

Altruistic Personality in the Context of the Empathy–Altruism Hypothesis

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Abstract

In this study the influence of the altruistic personality in general and social responsibility in particular on prosocial behaviour were investigated in the context of the empathy–altruism hypothesis. In an experiment 56 female participants had an opportunity to help a person in distress. In this setting, ease of escape without helping was manipulated. In addition, on the basis of their self-reports of situation-specific emotions, participants were divided into an empathic-concern and a personal-distress group. The results of the 2 (ease of escape) × 2 (predominant emotional response) design were in agreement with the empathy–altruism hypothesis. Further results indicated that in the easy-escape condition an altruistic motivation prevailed, whereas in the difficult-escape condition an egoistic motivation was more dominant. Besides the full scale, two subscales of social responsibility were formed: Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others and Adherence to Social Prescriptions. The full social responsibility scale was significantly related to helpfulness only in the difficult-escape condition. Further analyses including the subscales showed that the component Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others correlated positively with helping in the easy-escape condition. Results were interpreted as showing that specific profiles of personality variables are associated with helpfulness in the easy-escape and difficult-escape conditions. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Prosocial behaviour is—like behaviour in general—a function of the person and the environment (Lewin, 1951). The role of situational variables as determinants of prosocial behaviour has been investigated in many studies. One research programme, which is based on the empathy–altruism hypothesis, is of special significance (Batson, 1991). The basic idea is that empathic concern, as a situation-specific response of an observer witnessing another person's plight, motivates altruistic behaviour, which is mainly performed as an attempt to reduce the other person's suffering. Therefore, empathic concern is understood as a truly altruistic motivation, in contrast to egoistic motivation, which is directed towards

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the reduction of personal distress, another situation-specific response of witnesses of emergencies.

From this distinction, an empirically testable hypothesis was derived: as long as personal distress is stronger than empathic concern, the observer will choose that action alternative that promises the least cost and the highest reward. It is likely that such a motivational state will lead the observer to leave the situation in which he or she is confronted with another person's suffering if a direct escape route is available. The assumption is made that the observer's personal distress is alleviated after leaving the situation in which the victim is present because it is directly connected with the stress experienced by the observer in the situation. After coping with the stress by leaving the situation, personal distress is reduced even if the suffering of the victim continues. In contrast, when empathic concern is stronger than personal distress, prosocial behaviour is predicted to be likely, independent of the availability of an exit option. This is so because the activation of empathic concern is dependent on the continuation of the victim's suffering, so that simply leaving the situation is no good option. Knowledge of the victim's suffering contributes to continuing empathic concern, which will be reduced only if the suffering is alleviated, either through the intervention of the witness or the intervention of another person.

The empathy–altruism hypothesis was tested in an empathy \times ease of escape design. Prosocial behaviour is predicted to be likely in those conditions in which empathic concern predominates (independent of situational constraints), and in the difficult-escape condition, in which personal distress predominates. Less helpfulness is predicted only for those persons who are strongly motivated by personal distress and who have an exit option available. This hypothesis leads to the prediction of a statistical interaction between empathy and ease of escape. The empirical confirmation of the hypothesis hinges on the comparison between the predominantly distressed persons who are able to easily withdraw from the suffering of the victim and those persons who either predominantly feel empathic concern or predominantly feel personal distress but have no face-saving option to leave without helping the victim. The alternative hypothesis of egoistically motivated witnesses states that prosocial behaviour will be likely in the difficult-escape conditions and much less likely in the easy-escape conditions independent of the observer's motivational state. This hypothesis predicts a significant main effect of ease of escape. The level of prosocial behaviour of empathically concerned witnesses who meet the suffering victim in the easy-escape condition is crucial from a theoretical point of view. The question is whether their level of prosocial behaviour corresponds to the level of the 'prosocials' in the difficult-escape condition or to the level of the 'egoists' in the easy-escape condition. Note that being a 'prosocial' is not equivalent to being driven by empathic concern. Therefore, it is not sufficient for an empirical test of the empathy–altruism hypothesis to contrast the 'easy-escape' condition with the 'difficult-escape' condition because the emotional state that is triggered by the situation is of crucial importance. In several studies (summarized by Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987) the expected pattern of results was found.

A second theoretical approach to the prediction of prosocial behaviour emphasizes the other determinant of behaviour mentioned by Lewin (1951): the person. In several studies it has been shown that dispositional empathy and social responsibility are the core variables of the altruistic personality (cf., Bierhoff, 2002a). Specifically, the assumption of an altruistic personality is based on the expectation that people who score high on social

responsibility also score high on dispositional empathy. In accordance with the altruistic-personality hypothesis, empirical studies show that measures of the altruistic personality predict prosocial behaviour in the laboratory (Staub, 1974) as well as in the field (Bierhoff, Klein, & Kramp, 1991; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998).

