Creative Altruism: The Prospects for a Common Humanity in the Age of Globalization

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Abstract

This essay examines some of the ways in which applied sociology can contribute to the repertoire of responses that are available to those seeking to maximize the social benefits and minimize the social costs associated with the phenomenon commonly referred to as "globalization." Based on the later work of Pitirim A. Sorokin – founder and first Chair of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University, we propose to revitalize the concept of creative altruism and to promote its widespread adoption as a tool of planned sociocultural change. In the course of this discussion, we focus on the relationship between altruism and "coming to species consciousness," as understood by classical philosophers and the earliest sociologists, by Sorokin himself, and by contemporary researchers – especially Kristin Renwick Monroe. We conclude that the ideal of one world at peace can be achieved – and, indeed must be achieved when the alternatives are considered – through the conscientious application of altruistic thought and practice.

For better or worse, humanity is now becoming a unitary whole in an important and unprecedented way. Many names have been given to this process; and because names create realities, it matters very much which one we use. Some, beginning with the sociologist Harold Innes and his student Marshall McLuhan, see it as a movement toward a *global village*. Architect and futurist Buckminster Fuller referred to the *Spaceship Earth*. Now current in many quarters is the term *globalization*. Some, with good reason, speak of *capitalist imperialism*. Others say *modernization*, *Westernization*, *Postmodernization*, or *internationalization*. Sociologist George Ritzer has influenced many with his evocative term, *McDonaldization*.

For the purposes of this discussion, we have chosen an alternative formulation, one that might help us to avoid some of the unwanted connotations that "globalization" and the other terms carry. This is the process of *coming to species consciousness*. The phrase characterizes an evolutionary movement toward a state in which every member of the species *Homo sapiens* is aware that – beyond all secular differences – a common

humanity exists and demands to be treated as one.

Highlights in the History of the Idea

The idea of species consciousness has been expressed in many different cultures and historical eras. One of its most powerful statements is found in the *Ethics*, written in 1677 by the Dutch-born philosopher Baruch (Benedict de) Spinoza. According to Spinoza, underlying all of the diversity that characterizes the various nations and ethnicities of the world, there is a fundamental "harmony." He believed that this harmony could be understood if we think clearly about the nature of humanity, and that it would be realized if and when people act reasonably toward one another. "Nothing can be in more harmony with the nature of any given thing than other individuals of the same species," Spinoza wrote. "Therefore for man in the preservation of his being and the enjoyment of the rational life there is nothing more useful than his fellow-man who is led by reason" (*Ethics* Part IV, Appendix: proposition IX).

The Possibility of Species Consciousness

Spinoza and those who embrace his viewpoint believe that a species consciousness is possible; in fact, they assume that it is inherent in human nature. They also realize, however, that it is not automatic. For there are many forces arrayed against it, including habit, superstition, and prevailing public opinion, that must be overcome before we can understand ourselves "under the form of eternity."[1] This is an important point to remember as we consider the possible outcomes of the rapid sociocultural changes now underway. That is, if we are going to achieve species consciousness, something must be done: a program must be created and implemented to bring it about.

Spinoza chose to emphasize a program that involved a turn toward what he called "reason." This concept suggests that if one thinks about the human condition in a clear and orderly way it becomes apparent that every individual person is part of a larger, effective whole. To paraphrase the words of the poet John Donne: No one is an island. No one stands alone.

Unfortunately, from a contemporary standpoint, "reason" is an outmoded term that now can mean just about anything one chooses. For example, it can be argued that it is reasonable for a person or group to commit genocide, provided that the deed is planned clearly and systematically (logically).[2] Today, the program that will help us realize our common humanity must give directives that are far more specific than "be rational," even if we do understand what Spinoza really meant in his arguments against irrational philosophies and theologies.[3]

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (who lived during the era of the American and French Revolutions) was not the first writer to attempt to improve upon Spinoza's program, but he is certainly among the best remembered and most widely read. Kant believed that there exist certain moral standards - rules of right and wrong – that allow people to understand themselves "under the form of eternity." These rules are absolute, or "categorical," in that they are valid everywhere and always. In addition, such rules are expressed in the form of a command, as an "imperative," because one cannot avoid acting in the way(s) they stipulate and still be considered an ethical person. In his *Foundation for the Metaphysic of Morals* (1838[1961]: 581-82), Kant notes that an

> *[I]mperative is Categorical [when] it concerns not the matter of action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result; and what is essentially good in it consists in the mental disposition, let the consequence be what it may. This imperative may be called that of Morality.*

In recognizing the importance of eternal, moral rules in the movement toward a species consciousness, Kant goes beyond the assertion that "reason" is all that is required to understand and achieve a common humanity. For one thing, because our actions must be rule governed, the movement is viewed as normative and thus requires learning. It may be true that the potential to understand ourselves as parts of a physical and spiritual whole is inborn, or at

least intuitive, and that even the youngest children can grasp the idea. However, by the time most people reach maturity, they have either forgotten or have "unlearned" it - or, it is possible, they never understood it at all.

