

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND ALTRUISM

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The world religions proclaim prosocial values (Habito & Inaba, 2006), but it is still unclear whether these values translate into behaviors (Ellens, 2007) and whether they are really altruistic (Neusner & Chilton, 2005). Religious and atheist individuals have diverging opinions regarding whether or not religion promotes altruism. Historical and contemporary evidence seems to provide testimony in favor of both sides: Religious charity and religious violence have coexisted, in parallel or intertwined.

Asking the same question from a psychological perspective implies the need to focus on people's specific cognitions, emotions, and behaviors relating to altruism and the way these are influenced by, or possibly influence, religion. Interestingly, almost all classic theorists (James, Freud, Skinner, Erikson, and Allport) and contemporary evolutionary scholars underline the positive connection between religion and altruism, although each approaches this issue from a different theoretical perspective (for a review, see Saroglou, 2006a).

Yet, religious beliefs, psychological theory, and empirical research are different, sometimes conflicting, things. In the present chapter, a brief overview of the psychology of altruism and prosocial behavior (concepts, models, and research traditions) is first provided. Afterward, the chapter presents a synthesis of the empirical research on religion (including spirituality) and prosociality, with an emphasis on the past 15 years (for an earlier review, see Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993). Consistent with the integrative paradigm of this handbook (see Chapter 1 in this volume), distinctions are made

between different levels of analysis (personality, behavior, and underlying processes), dimensions of religion, and types of prosocial behavior. When possible, information is provided on group-level factors and cross-religious differences, and questions for future research arise. The conclusion provides a synthesis of the main lines of knowledge and considers the implications for scholars and practitioners.

MAPPING THE PROSOCIALITY-RELATED CONCEPTS AND PROCESSES

Psychological research from different fields (social, personality, developmental, and moral psychology) has developed many terms that beyond some common overlap, denote distinct aspects and processes involved in altruism (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010b). To examine how religion relates to altruism, it is useful to briefly review these concepts and corresponding processes.

A key distinction is made between prosocial behavior and altruism. *Prosocial behavior* is a descriptive, neutral, term denoting an act that benefits others (e.g., help, donation). *Altruism* refers to the subtler evaluative qualification of the motivation of prosocial behavior as being other-oriented rather than egotistic or self-oriented. People may help others to get personal or social benefits and not because they care about the person in need. It is, however, a debatable issue in psychology and other fields whether it is possible to distinguish between altruistic and egotistic motivations when people

behave prosocially: When we help others so that we feel good about having done the right thing, or at least not guilty for omitting the action, are our motives egotistic or altruistic? The present chapter focuses on *prosocial behavior* and *prosociality* in general. The term *altruism* is used as an equivalent only because of the familiarity with this term in everyday language. The term *altruistic motivation* is used when referring specifically to the qualification of prosocial behavior as other oriented.

Social psychologists have focused on prosocial behavior as a function of different contexts (Dovidio et al., 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010b). Different types of prosocial behavior vary in many ways, including their costs and rewards (nonaggression, cooperation, help, donating, volunteering, forgiving, sacrifice), duration (one-shot help in a lab experiment vs. long-term volunteering), the urgency of the situation and the spontaneity of the reaction, and the duplicable (e.g., blood donation) or nonduplicable (e.g., organ donation) character of the prosocial act. Distinctions can also be made as a function of the type of target, the degree of proximity and familiarity with that target, and the corresponding chance for reciprocity: Kin-based, extended reciprocity-based, and universal altruism imply distinct psychological processes. In addition, prosocial behavior occurs not only at the individual level but also at the group and organizational levels (Stürmer & Snyder, 2010).

Personality psychologists are interested in individual differences that are stable across situations and throughout the life span. Indeed, some individuals are higher overall than others in the broad personality dimension of *agreeableness*, which entails a prosocial and communal orientation in interacting with others (Graziano & Tobin, 2009). Some are also more likely than others to highly endorse the values of *benevolence* and *universalism*. Benevolence involves preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent contact, whereas universalism involves appreciation, tolerance, and protection of the welfare of all people as well as nature (Schwartz, 1992).

Across the many psychological fields that are interested in the interplay of emotions and cognitions or reasoning, a major distinction is made

between (a) prosociality based on feelings of *empathy* and similar other-focused *moral emotions* such as moral outrage (anger, contempt, and disgust), elevation, and gratitude (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Batson, 2010; Haidt, 2003); and (b) prosociality based on moral judgments that follow other-oriented moral principles (i.e., *principlism*; Batson, 2010). Various conceptual models of the latter exist, with the principles of *care* (Gilligan, 1982) and *justice* (Kohlberg, 1981) being at the heart of interpersonal morality. These universal principles of interpersonal morality are complemented in traditional societies or among conservatives by other kinds of moral principles that place value on the group or sacred entities: loyalty, authority, and purity (Haidt & Graham, 2007).

Developmental psychologists are interested in the origin and development of prosociality (empathy, moral principles, and moral judgment or reasoning) from infancy to late adulthood, with a particular emphasis on the environmental factors that, in interaction with age and personality, influence this development (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006; Hoffman, 2000). These factors are mainly educational styles emphasizing warmth, modeling, socialization, formation of moral identity, and security in parent-child relations that facilitate *trust*. Adulthood brings a key developmental task, *generativity* for others and the world, which adds a proactive and prospective dimension to prosociality (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004). Contrary to previous theorizations or common assumptions, research in developmental psychology has established that basic moral principles such as justice and care emerge in early childhood in a universal way. Furthermore, these principles seem to be autonomous with respect to religious teachings and socialization by parents (Turiel, 2006).

