maples et al., 2015)	20 (.90)	I'll stretch the truth if it's to my advantage.	T2	Yes
Big Five Agreeableness	[Individual] differences in the motivation to cooperate (vs. acting selfishly) in resource conflicts (Denissen & Penke, 2008); motivation to maintain positive relations with others (Graziano & Tobin, 2009)	NEO Five Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992); Big Five Aspects Scales (DeYoung et al., 2007); Big Five Inventory-2 (Soto & John, 2017); IPIP-50 (Goldberg, 1992)	52 (.95)	I am someone who takes advantage of others.	T1	Yes
HEXACO Agreeableness	The tendency to be forgiving and tolerant of others, in the sense of cooperating with others even when one might be suffering exploitation by them (Ashton & Lee, 2007)	HEXACO-60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009)	10 (.75)	People think of me as someone who has a quick temper.	T1	No
HEXACO Honesty-Humility	The tendency to be fair and genuine in dealing with others, in the sense of cooperating with others even when one might exploit them without suffering retaliation (Ashton & Lee, 2007)	HEXACO-60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009)	10 (.76)	I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.	T1	Yes
Detachment	Avoidance of socioemotional experience, including both withdrawal from interpersonal interactions, ranging from casual daily interactions to friendships to intimate relationships, as well as restricted affective experience and expression, particularly limited hedonic capacity (APA, 2013)	PID-5 (Maples et al., 2015)	20 (.91)	I don't like spending time with others.	T2	No

(continued)

# Caring as a Trait: Some More Candidates...

**Table 1.** (continued)

Construct	Definition	Questionnaire	Number of items ( $\omega$ )	Example item	Measurement occasion	Strict set
Disinhibition	Orientation toward immediate gratification, leading to impulsive behavior driven by current thoughts, feelings, and external stimuli, without regard for past learning or consideration of future consequences (APA, 2013)	PID-5 (Maples et al., 2015)	20 (.85)	I make promises that I don't really intend to keep.	T2	No
Stable beliefs						
Belief in a just world	[Individuals' tendency] to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve (Lerner & Miller, 1978)	Global & Personal Belief in a Just World Scale (Dalbert, 1999)	13 (.90)	I think basically the world is a just place.	T5	No
Beliefs in reciprocity	The view that both forms of [positive and negative] reciprocity are generally effective and widely used (Perugini et al., 2003)	Personal Norm of Reciprocity Scale (Perugini et al., 2003)	9 (.68)	To help somebody is the best policy to be certain that he or she will help you in the future.	T5	Yes
Competitive jungle world view	The belief that the social world is a competitive jungle characterized by a ruthless, amoral struggle for resources (Duckitt et al., 2002)	Two World View scale, short form (Sibley & Duckitt, 2009)	6 (.77)	It's a dog-eat-dog world where you have to be ruthless at times.	T5	Yes
Dangerous world view	The belief that the social world is a dangerous and threatening place in which good, decent people's values and way of life are threatened by bad people (Duckitt et al., 2002)	Two World View scale, short form (Sibley & Duckitt, 2009)	6 (.85)	There are many dangerous people in our society who will attack someone out of pure meanness, for no reason at all.	T5	No
Moral relativism	Advocates individualistic analysis of each act in each situation . . . Appraisals based on personal values and perspective rather than universal moral principles (Forsyth, 1980)	Ethics Position Questionnaire (Forsyth, 1980)	6 (.82)	Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.	T5	No

(continued)