In any case, Kant implied, people need to learn, and to learn how to act in accord with, the categorical imperatives. This normative aspect also allows for the possibility that people can think and behave in a manner that appears "rational" and at the same time act immorally: for example, when orderly, clear thinking nevertheless goes against or ignores a key imperative. Finally, when the importance of imperatives is considered, it is obvious that the possibility of achieving species consciousness is just that, a possibility, not something that is inevitable. In brief, reason is necessary, but it must be guided by the "rules of the game."

Enter Altruism

So, we might ask, did Kant have any particular moral imperative(s) in mind when he connected them to the quest for a common humanity? The answer is "yes," he had a very important one in mind. In fact, in keeping with his view that such moral norms are universal and eternal, he drew upon what we now know to be a cultural universal: a norm that is part of the morality of every human society ever studied.[4] Because it is so common, it has been expressed in many different ways. Most people in the English speaking world know it as the Golden Rule: "do unto other others as you would have others do unto you." Kant put it this way (as translated from the original German): "*Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*" In other words, see to it that anything that you might do could and should be done by everyone else in the world.[5]

Because of Kant's influence in academic circles, his ideas - including his categorical imperative - were studied carefully by his contemporaries; and they have continued to influence social thinkers to this day. Two of his contemporaries in France, Henri Saint-Simon (the older) and August Comte (the younger), worked on developing moral philosophy in what is now a familiar direction. For in Revolutionary France, Kant's work along with other sources, especially the writings of Adam Smith and his students (known collectively as the "Scottish moralist" philosophers), became the foundation for a new field that Comte called *sociology*.

Saint-Simon and Comte investigated many important topics, such as the possibility of studying human relationships according to the scientific method (another idea that can be traced to Kant). Often overlooked among their innovations, however, is their interest in the kind of behavior specified in the Golden Rule, Kant's imperative, and in similar moral norms. From a sociological perspective, such behavior is *prosocial* – for the collective good. This can be contrasted with behavior that is *selfish* – for the good of the self. Comte coined the terms whereby we still refer to these contrasting modes of action: *altruism* and *egoism*. Using Comte's word, then, the Golden Rule and the categorical imperative counsel *altruism*. Thus the essential connection was made between altruism, on one hand, and the movement toward species consciousness, on the other, a connection of which the French founders of sociology were well aware.

> *Comte considered altruism and egoism to be two distinct motives within the individual. He did not deny the existence of self-serving motives, even for helping; the impulse to seek self-benefit and self-gratification he called egoism. But Comte believed that some social behavior was an expression of an unselfish desire to "live for others." It was this second type of motivation to benefit others that he called altruism (Comte 1851/1875; quoted in Batson 1991: 5).*

Summary of the History of the Idea

The concept of a common humanity with a consciousness of itself is very old and widely discussed. In fact, for many centuries in Western and Eastern philosophy the idea was believed to be self evident to anyone who could reason properly. Ultimately, such beliefs were dismissed as too vague and/or ambiguous. However, in several instances, such as in Immanuel Kant's writings on morality, philosophers attempted to make the quest for a common humanity more specific. In the early 19th

century, Kant in particular proposed in his moral imperative a certain kind of thought and action that would be an effective means to achieve the goal of species consciousness. At about the same time, Auguste Comte, founder of the discipline of sociology, coined the term to refer to such thought and action that is used to this day: *altruism*. In this way, the links between a common humanity, species consciousness, reason, moral imperatives, and altruism were forged.

In Karl Marx's revolutionary program to create a common humanity, one finds the key principle of a group in-itself. This indicates that group-consciousness, including in this context species-consciousness, is the product of common life conditions plus a shared understanding by members of the group (species) that they have common interests - that the wellbeing of each depends on the wellbeing of all. Also necessary is a common "other" against which the group (species) can identify itself. In the case of the human species, in particular, this other is nature, with which humanity as a whole can and must cooperate in order to survive and prosper. Because, it appears, the achievement of species consciousness is neither automatic nor inevitable, the need for a program to guide the quest is once more apparent. In the following section, we discuss such a program.

Applied Sociology and the Quest for a Common Humanity

Thus far, we have discussed some aspects of species consciousness and the related concept of a common humanity. Our exploration has also briefly touched on several related ideas, including Kant's imperative, Comte's altruism, and Marx's theories of social change. This has helped to lay the foundation for addressing four key questions that do (or ought to) concern people today. These are:

1. What is the alternative to species consciousness, and what would the consequences be if people did *not* pursue it?
2. Is altruism real or is it just a dream of philosophers?
3. What is the relationship between altruism and the quest for a common humanity?
4. Assuming that such a quest is possible and desirable, what needs to be done?

