

Review

Prosocial behavior and reputation: When does doing good lead to looking good?

Jonathan Z. Berman¹ and Ike Silver²**Abstract**

One reason people engage in prosocial behavior is to reap the reputational benefits associated with being seen as generous. Yet, there isn't a direct connection between doing good deeds and being seen as a good person. Prosocial actors are often met with suspicion and sometimes castigated as disingenuous braggarts, empty virtue-signalers, or holier-than-thou hypocrites. In this article, we review recent research on how people evaluate those who engage in prosocial behavior and identify key factors that influence whether observers will praise or denigrate a prosocial actor for doing a good deed.

Addresses

¹Marketing Department, London Business School, Regent's Park, London, NW1 4SA, United Kingdom

²Marketing Department, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 3730 Walnut St., Philadelphia, PA, 19104, USA

Corresponding author: Berman, Jonathan Z. (jberman@london.edu)

Current Opinion in Psychology 2022, 43:102–107

This review comes from a themed issue on **People-Watching: Interpersonal Perception and Prediction**

Edited by **Kate Barasz & Tami Kim**

For a complete overview see the [Issue](#) and the [Editorial](#)

Available online 9 July 2021

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.06.021>

2352-250X/© 2021 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords

Prosocial behavior, Charitable giving, Altruism, Reputation, Charitable credit, Moral character.

Context

This article examines how people judge those who act generously, contribute to charity, or engage in prosocial behavior.¹ Historically, the study of selfless behavior has centered around what drives people to do good deeds at a cost to the self [1,3,4]. We diverge from this past

debate by examining observer *perceptions* of those who act generously. What are the reputational consequences of doing good deeds?

At first blush, the answer might seem straightforward: Observers praise selflessness and generosity, and they confer respect, gratitude, trust, and status upon those who sacrifice to help others [4–7]. But a closer look reveals that reactions to good deeds are not universally positive. Do-gooders are often met with suspicion and are sometimes cast as disingenuous braggarts, empty virtue-signalers, or holier-than-thou hypocrites.

When are individuals praised for doing good deeds, and when are they denigrated? The present article addresses this question both by illustrating recent contributions made in the literature and highlighting areas for future research. In doing so, we focus our attention on ‘charitable credit’ — the extent to which good deeds earn (or fail to earn) praise and associated attributions of moral character. Our central argument is that individuals allocate charitable credit in accordance with the perceived purity of an actor's motives. In the following sections, we outline the various factors that influence how motives are assessed, and consequentially, how reputation is afforded to those who do good deeds.

Motives matter

While actors are often praised for their good deeds, there isn't a direct connection between doing a good deed and receiving credit for it. Rather, observers care deeply about a prosocial actor's underlying motives: did the actor really care about helping others, or were they motivated — at least in part — by a desire to help themselves?

Theories of costly signaling argue that observers judge the motives of others by the extent to which they are willing to sacrifice to accomplish a goal [8,9]. Consistent with this notion, the more actors are seen as sacrificing when helping (e.g. by donating more money or exerting more effort), the more favorably they are evaluated [10–12].

However, even seemingly costly good deeds are sometimes met with suspicion. Observers typically assume that actors are ultimately motivated by self-interest [13] and will often re-construe ostensibly selfless actions as

¹ Although these terms have slightly different connotations, we use them interchangeably to signify situations in which actors incur a cost to the self to increase social welfare, regardless of if the actor were to subsequently benefit from the action. Prototypical acts include volunteering, donations to charity, or engaging in pro-environmental behavior. We do not focus on acts of generosity within personal relationships (e.g. doing favors or giving gifts), in which there is an expectation or opportunity for the recipient to reciprocate [1,2].

having an underlying ulterior motive [14,15]. For instance, the longer individuals are given to contemplate why a philanthropist gave to charity, the more likely they are to spontaneously come up with reasons why the philanthropist was secretly self-interested [16].

