



Empathy and Pro-Environmental Behaviors:

Investigating Human Altruism and its Link to Pro-Environmental Behaviors
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Abstract

Batson predicts that empathetic concern for others causes altruistic motivation, which may lead to helping behaviors (Batson et al., 2014). Environmental researchers have extended this literature to pro-environmental behaviors (PEB). Preliminary results from our literature review show that empathy consistently predicts PEB. However, the literature is somewhat theoretically confused with no overarching explanation of the basis of these relations. Our review aims to remedy this by examining whether specific factors Batson found essential in the human altruism literature apply to the environmental literature. For instance, the human altruism literature shows that empathy predicts helping only when the potential target is perceived as needy and deserving. Our review will examine whether this and other features of Batson's theory help sharpen the predictions in the environmental literature. To accomplish this, we are conducting a systematic search of both PsycInfo and Google Scholar using pre-specified search terms with strict criteria about eligible studies.

Representative Results of the Literature Review

Experimental

- When empathy was manipulated it found increased pro environmental behavior (Berenguer, 2007; Berenguer, 2010).

Empathy as a Mediator

- Empathy mediated the relationship between perceiving animals in need and perceiving intentions to help the animal (Shelton & Rogers, 1981).

Correlational

- Empathetic concern and perspective taking were positively correlated with biospheric values and environmental intentions (Schultz, 2001).

DEN (Dispositional Empathy with Nature)

- DEN is correlated with perspective taking, empathetic concern, environmental movement support, and green behavior frequency (Tam, 2013).

Compassion

- Compassion was significantly correlated with pro-environmental intentions and pro-environmental values (Pfattheicher et al., 2016).

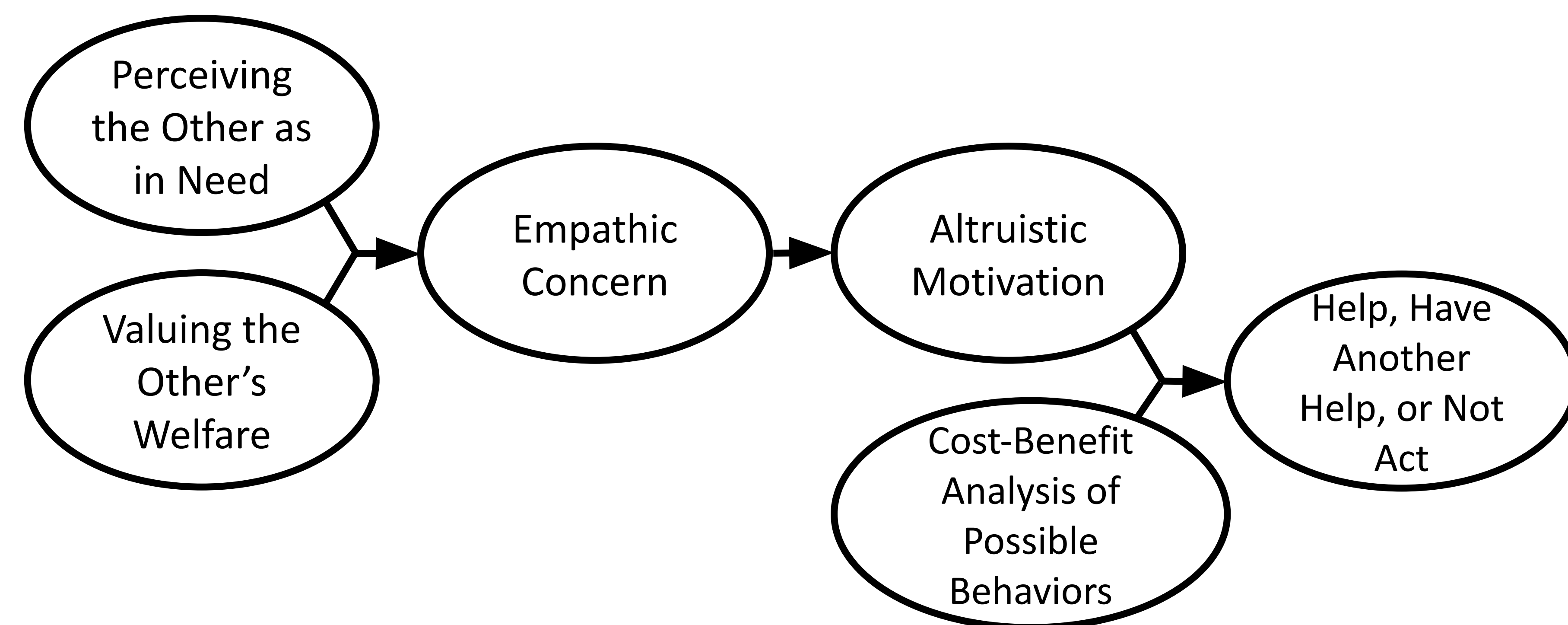
Definitions

Empathy is defined as “sincere concern for another person’s welfare”

- It is a response to another’s suffering
- *Altruism* is defined as the “motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare”

Batson’s Theory

- Based on his hypothesis, Batson found that humans are capable of genuine altruistic behaviors *if* they feel empathy for another person.
- Batson found these behaviors may occur if a person is perceived as *in need*, and the other’s welfare is intrinsically valued



Conclusions

The research is extremely telling of the pattern of human behaviors, and how it can be manipulated or appealed to. Preliminary results of our systematic literature review indicate:

- Empathy consistently predicts PEB
- Much of the literature has not tested the entirety of Batson's theory, thus it is unclear whether the relation between empathy and environmental behaviors indicates altruistic motivations to protect the environment

These results could be applied socially to promote more PEB nationwide.

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