
Altruism and Social Solidarity: Envisioning a Field of Specialization

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Establishing the study of altruism and social solidarity as a recognized field of specialization within sociology would make a major contribution to the discipline and to society at large. In the broadest sense this field focuses on those aspects of personality, society, and culture that benefit the lives of individuals and ennoble social life. This field would directly address the systematic study of these positive phenomena in interpersonal, intergroup, and international relations. Understanding how social relations of varied types can be made more positive in this manner is a most vital task in this historical era.

Sociologists have devoted considerable attention to the study of dysfunctional phenomena, such as criminal behavior, racism, sexism, violent ethnic conflicts, and other forms of oppression that threaten societies and deprive individuals of security or their basic rights. In contrast, the discipline has tended to give more limited attention to positive forms of social behavior and organization, such as the study of altruism. The current *Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology* (2006) indicates there is no graduate degree-granting university that lists a special program in the study of altruism.

It is the discipline of psychology that established altruism as a scientific field within social psychology. Recent years have seen major contributions to this field by evolutionary biology on the one hand, and religious studies on the other. Contributions by sociologists appear limited to writings by particular individuals. A review of recent research from a sociological perspective is provided by Piliavin and Charng (1990).

This article advances a proposal of foundational ideas for sociology to become a full partner with other disciplines in the development of this vital but understudied scientific field. Sociology has a body of theory and research, particularly in the areas of socialization, organizations, stratification, institutions, and culture that can be integrated with the existing state of the field and its greater emphasis on individual and psychological factors and levels of analysis. This article is intended to demonstrate that there is a substantial body of

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substantive topics within the potential specialty area of the sociology of altruism and social solidarity. Some topics have considerable theoretical development and empirical research, while others are relatively undeveloped.

The Concept of Altruism

Sociologists have employed the concept, if not the term “altruism” since the founding of the discipline. Indeed, the idea can be traced back to Ibn Khaldun, Vico, Mandeville, and the Scottish Moralists philosophers in the pursuit of what Louis Schneider referred to as “protosociology.” Auguste Comte is credited with coining the concept of altruism, and introduced the paired concept “egoism-altruism” in his *Positive Philosophy* to indicate a fundamental principle, one on which he believed all social relations are based. Durkheim had much to say about altruism: its role in the dialectic of social integration/disintegration, most famously—but hardly exclusively—as a factor in certain types of suicide, and implicitly as an element of his concept of morality.

A general consensus emerges in the contemporary scholarly literature regarding the meaning of the concept of altruism. Although many research studies have emphasized behavior, there is considerable agreement that motive should also be considered (Oliner, 1992: 7-8). This dual emphasis on motive and behavior is expressed in the definition of Macaulay and Berkowitz (1970: 3) that altruism is “behavior carried out to benefit another without anticipation of rewards from external sources.” In a definition that is related to a series of gradations in altruism, Krebs and Van Hestern (1992: 149) view the common feature of all forms of altruism as “the goal or purpose of enhancing the welfare of another.” Crosbie and Oliner (1996: 203) emphasize giving and sacrifice of self in the following definition: “Altruistic love is a giving, sacrificial love: it often involves the sacrifice of very important interests, including the sacrifice of the individual’s life.” The manifestations of this “other-regarding love” are described by Post (2003: 162) as ranging “from compassion and kindness to altruism and volunteerism.”

Both altruistic motivation and behavior are recognized as varying in degree. For example, Krebs and Van Hestern (1992) specify seven forms of altruism, ranging from the minimal of egocentric accommodation to the maximum of universal love. Each stage “more fully, exclusively, precisely, and effectively” realizes the enhancement of the welfare of others (Krebs and Van Hestern, 1992: 151). Another approach to the variation of altruistic love is provided by Sorokin’s (1954a: 15-35) five dimensions of love: intensity, the degree of effort, and energy expended; extensity, the range of others to whom love is given; duration, the amount of time love is expressed; purity, the degree to which the motivation of love is not self-centered; and adequacy, involving both the degree to which the subjective intent to love is present and the degree to which the objective consequences of actions enhance the welfare of the other. Various investigators (Galston, 1993; Krebs and Van Hestern, 1992: 159; Rushton, 1980: 8; Sorokin, 1948: 58-62) view altruism as behavior at one end of a continuum, with egoism at the other end.