With respect to the altruistic personality, our emphasis here is on social responsibility, which is defined as a moral obligation to fulfil the justified expectations of others and to adhere to social norms. The most widely used questionnaire for measuring social responsibility was developed by Berkowitz and Daniels (1964). The 22 items of this scale are quite heterogeneous in content. Therefore, Bierhoff (2000, 2002b) suggested to distinguish between two dimensions of social responsibility. The statement 'I am the kind of person that people can count on' illustrates the dimension Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others, whereas the statement 'When a person does not report all his income in order to get out of paying some of his taxes, it is just as bad as stealing money from the government' fits the dimension Adherence to Social Prescriptions. Whereas the first statement refers to behaviour on which others can rely, the second statement refers to the question of whether a person acts in correspondence with social standards of behaviour. This distinction is related to the well known contrast between shame and guilt. Whereas the violation of internal standards of appropriate behaviour is likely to elicit guilt feelings, the violation of external standards is likely to produce shame (Feshbach, Weiner, & Bohart, 1996, p. 423). Therefore, Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others corresponds with guilt avoidance and Adherence to Social Prescriptions with shame avoidance.

Social responsibility is an orientation which is presumably relevant in a large number of social situations. One area which is of special significance is prosocial behaviour. Those who follow the notion of social responsibility are likely to act more prosocially than people who express less of such an orientation. Empirical studies show that this hypothesis tends to be confirmed, although the evidence is not as consistent as one might wish. For example, Carlo, Eisenberg, Troyer, Switzer, and Speer (1991) reported that social responsibility was a significant predictor of prosocial behaviour in adults when they could easily leave the situation without helping and when the need for help was high (i.e. high emotional evocativeness). A high need for help may contribute to the activation of the norm of responsibility. Berkowitz and Daniels (1964) showed that social responsibility as an individual difference variable was positively correlated with helping when the norm of social responsibility was made salient. In addition, Staub (1974) reported the results of a study on the relevance of the prosocial personality, which show in general that the prosocial personality is a viable concept and more specifically that the social responsibility scale correlated positively with prosocial behaviour. Whereas these results were obtained in the laboratory, the field study of Oliner and Oliner (1988) of rescuers of Jews during the Nazi terror showed that people who rescued Jews had higher scores on the social responsibility scale than people from a control group who did not intervene on behalf of Nazi victims.

Social responsibility seems to be a part of human nature. This was demonstrated in a twin study by Neiderhiser, Reiss, and Hetherington (1996). Besides the genetic component, however, an environmental component was visible, because changes in social responsibility across a time span of three years were better explained by environmental factors that had operated on adolescents. In accordance with this, cultural differences between India and the US in social responsibility were reported (Miller,

Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990). Whereas Indian respondents applied the norm of responsibility in a broader sense to include friends and strangers besides family members, Americans were more restrictive in their application of the norm to family members only.

The significance of the norm of social responsibility is also highlighted by the fact that it is a cornerstone of the altruistic personality, which in addition is characterized by high dispositional empathy (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Although positive correlations between social responsibility and dispositional empathy were obtained, the level of association is quite moderate. In a study by Bierhoff, Klein, and Kramp (1991) the role of social responsibility in the willingness to intervene on behalf of victims of traffic accidents was confirmed.

Referring to the altruistic personality, Batson, Bolen, Cross, and Neuringer-Benefiel (1986) made the assumption that it is related to egoistic motivation. They assumed that in the difficult-escape condition an egoistic goal of the observer is operative, namely the avoidance of guilt and shame. It was expected that under these circumstances a positive correlation with measures of the altruistic personality would occur. In correspondence with this assumption, measures of the altruistic personality correlated positively with helping only in the difficult-escape condition (but not in the easy-escape condition). Specifically, self-esteem, ascription of responsibility, and empathy were significantly associated with helping in the difficult-escape condition. These results confirm the assumption that measures of the altruistic personality are positively related to helping but only in the difficult-escape condition, which was assumed to activate a more egoistic motivation because of the anticipation of guilt and shame. Therefore, Batson et al. (1986), referring to the altruistic personality, speak of 'pseud altruistic personality characteristics' (p. 213). Indeed, the pattern of results has ironic implications for the concept of altruistic personality because it unfolds its influence under situational conditions that presumably bring about an egoistic motivation.