Following developments in positive psychology, other researchers have recently operationalized prosocial constructs that are highly ideal and moral and, to some extent, inspired by religious and spiritual traditions. These include *compassion* (Cassell, 2009) and *compassionate love* (Fehr, Sprecher, & Underwood, 2009; Underwood, 2002). Compassionate love refers to altruistic tendencies (other-oriented feelings, beliefs, and acts) that are conscious, well

motivated, and deliberate. Compassionate love includes (a) compassion for those who are suffering and (b) passionate attachment to the flourishing of other, possibly all people.

In conclusion, if one wants to understand how religion relates to, influences, or is influenced by prosociality, one actually needs to examine how religion is connected with various prosocial personality traits, values, principles, emotions, behaviors, and motivations. These elements of prosociality, in turn, may vary considerably on the basis of contextual factors.

RELIGION AND PROSOCIAL PERSONALITY: TRAITS, VALUES, AND EMOTIONS

In recent decades, a growing body of evidence has demonstrated that people who are religious (intrinsic religion, beliefs, or practice) perceive themselves as being prosocial. The global personality dimensions of agreeableness (in the five-factor model; for a meta-analysis, see Saroglou, 2010) and low psychoticism (in Eysenck's model; for a review, see Francis, 2009) are typical among religious individuals. These broad prosocial traits translate into more focused traits or dispositions, such as helping (Batson et al., 1993), honesty (e.g., Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschuere, & Dernelle, 2005), forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999), gratitude (see Chapter 23 in this volume), and generativity (Dillon, Wink, & Fay, 2003). Both prosocial principles and emotions seem to be implicated. Indeed, religious people tend to attribute high importance to the value of benevolence (for a meta-analysis, see Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004) and the moral principles of care and justice (Graham & Haidt, 2010). They also report high feelings of empathy (e.g., Markstrom, Huey, Stiles, & Krause, 2010; Saroglou et al., 2005), compassion, and love (e.g., Smith, 2009). Interestingly, these prosocial traits, values, or emotional dispositions are typical of religiosity not only among Christians (from which the majority of studies in psychology of religion derive) but also among Buddhists, Jews, and Muslims; and they are present in both genders, in different ages, and in various cohorts from the

World War II into the early 21st century (see Saroglou, 2010; Saroglou et al., 2004, for meta-analyses; see also Francis, 2009).

The associations between religious and prosocial measures, however, are typically modest in size, as if the prosociality of religious people was not as important as one might suspect on the basis of theological traditions and classic psychological theories. Examining then the “real” prosocial behavior of religious people, as the next section of this chapter does, is a way to test the accuracy of such a link—although behavior is, of course, not a simple mirror of personality. Behavior varies importantly as a function of situational features, whereas personality characteristics reflect tendencies shown across situations. The associations between religiousness and prosocial personality traits become greater when one focuses on specific traits rather than global dimensions. In addition, the association between religiousness and prosocial constructs becomes clearer when one moves from adolescence and early adulthood to middle and late adulthood (for a review, see Saroglou, 2010).

A modest but consistent link also exists between religion and social desirability (for a meta-analysis, see Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010). This finding raises questions about whether the results linking religion and prosocial tendencies reflect nothing more than conformity to social standards and expectations—or whether they might simply reflect the concern to relay a positive image to oneself or the researcher. When social desirability is controlled for, the strength of the link between religion and prosocial self-perception decreases; importantly, however, the link does not disappear. More important, several kinds of “others” (parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and colleagues) provide peer validation: They also perceive religious targets as being high in agreeableness, honesty, forgiveness, gratitude, and generativity (for a review, see Saroglou, 2010). Moreover, the idea that religious people are prosocial—and, in parallel, that atheists are low in prosociality—seems to be intrinsic to the stereotypes regarding religious and atheist people (Harper, 2007; Lewis, 2001). Such perceptions are also part of both believers' and nonbelievers' *metastereotypes*—that is, their estimations of how they are perceived

by the other group (nonbelievers and believers, respectively; Saroglou, Yzerbyt, & Kaschten, 2011).

In sum, although modest in size, the association between individual religiousness and prosocial dispositions emerges consistently across studies, contexts (countries, religions, ages, genders), and the psychological dimensions concerned (traits, values, emotions). Prosociality seems to be a key characteristic of religious personality, possibly one of its universals. Religious people perceive themselves, are perceived by others, feel, think and value things in a way that emphasizes the importance of others' interests and needs as well as social cohesion.

RELIGION AND LIMITED PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR AS A FUNCTION OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

There is some correspondence between religious personality (and related values and emotions) and prosocial behavior. The picture, however, is complex. As will be detailed in the following section, religious prosociality, like prosocial behavior in general, varies as a function of several factors: nature of the behavior, type of target, costs and benefits, competing principles, salience of religious norms, and type of motivation. Moreover, beyond general, personal religiosity (intrinsic religion, religious beliefs and practices), specific dimensions, such as fundamentalism, spirituality, and religion-as-quest, have been tied to significant variations in the extent and nature of prosocial behavior.

Limited and Minimal Religious Prosociality: Targets and Costs

According to Saroglou et al. (2005; see also Saroglou, 2006a), one reason why the link between religiosity and prosocial personality is modest is that religious prosociality is not unconditional; instead, it seems to be limited in several ways. First, religious prosociality is limited as a function of contextual features, which include proximity and familiarity with the target. Religious people value cohesion in interpersonal relationships, need social approval, and support the existence of in-group versus out-group barriers. Religious people should thus show prosociality toward relatives, acquaintances, and

people with whom they are in close interaction and whose judgment is valued. They should be less likely to behave prosocially toward unknown people with whom there is little or no chance for reciprocity—and certainly not toward individuals who, like out-group members, threaten their religious values. Second, with the exception of sacrificial acts made at critical moments in life (especially by heroic figures and saints), religiosity in everyday life should predict *minimal prosociality*. This term refers to behaviors that are not necessarily of high cost but hold at least some importance if one wants to perceive oneself and be perceived by others as moral (see also Batson et al., 1993).