First we consider the first three questions together, then we continue with a few additional thoughts on each as we attempt to answer the fourth question.

The Alternatives

Short of an enormous and unforeseen catastrophe, there appears to be nothing that can stop the increasing connectedness occurring between and among people in all parts of the world. Promoted by powerful technologies and institutions such as the Internet, satellite television, radio, and telephones, the spread of English as a common world language, common currencies such as the Euro and the dollar, and the growth, consolidation, and ever-expanding reach of multinational corporations, McLuhan's global village is, or is on the verge of becoming, a reality. Yet, if "village" is the proper metaphor, it is hardly a village at peace.

The social, economic, and political inequalities that exist between and within the village's "neighborhoods" range from substantial to enormous and from enormous to (there is no other way to put it) obscene. Some residents own two or more cars that cost tens of thousands of dollars each, whereas others cannot even afford an ox cart. Many political and religious "leaders" of the village are benefiting mightily, some as never before, by preaching hatred and intolerance of one's neighbors. God's name is routinely invoked to justify all manner of murder and mayhem. In some neighborhoods, residents are on the verge of starvation, while in others food is thrown away by the ton.

The emerging political system of the village is highly undemocratic. It is, rather, an autocracy in which those individuals, groups, and geographic regions currently wielding the most power have shaped the system in a way that will keep them in power well into the foreseeable future. Free markets and sovereign consumers do not characterize the village's emerging economy, as its defenders would like us to

believe. Nor is the economy the socialistic system – once embraced by capitalism's critics, which operates according to the principle of "from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs." Instead, it has thus far proved to be simply a more extended and more coordinated version of the system of huge monopolistic corporations that first emerged in the early twentieth century.[6] As the global village has taken shape, these corporations have achieved unparalleled political influence. It has also become increasingly clear that they are indifferent to the goods and services they actually produce. For their main business is to maximize profits by underpaying and, when desirable, laying-off workers and by cajoling, tricking, or forcing consumers to buy more and more things that are less and less important.

The glamorous and seemingly unstoppable spread of the Internet, cell phones, the dollar, and corporate economics has a another, often unpleasant, side that residents of the more affluent neighborhoods tend to overlook. Along the same channels that bring innovations such as satellite TV to the far corners of the village, great fear and anxiety flow about the loss of traditional, local beliefs and practices.

In response to such fears, the less privileged residents seek solace in what they believe to be the past (even if it is a largely mythical past). Old languages, art, and music are revived from the brink of extinction; and ethnic power and "cleansing" movements arise to challenge the cultural homogenization overtaking the village. Religious fundamentalism is embraced in increasing numbers by adherents of the village's major faiths: Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and in smaller sects and denominations as well, in response to the forces of secularization. Nationalism, and its frequent companion militarism, experiences a significant revival in an attempt to counter the reach of multinational institutions. These are not aberrations or mysterious contradictions. Rather, the current growth and popularity of such movements, and the potential of social conflict that they entail, are as much a part of the global village as e-mail or MTV. As Benjamin Barber notes in his widely read work on this phenomenon, "the two axial principles of our age – tribalism and globalism – clash at every point except one: they may both be threatening to democracy."[7]

In the absence of species consciousness, there is no reason to believe that current trends will cease or even slow down. To the contrary, a global village that is not a village for-itself is bound to be a village in continual conflict and strife: autocratic politics, monopolistic economics, exploitation, religious intolerance, inter-ethnic violence, and militarism. Of course, these are hardly new problems. But they are serious and dangerous in a new way when they occur in humanity's one and only village, with no other place to go and no one other than ourselves to whom we can turn for help. That is why the need for all people to see themselves as one has never been more urgent.

Summary of the Research Literature

Research in the several fields leaves many unanswered questions about the reality of species consciousness and altruism.[8] The ambiguity is, in part, the result of differences among disciplinary perspectives from which the problem is viewed. Some studies focus on motivation, others do not even see motives as necessary; some studies are concerned with the behavior of individuals, whereas others look to the group level; etc. Another factor that cannot be ignored is an ideological tendency to dismiss apparently altruistic acts as mere manifestations of selfishness. Those who take this position tend to credit themselves as "realists." Yet, on reflection, it seems obvious that no facts or logical arguments will persuade such people that altruism can sometimes be realistic. Thus, they actually have little to contribute to serious research on the subject. (see, especially, Monroe, Barton, and Klingermann 1990)

Despite the disciplinary and ideological obstacles yet to be overcome, it is obvious that the phenomenon of altruism is currently of interest to a wide range of scholars in many fields. Moreover, as our knowledge about altruism, egoism, and their sources and consequences increases, it becomes increasingly clear that our behavior toward others is intimately connected to our self-preservation - as individu-

als, as groups, and as a species. Sociologists and others are still far from solving all of the riddles that are associated with altruism, but a significant movement among those interested in it is taking shape around the connection between pro-social behavior and perceptions of a common humanity. This connection is especially important in the work of one of the leaders of this movement, political psychologist Kristen Monroe.