In another experiment by Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, and Varney (1986, Experiment 2) respondents indicated their level of helpfulness after they were confronted with the fate of Janet, who felt lonely and needed company. In this context, measures of empathic concern and personal distress were obtained. In addition, dispositional empathy was measured on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1994). Results indicated that dispositional empathy tended to be positively associated with helpfulness. In addition, empathic concern was positively correlated with helping (especially in an anonymous situation), and this correlation remained significant after controlling for dispositional empathy. The correlation between empathic concern and helping was also significant after partialling out personal distress, meaning that the pure empathic emotion from which the variance due to personal distress was removed predicted the level of helpfulness. In contrast, personal distress did not significantly correlate with helping (with or without partialling out empathic concern).

To date, the contradiction between the concept of the altruistic personality and the results found by Batson and his co-workers in the context of the empathy–altruism hypothesis has not really been resolved. On the one hand, the altruistic personality is an intuitively plausible approach, which corresponds with everyday experience and the results of empirical studies. On the other hand, if the distinction between easy-escape and difficult-escape conditions is taken into account, the concept of the altruistic personality vanishes.

In the original experimental scenario that was used to test the empathy–altruism hypothesis observers watch Elaine, a confederate of the experimenter, as she seemingly

takes part in a learning experiment: the observers are told that in the course of ten aversive trials, in which Elaine is supposed to solve intellectual tasks, she is randomly given electric shocks (Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981). In this experimental setting, which was supposedly designed to study learning under stressful conditions, ease of escape from the situation without helping was manipulated.

Of special relevance in the context of the present research are studies in which empathic concern and personal distress were measured. Empathic concern is assumed to be high if a person indicates that he or she feels warm, soft-hearted, and compassionate when faced with the suffering victim. Personal distress is expressed by feeling alarmed, troubled, and upset in the same situation. To indicate the relative dominance of empathic concern and personal distress, a difference index was calculated by subtracting the personal distress score from the empathic concern score. This index of predominant emotional response is positive if empathic concern is higher than personal distress and negative if personal distress is stronger than empathic concern. Empirically, a median split was performed on the difference score, leading to the distinction of two groups of persons who are assumed to be either altruistically or egoistically motivated. In correspondence with the empathy–altruism hypothesis, results indicate that altruistically motivated persons helped a suffering victim in both the easy-escape and the difficult-escape condition. In contrast, egoistically motivated persons were quite helpful (and in fact as helpful as the altruistically motivated persons) in the difficult-escape condition, whereas their level of helpfulness was considerably lower in the easy-escape condition (Batson et al., 1987).

An intriguing pattern of correlations was predicted between empathic concern and personal distress, respectively, on the one hand and prosocial behaviour on the other hand because it was assumed that the correlations would differ depending on ease of escape (Batson, Bolen, Cross, & Neuringer-Benefiel, 1986). Specifically, it was predicted that empathic concern would be positively correlated with helpfulness in the easy-escape condition because this situation was assumed to elicit an altruistic motivation. In contrast, in the difficult-escape condition it was assumed that an egoistic motivation would be elicited, rendering a low correlation between empathic concern and prosocial behaviour. In an experiment, empathic concern and personal distress were measured besides personality variables that are related to the altruistic personality (i.e. social responsibility, responsibility denial, and dispositional empathy). Contrary to expectations, the zero-order correlation of empathic concern with helpfulness was higher in the difficult-escape condition than in the easy-escape condition. This pattern of correlations was the opposite of what Toi and Batson (1982) had found; they reported—in accordance with predictions—a higher correlation in the easy-escape condition than in the difficult-escape condition. After partialling out the personality variables (plus birth order) the pattern of correlations corroborated the assumptions because a positive and significant partial correlation was obtained in the easy-escape condition, whereas the same correlation was around zero in the difficult-escape condition. In contrast, personal distress was unrelated to helpfulness in both experimental conditions. These results (in combination with those of Toi and Batson, 1982) are interpreted as support for the notion that empathic concern, which is statistically independent from personality scales, motivates altruistic behaviour in the easy-escape condition, where only the presence of the altruistic goal is assumed to influence whether the observer of the victim is ready to intervene on her behalf or not.

In the present study, we combined predictions from the empathy–altruism hypothesis with predictions from the altruistic–personality hypothesis. The relation between situation and personality factors refers to the contrast between states and traits. More specifically,

Batson (1991) emphasizes emotional states in the situation, whereas the altruistic-personality hypothesis focuses on traits. From this one might infer that traits as exogenous variables are reflected in empathic concern and personal distress, because it is possible that traits predetermine the range of emotions that will be activated in a specific situation. But from the results that were reported by Batson et al. (1986) we know that the correlations between personality measures (e.g. social responsibility and dispositional empathy) on the one hand and empathic concern and personal distress on the other hand are quite low. In addition, personality measures correlate similarly with both empathic concern and personal distress. For example, perspective taking as a subscale of the empathy questionnaire (Davis, 1994) correlated $r = 0.27$ with empathic concern and $r = 0.31$ with personal distress, respectively. The correlations of social responsibility with emotional states were very low ($r = -0.05$ and $r = -0.06$, respectively). In conclusion, the state variables (i.e. empathic concern and personal distress) do not reflect much influence of the personality measures.