Several studies confirm that religious prosociality is limited to personally known targets and does not extend to unknown people and those who threaten religious values. These studies used the strategy of presenting the same series of hypothetical situations with versions (conditions) in which the target in need varied in proximity. Among Belgian students, religiosity was positively related to the willingness to help acquaintances and relatives ($r = .38$) but was totally unrelated to the willingness to help unknown targets in the exact same situations ($r = -.01$) (Saroglou et al., 2005, Study 2). Similarly, among Polish students, religiosity predicted willingness to help friends in need ($r = .46$) but was unrelated to willingness to help unknown targets with the same needs ($r = .03$; Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011, Study 2). Another study showed that Polish religious students were willing to help a confederate pass an exam ($r = .36$) but not if the confederate was a feminist ($r = -.02$; Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011, Study 1). In the United States, Batson et al. (1993) reviewed studies suggesting that (intrinsic) religiosity predicts prosocial behavior; however, the target was always an in-group member such as another student, a blind student, or a coreligionist.

Intentions may indicate real behavior. In another study, the more religious students were, the more likely they were to help an older student with her master's thesis by immediately dedicating 30 min to filling out a questionnaire (Blogowska, Lambert, & Saroglou, 2012). Other studies confirm the idea of at least minimal (in standards, extent, and resources to invest) religious prosociality, such as nonaggression.

For instance, using a projective measure (the Rosenzweig Frustration Test), Saroglou et al. (2005, Study 1) found that religious participants tended to spontaneously provide few aggressive responses when hypothetically interacting with frustrating others. Similarly, analyses of large international data sets from European countries show that individual religiosity is neither positively nor negatively related to attitudes toward immigrants (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). It protects religious people, however, who have the tendency to vote in favor of conservative right-wing parties, from voting for extreme right-wing parties, which are prone to violence and anti-immigrant hostility (Arzheimer & Carter, 2009). In another study, religious Israeli children were evaluated by their peers as using less aggressive behavior and victimization than their secular counterparts (Landau, Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, Österman, & Gideon, 2002). Religious people also seem to be immune to the aggressive consequences of the activation of mortality salience (Norenzayan, Dar-Nimrod, Hansen, & Proulx, 2009). Finally, the link between religion and low aggression is also supported at the community and institutional level. Analyzing violent crime rates in rural areas in the United States, Lee (2006) found that rates of rural violence are lower where there are more churches per capita, after accounting for the effects of several important control variables.

Although aggression is not the mere opposite of prosociality, nonaggression can be seen as minimal prosociality. Forgiving an offender, in contrast, may demand greater personal effort and the investment of more psychological resources than simply helping or not aggressing. In line with the idea of religious minimal and no-high-cost prosociality, the existing evidence suggests that religious people, who constantly value and report practicing forgiveness, do not really differ from their nonreligious counterparts when it comes to real behavior (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In several recent studies, participants' religiosity turned out to be unrelated to behavioral forgiveness, measured as low retaliation. This was the case when participants (a) administered questions varying in difficulty to a confederate who allegedly had given them a negative evaluation (Saroglou, Corneille, & Van Cappellen, 2009),

(b) allocated money to a disruptive confederate (Greer, Berman, Varan, Bobrycki, & Watson, 2005), or (c) administered "shocks" to a provocative (but fictitious) opponent (Greer et al., 2005; Leach, Berman, & Eubanks, 2008).

Religious Prosociality Limited by Competing Principles

There may be another explanation, besides that of the high cost, for this scarcity of behavioral confirmation of religious forgiveness. In fact, together with prosocial ideals, religion also promotes other aspects of moral integrity (Graham & Haidt, 2010). It can provide a sense of personal coherence, which seems to correspond to religious people's need for order and closure instead of uncertainty and ambiguity (Saroglou, 2002). Thus, not surprisingly, in some religions, effective forgiveness seems to depend on other principles. For instance, for Jews, some offenses are unforgivable (Cohen, Malka, Rozin, & Chermas, 2006). Muslims are particularly sensitive to the offender's apologies and demonstrations of repentance, and they thus tend to endorse less unconditional forgiveness than Christians (Mullet & Azar, 2009).

More generally, acting prosocially with regard to several targets in need may be in conflict with other principles and beliefs that religious people endorse. For instance, people who held orthodox religious beliefs were found to be unwilling to help homeless or illegal immigrants, and this finding was partially explained by participants' just-world beliefs—beliefs that "they deserve what they got" (Pichon & Saroglou, 2009; for similar findings on fundamentalists' low helping of unemployed people who are gay or single mothers, see also Jackson & Esses, 1997). In another study focusing on the moral conflict between abstract, impersonal deontology (e.g., honesty, loyalty) and interpersonal care (e.g., helping, saving another person's life), religious priming made people high in authoritarianism led to a preference for the respect of abstract deontology despite the detrimental consequences for the other person (Van Pachterbeke, Freyer, & Saroglou, 2011).

We can interpret in a similar way (i.e., abstract deontology limits care) several studies showing religious people's uneasiness to apply the sinner-sin

distinction: “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” Not only were intrinsically religious people less willing to help a gay confederate participate in a gay rally, but also they were less willing to help this target visit his or her grandparents (Batson, Floyd, Meyer, & Winner, 1999). And although religiosity relates to the endorsement of the sinner–sin distinction, it predicts negative attitudes toward both homosexual behavior and homosexual persons (Veenvliet, 2008).