This motive cynicism is often triggered when observers detect selfish incentives in an actor's environment that could account for their choice to do good. Even the slightest hint that an actor was selfishly incentivized for helping can lead observers to discount their generosity [17]. For instance, observers may infer that an actor who accepts a thank-you gift in exchange for a donation was motivated to contribute to receive the gift rather than from a pure desire to help. In some cases, actors who seem to have ulterior motives are judged to be less moral than if they had not helped at all [18].

Although selfish rewards and charitable credit are typically at odds, emerging research suggests that extrinsic benefits and positive attributions can sometimes co-occur, particularly when selfish rewards appear to be incidental to the actor's decision [19]. Those who seem like they would have performed a good deed regardless of if they were rewarded for it are still praised for their generosity [20]. Such judgments seem to be tied to counterfactual reasoning processes [21]. When assessing prosocial actors, observers often consider whether the actor *would have* performed a good deed *if* the incentive had not been present. The easier it is to imagine an actor doing good in the absence of an incentive, the more credit they receive. Similarly, when observers are reminded that prosocial actors with selfish motives could have chosen not to help at all, observers are more willing to give 'partial credit' to those actors [18].

Beyond accounting for incentives, observers also decipher motives from features of the actor's decision-making process. For example, the more time actors spend considering whether to do a good deed, the more they are assumed to be conflicted and the less credit they receive [22].

Motives can also be inferred from social context. More original or unusual forms of prosocial behavior are considered more diagnostic of pure motives than those that are more socially normative or expected [23,24]. In addition, those who help higher-powered individuals are met with greater suspicion than those who help lower-powered ones [25].

Motive ambiguity and do-gooder derogation

Although people care deeply about the motives of do-gooders, motives are difficult to verify. This leaves observers with flexibility to judge actors however they wish. Anecdotally, it seems that when observers feel motivated to disparage, they do not need to draw on

much evidence. Simply saying that an actor wanted to improve his or her reputation or that a do-gooder is 'smug' may often be enough to discredit their good deeds. Such cases have in common an element of 'observer wiggle room' sufficient ambiguity in the circumstances or cognitions around an actor's good deeds to allow bad-faith observers to levy reputational blows.

It may seem curious that observers would be motivated to discredit do-gooders in the first place; however, emerging evidence suggests that people will disparage good deeds when they feel that moral actors will judge them negatively [26] or if they feel they are competing with others to be seen as generous [27]. Some observers explain that they dislike particularly generous others because they look bad by comparison [28,29].

Are emotions selfish?

The logic of altruism suggests that any selfish incentive should be sufficient to taint a selfless act. Is this true for emotional incentives such as feeling a 'warm glow' from performing a good deed?

Philosophers, psychologists, and economists have all argued that emotional reasons for giving are self-gratifying, and therefore ought to be met with suspicion [30–32]. However, laypeople hold a more positive view of the role of emotions in prosocial behavior. Whereas observers discount prosocial behavior motivated by material or reputational benefits, emotional reasons for giving do not provoke the same cynicism.

Rather, the more a prosocial actor shows positive emotions alongside doing good deeds (e.g. via facial expressions, verbally communicating emotions to others), the *more* altruistic that actor is perceived to be [12,33,34]. This is because emotions are seen as a direct signal of an actor's underlying feelings about their desire to help [33,35–37]. In fact, those who are driven to help by emotional pull are thought to be more moral than those who decide to help through deliberation [38,39]. Still, questions pertaining to how actor emotions impact perceptions of charitability are not fully settled, as research finds that emotions in certain situations (e.g. assuaging one's guilt for doing bad deeds) can be associated with selfishness [40,41].

Generosity and self-promotion

Doing good can only improve an actor's reputation if others know about it. Yet, advertising one's generosity is a risky proposition. There exist strong norms that good deeds should be anonymous, and those who tell others about their generosity are often seen as disingenuous self-promoters [42–45].

Talking about one's generosity sends two opposing signals. It communicates that a good deed has been

performed, which signals selflessness, but it also suggests the actor may want credit for their good deed, which signals self-interest. As a result, self-promotion can increase or decrease perceptions of generosity depending on observers' prior knowledge about the good deed or the individual doing it. The less information that observers have about a prosocial actor, or the more they have previously assumed an actor to be selfish, the more self-promotion can help because it causes observers to update their beliefs about the actor's tendency to do good deeds. However, if observers are already aware of an actor's tendency to do good, self-promotion can backfire because it no longer communicates new information and simply raises skepticism that the actor had ulterior motives [42].