We replicated the Elaine experiment by contrasting a difficult-escape with an easy-escape condition and considered correlations between empathic concern and helping on the one hand and social responsibility and helping on the other hand separately in each of these conditions. Specifically, four hypotheses were investigated.

The first hypothesis is that the interaction effect in the empathy \times ease of escape design will be replicated. This pattern was consistently found in the studies summarized by Batson et al. (1987), who used the index of predominant emotional response (distress score subtracted from empathy score) as the basis for the classification of observers of Elaine as either high or low in empathic concern. Note that support for the hypothesis would contribute to cross-national generalizability of research findings on the empathy–altruism hypothesis, which as far as we know has only been confirmed in American laboratories to date.

The second hypothesis is that the relative strength of emotional response is positively correlated with helping in the easy-escape condition but not in the difficult-escape condition. That is, the easy-escape condition will elicit an altruistic motivation, which is not the case in the difficult-escape condition.

The third hypothesis is that social responsibility is positively correlated with helping in the difficult-escape condition. According to Batson et al. (1986), measures of the altruistic personality are related to prosocial behaviour only in the difficult-escape condition. In fact, they found such correlations for responsibility denial and dispositional empathy but not for social responsibility, which did not correlate with helpfulness in either condition. In our study a measure of social responsibility was used that includes the same 22 items as originally developed by Berkowitz and Daniels in their social responsibility scale. The revised questionnaire allows for the distinction between two separate components of social responsibility: Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others and Adherence to Social Prescriptions. Specifically, we predicted that Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others is positively related to prosocial behaviour in the easy-escape condition, whereas Adherence to Social Prescriptions is positively related to prosocial behaviour in the difficult-escape condition. This hypothesis is based on the proposition that Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others constitutes the other-oriented component of social responsibility, whereas Adherence to Social Prescriptions represents the self-oriented component.

With the fourth hypothesis we enter new ground. It is related to the assumption of Batson et al. (1986) that the easy-escape condition primarily elicits an altruistic

motivation, whereas the difficult-escape condition primarily elicits an egoistic motivation. Earlier studies have shown that interpersonal attraction is related to helpfulness. Specifically, the more the helper liked the help-recipient, the more readiness to respond prosocially on behalf of the help-recipient was registered (Baron, 1971; Pandey & Griffitt, 1974). It can be assumed that this association expresses the operation of an egoistic motivation of the helper because it should be more rewarding to support an attractive other than a less attractive other. High interpersonal attraction presumably reflects a more positive interpersonal evaluation. It is tapped by the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS), which was developed in research on the attraction paradigm by Byrne (1971). For example, attraction as measured by the IJS is a positive linear function of the proportion of similar attitudes expressed by a stranger, and persons who belong to attitudinally similar groups express more cohesion in the group (Castore & DeNinno, 1977). We propose that the attraction–helping link will only apply in the difficult-escape condition, whereas in the easy-escape condition interpersonal attraction will not be related to helping at all. This assumption results from Batson's argument that in the easy-escape condition altruistic motivation is dominant, which should be independent from whether the helper likes or dislikes the help-recipient. In the difficult-escape condition egoistic motivation determines the choice of a behavioural option, which most probably takes interpersonal attraction into account because it is more rewarding to help a liked other than a disliked other.

Method

Sample and procedure

Fifty-nine women aged between 20 and 33 took part in the experiment (mean age 24 years), nearly all of whom were students. One participant had graduated and worked as a scientist, and another one was a social worker. Among the students 47% studied social sciences, 20% natural sciences, and 27% languages. On average, students had studied for 5.7 semesters.

The experiment was conducted by two female experimenters. Experimenter 1 instructed participants that the aim of the experiment was to investigate the performance of a person working under stress, which they were to observe. The task of the target person, who was a confederate of the experimenter, was to recall digit numbers while electric shocks were being administered randomly. The participants were told that the electric shocks would be distributed among the trials in such a way that they were not contingent with mistakes. Rather, they were to function as an aversive background in the learning situation, the effect of which on performance supposedly was the research topic.