In a more fundamental way, as argued elsewhere (Saroglou, 2010), the religious personality disposition for prosociality (high Agreeableness) is not unlimited but restricted by another important personality dimension that is also systematically related to religion: conscientiousness. Conscientiousness implies order, self-control, and dutifulness. In fact, altruism, care, and justice, which are aspects of interpersonal morality, are not the only moral concerns of religion. Religion is also concerned with principles of authority, loyalty, and purity that imply duties and obligations to oneself, to society, or to transcendent entities (Graham & Haidt, 2010). Morality having to do with purity and sexuality seems even more strongly linked to religious attendance than interpersonal morality (Weeden, Cohen, & Kenrick, 2008). Similarly, organ donation, which is a typical altruistic act and is supported by the major religious institutions, does not follow the general positive religion–donation link (e.g., Cornwall, Perry, Louw, & Stronger, 2012; W. A. Lam & McCullough, 2000; Stephenson et al., 2008), possibly because of conflicting religious views having to do with purity, integrity, and related fears of disgust and contamination. The same could be true for blood donation (Gillum & Masters, 2010).

Average-Level Religious Prosociality: Cooperation, Volunteering, and Donating

Several studies in recent years have examined whether religiousness predicted behaviors of cooperation during lab experiments that used different versions of economic games. When studies provided significant results, religious participants showed higher cooperation or generosity in the United States (Anderson & Mellor, 2009), India (Muslim students; Ahmed, 2009), and Israel (Jewish kibbutzim;

Ruffle & Sosis, 2007). Moreover, participants in general (independently of their religiousness) increase trust and cooperation when they interact with a religious partner, as found in Germany (Tan & Vogel, 2008), Belgium (De Dreu, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1995), and Bangladesh (Johansson-Stenman, Mahmud, & Martinsson, 2009).

Cooperation, helping, forgiveness, and other interpersonal prosocial behaviors have been the main focus of psychological research on prosociality. More often, sociologists have studied volunteering and charitable donations. On the basis of multilevel analyses of the World Values Survey data from 53 countries (mostly Christian populations), Ruiters and De Graaf (2006; see also Ruiters & De Graaf, 2010) found that religious attendance at the individual level predicts higher rates of volunteering for both religious and secular organizations. The (higher) level of religiousness of the country has an additive positive effect on volunteering. Interestingly, the greater volunteering of religious compared with nonreligious participants becomes clearer in secular national contexts. Protestantism implies stronger effects on volunteering. Analyzing data from 29 nations, P.-Y. Lam (2006) found that Protestants, more oriented to the extrafamilial social world, are more likely than Catholics, who are more family oriented, to be members of voluntary associations; this difference was found at both the individual and the country levels. Furthermore, across dozens of countries from all continents, it is institutional, broad societal collectivism and not familism (in-group collectivism) that predicts participation in voluntary organizations, including religious organizations, an effect that is more typical of countries of Protestant tradition (Realo, Allik, & Greenfield, 2008).

Bekkers and Wiepking (2007; see also Lincoln, Morrissey, & Munday, 2008) made an extensive review of studies on charitable donations. Among other results, they found that individual religiosity (affiliation and especially church attendance) and parents' religiosity predicted both religious and secular philanthropy. Contexts implying solicitation (e.g., religious congregations) heightened the generosity of religious individuals. Differences in solicitation strategies may explain why, in several countries,

Protestants seem to give more than Catholics. (Again, note that most studies sampled Christian populations.) People holding strongly orthodox beliefs were high in religious charity, an effect due to church attendance rather than the orthodox beliefs themselves, but they were not necessarily high in nonreligious charity. Interestingly, the role of religious attendance and related solicitation on increased donations has been confirmed among adherents of Eastern religions in Asia (Chang, 2006).

To some extent, religious giving may be a relatively easy way to fulfill one's own religious obligations. Interesting findings, diverging from those of many other studies, have emerged from an economist's study (Gruber, 2004). This study found that greater levels of religious giving led to lower levels of religious participation, suggesting that religious giving and participation may be substitutes for one another.

From Coalitional Fundamentalism to Universal Spirituality

An important body of research has demonstrated that some religious dimensions, but not others, are associated with prejudice and violence. For instance, in a survey of six religions in six nations as well as two surveys of Palestinians, regular attendance at religious services positively predicted support of religious suicide and out-group hostility, but regular prayer did not (Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009). Other work has demonstrated that religious fundamentalism—rather than personal, intrinsic religiosity—predicts greater prejudice toward people who differ on ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or convictions (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

Nevertheless, the religious dimension of fundamentalism or orthodoxy seems to attenuate the aggressive character of the authoritarian structure typical of conservative (orthodox) and dogmatic (fundamentalist) religiosity. Indeed, the links between fundamentalism (or orthodoxy) and derogation, discrimination, and prejudice repeatedly have been found to be mediated by right-wing authoritarianism (Rowatt, Johnson, LaBouff, & Gonzalez, in press). An exception may be homophobia, which may depend rather directly on religious morality (for

a meta-analysis, see Whitley, 2009). Going a step further, Blogowska and Saroglou (2011, 2012) hypothesized that fundamentalism may show some prosocial tendencies that are typical of mere religiosity. Across four studies in two European countries, these authors found that people scoring high on fundamentalism showed negative attitudes toward value-threatening individuals and were not necessarily willing to help unknown targets; fundamentalism thus paralleled authoritarianism. Yet the same high scorers on fundamentalism were also prone to help and show prosocial tendencies toward acquaintances (friends and colleagues) or even toward unknown and threatening (e.g., atheist) targets after exposure to a positive religious text; in this context, fundamentalists were behaving similarly to other people with high personal religiosity scores—and unlike authoritarians.