# Caring as a Trait: Some More Candidates...

**Table 1.** (continued)

Construct	Definition	Questionnaire	Number of items ( $\omega$ )	Example item	Measurement occasion	Strict set
Normlessness	Expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals (Seeman, 1959)	Normlessness Scale (Kohn & Schooler, 1983)	4 (.65)	If something works, it doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong.	T5	Yes
Social dominance orientation	A general attitudinal orientation toward intergroup relations . . . [such that] one desires that one's in-group dominate and be superior to out-groups (Pratto et al., 1994)	SDO7 Scale (Ho et al., 2015)	8 (.83)	An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.	T3	No
Sensitivity to befallen injustice	[Tendency to] look at social situations more often from a social-comparison point of view and therefore discover more instances of injustice (Schmitt et al., 1995)	Sensitivity to Befallen Injustice scale (Schmitt et al., 1995)	18 (.95)	I am taken advantage of by others.	T5	No
Trait cynicism	A general attitude of contempt or skepticism about human beings and their values . . . [belief] that everyone has a price; that ideals are easily shown up to be empty when they conflict with self-interest (Vice, 2011)	Cynicism Scale (Chowdhury & Fernando, 2013)	5 (.83)	Most people would tell a lie if they could gain by it.	T5	No
Trust beliefs	[The tendency to expect] goodwill and benign intent (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994)	General Trust Scale (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994)	6 (.91)	Most people are basically good and kind.	T5	No
Ultimate-justice beliefs	[Belief in] the promise of higher justice—perhaps in another world or within a larger time frame (Maes & Schmitt, 1999)	Ultimate justice beliefs scale (Schmitt et al., 1995)	6 (.93)	Someday, everyone has to make amends for the harm they have done.	T5	No
Aversive (dark) traits						
Amoralism-crudelia	Manifested by sadistic, brutal and destructive behaviors (Gvozden et al., 2015)	AMR40 (Knežević, 2003)	13 (.88)	Doing good deeds brings joy to the heart.	Follow-up 2020-05b	Yes
Amoralism-frustralia	Manifested by resentment and a dark picture of reality which rationalize personal manipulation and Machiavellianism (Gvozden et al., 2015)	AMR40 (Knežević, 2003)	14 (.76)	The ends do not always justify the means.	Follow-up 2020-05b	Yes
Competitiveness	An individual's desire to get ahead of others and striving for individual achievements (Chen & West, 2008)	Individualism-Collectivism Scale (Chen & West, 2008)	8 (.86)	I want to be the best every time I compete.	T3	Yes

(continued)

# Caring as a Trait: We Might Have a Problem

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Hilbig et al. (2023) identify 58 different traits that could explain how people distribute resources between themselves and others.

Are there so many different aspects to caring for others?

Or do we have many constructs that basically describe very similar things?