The target person (the 'learner') sat in an observation room wired to an apparatus that created the impression that it was an electroshock generator. A video camera was installed in the observation room. Observers were informed that they would see the live video recording on a TV monitor in the room they were in, which was next to the observation room the participants had walked through before. To make the situation more credible, the participants personally met the confederate. The participants were led to believe that the roles of target person and observer were determined by chance. However, in reality the participant was always given the role of the observer 'by chance'. Unknown to the participants they saw a video recording that had been pre-recorded. The task of the observer was to closely monitor the learning performance of the target person.

Ease of escape was manipulated in the instructions. In the *easy-escape condition* the participants were informed that they had to observe two trials of the learning experiment

even though a total of 10 trials would have to be conducted. In the *difficult-escape condition* participants were informed that they would have to observe ten trials. Thirty-one participants were run in the first condition and 27 in the second. One participant had to be eliminated because the data concerning the condition she was assigned to had been lost. Two other participants did not follow through the experiment until the end, leaving the data of 56 participants for the test of the hypotheses.¹

Dependent variables

After two trials the target person asked for a break and a glass of water. On the monitor the participants saw that the second experimenter asked the target person how she felt. When she answered that she felt stressed, the experimenter suggested that she would ask the observer whether she would be willing to trade roles with the target person for the remaining trials. After a short while the second experimenter, who was blind with respect to the experimental condition, asked the participant whether she would be willing to serve as target person. Note that the participants in the easy-escape condition were allowed to leave the experimental room after the second trial, whereas participants in the difficult-escape condition believed they would have to observe eight additional trials.

The dependent variable was prosocial behaviour, which was measured as the number of trials that the participants were willing to take over. This measure varied between 0 (no willingness to help) and 8 (willingness to help in each of the remaining trials). Inspection of the frequency distribution revealed that many participants were clustered at the endpoints of the scale, with 24 women offering no help at all, 19 women offering maximum help, and the other women scattered in between. Therefore, we recoded the response scale to distinguish between three levels of helping: low ($n = 24$), intermediate ($n = 13$) and high ($n = 19$). All analyses were also run with the original response scale. Results showed only minor variations. In the result section we report the results for the recoded scale of helpfulness only.

In addition, measures of empathic concern and personal distress were obtained. Participants were asked to assess their current feelings on 21 adjective scales (from 1 = little to 7 = very much). In accordance with previous research, two factors were extracted from the correlation matrix (principal component, Varimax rotation). Three eigenvalues were greater than one. The first two eigenvalues accounted for 56.8% of the total variance. Whereas the first factor was interpreted as personal distress, the second factor represented empathic concern. Three adjectives were selected that represented each factor, with two restrictions: the adjective should correspond with the list of distress adjectives and empathic adjectives, respectively, as summarized by Batson (1987, p. 98) in his Table 1, and it should display no double loadings. From this the empathic concern index was computed as the mean of the assessments of *soft-hearted*, *tender*, and *warm*, whereas the personal distress index was built on *alarmed*, *grieved*, and *troubled*. The average score of empathic concern and personal distress, respectively, were $M = 3.86$ and $M = 4.12$. A *t*-test for paired observations showed that the means do not differ

¹After the experiment (but before debriefing) participants were probed for suspicion. Thirteen of 56 respondents indicated that they had some suspicion at some point during the experiment. These respondents were distributed almost equally between experimental conditions, $\chi^2 = 0.43$, $p = 0.37$ (Fisher's exact test). In addition, we correlated whether or not participants felt suspicious with the other variables measured. Only one correlation proved to be significant: respondents who indicated that they were suspicious scored higher on the belief in the control of powerful others than those who expressed no suspiciousness, $r(53) = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$. Taken together, these results indicate that suspiciousness did not interact with experimental conditions and was not systematically correlated with altruistic personality.

Table 1. Helpfulness depending on ease of escape and predominant emotional response

Ease of escape	Predominant emotional response	
	Empathy	Distress
Easy	2.06 (17)	1.39 (13)
Difficult	2.00 (13)	2.08 (12)

Helpfulness was measured on a three-point scale (1 = low help; 3 = high help). *n* in brackets.

significantly, $t(54) = 1.51$, ns. The internal consistency was $\alpha = 0.69$ for the empathic concern index and $\alpha = 0.82$ for the personal distress index. From the two scores for each participant, an index of relative strength of empathy was formed by subtracting the distress score from the empathy score. Higher values on this index of relative empathy indicate that empathic concern is relatively stronger than personal distress. The mean value across all participants was $M = -0.26$.

Social responsibility

After the experiment was over participants filled out a questionnaire that included measures of empathic concern, personal distress, and altruistic personality. The German version of the social responsibility scale, which was originally developed by Berkowitz and Daniels (1964), was used. Bierhoff (2000, 2002b) distinguished two subscales, which are measured by eight items each: Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others and Adherence to Social Prescriptions. In addition, an overall measure of social responsibility is based on all 22 items. The items were assessed on six-point scales (1 = completely wrong, 6 = completely right). The internal consistencies of the scales were as follows: overall social responsibility $\alpha = 0.76$, Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others $\alpha = 0.73$, and Adherence to Social Prescriptions $\alpha = 0.75$.