Taken as a whole, these studies suggest that fundamentalists' authoritarianism is, to some extent, responsible—statistically speaking—for prejudice and violence. Fundamentalists' religiosity is also responsible for in-group prosociality, however. Fundamentalism would seem to accentuate the general coalitional aspect of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices. More precisely, fundamentalism combines in-group favoritism and prosociality, typical of common religiosity, and out-group derogation, typical of authoritarianism.

Attitudes toward out-group members may vary from negative (e.g., derogation, discrimination, and prejudice) to positive (e.g., tolerance, equal treatment, and preferential over in-group treatment). On the positive pole of the continuum, one can find open-minded religious and spiritual dimensions. This is the case with spirituality, which Piedmont (2007) has framed in terms of *connectedness* (a sense of connection and commitment to others and humanity as a whole) and *universalism* (a belief in the unity and purpose of life), be it within or outside a context of a specific religious tradition. Open-minded thinking also characterizes *religion-as-quest*, which is the religious attitude defined by valuing doubt, self-criticism, and openness to the possibility of change (Batson et al., 1993).

The importance attributed to spirituality in one's personal life reflects several features contrary to

traditional religiosity, including (a) universalism and not only benevolence in value hierarchies (Saroglou & Muñoz-García, 2008), (b) willingness to help unknown rather than only known people (Saroglou et al., 2005, Study 2), and (c) citizen-of-the-world identity and not only ethnic and national identities (Saroglou & Cohen, in press). People characterized by relativism in their beliefs express willingness to help individuals in need, such as immigrants and homeless people—a tendency partially mediated by a belief in ultimate justice (Pichon & Saroglou, 2009). In some studies, spirituality relates even more clearly to compassionate love of strangers and humanity than to compassionate love of close others (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005).

Moreover, experiments by Batson and collaborators have shown that religious people with high scores on quest orientation do not discriminate between those who violate norms (gay, antigay, fundamentalists) and “neutral” individuals in general helping contexts. They are, however, less willing to help an intolerant individual (e.g., an antigay, a fundamentalist) if it involves participation in activities promoting intolerance (Batson, Denton, & Vollmecke, 2008; Batson et al., 1999; Batson, Eidelman, Higley, & Russell, 2001). In addition, when they act prosocially, people high in quest seem to be more intrinsically motivated by altruism than by self-concerns. They tend to be sensitive to the needs expressed by the suffering individual, and they are willing to help even if the cost is high and the social pressure low (Batson et al., 1993).

In sum, religion seems to be drawn by two oppositional forces coming from two distinct components. Its coalitional dimension (community and shared normative beliefs and practices) emphasizes the in-group versus out-group barriers, thereby limiting the extent of prosociality apparently inherent in the very nature of religion. Yet, its spiritual (devotional, mystical) dimension, reflected in the connection with the divine or transcendence in general, points to a universal altruistic prosociality. Prayer, beliefs, or measures of personal, intrinsic religiosity often seem to predominate over measures of religious attendance and affiliation in terms of predicting compassionate values, feelings, and behaviors (e.g., Markstrom et al., 2010; Smith, 2009).

Religious donation seems to be an exception to this pattern, however, because religious attendance plays an important role in this context.

CAUSAL DIRECTIONS AND PROCESSES

Is there a causal relationship between religion and prosociality? What may be the explanatory psychological processes beside this relationship? The following sections will address these questions.

Causal Directions

Until now, the reviewed studies have measured religion as an individual-difference construct and investigated correlational links of religiousness and its different forms with prosocial attitudes or behaviors, alone or as a function of contexts varying across experimental conditions. Yet the question remains as to whether there are causal links between religion (not only individual religiousness) and prosociality, and what the directions of these links may be.

Promising experiments in recent years have provided evidence in favor of the more intuitive causal direction that goes from religion to prosociality. Most of these experiments used priming techniques. Many priming studies have established the powerfulness of mental representations, which, even when activated outside participants' conscious awareness, increase the odds of related behaviors. For instance, briefly holding a cup of hot coffee (vs. a cup of ice-cold coffee) increases the perception of a target as being warm, generous, or caring (Williams & Bargh, 2008). Being exposed for milliseconds—thus, nonconsciously—to words related to the elderly stereotype causes participants to subsequently walk slower (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996).

Introducing religious words in a scrambled test increased people's accessibility of prosocial concepts (Pichon, Boccato, & Saroglou, 2007, Study 2) as well as the tendency to be more generous, as measured by the allocation of more money to a hypothetical confederate in a one-shot anonymous dictator game (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; see also Ahmed & Salas, 2011). Depicting a target in need (homeless) in front of a church instead of a secular building increased participants' willingness to help this target (Pichon & Saroglou, 2009).

Subliminal exposure to religious words has been shown to increase (a) participants' willingness to volunteer to distribute pamphlets for a charity (Pichon et al., 2007, Study 1); (b) "forgiveness," as indicated by participants being more prone to ask easy rather than difficult questions to a hypothetical confederate who had allegedly provided negative feedback (Saroglou et al., 2009, Study 2); and (c) cooperation, measured in a one-trial dictator game (Preston & Ritter, 2010, Study 1). Finally, in a series of three experiments, prayer reduced anger and aggression after a provocation (Bremner, Koole, & Bushman, 2011).