Monroe has provided a significant contribution to the literature on altruism. In *The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of a Common Humanity*, she defines altruism as "behavior intended to benefit another, even when this risks possible sacrifice to the welfare of the actor." (Monroe 1996: 6) Monroe examines the possible influences that encourage altruism and highlights the importance of separating this discussion from a rational choice perspective. As a staunch advocate of the plausibility of altruism as part of human nature, Monroe succinctly argues against the limitations provided by rational choice theorists. (As noted above, the key to their argument is that egoism is normal behavior, even in the performance of apparently other-directed acts.)

Monroe's work is based on an in-depth study of individuals whose behavior can be placed along a continuum from altruistic to egoistic and which includes several points in between. As in the work of Fogelman (1994) and Oliner and Oliner (1988), Monroe argues that the most altruistic individuals are rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. In addition to the rescuers, along the continuum from more-to-less altruistic are heroes, philanthropists, and entrepreneurs. For Monroe, entrepreneurs display the least altruistic behavior. Using these categories, she contrasts research findings with theoretical assumptions based on both rational choice and altruistic theories. Her conclusion is that rational choice theories cannot account for the behavior of altruists.

Monroe originally believed that the roots of altruism might be traced to factors such as parental modeling, education, and religion; but her findings did not support this. Rather, she discovered that what sets the more altruistic subjects apart from the others is a shared general perspective, a "cognitive orientation." She concluded that the perspective itself, and not the specific factors, consistently accounted for altruism.

For Monroe, the altruistic perspective is best understood in philosophical and psychological terms, although she uses principles from other social sciences as well. In fact, the perspective is quite complex and consists of several components: cognition and cognitive processes, expectations, worldviews, empathy, and views of self. Following is a brief description of each of these components.

- Cognition is the process by which individuals make sense of the world. It consists of being aware of something and making a judgment about it. It also accounts for cultural norms. It allows one to interpret how altruists see themselves, as members of a group or as individuals.
- Expectations imply what the altruist expects will occur under certain circumstances. These include opinions, beliefs, and stereotypes of what helping means.
- Worldviews consist of people's ideas about the world and themselves, for example, how they think about themselves as individuals and as members of groups.
- Empathy is the result of a cognitive and affective response toward someone *else's* feelings.
- Finally, views of self are related to one's identity perception and whether or not it is consistent with behavior.

Based on these components, the most altruistic subjects – especially the rescuers – consistently saw themselves as members of a shared humanity. They thought of themselves as ordinary people who had not done anything praiseworthy by saving other people's lives. They exhibited a universalistic worldview, in which being part of the human community was more important than being part of a just world or believing in the inherent goodness of people. They understood what is meant to be in need, and therefore felt that they had no choice in their actions.

Monroe's concept of common humanity

reinforces the findings of other research on altruism. For instance, Sorokin noted how his "good neighbors" had a similar attitude toward the whole world and humanity. Similarly, Oliner and Oliner (1988:84) referred to a kind of cognition or inclusiveness as "a predisposition to regard all people (universally) as equals and to apply similar standards of right and wrong to them without regard to social status or ethnicity." Fogelman, too, discussed the importance of "awareness" or the process of transformation that a bystander goes through before becoming a rescuer. Such awareness signifies that others are in need and that all should be treated equally. In a broader sense, Monroe's research draws on Kant's categorical imperative, Comte's altruism, and Marx's theories of social change, as discussed above.

Monroe's concept at first proved difficult to test empirically. For each of her key components includes several intricate, multi-leveled variables. However, her more recent research (Monroe 2001) suggests further ways to analyze the altruistic perspective, in the context of rescue behavior and other uncalculated, spontaneous acts. Although this is highly analytical work, rooted in psychological, linguistic, and psychoanalytic theories, it does provide a clearer understanding of the interconnections among altruism, morality, and our sense of selves. In particular, she has discovered that "morality is driven not by ratiocination or religion but by identity and perceptions of self in relation to others." (Monroe 2001:491) That is, the human need for consistency and self-esteem, and our desire to be treated by others as we treat them, result in a "universal entitlement." This is an entitlement to extend universal rights to others (compare with Kant's categorical imperative); and, according to Monroe, it is what drives people to be moral actors.

Elements of the Program

If it is both desirable and possible for people, everywhere, to become more altruistic, then the next step is to advance the program meant to achieve this goal, the program begun by Spinoza, Kant, Comte, and Marx. We have noted how researchers in several disciplines are interested in the phenomenon of altruism. However, the field that has the potential to make one of the most important contributions to the *practical* aspects of this research is applied sociology. There are two main reasons for this. First, the field, although labeled "sociology," is highly interdisciplinary and thus includes insights and principles from psychology, social philosophy, biology, anthropology, and political science.[9] Second, sociology was founded by Comte and his contemporaries as an applied field and with the explicit mission of promoting altruistic thought, behavior, and institutions.