The central idea in definitions of altruism or altruistic love is that of benefiting the welfare of another in some manner. This idea of the essence of altruism is similar to what has traditionally been called benevolent love (Jeffries, 1999). Both Aristotle (1941: 1058-1102) and Aquinas (1981: 1263) considered that the love of benevolence is characterized by wishing good to the other, and is expressed in behavior directed toward that end.

The concept of solidarity is used to refer to the positive ways of relating to others included in the concept of altruism as they are expressed in a form of interaction (Sorokin,

1947: 93-144; 1954a: 13). Solidary interaction involves a concordance of attitudes and behavior between the interacting parties such that the parties are mutually helpful in attaining their objectives. This interaction is characterized by attributes such as mutual help, harmony, love, peace, and constructive creativity (Sorokin, 1998b). To be consistent with this form of interaction, the concept of solidarity needs to be formulated in regard to potentially universal application. It is thus limited to interaction directed towards ends that are not in violation of the good of the human person, or of basic rights of a personal, social, economic, or political nature. Its essence entails justice in interaction and in inter-group relations, in which all parties receive their right or due (Pieper, 1966: 43-53). The concept in this usage excludes internal solidarity that is used to deprive others of basic freedoms and human rights. Formulating such a concept of solidarity and specifying its operational indicators in different research traditions and at levels of analysis from micro to meso to macro is an important task in developing this scientific field.

Forms of Sociological Practice

Elaboration of the study of altruism and social solidarity as a scientific field is presented in terms of the four forms of sociology and social science stipulated by Burawoy (2005a, 2005b): professional, critical, policy, and public. Professional sociology provides empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding, critical sociology formulates foundational value perspectives, policy sociology applies concrete knowledge to the solution of problems, and public sociology transmits information and engages in dialogue with both specific and general audiences in society.

The Professional Foundation

Professional sociology consists of theoretical frameworks and empirical research. It includes the composite of research findings, knowledge, and understandings that exist in a given area of science. Its practice focuses on internal discourse among specialists that is intended to produce scientific knowledge about sociocultural phenomena (Burawoy, 2005a).

A considerable body of empirical research and theory provides the foundation for further development in the study of altruism. Although a predominant portion of this professional base derives from psychology and is primarily oriented toward the individual personality, there is also considerable attention given to more sociological concerns.

The beginning of the systematic scientific study of altruism can be attributed to the work of Pitirim A. Sorokin in the 1950s. The organizational base of his efforts was the Center for Creative Altruism at Harvard University that was founded by Sorokin and funded by the Eli Lilly Foundation. In Sorokin's view creative altruism is central to sociological research because it is the only viable form of reconstruction available in this contemporary era. The basic crisis of our times is a moral one that can only be approached through the reduction of anomie inherent in the turn toward altruism and away from the prevailing culture (Tiryakian, 1963).

Sorokin's endeavors at the Center for Creative Altruism produced two empirically based works (Sorokin, 1950a; 1954a) and two edited symposia (Sorokin, 1950b; 1954b). He also produced works examining how altruism could be increased at the personal, social, and cultural levels (Sorokin, 1948) and in terms of the morality of powerholders and ruling elites (Sorokin and Lunden, 1959). Sorokin's writings and system of sociology

are a foundational source in organizing the field of altruism in sociology and providing insight into areas of future research.

The development of the concerted study of altruism in psychology took place a decade after Sorokin's pioneering work, apparently independently of his ideas. The question of why people will help others was central in the first text on social psychology deriving from psychology by William McDougall (1908), but did not become of general concern in psychology until the 1960s. In the research and theory developed by psychologists, a distinction is sometimes made between prosocial behavior, actions intended to benefit others, and altruism, the motivation to increase the welfare of others (Batson, 1998: 282).