Still, there are ways for individuals to communicate their generosity while minimizing reputational risks. For one, prosocial actors can subtly signal generosity to select others, perhaps by telling just a few close acquaintances [46,47]. Such targeted communication can convey selflessness to key observers without provoking the inference that one wants to improve their reputation more generally. Moreover, these select others may, in turn, brag on behalf of the generous actor. Self-promoters can also invite others to help the cause, thereby providing an altruistic justification for their brag and decreasing suspicion regarding their motives [41].

The more normative it is to brag about one's good deeds, the more others might feel social pressure to act in kind [47,48], so the distaste people show toward those who advertise their good deeds may ultimately do more social harm than good. Specifically, discouraging individuals from talking about their good deeds might inhibit the formation of a 'culture of giving' in which individuals proudly signal their generosity to encourage others to join the cause [49]. It may also prevent people from learning about worthy causes or ways to help.

One possible solution is for sufficiently high-status givers to visibly challenge or dare others to help as was done with the Giving Pledge, a campaign that encourages billionaires to publicly pledge most of their wealth to charity. In turn, those responding to such a challenge are given an excuse for communicating their good deeds publicly, both because they were publicly challenged to do so in the first place and because they can pass along the same challenge to others. However, such attempts to make donations more public may be met with resistance. People may not want to feel added pressure to explicitly compete with others over their generosity.

Little credit for impact and effectiveness

If the goal of donating to charity is to help others, then individuals should presumably receive more credit when their good deeds achieve more benefits. But, at

least descriptively, this does not seem to be the case. Rather, charitable credit is much more sensitive to how much an actor gains or sacrifices while doing a good deed than how much the act benefits others [11,12,50,51].² Consistent with costly signaling theory, the sacrifices actors endure in the course of helping represent a more trustworthy indicator of underlying character than benefits achieved [11].

Another possible reason why observers do not give credit in accordance with impact is that social benefits are difficult to evaluate [53–57]. Such explanations draw on cognitive arguments that people are scope insensitive [56,57] or that they lack a frame of reference by which to evaluate how much good *should* result from any given good deed or donation to charity [53,54]. When benefits are easy to compare, individuals do judge others in accordance with the amount of good deed performed [12,58]. However, even when benefits are comparable, people still prioritize degree of sacrifice over benefits achieved [11].

Further evidence of impact-insensitivity can be seen in observer reactions to donations of money. Monetary donations are fungible and, therefore, particularly effective at delivering benefits [59]. Yet, observers give more credit to those who donate goods or volunteer time rather than those who give money, as these seem to signal greater emotional investment and communal intention [60,61]. Expenditures of time and effort are also considered a stronger indicator of strength of desire than expenditures of money [62].

Ultimately, what seems to matter most is whether an actor chose to do good at all [51]. While some work has found little difference in perceived generosity per dollar amount donated [12,51], other work has found that observers do care how much a donor gives when their wealth is known [63] or when differences in the amount given are large [11]. Thus, it appears that individuals primarily give credit in accordance whether someone chose to help, less so to how much that actor sacrificed while helping and even less so in accordance with benefits achieved.

Obligations to personal relations

One complicating factor that affects how actors are judged by others concerns whether they are donating to a cause that benefits a close personal relation. Recent theories of morality suggest that people see others as obligated to help close personal relations over distant strangers [64,65]. Despite these obligations, or perhaps because of them, prosocial actors are afforded *less* credit when they donate to causes that benefit close others,

² However, some work shows that the more social benefits that prosocial actors provide, the more competent they are perceived to be. In contrast, degree of personal sacrifice does not seem to impact perceived competence [52].

doing so is seen as relatively selfish compared to helping strangers [40,66]. At the same time, helping a stranger *instead of* helping a close other is seen as a violation of one's commitments and obligations, which can also damage one's reputation [66,67]. Understanding the role of relationship-specific obligations in judgments of selfless behavior is still nascent and represents an emerging area of research.