Interestingly, in those studies, religious concepts worked to activate prosocial concepts, intentions, and behaviors for all participants, both religious and nonreligious. The extent of prosociality activated by religious concepts is not unlimited, however. In all of these experiments, the targets were people in need or anonymous confederates. But when the targets are out-group members (other ethnicity or race), religious priming is not found to increase prosociality (Pichon & Saroglou, 2009, willingness to help; Preston & Ritter, 2010, Study 1, cooperation). In fact, religious priming can actually lead to in-group over out-group preference (Preston & Ritter, 2010, Study 2, charity donation) or even increase covert racial prejudice (M. K. Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2010) and negative attitudes toward various outgroups (LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, & Finkle, 2012). It may also be that not all religious primes have the same effects (Preston, Ritter, & Hernandez, 2010). For instance, priming "synagogue" was found to increase Israeli settlers' endorsement of a suicide attack against Palestinians, whereas priming "prayer" decreased endorsement of such an attack (Ginges et al., 2009, Study 3). Similarly, priming "God" instead of "religion" was found to enhance cooperation with and charity toward an out-group in another set of studies (Preston & Ritter, 2010, Studies 1 and 2).

Yet the opposite causal direction that goes from prosociality to religion is not to be excluded. At the moment, there is only indirect evidence in favor of this alternative and possibly complementary pathway—one that concerns religion as a whole as well as individual religiousness. In a recent

experiment, Van Cappellen and Saroglou (2010) found that watching a video praising charity increased participants' reported spirituality in comparison with a humor-inducing video or a neutral video. Moreover, as argued elsewhere (Saroglou, 2010), studies on personality and individual religiousness suggest that people with basic personality tendencies to be agreeable (and also conscientious) are more prone to remain or become religious throughout the life span. Several longitudinal studies (e.g., McCullough, Tsang, & Brion, 2003; Wink, Ciciolla, Dillon, & Tracy, 2007) show that both baseline personality and personality changes influence religiousness and changes in religiousness years, if not decades, later. People with dispositions to be agreeable—across situations and time—may be more attracted by cultural systems, like religion, that promote altruistic values, beliefs, and rituals corresponding to and reinforcing agreeableness (Saroglou, 2010).

A complementary perspective is that individual differences on religiousness and prosocial or antisocial behavior, in part, may be outcomes of the same causes. In a study on adult male twins, Koenig, McGue, Krueger, and Bouchard (2007) found that the variance shared between (retrospective and current) religiousness and the adult antisocial or prosocial behavior (self-reported) was due to both genetic and shared environmental influences. Finally, personality and genetic dispositions may moderate the role of religion on altruism (Sasaki et al., 2011).

Processes

What are the psychological mechanisms explaining how religion relates to and influences prosociality? Unfortunately, there is almost no research on the psychological mediators of the religion–prosociality relation. There is indirect evidence suggesting multiple possible processes, however, as religion relates or leads to most of the psychological factors known to play a role in building and promoting prosociality.

Other-oriented emotions, principles, and relational experiences. As mentioned in this chapter, religion relates to both emotional (empathy and other moral emotions) and cognitive–appreciative

dimensions (prosocial values, reasoning, and social norms) related to prosocial behavior, especially when the latter is altruistically motivated. This implies that one motivation of religious prosociality can be other-oriented concerns and, possibly, internalization of prosocial values and teachings. These values are likely to come from parental education and broader socialization. There is evidence for the intergenerational transmission of volunteering and charity by religious parents (Caputo, 2009; Wilhelm, Brown, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2008) and of religion by generous parents (Peterson, 2006). The religion–empathy link may explain why religiousness is found only occasionally to predict cooperation in prisoner’s dilemma and dictator games (in cases in which the partner is not in need), whereas it quite consistently predicts volunteering and donating for targets in need.

Imitation of prosocial parents and peers—and, more generally, role modeling—is another important mechanism that contributes to the development of empathy and altruism (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Religion’s exemplary figures are saints and holy figures who, like heroes, show other-oriented, often sacrificial altruism. Such altruism is a major characteristic of the personalities of heroes and saints, as evidenced by self-reported, peer-reported, archival, and interview-based data (Saroglou, 2006b; Walker, Frimer, & Dunlop, 2010). Saints demonstrate to others that altruism, an a priori risky behavior in interpersonal relations, is an ideal that can be realistic (James, 1902/1985). More generally, religious texts and institutions provide moral exemplars that may serve for role identification (Sundén, 1959) and spiritual modeling at many levels, including interpersonally oriented virtues (see Chapter 10 in this volume). This may be particularly important in adolescence for reasons focused on moral development and identity.

A specific ingredient of religious prosociality, when motivated by other-oriented concerns, may be the emotion of gratitude (see Chapter 23 in this volume). In many religions, compassion and love are conceptualized as a way to pass on to others the compassion and love received from the divine. Moreover, as previously suggested (Saroglou et al., 2005, Study 2), secure attachment may be an

additional mechanism that contributes to a religious prosociality. Secure attachment is known to relate to both prosocial concerns and behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010a) and to religiosity through the life span, especially a socialization-based religiosity (see Chapter 7 in this volume). Secure attachment has been found to consolidate the effects of gratitude on prosocial behavior, whereas insecure attachment undermines these effects (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010a).

Self-control and self-enhancement. A series of other processes that may underlie the religion–prosociality link can be classified as self-oriented, or at least as aiming to increase self-control or self-enhancement. This may be egoistic in the case that one chooses the self at the detriment of the others; but in some cases, self-control and self-enhancement concerns also serve other-oriented goals. Religion aims to satisfy needs for self-control at the emotional, cognitive, and motivational levels (see Chapter 6 in this volume). Religion may help to meet needs for self-enhancement, which is the motivation to see oneself favorably in terms of culturally valued characteristics (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010). Compassionate and self-image goals seem to coexist within religion and spirituality (Crocker & Canevello, 2008).