Many "mainstream" sociologists have, of course, taken the field in different directions. Yet, the original interest in altruism and related phenomena has been kept alive, at least at the margins of the discipline and especially among those involved in sociological practice. So, we may ask, is there in applied sociology a program that links the research of Oliner and Oliner, Fogelman, Monroe, and the others with moral imperatives, altruism, species consciousness, and the human prospect? Our answer to this question is a cautious "yes." Although a complete and perfect program has yet to be created, applied sociology today is well on its way to developing a commonly accepted set of ethical dimensions and/or moral imperatives that feature altruism.[10] In fact, a framework for this task has already been established.

The framework to which we refer was first proposed by the sociologist, Pitirim A. Sorokin (1880-1968), whose work was mentioned earlier. Sorokin was the first Chair of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University, and he served as President of the American Sociological Association in 1964. Among the key concepts introduced by him are *sensate* and *ideational* culture types, *creative altruism*, and *integralism*. Since Sorokin's death, several studies have supplemented his approach, some with explicit reference to him but, because his contributions were generally ignored, most lacking such citations.[11] Among the works that do cite him are those of Kristen Monroe, especially in relation to her discovery of the important cognitive orientation, perception of a common humanity.

Creative Altruism: A Summary

We focus here on Sorokin's work at the Research Center in Creative Altruism at Harvard University to examine his concept of creative altruism and to indicate how it can be used by applied sociologists today. Also relevant are Sorokin's contributions as viewed by his biographer, Barry V. Johnston. Johnston has stated that, by the end of his long and productive career, Sorokin had arrived at an integrated theory of social action and reform. (Johnston 1995: 127-28)

> *[Sorokin's paradigm] frames a universe of discourse, produces an ontological and epistemological consensus on the nature of social reality and knowledge; sets malleable boundaries for doing sociology; and emphasizes the application of knowledge to practical problems of existence. (Johnston 1998: 17)*

Guided by these principles, applied sociologists are currently in a position to influence the movement toward a species consciousness by practicing what Sorokin preached. That is, the study of creative altruism and the methodologies to put it into practice are key steps in developing a program for our global village that works. (Weinstein 2000a: 6)

Following the founding of the Research Center for Creative Altruism at Harvard University in the late 1940s, Sorokin explored the principles of a social science based on an integral philosophy and a new applied science, which he called *amitology*. (see Sorokin 1954a; b) His integral philosophy, or integralism, is presented as the solution to problems associated with the most recent stage of a long historical cycle. This cycle is comprised of three alternating types of cultures: the sensate, the dominant type in the contemporary Western world; the ideational, characterized by spirituality and altruism; and the idealistic, a transitional stage that occurs between the other two. These are described and illustrated extensively in his comprehensive four-volume study, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*. (Sorokin 1962; also see Johnston 1995: 143-49) Sorokin believed that the present stage, which he further defined as *cynical* or *late* sensate, is on the verge of decline and that a new, idealistic stage might be emerging (if it could be helped along).

According to Sorokin, each type of culture is characterized by a particular way of knowing about reality. The sensate stage is characterized by the core belief that truth is based on the senses alone. This is opposed to both the truth of reason and a supersensory truth, which permeate the idealistic and ideational types of cultures. By the rule of "logico-meaningful" affinity, whereby specific cultural traits reflect the master values, the sensate stage is dominated by materialism, greed, and egoism.

With the help of philanthropist Eli Lilly and others, Sorokin founded the Center to combat the exclusive role played by sensate beliefs and practices in contemporary society. In their place, he sought to promote behavior based on altruistic values and *integralism*, which combines all three ways of knowing reality. (the sensory, the rational, and the super-rational) This combination is the hallmark of idealistic culture. To Sorokin, the time had come to do something about transforming society through the application of integralism, to act in a reconstructive way. (Johnston 1995: 127, 128, 240)

As Johnston (1995: 204) observes, however, "the research of the Center failed to start a significant mass movement or to institutionalize the study of altruism in the social sciences." The sociological community showed little interest in altruism, integralism, or the reconstruction of society. In fact Sorokin's work, especially the earlier volumes of *Dynamics*, was criticized as metaphysical. Johnston (1995: 174) suggests the reason for this negative reaction:

> *Sorokin's methods simply will not sustain his arguments with the precision he desires...what he has produced in Dynamics and the works that follow is a broad and valuable philosophy of history. It is a start, not a science...*