Future directions: strengthening norms around giving?

The research reviewed here examines how individual do-gooders are judged by observers. However, some of the most challenging questions concern how to use reputational incentives to strengthen norms around giving. Indeed, if one major reason why individuals do good deeds is to reap reputational rewards [51], then how can we use what we know about the psychology of moral credit to engender a 'culture of giving'?

Currently, societal norms about how much people ought to sacrifice and which causes people ought to support are weak.³ Most people see charitable giving as an inherently personal and subjective decision, not one that should be dictated by external forces [58]. In this sense, prosocial behavior is often considered *supererogatory* (good to do, but optional) rather than *obligatory* in most contexts. Although people have some ideas about how much they and others should be contributing, these judgments are often vague and self-serving. For example, most people believe that they themselves are excused from donating anything beyond a trivial amount of money to charity, instead arguing that the burden ought to fall on those earning more money than themselves [68].

Strengthening norms around giving likely requires making prosocial behavior more visible so that people feel more social pressure to give and so that do-gooders feel some sense of competition over being generous [69,70]. But people may resist such changes. At present, many who do good deeds are hesitant to talk about them [48,71], and those who make their generosity public run the risk of being targeted as disingenuous [42–45]. Furthermore, people are generally resistant to being told they have costly obligations — such as taxes [72]. The introduction of stronger norms around giving may also affect the reputational dynamics associated with doing good deeds. For instance, in situations where there is a clear expectation for how much people ought to help, actors are not praised for going above and beyond [73,74].

Can observers be taught to credit impact instead of motives? What might encourage do-gooders to talk about their good deeds and call on others to join them?

How can we leverage social agreements like pledges, public challenges, and wagers to boost generosity? Answers to such questions will help identify steps to create a culture of giving and improve long-term welfare for the world at large.

Conflict of interest statement

Nothing declared.

References

Papers of particular interest, published within the period of review, have been highlighted as:

- of special interest
- of outstanding interest

1. Small DA, Cryder C: **Prosocial consumer behavior**. *Curr Opin Psychol* 2016, **10**:107–111.
 2. Barclay P: **The evolution of charitable behaviour and the power of reputation**. In *Applied evolutionary psychology*. Edited by Roberts SC, Oxford University Press; 2012:149–172.
 3. Bekkers R, Wiepking P: **A literature review of empirical studies of philanthropy: eight mechanisms that drive charitable giving**. *Nonprofit Voluntary Sect Q* 2011, **40**:924–973.
 4. Andreoni J: **Impure altruism and donations to public goods: a theory of warm-glow giving**. *Econ J* 1990, **100**:464–477.
 5. Hardy CL, Van Vugt M: **Nice guys finish first: the competitive altruism hypothesis**. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 2006, **32**:1402–1413.
 6. Albert M, Güth W, Kirchler E, Maciejovsky B: **Are we nice(r) to nice(r) people?—an experimental analysis**. *Exp Econ* 2007, **10**:53–69.
 7. Bénabou R, Tirole J: **Incentives and prosocial behavior**. *Am Econ Rev* 2006, **96**:1652–1678.
 8. Zahavi A: **Reliability in communication systems and the evolution of altruism**. In *Evolutionary ecology*. Edited by Stonehouse B, Perrins CM, London: MacMillan Press; 1977:253–259.
 9. Smith EA, Bird RLB: **Turtle hunting and tombstone opening: public generosity as costly signaling**. *Evol Hum Behav* 2000, **21**:245–261.
 10. Bigman Y, Tamir M: **The road to heaven is paved with effort: perceived effort amplifies moral judgment**. *J Exp Psychol Gen* 2016, **145**:1654–1669.
 11. Johnson Samuel: **Dimensions of altruism: do evaluations of prosocial behavior track social good or personal sacrifice?**. November 2, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3277444>. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3277444>.
- Observers judge the moral character of prosocial actors much more in accordance with the amount that the actor sacrificed compared to how much social benefit the actor caused. This holds even when benefits are comparable in joint evaluation.
12. Erlandsson A, Wingren M, Andersson PA: **Type and amount of help as predictors for impression of helpers**. *PLoS One* 2020, **15**:1–23.
 13. Miller D: **The norm of self-interest**. *Am Psychol* 1999, **54**:1053–1060.
 14. Miller DT, Ratner RK: **The disparity between the actual and assumed power of self-interest**. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 1998, **74**:53–62.
 15. Lin-Healy F, Small DA: **Nice guys finish last and guys in last are nice: the clash between doing well and doing good**. *Soc Psychol Personal Sci* 2013, **4**:692–698.
 16. Critcher CR, Dunning D: **No good deed goes unquestioned: cynical reconstructions maintain belief in the power of self-interest**. *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2011, **47**:1207–1213.