By the early 1970s several reviews of research on prosocial behavior had been published (Batson, 1998: 282). It has been estimated that by 1982 more than 1,050 scholarly papers on altruism had been published in psychology-related journals, almost all since 1962. Focusing on seven major social psychology journals, 538 articles on altruism or prosocial behavior were published between 1973 and 1996. Almost all textbooks in social psychology contain a chapter on altruism and/or prosocial behavior, and more than 20 edited volumes summarizing research on altruism had been published (Batson, 1998: 283). Both theoretical and practical concerns have provided the basis for interest in this topic in psychology, with the question of how prosocial behavior can be increased guiding the latter concern (Bateson, 1998: 283).

Earlier collections of readings in the field of altruism tended to focus primarily, though not exclusively, on the psychology and social psychology of altruism and helping behavior. For example, Macaulay and Berkowitz (1970) include articles on topics such as situational determinants, the influence of social norms, socialization of altruism, guilt and altruism, and justice and altruism. The reader edited by Rushton and Sorrentino (1981) examines how altruism develops, personality factors influencing altruism, individual differences, social influences, and the consequences of altruism. Finally, Wispe (1978) includes selections that emphasize the biological basis of altruism and sympathy, psychological explanations, and the consequences of helping behavior.

Readers published in more recent years indicate a shift toward conceptual clarification and a more comprehensive interdisciplinary approach to the study of altruism that places more emphasis on both biological and sociological factors and processes. A reader edited by Oliner et al. (1998) is organized in terms of philosophical and conceptual issues, sociobiology and altruism, the development of altruism in individuals and its behavioral expression in situational contexts, altruism that transcends group boundaries, and the promotion of altruistic bonds. A reader edited by Post et al. (2002) includes sections pertaining to defining altruism, motivation and altruistic behavior, evolutionary biology and altruism, the neurobiology of altruism, and the relation between religion and altruism.

In recent years there has been increased interest and activity in the study of altruism by scholars in diverse disciplines. In calling for the creation of a new interdisciplinary field focused on the scientific study of altruistic or "unlimited" love Post (2003: 159-202) describes recent funded research in this area. In 2003-2005 the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love at Case Western Reserve University provided funding for 21 research projects grouped into six research program areas: human development, public health and medicine, approaches to defining mechanisms by which altruistic love affects health, other-regarding virtues, evolutionary perspectives on other-regard, and the sociological study of faith-based communities and their activities in relation to the spiritual ideal of unlimited love. The Institute for Research on Unlimited Love is endowed by the John

Templeton Foundation and “has established itself as a center for scientific research on unselfish love for all humanity” (Post, 2003: 176). During this same time period the Fetzer Institute funded an approximately equal number of projects on various aspects of altruism through its Initiative on the Science of Compassionate Love.

Several areas of theoretical development and research can be identified in briefly surveying the existing state of the study of altruism. The substantive areas or sources considered below are not intended to be exhaustive. These areas are presented to illustrate the nature of this subfield of sociological work, some of the topics that are included in the scientific study of altruism, and to indicate the existence of a sizeable body of scholarly literature. They also show that the study of altruism has sufficient diversity in topical content, levels of analysis, and potential theoretical development to appeal to scholars with varied perspectives and interests.

The Altruistic Personality

A considerable body of research findings indicates that some individuals are consistently kinder, more compassionate, more helpful, and more willing to sacrifice for others. Such altruistic motivations have been manifested in a variety of social situations (Oliner, 2003). There is general agreement that the evidence warrants the idea of an “altruistic personality” (Bierhoff, Kiein, and Kramp, 1991; Eisenberg et al., 1989; Galston, 1993; Krebs and Van Hesteren, 1992; Oliner and Oliner, 1988: 10-12; Rushton, 1980: 58-85, 1984; Van Hesteren, 1992).