As Johnston also points out, the critics failed to see that in the fourth volume of *Dynamics* Sorokin *had* arrived at integralism, a theory of social reform. It appears that by then the intellectual community was no longer interested. Nevertheless, many sociologists now believe that the time has come to continue the work that began with Sorokin's explorations. Clearly, given the nature of today's social prob-

lems and the challenges of the global village, it might be wise at least to consider what Sorokin called "positive types of social phenomena." For, as he argued, too much of social science has focused on negative types:

> *A scientific study of positive types of social phenomena is a necessary antidote to that of negative types of our cultural, social and personal world. The moral effect alone fully justifies a further investigation of persons and groups of good will and good deeds.(Sorokin 1950: 87)*

Amitological Principles

The activist part of Sorokin's program was the development of amitology, the applied aspect of integralism. Sorokin defines amitology in *Forms* and *Ways* (1951) as: "The applied science or art of developing friendship, mutual aid and love in individual and intergroup relations." If the goals of amitology are to be achieved, Sorokin noted, not only is it necessary to investigate altruistic phenomena, but altruistic acts must be practiced by ordinary people involved in common social settings. Sorokin wrote in *Altruistic Love* (Sorokin 1950: 10), referring to the altruistic activities of "good-neighbors":

> *Great altruists alone cannot supply even the very minimum of love and mutual help necessary for any surviving society...it is furnished by thousands and millions of our plain "good-neighbors." Each giving a modest contribution of love, in their totality they produce an enormous amount of "love energy". Without this moral foundation of the deeds of the "good-neighbors" no society can be satisfactory.*

At the Center, Sorokin produced his major works on altruism, from which we can draw some of his definitions.[12] In Reconstruction (Sorokin 1948), he defines altruism as

> *the action that produces and maintains the physical and/or psychological good of others. It is formed by love and empathy, and in its extreme form may require the free sacrifice of self for another.*

In Altruistic Love (Sorokin 1950), he characterizes "good neighbors" along these lines:

> *A quest for sympathy, understanding, and encouragement – the desire to find a co-sympathizer in either despair or loneliness – is just as strong in human beings as the need for food or clothing.*

These comments obviously point to the importance of altruistic phenomena. However, if such ideas are to aid in our quest for a global village at peace, we must first teach and learn about their underlying values and positive effects. Our schools and colleges must develop and offer courses that focus on the teachings of altruism. Then, on this informed basis, we might try to modify our culture and social institutions by acting through the concerted actions of individuals united as groups.

Degrees of Altruism in the Work of Sorokin and Monroe

We have reviewed some of the literature on altruism principally to stress the importance of learning and teaching about it, and the ways in which we might approach practicing it in the real world. Of course, many people are already altruistically inclined; but the philosophy and techniques of altruism are rarely if ever part of our formal education. Even more serious is the fact that most people, even those who study sociology, have not had the opportunity to reflect on the phenomenon. One gets the impression that when people hear about altruism, they either disregard it as unimportant, or they believe that it is unattainable.[13]

Taken as a whole, Sorokin, Monroe, and the research literature on the subject, in general, strongly indicate that various *degrees* of altruism exist; and much human behavior can be explored along the diverse range encompassed by the concept and phenomenon. This, in turn, suggests the need to invent more effective techniques for ennobling human beings, and, through these perfected techniques and increased knowledge, it will become possible to develop appropriate strategies for planned social change (Sorokin 1948: 234). Finally, in order for our techniques and plans to be truly effective, we must show not only that they are important to pursue, but also that they work. Although we have seen that much research and related work remain to be done, considering the centrality of the concept of altruism in the social science tradition and the current state of affairs in the world, it seems well worth the effort.

The observation that there are degrees of

altruistic behavior – that might be measured along a continuum – is tied to a contrast between the "rational" actors of classical economic theory and altruists. Monroe has pointed out that rational choice theories, which equate seemingly altruistic behavior with acts pursued solely for extrinsic rewards, cannot account for altruism. Not all normal human behavior consists of the pursuit of individual self-interest. You will recall that, based on her research, the factor that best explains altruism is a *cognitive* orientation, one that is not considered in rational choice or related theories: the perception of a common humanity.

> *While there are clear cognitive influences on altruism, the influence does not take the form traditionally suggested in the literature. Instead, the relevant cognitive component centered more on altruist's world views and canonical expectations about what constitutes normal behavior and on their perceptions of a shared humanity (Monroe 1996: 197, our emphasis).*

Monroe's ideas about what it means to perceive a shared or common humanity should sound a familiar note by now. A worldview is "important to the extent to which it provides a sense of connectedness to others ... a perception of self at one with all mankind ... a different way of seeing things."