³ One exception is the norm of tithing practiced within some religious communities.

17. Silver I, Newman G, Small DA: **Inauthenticity aversion: moral reactance toward tainted actors, actions, and objects.** *Consum Psychol Rev* 2021, **4**:70–82.
18. Newman GE, Cain DM: **Tainted altruism: when doing some good is evaluated as worse than doing no good at all.** *Psychol Sci* 2014, **25**:648–655.
Those who do good deeds that benefit the self and others are evaluated more negatively than those who do similar deeds that benefit just the self.
19. Carlson RW, Zaki J: **Good deeds gone bad: lay theories of altruism and selfishness.** *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2018, **75**:36–40.
20. Silver I, Silverman J: **Doing good for (maybe) nothing: motive inferences when rewards are uncertain.** Working Paper. 2021.
21. Lipe MG: **Counterfactual reasoning as a framework for attribution theories.** *Psychol Bull* 1991, **109**:456–471.
22. Critcher CR, Inbar Y, Pizarro DA: **How quick decisions illuminate moral character.** *Soc Psychol Personal Sci* 2013, **4**:308–315.
23. Kraft-Todd GT, Rand DG: **Rare and costly prosocial behaviors are perceived as heroic.** *Front Psychol* 2019, **10**:234.
24. Silver I, Kelly BA, Small DA: **Selfless first movers and self-interested followers: order of entry signals purity of motive in pursuit of the greater good.** *J Consum Psychol* 2021.
Observers give greater charitable credit to actors that are the first to engage in a specific type of prosocial action. Prosocial followers are seen as less purely motivated and receive less credit for their good deeds.
25. Inesi ME, Adams GS, Gupta A: **When it pays to be kind: the allocation of indirect reciprocity within power hierarchies.** *Organ Behav Hum Decis Process* 2021, **165**:115–126.
26. Minson JA, Monin B: **Do-gooder derogation: disparaging morally motivated minorities to defuse anticipated reproach.** *Soc Psychol Personal Sci* 2012, **3**:200–207.
Meat-eaters evaluate vegetarians negatively in part because they expect vegetarians to evaluate meat-eaters to be morally inferior for eating meat.
27. Pleasant A, Barclay P: **Why hate the good guy? Antisocial punishment of high cooperators is greater when people compete to be chosen.** *Psychol Sci* 2018, **29**:868–876.
Relatively selfish individuals are more likely to punish altruistic others in situations involving competitive partner selection compared to situations when competitive partner selection is absent.
28. Parks CD, Stone AB: **The desire to expel unselfish members from the group.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2010, **99**:303–310.
29. Kawamura Y, Kusumi T: **Altruism does not always lead to a good reputation: a normative explanation.** *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2020, **90**.
30. Kant I: *Foundation of the metaphysics of morals* (L. W. Beck, Trans.). Indianapolis: IN: Bobbs-Merrill; 1959 (Original work published 1785).
31. Cialdini RB, Darby BL, Vincent JE: **Transgression and altruism: a case for hedonism.** *J Exp Soc Psychol* 1973, **9**:502–516, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031\(73\)90031-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(73)90031-0).
32. Andreoni J: **Impure altruism and donations to public goods: a theory of warm-glow giving.** *Econ J* 1990, **100**:464–477, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2234133>.
33. Barasch A, Levine EE, Berman JZ, Small DA: **Selfish or selfless? On the signal value of emotion in altruistic behavior.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2014, **107**:393–413.
Observers judge actors more positively if they are motivated to reap emotional benefits when doing good deeds. In contrast, observers judge actors less positively if they are motivated to reap material or reputational benefits when doing good deeds.
34. Ames DR, Johar GV: **I'll know what you're like when I see how you feel: how and when affective displays influence behavior-based impressions.** *Psychol Sci* 2009, **20**:586–593.
35. Frank RH: *Passions within reason: the strategic role of the emotions*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company; 1991.