Interpersonal Judgment Scale

Following Byrne's (1971) research on the attraction paradigm the Interpersonal Judgment Scale was employed. It consists of two items, which refer to liking and working together. In the present research the scale reached an internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.85$, the correlation between the two items being $r(54) = 0.75$, $p < 0.01$.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis refers to the means of prosocial behaviour in the four cells of the 2 (ease of escape) \times 2 (predominant emotional response) design. Following Batson et al. (1987) a median split was performed on the index of relative strength of empathic concern with 45.5% of participants in the personal-distress group (minimum = -3.67 , maximum = -0.33) and 54.5% in the empathic concern group (minimum = 0.00 , maximum = 2.67). The empathy–altruism hypothesis was tested by a planned comparison contrasting the three conditions in which a high level of prosocial behaviour was expected with the low-empathy, easy-escape cell, in which a low level of prosocial behaviour was predicted. The orthogonal contrast was significant, supporting the empathy–altruism

hypothesis, $t(51) = 2.45, p < 0.05$. The combined mean of the three conditions in which a high level of prosocial behaviour was expected was 2.05, and the mean in the low-empathy, easy-escape condition was 1.39 (see Table 1). This analysis was corroborated by a regression analysis (cf. Cohen & Cohen, 1975), in which the product term of ease of escape and index of relative strength of empathic concern significantly predicted prosocial behaviour, $b = 0.22, t(1, 53) = 2.02, p < 0.05$.

Table 2 contains the correlations among the situation-specific measures. First, a significant positive correlation was found between empathic concern and personal distress. It is on a level of association that was also found in other studies using the same methodology. Such an association is expected for several reasons, which are more fully discussed by Batson (1987, pp. 97–98). The correlations of empathic concern and personal distress, respectively, with predominant emotional response reflect how the emotional overall index was formed. Finally, the IJS was unrelated to the emotion scales, indicating that self-report of emotion and interpersonal attraction were independent of each other.

The second hypothesis predicts a differential pattern of correlations depending on ease of escape without helping. Specifically, predominant emotional response is expected to correlate significantly with helpfulness only in the easy-escape condition, whereas interpersonal attraction was assumed to correlate with helpfulness only in the difficult-escape condition. The relevant correlations are summarized in Table 3. In general, the results support the hypothesis. Specifically, the overall index of emotional response correlated significantly with prosocial behaviour in the easy-escape condition, whereas the sign of the correlation was reversed in the difficult-escape condition. Because the variances in both conditions were comparable a test of differences between correlations from independent samples was performed. This test yielded a significant result, $t = 1.80, p < 0.05$, one sided. Because higher values reflect more empathy on this index, the significant correlation corresponds with the expectation that in the easy-escape condition an altruistic motivation influenced helpfulness.

The fourth hypothesis stated that interpersonal attraction is only correlated with prosocial behaviour in the difficult-escape condition because the attraction–helping link presupposes the dominance of egoistic motivation. The pattern of results, which is summarized in Table 3, supports this hypothesis. Whereas attraction and prosocial behaviour have 36% of common variance in the difficult-escape condition, the overlap is very small in the easy-escape condition, which presumably elicited an altruistic motivation. This pattern of results was hardly affected by partialling out empathic concern and personal distress. Because the variances in both conditions were significantly different in the Levene test² ($p < 0.01$) the test of differences between correlations from

Table 2. Correlations of situation-specific state measures

States	1	2	3	4
1. Empathic concern	—	0.46***	0.38**	0.18
2. Personal distress		—	−0.65***	0.14
3. Relative empathy			—	0.01
4. IJS				—

IJS = Interpersonal Judgment Scale. $N = 55$.

** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

²The Levene test is based on the F -distribution. The variances of two samples are compared for equality (cf. Hays & Winkler, 1970).

Table 3. Zero-order and partial correlations of relative empathy and interpersonal attraction with helpfulness depending on experimental condition

State measures	Ease of escape	
	Easy ($n = 30$)	Difficult ($n = 25$ or 26)
Predominant emotion ^a	0.36*	-0.14
IJS	0.09	0.63**
IJS partialling concern and distress	0.05	0.61**

IJS = Interpersonal Judgment Scale.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

^aHigher scores indicate greater strength of empathic concern relative to personal distress.

independent samples was performed with a significance level of $p = 0.01$. The test of differences of correlations yielded a significant result, $t = 2.29$, $p < 0.01$, one sided.