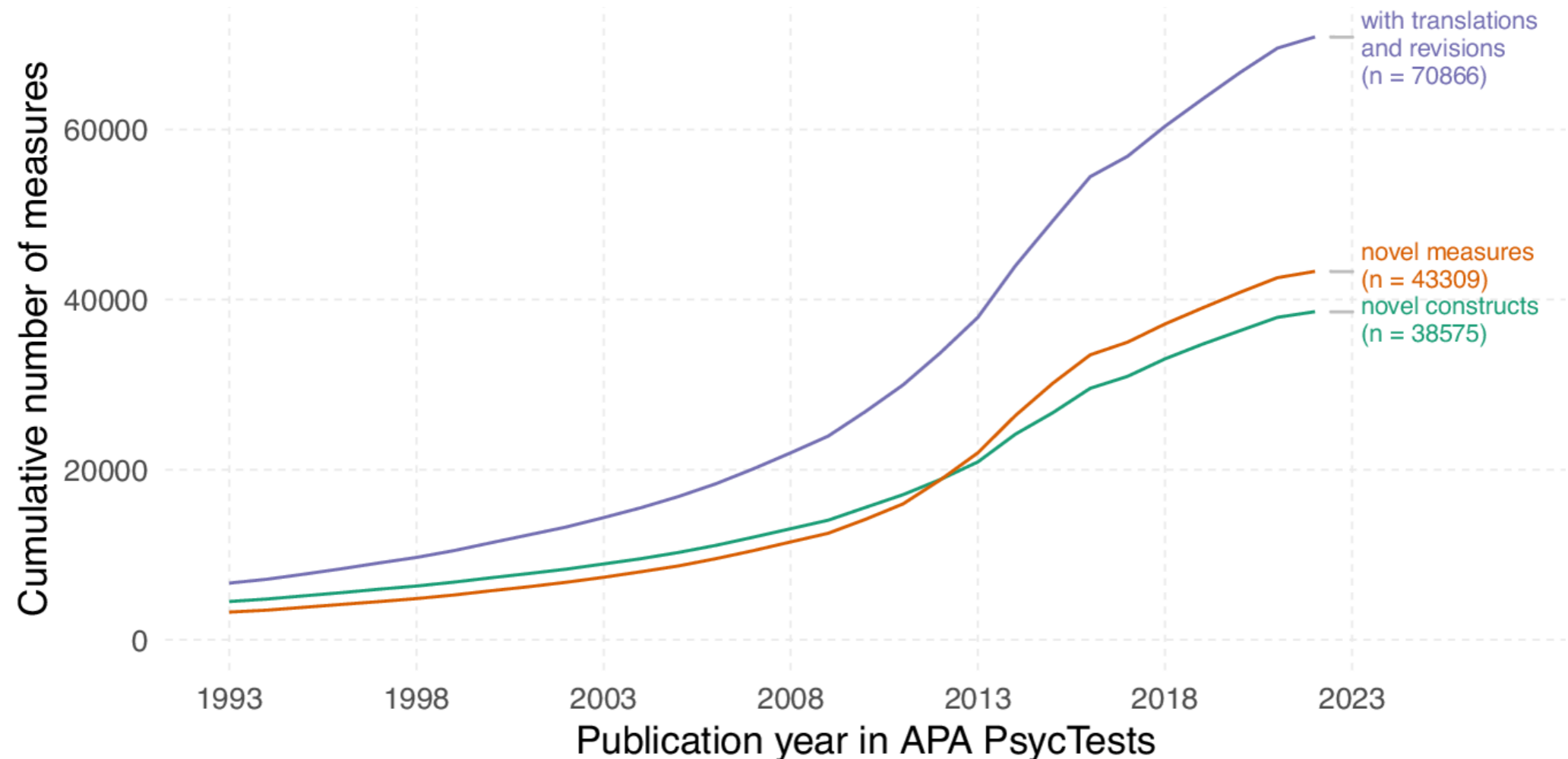


# Caring as a Trait: We Might Have a Problem

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# Caring as a Trait: The Problem Might Be Even Bigger



Almost 40,000 psychological constructs have been proposed. Which are important? Which are allowed to go?

# Caring as a Trait: The *Dark Factor of Personality* Underlies SVO Responses

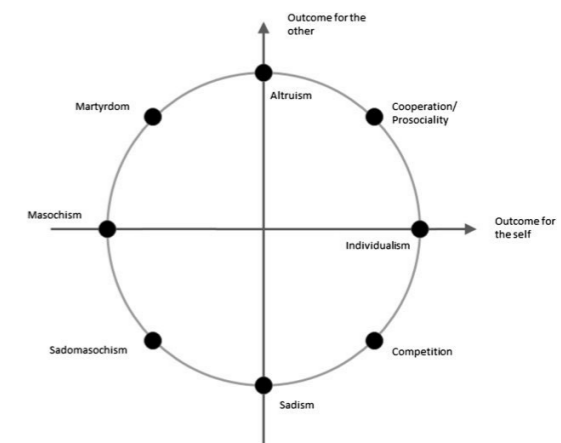
None of the 58 traits investigated by Hilbig et al. (2023) explains additional variance in SVO responses beyond what is explained by *D*.

The Dark Factor of Personality (*D*):

The general tendency to maximize individual utility at the cost of others, accompanied by beliefs that serve as justification.

But: (Some of) these 58 traits might explain additional variance in behaviour not captured by SVO.

Item 1	self	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
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# Caring as a Trait: Summary

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There are many constructs that touch on how much people care for others versus themselves.

The *Dark Factor of Personality (D)* is the common trait underlying all these other constructs.

Conceptual clarity remains a central challenge for psychology.



# Optional Reading on Cooperation

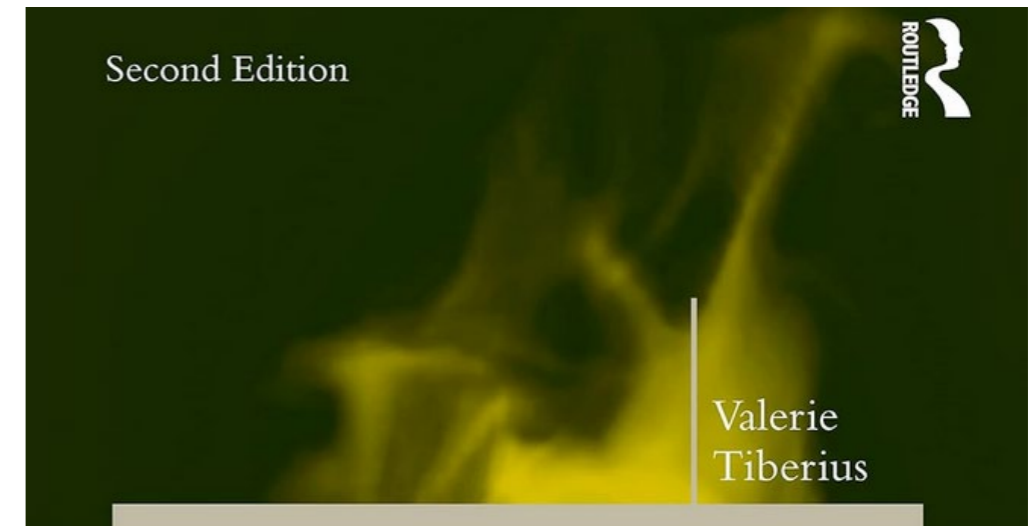
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## Psychological Egoism

Tiberius, V. (2023). *Moral Psychology. A Contemporary Introduction (2nd Edition)*. Routledge.

## Caring as a Trait

Hilbig et al. (2023). The Dispositional Essence of Proactive Social Preferences: The Dark Core of Personality vis-à-vis 58 Traits. *Psychological Science*, 34 (2), doi:10.1177/09567976221116893



## MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