36. Krull DS, Seger CR, Silvera DH: **Smile when you say that: effects of willingness on dispositional inferences.** *J Exp Soc Psychol* 2008, **44**:735–742. May 1.
37. Ames DR, Flynn FJ, Weber EU: **It's the thought that counts: on perceiving how helpers decide to lend a hand.** *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 2004, **30**:461–474.
38. Levine EE, Barasch A, Rand D, Berman JZ, Small DA: **Signaling emotion and reason in cooperation.** *J Exp Psychol Gen* 2018, **147**:702–719. 2018.
39. Montealegre A, Bush L, Moss D, Pizarro D, Jimenez-Leal W: **Does maximizing good make people look bad?** 2020, <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/2zbax>.
Those who deliberate on which charity to donate to are afforded less credit than those who express empathy when choosing where to give their money. The negative effects of deliberation are reduced if actors first express empathy prior to deliberating.
40. Lin-Healy F, Small DA: **Cheapened altruism: discounting personally affected prosocial actors.** *Organ Behav Hum Decis Process* 2012, **117**:269–274.
41. O'Connor K, Effron DA, Lucas BJ: **Moral cleansing as hypocrite: when private acts of charity make you feel better than you deserve.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2020, **119**:540–559.
Actors who work for sin industries are deemed hypocrites if they privately donate to minimize harm caused by their occupation, relative to if they donate to causes unrelated to their occupation.
42. Berman JZ, Levine EE, Barasch A, Small DA: **The Braggart's dilemma: on the social rewards and penalties of advertising prosocial behavior.** *J Market Res* 2015, **52**:90–104.
Actors who tell others about their good deeds send two conflicting signals regarding their generosity. On the one hand, they inform others that they have done a good deed which increases perceptions of generosity. On the other hand, they signal that they did the good deed in part to obtain reputational benefits which decrease perceptions of generosity.
43. Heyman G, Barner D, Heumann J, Schenck L: **Children's sensitivity to ulterior motives when evaluating prosocial behavior.** *Cognit Sci* 2014, **38**:683–700.
44. Siem B, Stürmer S: **Attribution of egoistic versus altruistic motives to acts of helping: the role of the helper's status and the act's intended publicity.** *Soc Psychol* 2019, **50**:53–66.
45. De Freitas J, DeScioli P, Thomas KA, Pinker S: **Maimonides' ladder: states of mutual knowledge and the perception of charity.** *J Exp Psychol Gen* 2018, **148**:158–173.
46. Hoffman M, Hilbe C, Nowak MA: **The signal-burying game can explain why we obscure positive traits and good deeds.** *Nat Hum Behav* 2018, **2**:397–404.
47. Bird RB, Ready E, Power EA: **The social significance of subtle signals.** *Nat Hum Behav* 2018, **2**:452–457.
48. Silver I, Small DA: **Put your mouth where your money is: a field experiment nudging consumers to publicize their donations to charity.** Working Paper. 2021.
49. Singer P: *The life you can save: how to do your part to end world poverty*. The Life You Can Save; 2009.
50. Yudkin DA, Prosser A, Crockett MJ: **Actions speak louder than outcomes in judgments of prosocial behavior.** *Emotion* 2019, **19**:1138.
51. Burum B, Nowak MA, Hoffman M: **An evolutionary explanation for ineffective altruism.** *Nat Hum Behav* 2020:1–13.
The authors argue that the reason why prosocial behavior is so often ineffective is because reputation is afforded to those who commit good acts at all rather than in accordance to how much good is being done.
52. Kawamura Yuta, Ohtsubo Yohsuke, Kusumi Takashi: **Effects of cost and benefit of prosocial behavior on reputation.** *Soc Psychol Personal Sci* 2020, **12**:452–460.
53. Caviola L, Faulmüller N, Everett JA, Savulescu J, Kahane G: **The evaluability bias in charitable giving: saving administration costs or saving lives?** *Judgm Decis Mak* 2014, **9**:303–316.
54. Caviola L, Schubert S, Greene JD: **The psychology of (in) effective altruism.** *Trends Cognit Sci* 2021, **25**(7):596–607.
55. Zhang Y, Epley N: **Self-centered social exchange: differential use of costs versus benefits in prosocial reciprocity.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2009, **97**:796–810.