The third hypothesis predicts a differential pattern of correlations between social responsibility and helpfulness in the two experimental conditions. The results are summarized in Table 4. The full social responsibility scale was a significant correlate of helpfulness in the difficult-escape condition but not in the easy-escape condition. This pattern of results corresponds with the data on the altruistic personality that were reported by Batson et al. (1986). However, the analysis of the social responsibility subscales makes a more sophisticated analysis possible. Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others was significantly correlated with helping only in the easy-escape condition, whereas Adherence to Social Prescriptions was marginally significantly ($p < 0.10$) related to helping in the difficult-escape condition but not in the easy-escape condition. Therefore, the two subscales showed a distinct pattern of correlations with helpfulness depending on ease of escape as predicted in the third hypothesis. According to the Levene test,² variances of the full social responsibility scale and its subscales, respectively, were similar across both experimental conditions. The differences in correlations between the easy-escape and difficult-escape condition were not significant. Only the correlations of Adherence to Social Prescriptions tended to be different between the two conditions, $t = 1.58$, $p < 0.10$, one sided.

Further results indicate that the personality measures are not significantly related to the state variables. Specifically, Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others correlated with the index of predominant emotional response $r(28) = 0.26$ in the easy-escape condition and $r(23) = 0.12$ in the difficult-escape condition. In addition, Adherence to Social Prescriptions correlated $r(26) = 0.19$ with this index in the easy-escape condition

Table 4. Correlations of responsibility scales with prosocial behaviour depending on condition

Scales	Ease of escape	
	Easy ($n = 30$)	Difficult ($n = 26$)
Social responsibility	0.20	0.41*
—Moral fulfilment	0.37*	0.21
—Adherence	-0.07	0.36

Moral fulfilment = Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others; Adherence = Adherence to Social Prescriptions.

* $p < 0.05$.

and $r(22) = -0.01$ in the difficult-escape condition. The same non-significant pattern of correlations with the responsibility scales emerges if we consider empathic concern and personal distress separately. These correlational data support a parallel-process model, which assumes that responsibility factors and emotional states exert independent influences on prosocial behaviour.

DISCUSSION

Although the present research is not an exact replication of the original study by Batson et al. (1986), it comes quite close to it. First, it is important to recognize that we confirmed the pattern of means that is predicted by the empathy–altruism hypothesis in the ease of escape \times predominant emotional response design. Therefore, the Elaine experiment as a setting in which egoistic and altruistic motivation are aroused depending on ease of escape without helping was confirmed. Because most of the research on the empathy–altruism hypothesis has been conducted in the United States, this corroboration of the basic findings in Germany strengthens the hypothesis at least for those tests conducted in Western cultures.

Second, the data on situation-specific emotions and on interpersonal attraction between helper and help-recipient support Batson's (1987, 1991, 1995) explanation of altruistic behaviour even further. In accordance with the viewpoint that the easy-escape condition elicits an altruistic motivation, predominant emotional response (i.e. higher empathic concern) was significantly correlated with prosocial behaviour when ease of escape without helping was high. In the theoretical framework high relative empathy is an indicator of altruistic motivation. On the other hand, interpersonal attraction motivated prosocial behaviour only in the difficult-escape condition. The high correlation of the IJS with helpfulness in the difficult-escape condition is consistent with the view that an egoistic motivation dominated in this condition. Observers tend to help more when they like the victim. In the easy-escape condition the IJS was not related to helping, suggesting that interpersonal liking does not play a role in motivating prosocial behaviour under these circumstances. It is not too far fetched to assume that interpersonal attraction contributes to an egoistic motivation to help, supporting the viewpoint that when it is not possible to exit the situation selfish considerations on the basis of an evaluation of the situation predominate. With a little speculation one can imagine that the participant in this condition says to herself 'I can't leave. Do I like the suffering person? If yes, I act on my liking and help her. If no, I hesitate to help her'.

Third, we also replicated the result that helpfulness is independent of social responsibility in the easy-escape condition. This pattern of results led to the rhetorical question 'Where is the altruism in the altruistic personality?' (Batson et al., 1986). But our results also go beyond this replication of earlier findings by showing that Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others was correlated with prosocial behaviour in the easy-escape condition. In situations such as those that were investigated in this experiment (i.e. easy-escape and difficult-escape conditions) the profile of personality correlates is specific for the situation.