> *It is not any mystical blending of the self with another; rather it is a very simple but deeply felt recognition that we all share certain characteristics and are entitled to certain rights, merely by virtue of our common humanity. It constitutes a powerful statement about what it means to be a common humanity (Monroe 1996: 206).*

In directly addressing the question of degrees of altruism, Monroe (1996:7) observes that "the world is not divided into altruists and non-altruists." Rather, pure self-interested behavior and pure altruism are the two poles of her continuum, and normal behavior generally occurs at some point between them. Some people "engage in quasi-altruistic behavior, in other words, without being altruists." And, in her analysis, quasi-altruistic behavior is normal behavior that exhibits some but not all of the defining characteristics of altruism. Based on a series of intense, in-depth interviews with several ordinary people and "good-neighbors," she delineated three broad categories of quasi-altruistic motivation: (1) spontaneity, (2) lack of choice, and (3) the constancy and universality of the altruistic bond (Monroe 1996: 234).

Similarly, Sorokin (1950: 39) found that "...the majority of 'good-neighbors' have a similar attitude toward the whole world and humanity."

> *They are not notable altruists; but all in all they are seemingly above the average in their altruistic activities and "good-neighborliness." Most of them do not look heroic in their good deeds. Their altruism is plain and fairly ordinary. It is however, real...their plain good deeds make the moral foundation of any society (Sorokin 1950: 7-10).*

These findings bear on recent and future research in sociology and other fields. For example, we might narrow our focus to the study of particular degrees of altruism (from "pure" egoism to "pure" altruism) and various behavioral patterns (spontaneity, lack of choice, constancy, and universality) along Monroe's continuum. Also, we might concentrate on specific social contexts. Thus, on the high end of the scale of Monroe's altruism, we might study authentic heroes. Or, on the low end, we may prefer to focus on the type of persons who we are more likely to encounter in day-to-day interactions.

Conclusion: Altruism and the Global Village

Popular culture and perspectives like rational choice theory would have us believe that altruism as something dangerous, impossible or, at best, of little practical value. Yet, a considerable amount of research in several fields has demonstrated that it is real and that it has an important role to play in human relations. In fact, the theories of Sorokin, Monroe, and others have suggested that altruism can mitigate if not solve many of the social problems encountered today, including such controversial issues as religious and ethnic intolerance, family crisis, health care, and homelessness. More than a century after Comte's death and decades after Sorokin's, the study of altruism is now beginning to make inroads into our educational sys-

tem, while people everywhere are beginning to take altruism seriously as a behavioral option to "rational selfishness."

Sociology in general and applied sociology in particular has a major role to play in these changes. For there is obviously a close connection between prosocial behavior and the belief that all humans have common needs and interests. Moreover, the existence of a common humanity is a core belief among sociologists. Indeed the sociological enterprise is premised on the view that as a species humanity is essentially one, but that socialization and other sociocultural forces create profound differences among us. Those who teach sociology have nothing to teach if it isn't this: Whereas there are degrees of altruism, the idea of "degrees" of humanity, from less to more, higher to lower, etc. has no scientific basis.

In this light, all of us, experts and laypersons alike, would benefit substantially from further study of Monroe's observation that perspective promotes altruism. The perception that a common humanity exists and the type of thinking related to this perception can lead to altruistic behavior. This is an especially important task because intolerance, homelessness, and many other of today's social problems are caused or intensified by egocentric, self-interested behavior and the perception of some people that others are less than human. Many problems can be solved if we follow Kant's categorical imperative. We know that people in situations of conflict often do forget that we are all human. They tend to deal with others in terms of stereotypes or as enemies. The failure to recognize our common humanity does stand in the way of effective resolution of a large proportion of the problems faced in today's society.

The mission to insert into our practical work the imperative that others are no less human than ourselves is both timely and potentially effective. And it may be an important step toward improving human relations before it really is too late. Of course, as is true of other well-intended programs, this is much easier said than done. In this case, there are several obstacles to putting these sound - but not especially novel - ideas into practice. One is the tenacity of egoistical models in the social sciences and in culture generally, and the consequent failure to grant altruism a serious role in human affairs. Strong opposition to altruism exists in beliefs such as those outlined above. That is, in our type of culture altruism is understood to be deviant behavior.

> *"Good neighbors" and saints are deviants who rise above the level of moral conduct demanded by the official law. Their actions are "superlegal." Some of these superlegal actions do not conflict with the official law; others result in conflict between the good-neighbors and saints on the one hand, and the official law and government on the other (Sorokin 1950: 208).*

Sorokin believed that the more altruistic a person is, the more likely he or she is to come in conflict with society's prevailing norms. He also thought that altruistic people are more likely to come in conflict with others who, for one reason or another, feel uncomfortable about altruistic behavior. Thus, learning about altruism also entails trying to understand why altruism is viewed as a threat.