56. Fetherstonhaugh D, Slovic P, Johnson S, Friedrich J: **Insensitivity to the value of human life: a study of psychophysical numbing**. *J Risk Uncertain* 1997, **14**:283–300.
 57. Slovic P: **If I look at the mass I will never act: psychic numbing and genocide**. In *Emotions and risky technologies*. Dordrecht: Springer; 2010:37–59.
 58. Berman JZ, Barasch A, Levine EE, Small DA: **Impediments to effective altruism: the role of subjective preferences in charitable giving**. *Psychol Sci* 2018, **29**:834–844.
 59. Singer P: *Famine, affluence, and morality*. USA: Oxford University Press; 1972.
 60. Gershon R, Cryder C: **Goods donations increase charitable credit for low-warmth donors**. *J Consum Res* 2018, **45**: 451–469.
 61. Johnson SG, Park SY: **Moral signaling through donations of money and time**. *Organ Behav Hum Decis Process* 2021, **165**: 183–196.
 62. Shaddy F, Shah AK: **Deciding who gets what, fairly**. *J Consum Res* 2018, **45**:833–848.
 63. Yuan M, Wu J, Kou Y: **Donors' social class and their prosocial reputation**. *Soc Psychol* 2018, **49**(4):205–218.
 64. Rai TS, Fiske AP: **Moral psychology is relationship regulation: moral motives for unity, hierarchy, equality, and proportionality**. *Psychol Rev* 2011, **118**:57–75.
 65. Earp BD, McLoughlin KL, Monrad J, Clark MS, Crockett M: *How social relationships shape moral judgment*. 2020, <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/e7cgg>.
 66. McManus RM, Kleiman-Weiner M, Young L: **What we owe to family: the impact of special obligations on moral judgment**. *Psychol Sci* 2020, **31**:227–242.
- Actors who help strangers are judged to be more moral than actors who help their kin. However, actors who prioritize their kin over strangers are deemed to be more moral than actors who prioritize strangers over their kin.
67. Law KF, Campbell D, Gaesser B: **Biased benevolence: the perceived morality of effective altruism across social distance**. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 2021.
 68. Berman JZ, Bhattacharjee A, Small DA, Zauberman G: **Passing the buck to the wealthier: reference-dependent standards of generosity**. *Organ Behav Hum Decis Process* 2020, **157**:46–56.
 69. Kraft-Todd G, Yoeli E, Bhanot S, Rand D: **Promoting cooperation in the field**. *Curr Opin Behav Sci* 2015, **3**:96–101.
 70. Raihani NJ, Smith S: **Competitive helping in online giving**. *Curr Biol* 2015, **25**:1183–1186.
 71. Raihani NJ: **Hidden altruism in a real-world setting**. *Biol Lett* 2014, **10**.
 72. Sussman AB, Olivola CY: **Axe the tax: taxes are disliked more than equivalent costs**. *J Market Res* 2011, **48**:S91–S101.
 73. Klein N, Epley N: **The topography of generosity: asymmetric evaluations of prosocial actions**. *J Exp Psychol Gen* 2014, **143**: 2366.
 74. Klein N, Grossman I, Uskul AK, Kraus A, Epley N: **It pays to be nice, but not really nice: asymmetric evaluations of prosociality across seven cultures**. *Judgm Decis Mak* 2015, **10**: 355–364.