In addition, low impulsivity as a function of religiosity, which seems to be a consistent finding across studies (Saroglou, 2010), may be responsible for the role of religion in reducing antisocial behavior. More generally, prosocial behavior demands effort, self-regulation, and energy (Gailliot, 2010). Religion’s enhancement of self-control may thus facilitate prosociality. Similar self-control-related concerns, centering on the need for social cohesion, may at least partly explain why religion primarily leads to minimal prosociality (e.g., low aggression) and philanthropy toward those in need, but it may not necessarily lead to universal and unlimited love, especially toward out-groups and people perceived as threats to religious values. The latter forms of prosociality introduce complexity, disorder, and uncertainty.

Self-enhancement covers psychological processes having to do with (a) self-esteem and positive

self-image, (b) positive reputation and social approval, and (c) symbolic rewards. Each of these dimensions is related to general religiosity and seems to contribute to a prosociality limited by concerns for positive self-image (Batson et al., 1993), social reputation (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008), or afterlife-related rewards (Tao & Yeh, 2007).

Theorists who adopt an evolutionary approach to religious prosociality point out the role religion has played in human evolution in enhancing reputation, trust, and cooperation within extended social groups (e.g., Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008). A reputation-based religious prosociality has been facilitated by the belief in an omniscient supernatural being that controls human actions and thoughts and punishes the cheaters of the reciprocity norms (D. D. P. Johnson & Bering, 2006; D. D. P. Johnson & Kruger, 2004). It has been facilitated by religious collective rituals that, although costly, constitute opportunities to experience emotions of connectedness (Wiltermuth & Heath, 2009). Rituals may also provide opportunities to present oneself and be perceived by others as worthy of trust and cooperation (Sosis & Alcorta, 2003) or to enhance followers' commitment to the group's ideology and in-group cooperation (Henrich, 2009). Such mechanisms obviously have facilitated the extension from a kinship-based altruism to altruism at the level of culture. Cultural altruism, which is found in large and complex human societies, involves reciprocity between unrelated partners that can be reinforced by beliefs, symbols, moral gods, and norms of fairness of the world religions (Batson, 1983; Henrich et al., 2010; Roes & Raymond, 2003; Stark, 2001).

Moral identity. Prosocial behavior also can be based on principism, which is the motivation to act in order to be moral and to conform with one's own moral identity and principles (Batson, 2010). It is unclear whether principistic prosociality should be considered other oriented or self oriented: Is doing the right thing primarily important and beneficial for others or the self? Nevertheless, the role of principism may be important to understand religious prosociality. For instance, priming people with the Ten Commandments activates moral self-schemas, which increase

one's willingness to behave in a prosocial manner (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). More generally, religious priming has been found to activate moral integrity by increasing honesty (Randolph-Seng & Nielsen, 2007) and decreasing hypocrisy (Carpenter & Marshall, 2009).

Following sources of authority. Finally, moral decisions and behaviors, including those that are prosocial, may result from either an autonomous internalization of moral values or from a mere conformity to social standards and submission to various sources of authority. People with individual dispositions for submissiveness may be particularly sensitive to religion's power to induce behaviors, moral or immoral, through submission. In a series of three experiments, Saroglou and collaborators found that among people with dispositional submissiveness, religious words (indeed, the same that previously were found to activate volunteering; Pichon et al., 2007) also (a) activated submission-related concepts, (b) increased the odds of showing behavioral retaliation when requested by the experimenter, and (c) increased conformity to informational influence exerted by anonymous others (Saroglou et al., 2009, Studies 1 and 2; Van Cappellen, Corneille, Cols, & Saroglou, 2011).

Religious texts are highly authoritative for religious people. Depending on the compassionate versus violent nature of the religious text to which participants were exposed, religious fundamentalists showed prosocial (or decreased antisocial) tendencies versus antisocial attitudes, respectively (Blogowska & Saroglou, 2012; Rothschild, Abdollahib, & Pyszczynski, 2009). Aggression after exposure to a violent religious text was also found to occur for participants in general, and more strongly for the religious (Bushman, Ridge, Das, Key, & Busath, 2007). Responsiveness to an appeal for charity was found to be higher among religious, compared with nonreligious, people—but only on Sundays after worship, not during the weekdays (Malhotra, 2010). Religious teachings and rituals may serve as an arousal of prosociality. Experimental induction of awe was found to lead religious people to express feelings of oneness with others (Van Cappellen & Saroglou, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Religious prosociality is not a myth. The partial discrepancy, in religious people, between self-perceptions as being prosocial and real behavior seems to reflect complex underlying psychological processes rather than simple moral hypocrisy (as suspected in the past). Prosociality exists—not only in religious people’s minds—as an important key part of religious people’s personality and related aspirations, values, moral principles, and emotions. Yet, common religious prosocial behavior does seem to be largely limited to known people and in-group members. It does not appear to be universal in terms of being extended to unknown people and those who threaten religious values. Religious prosociality also seems to be conditional rather than unconditional, depending on other possibly conflicting principles, beliefs, and concerns. It tends to be minimal and of low or average cost (e.g., nonaggression, volunteering, cooperation, conditional help) rather than highly costly (e.g., forgiveness, sacrifice), and it may need some arousal (i.e., activation of religious concepts, norms, and emotions) to be better manifested. Religious prosociality often appears to be motivated by concerns for positive self-perception, social reputation, and reciprocity; however, other-oriented emotions, values, and family and socialization experiences seem to also play a role.