The preponderance of research and theoretical development has dealt with psychological topics such as predispositions, motivation, and personality structure and dynamics. An extensive annotated bibliography of research studies on personality and individual differences in altruism has been compiled by Kilpatrick and McCollough (2002). There has been some research on the sociocultural sources of the altruistic personality by Oliner and Oliner (1988) and by Sorokin (1954a), and Jeffries (1998) has considered how personal dispositions to altruism can vary in expression according to situational factors.

Virtues and Character Strengths

The study of altruism appears closely related to the study of the virtues in psychology. The development in recent years in psychology of a major tradition called “positive psychology” has given a central theoretical and research focus to the concept of virtue (Vitz, 2005). Virtues are traditionally regarded as habits that are good. They therefore produce good works. They represent the perfection of the powers that move the individual toward what is good within human nature (Aquinas, 1981: 819-827; Aristotle, 1941; Pieper, 1966). In modern psychology the study of the virtues has been characterized in terms of human strengths and welfare (Aspinwall and Staudinger, 2003; Keys and Haidat, 2003), and has produced a considerable number of operational measures of the different virtues (Lopez and Snyder, 2003; Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

In a recent major work in the tradition of positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman (2004: 3-52) emphasize the historical and cultural universality of the concept of virtue. They maintain that six broad categories of virtues emerge as universally regarded personal manifestations of the good in the thinking of moral philosophers and religious thinkers representing the major world religions: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

The study of the virtues can be related to altruism in various ways that give promise to further theoretical development and research. Nichols (2005) has noted various parallels between positive psychology and Sorokin's integral perspective, including his study of altruistic love. Both emphasize ideas such as a social science that studies the positive, a pervasive sociocultural crisis, the idea of universal standards of goodness such as altruistic love and the virtues, transcendence, and the value of the human person. From a more specific perspective, the virtues can be regarded as part of the multidimensional psychic structure that predisposes the individual to altruistic motivation and behavior, with particular virtues being important in determining the manifestation of altruism in a given situational context (Jeffries, 1998). Additionally, some of the virtues, such as justice, or "charity" in classical terms (Jeffries, 1998), "humanity" in more recent formulations (Peterson and Seligman, 2004: 3-52), are intrinsically similar to the idea of benefiting the other that is central to the concept of altruism. The affinity of the concepts of virtue and altruism is further indicated by the work of Bono and McCullough (2003), who have compiled an annotated bibliography on recent studies of the virtues and altruism.

Sociobiology and Evolutionary Theory

In recent decades evolutionary theory has been influential in the study of altruism. Though predominately questioning genuine altruistic behavior in its earlier years, the analysis of the relation between evolutionary theory and altruism has taken new directions in recent years. Areas of intense debate have included the degree of biological determinism in the nature and extent of altruism, and the role of the processes of adaptation and selection in altruism (Schloss, 2002). In recent writings illustrating these developments Vine (1992) traces general theoretical development in the area of evolution and altruism, while Cohen (1992) explores how both biological and cultural evolution have influenced the evolution of altruism. In more focused analysis, Pope (2002) has examined the ordering of love and evolutionary theory, while Wilson and Sober (2002) present a potentially empirically testable model composed of the variables of degrees of helpfulness in human nature and degrees of social control.

Increasing Altruism

A major area of theory and research that is particularly related to practical application is the investigation of the methods through which altruism can be increased. This topic has been approached both with respect to individual personalities and in terms of the general level of altruism in groups of various types. Sorokin's (1954a) major study of altruism devotes considerable attention to the specific techniques through which both individual altruism and the levels of altruism in groups can be increased. In another work (Sorokin, 1948) this analysis is extended to social institutions such as political, economic, educational, and religious institutions, and the general culture. Oliner and Oliner (1992) have examined the social processes through which altruism can be extended to groups in the immediate environment and to more distant groups and the broader world. Staub (1981, 1992) has focused on the level of analysis of family and educational institutions, and of the general culture in exploring this same question.