A similar conclusion is warranted from the research of Carlo et al. (1991). They found that dispositional altruism, which was based on responsibility denial, social responsibility, perspective taking, and sympathy, correlated with prosocial behaviour in only one of four experimental conditions, which resulted from crossing ease of escape (easy versus

difficult) and emotional evocativeness (high versus low experience of distress). In the easy-escape, high-evocativeness condition a significant correlation emerged after controlling for gender and social desirability. This result indicates that the association between altruistic personality and helping was situation specific. In addition, a significant association was found in the easy-escape condition in which evocativeness was high. It is likely that in our study evocativeness was also high because the distress due to electric shocks applied to the confederate was clearly depicted and repeatedly shown. On the basis of our results, a suggestion is that in the Carlo et al. study the component of Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others was tapped primarily. Because the authors do not present results for each personality scale separately, this remains a speculation.

In terms of a situational analysis, the experimental manipulation of ease of escape without helping may be understood as a situational episode (Krahé, 1992). On the basis of situation cognition it might be fruitful to investigate how the different helping episodes are perceived by potential helpers. It is likely that how a situational episode is perceived depends on individual differences in altruistic dispositions. For example, a person who scores high on altruistic personality might be predisposed to focus attention on situations in which an emergency has occurred. In addition, it seems likely that different facets of the altruistic disposition relate differently to helping depending on situational cognition. People who are interested in what is measured by the subscale Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others may consider an easy-escape condition as an appeal to respond on a moral basis.

The first lesson that can be drawn from the results of this experiment is that—as proposed by Batson (1991)—the motivational dynamics in the easy-escape and difficult-escape conditions are really quite different. This is evidenced by the differential correlation patterns for both the index of emotional response as well as the IJS. Ease of escape is a situational variable that seems to interact with predominant emotional response on the one hand and facets of responsibility on the other hand.

Another important lesson is that none of the facets of responsibility were *consistently* related to helpfulness in this experiment. Following the terminology of Batson et al. (1986), one might distinguish between pseudoaltruistic personality factors (those that correlate with helpfulness in the difficult-escape condition) and altruistic personality factors (that correlate with helpfulness in the easy-escape condition) because in the difficult-escape condition the egoistic motivation is dominant, whereas in the easy-escape condition the altruistic motivation is prevalent. Therefore, Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others proved to be an altruistic personality factor.

A third implication is that from a theoretical point of view the data are more supportive of a parallel-process model than a common-process model of personality traits and emotional states. If we consider emotional state and responsibility traits simultaneously, the results point in the direction of a parallel-process model. The correlations between social responsibility and its subscales and helpfulness do not seem to be mediated to any substantial extent by empathic concern and personal distress. Therefore, a common-process model in which social responsibility is the exogenous variable, which is causally pre-ordered to the emotional states of empathic concern and personal distress, is not viable on the basis of our data.

Although such a common-process model is not confirmed by the present data, it may be more viable in a situation where a higher similarity in content between trait and state variables is secured. Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others does not overlap much in content with empathic concern, and the same conclusion seems to be

warranted with respect to Adherence to Social Prescriptions and personal distress. From this negative statement a promising route for future research may be delineated. After identification of personality measures that fit the content of empathic concern and personal distress, respectively, it would be possible to test a model that assumes that personality and situation jointly generate specific emotional states in the participants. In such a common-process model these emotional states would be considered the direct causes of helping. A further hypothesis—given this integrated model that goes beyond the empathy–altruism hypothesis—would be that the path from personality to helping is different in the easy-escape and difficult-escape conditions. Such an assumption would be congruent with the result of this study that responsibility measures are not consistently related to prosocial behaviour.

In conclusion, associations between prosocial behaviour and personality are to be understood primarily as a situation-specific profile (e.g. dependent on ease of escape without helping). Batson (1995) argued that the altruistic personality is possibly not at all altruistic but might be the expression of ‘instrumental means to the egoistic ultimate goal’ (p. 366). From the viewpoint of the present research he was right in pointing out that some facets of the altruistic personality—such as the full social responsibility scale—are more closely related to egoistic motivation than to altruistic motivation, but social responsibility seems to be quite a heterogeneous concept, which includes a more altruistic and a more egoistic component, which resemble the traditional differentiation between guilt avoidance (by following personal norms) and shame avoidance (by fulfilling the expectations that are fixed in social norms). By separating these two basic components out, it was possible to show that the Moral Fulfilment of the Justified Expectations of Others was connected with the altruistic motivation that presumably was elicited in the easy-escape condition.

The altruistic personality as a monolithic construct does not seem to be viable. Instead, we expect that personality–situation interactions emerge, as the comparison between easy-escape and difficult-escape conditions shows. Therefore, it is promising to identify profiles of personality factors that are relevant for helping in specific types of emergency situation. In future research it would be interesting to focus on the subjective representations of these situations more fully and to clarify the underlying situation cognition processes related to them more comprehensively.

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