> *Can there be a pure and lofty altruism, not generating collision and conflict...tentatively, the answer is that there is such a way, but that it requires among other conditions, an extension of our "in-group" feelings to all humanity; and this extension must be real, manifested not only in our speech reactions but in our entire behavior...Jesus rightly said that he brought not only peace but also the sword. So does any unselfish person or deed! (Sorokin 1950: 83-84)*

As we gain a better understanding of why some people are more altruistic than others and what shapes altruistic acts may take, stereotypes will cease to limit our ability to resolve many of today's problems such as sexism or ethnic conflict. Learning about "good neighbors" as deviants may reveal much about the moral values and ethical boundaries of ordinary people. By insisting that we are all human beings, all part of one world, we may be able to be more effective actors. We would then be prepared to meet the challenges of this late sensate era and, at last, to realize the promise sensed by the first sociological students of altruism, especially Comte. That is, the promise of what Sorokin (1948: 225) called "the ennoblement of human personality."

The practice of kindness and love is one of the best therapies for many mental disorders; for the elimination of sorrow, loneliness and unhappiness; for the mitigation of hatred and other antisocial tendencies, and, above all, for the ennoblement of human personality, for release in man of his creative forces, and for the attainment of union with God and peace with oneself, others, and the universe.

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Notes

1. Spinoza's idea of species consciousness is also expressed in his argument that the physical unity of humanity is reflected in its unitary mind, "under the form of eternity." "The mind does not conceive anything under the form of eternity, except in so far as it conceives its own body under the form of eternity." (*Ethics*, Part V, proposition XXIX)
2. The sociologists Max Weber and Karl Mannheim, among others, attempted to rescue the related concept of "rationality" by distinguishing between (1) acts (or thoughts) that are rational in relation to a specific task and (2) those that are rational in relation to a widely accepted system of values. In this way, the clear and orderly pursuit of genocide might be considered rational in the first sense but irrational in the second, because genocide is widely viewed as immoral. It has now become clear that the situation is more complex than that, and that there are many levels of rationality. For example, the group pursuing what some would label "genocide" might believe that it is protecting itself from an imminent and evil threat. Thus, in relation to that group's value system, so-called genocide is actually self-preservation and a rational means to achieve peace and security. The rest of the world might believe that it is irrational, but that just increases the complexity of our judgments.
3. Spinoza was hardly the first philosopher to argue that the unitary nature of humanity is obvious to anyone who thinks clearly about the matter. Socrates, the founder of Western philosophy, defined "ignorance" as the inability to conceive of (and act toward) others as one does of (toward) oneself (see Ozinga 1999, especially p. xvi).
4. The question of what constitutes cultural universals and, if they exist, what they are is one of the most hotly debated issues in social science. For background on this debate, see Brown (1991).
5. Thomas Hill (1993) has developed an explicit theoretical linkage between Kant's work and contemporary approaches to altruism.
6. One of the more recent and most complete studies of the emergence of corporate power is Derber (2000).
7. Several sociologists and other observers have written about the dialectic of globalization, in which cosmopolitan innovations *and* local reactions to them are viewed as parts of a whole. The basic premise is that modernity does not *re*place tradition; instead it *dis*places tradition. In this way, rather than disappearing, traditional values and practices move over, so to speak, to make room for modern ways. As a result of such coexistence there is bound to be conflict: action/reaction. An early statement of this view is in Weinstein and McNulty (1980). Also see Weinstein (1997: Chapter 14). Benjamin Barber (1995) has popularized this perspective in his contrast between "Jihad versus McWorld."
8. Key works in this surprisingly vast (and growing) body of research literature on altruism include Hoffman (1981), Oliner and Oliner (1988), Fogelman (1994), Piliavin and Chang 1990), Hutchinson (1993), Staub (1991), and Sober and Wilson (1999).
9. As is true of other practice-oriented fields, the main purpose of applied sociology is not to advance the knowledge base of the discipline (although this often happens). Rather, it is to solve practical problems for clients. But practical problems (for example, how to better organize a state-wide childcare program) are just problems and do not come with labels such as "sociological," or "political." Thus, it is generally necessary for the applied sociologist to draw on knowledge from other fields, within a broad sociological framework.
10. To many academic social scientists this might seem a rather strange, if not unappealing, project. For it assumes that we can and should agree about the kinds of social

relations we would like to create or avoid in the global village. On reflection, however, these concerns make us uncomfortable only when viewed from a largely outmoded "value free" perspective in which such partisanship is to be avoided - not sought out. For today's sociological practitioner, the search for the right and the wrong ways to conduct human affairs is no more unusual than the physician's attempt to define health and illness.

11. Among the works of special relevance to our discussion are: Hutchinson (1993), Macaulay (1970), Midlarsky and Kahana (1994), Oliner and Oliner (1988), Paul, Miller, and Paul (1993), Penner (1995), Piliavin and Charng (1990), Rushton (1980), Wildavsky, (1993), and Wispé (1978).
12. August Comte, who coined the term "altruism" in the 1850s, believed that some social behavior was an expression of an "unselfish desire to live for others." (Batson 1991)
13. We have noted that "altruism and apposite concepts have been viewed as 'soft' and marginal to the main thrust of social scientific research." (Weinstein 2000b)

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