In terms of a link between religion and prosociality, evidence exists for both causal directions. People with prosocial personality predispositions, for which both genetic and environmental influences are responsible, are attracted by religion’s norms, symbols, and rituals emphasizing altruism and harmony. In turn, religion can activate—even subliminally—prosocial ideas, and it enhances altruism in a rather universal way (i.e., among both the religious and nonreligious). There is also evidence to suggest that sacrificial altruistic behaviors are present in the lives of saints and heroes and are motivated, among others, by religious reasons.

In fact, religion seems to operate in the middle of two tendencies exerting opposite influences. Its coalitional dimension pushes for strong in- versus out-group barriers, which, in the context of fundamentalism and conservative religion, can facilitate

out-group prejudice and derogation. On the contrary, religion’s spiritual, devotional, and self-reflective dimension pushes for an extended altruism, which possibly may be universal and motivated by other-oriented concerns. Several differences in prosociality between religions or religious denominations can be explained as reflecting the way religiosity, as experienced in a specific context, is more focused on spiritual (self-transcendent) concerns versus those that are more coalitional. Charity for those in need, helping in-group members, and reciprocity between people worthy of trust are prosocial tendencies that are present across religions (e.g., Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims). Competing principles having to do with other norms, conservative morality, just-world beliefs, or out-group avoidance may limit prosociality in traditional religious contexts. Trust in cooperation and social collectivism is more evident among Protestant individuals and nations. In sum, different aspects of religion are linked with different levels of the process going from a kinship-based altruism to an extended cultural altruism, both at the individual and the collective levels.

Galen (2012) conducted a critical review of the empirical research and concluded that religious prosociality is simply a stereotype, mere ingroup favoritism, and possibly even a myth; in his view, no real, causal effects of religion on prosociality exist. Although Galen’s review addressed very interesting issues, his conclusion seems excessive and more provocative than well justified (Saroglou, 2012).

Understanding the complex ways in which religion, spirituality, and altruism are interconnected has several important implications. These implications are relevant not only for scholars of different fields but also for different kinds of practitioners working, for instance, in counseling, psychotherapy, training of ministers, and interfaith dialogue. Three issues that seem the most intriguing or important will be discussed in this section.

A broad question that arises is how altruism works in a nonreligious, including atheist, context. This is an area for which studies are needed. The following are just a few ideas that may be worth investigating. On average, nonbelievers seem to score lower than believers on prosocial personality

dispositions (at least if the reported correlations between religiosity and prosocial traits are linear). This does not mean, however, that nonbelievers should necessarily show low levels of empathy, prosocial moral reasoning, and prosocial behavior. Probably, the role of environment, socialization, and personal effort is stronger among nonbelievers when acting prosocially, because they may be less “naturally” agreeable (in terms of genetic predisposition). Moreover, prosociality within religion presents the advantage of a powerful combination of nonreligious (secular) and religious sources (beliefs, practices, community). Furthermore, the mutual reinforcement between emotional, role-modeling, principled, and social components integrated into a coherent religious set can reasonably be expected to increase the motivational force to act prosocially.

On the other hand, there are two limitations in religious prosociality that may constitute advantages within a nonreligious context. First, religious and conservative moral concerns for principles such as authority, loyalty, and purity do not only extend the sphere of morality beyond the interpersonal principles of care and justice, as initially argued (Haidt & Graham, 2007). They also limit care, when in conflict with it (Van Pachterbeke et al., 2011). Care and justice among nonconservatives and the nonreligious thus may be “freer” from other constraints. Not surprisingly, therefore, feelings of compassion seem more powerful among less religious people in leading to generosity (Saslow et al., 2012). Second, although religiousness may be compatible with internalization of values and autonomous thinking, it presents an overall discomfort with the value of autonomy, even among young generations (for a meta-analysis, see Saroglou et al., 2004). Also, as detailed in this chapter, religion can activate conformity among people with dispositional submissiveness. Nonreligious prosociality thus may be, as far as it exists, more autonomous and intrinsic than religious prosociality.

Experts and practitioners may be interested in some good news: Religious fundamentalism is not a mere manifestation of authoritarianism. The religious dimension of fundamentalism provides tools (e.g., altruistic values, rituals, theology, and texts; recategorization of different groups under a

superordinate broader in-group, such as “we are all children of God”) that can be selectively used to encourage prosociality and tolerance. Religious authorities’ or psychotherapists’ selection of altruistic and encompassing out-group material may have beneficial effects for interpersonal, intergroup, and interreligious relations. Recategorization under a broader in-group membership not only reduces intergroup prejudice but also enhances intergroup altruism (Dovidio, Gaertner, Shnabel, Saguy, & Johnson, 2010).

Finally, an important psychological implication of altruism in a religious context is that prosocial attitudes and behaviors contribute to the agent’s well-being (Krause, 2007; Post, 2007). Volunteering across the life span improves psychological well-being because it leads people to develop other-oriented values, motives, and a sense of self that leads them to believe that they matter to others in the social world (Piliavin, 2010). There is suggestive, cross-sectional, evidence that compassionate attitudes mediate the link between religiosity and indicators of well-being, an effect found to be stronger than that of social support (Steffen & Masters, 2005; for a nonlaboratory intervention study, see also Oman, Thoresen, & Hedberg, 2010).

In conclusion, altruism is an important, but obviously not unique, psychological dimension of religion. Well-being, moral integrity, and both social cohesion and individuation are also important dimensions of religion. Understanding how these dimensions are affected by or shape religious prosociality is still an issue to be fully investigated and of great interest for both theory and practice.

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