Interpersonal and Intergroup Forgiveness

There is a substantial amount of evidence that most people have been hurt in some serious way. Apology and forgiveness are therefore ways to help people to reconcile and

to reestablish harmonious relations with one another. This is true between individuals, in interpersonal apology and forgiveness, and also between groups, in intergroup forgiveness. The idea of groups and nations being able to reestablish good relations through the process of intergroup forgiveness is a promising avenue of further research on the sociological level of analysis. In the study of intergroup forgiveness at this point there appear to be about 100 apologies made by various leaders on behalf of groups that have harmed other groups, either recently or in the past. Initially we foresee positive results from these apologies, and harmonious relations have indeed been established in some cases. Research indicates that one of the important factors in this process is altruism. Altruistic inclinations lead people to recognize the harms they have done, and allow them to see the humanity in those they have harmed (Oliner, 2005b).

Major works in this area that illustrate the diversity of approaches and the sociological implications of forgiveness include edited volumes (Enright and North, 1998; McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen, 2000), a focus on the sociology of forgiveness (Tavuchis, 1991), a topical issue on altruism and forgiveness (Oliner, 2005a), analyses of the dimensions of forgiveness (Worthington, Jr., 1998), the role of forgiveness in politics (Shriver, Jr., 1995), the results of forgiveness (Luskin, 2001), and the steps involved in forgiving (Smedes, 1996). Institutes for the study of forgiveness include the International Forgiveness Institute that was established in 1985 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison directed by Robert Enright, the Stanford Research project at Stanford University directed by Frederic Luskin, and A Campaign for Forgiveness Research located in Alexandria, Virginia directed by Everett Worthington.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism is a form of altruistic behavior that involves planned and sustained activities of a social nature that are intentionally directed toward helping others in some manner. It goes beyond single acts of prosocial behavior to continuing participation in altruistic activities (Gillath et al., 2005). A large number of studies have dealt with various factors influencing volunteerism, and are reviewed by Penner (2002).

Social Institutions

The characteristics of social institutions can have a major impact on whether or not altruism is developed and maintained in individual attitudes and behavior, social interaction, and groups of various types. The influence of both family and religious institutions upon altruism has been the subject of some degree of research.

Family. Considerable evidence shows the importance of the family as a source of socialization in altruism (Rushton, 1980: 113-132; Sorokin, 1954a: 184-205; Staub, 1992: 390-404). The family system most conducive to altruistic socialization appears to be a loving and supportive one in which parents serve as role models and provide both moral standards and discipline to the child. These family characteristics have been found associated with a relatively easy and consistent transition from childhood altruism to adult altruism (Sorokin, 1954a: 148-154), continuing high risk participation in the early Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Rosenhaun, 1970), and rescuing Jews in Nazi occupied Europe (London, 1970; Oliner and Oliner, 1988: 173, 184-185). The processes associated with altruism in laboratory studies appear to have the same result in families (Rushton, 1980: 114). In a historical study of the institution of the family

in Western civilization Zimmerman (1947) presents evidence that the institution of the family can be a major source of norms of caring and obligation to others.

Religion. Religion appears to be associated with altruism under certain conditions. In a study of individuals nominated as good neighbors Sorokin (1950: 42-49) found that religion influenced the manifestation of altruism. Likewise, Wuthnow (1991: 157-187) found that both religious piety and involvement in an organized religious community were related to a belief in compassion and to involvement in charitable activities. Religious commitment that entails a belief in the obligation to care for others that is extended to all humanity was found to be related to rescuing Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe in two different studies by Oliner and Oliner (1988: 155-156) and by Kurek-Lesik (1992). A recent development in this substantive area is the analysis of the relationship between the meaning and sources of love in religious traditions and the scientific study of love (Browning, 2002; Habito, 2002; Post, 2003).

Culture

Despite the obvious importance of studies of the relation between culture and the incidence of altruism there is limited systematic empirical evidence relating cultural and altruistic variations. Staub (1978: 428-431) notes that cultural variations in the relative stress on cooperation, generosity, empathy, and the common humanity of individuals have influence on the degree of altruism. In a similar vein, Sorokin (1947: 119-131) notes that cultures that stress mutual aid, love, and respect will have greater solidarity than those that stress egocentrism and competition. Cultures with relatively unconditional ethical norms are also regarded as fostering altruism in comparison to those with relativistic and utilitarian norms (Sorokin, 1941: 133-166).

Gender

The study of gender and altruism provides a context for examining the influence of general cultural expectations, gender roles, situational factors, and biological differences on attitudes and behavior. Reviews of the literature appear to indicate that women are higher in altruistic attitudes than are men (Piliavin and Charng, 1990:34). For example, in a recent national survey, women showed more empathy and more altruistic values than men (Smith, 2003). On the other hand, gender differences in altruistic behavior appear to be influenced by role expectations and by the nature of social situations, with some inconsistencies in the findings across studies (Batson, 1998: 289; Howard and Piliavin, 2001: 117; Piliavin and Charng, 1990: 34).

Organizational Studies

Altruism can be studied in terms of the policies and actions of organizations. For example, Krohn (1995) has used congregations, and Pickering (1985) dioceses, as the unit of analysis in studying factors that account for variations in financial giving in religious denominations. Buono and Nichols (1985) analyze a broad range of philosophies of corporate social responsibility, and examine their implementation by financial organizations that invest in local communities. Piliavin and Charng (1990) provide a review of studies of corporate giving to charitable causes.

Social Stratification

Social stratification is a major feature of social organization, focusing on strata of social inequality and the nature of power, authority, privilege, and prestige within this context. One area of potential investigation is that of high social position and altruism.

Sorokin and Lunden's (1959) pioneering study of power and morality illustrates one focus of investigation of altruism and high social position. After documenting a strong trend of immorality in the use of power by those in high positions throughout history, these authors explore the conditions necessary to change this situation. First, the power of elites in government and in economic activities must be limited through persuasion and legislation. Various changes in social organization and culture are then proposed as necessary to encourage the manifestation of sympathy, love, and mutual aid toward all on the part of power holders in both government and the private spheres of capital and labor.

A second focus of investigation of high positions and altruism is illustrated by studies of philanthropy. While not all philanthropists are among the very wealthy, many are. Oliner (2003: 173-193) presents case studies and reviews the motivations, social context, and cultural factors associated with philanthropy.

Global Altruism

Study of the emerging global society as a unit of analysis is a necessity for sociology if the discipline is to provide understanding of the current era. This period of history is one in which processes and structures that are global in nature are assuming increasing importance. This can be observed in areas such as the economy, information, communication, migration, the spread of culture, and transnational social movements that are global in their scope (Tiryakian, 2004). The development of a systematic approach to the study of altruism and solidarity with global society as the primary unit of analysis is a potentially vital focus in the sociology of globalization.

The study of social movements for global justice and human rights (Smith, 2006), of global factors influencing the adequacy of healthcare (Ugalde and Homedes, 2006), and of nongovernmental emergency relief and economic development programs to Third World countries (Kniss and Campbell, 1997) are examples of foci that could emerge as the nature of theory and research on global altruism is defined and specified. Other promising areas of research relating altruism to globalization would include at the macro level, differentials in countries with high income level between those (particularly Scandinavian nations) that contribute a significantly higher proportion of GDP to direct development assistance. At the meso level, altruism may be studied as activities of such INGOs as Medecins sans frontiers and Amnesty International; and at the micro level, the missionary and voluntary activities of expatriates like the legendary Mother Theresa, who often risk their lives to assume the situation of "the other."

The Critical Perspective

Critical sociology formulates and applies moral and value perspectives to evaluate various aspects of scientific practice. It involves internal discourse among specialists on topics such as the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying knowledge production, the stance of knowledge producers toward their work, the nature of desirable

values and of the good, and the consequences of particular forms of knowledge (Burawoy, 2005a; 2005b). This form of sociology derives from the assumption that values should be made explicit because they are inevitably involved in various aspects of the practice of science (Myrdal, 1958). One way in which such value premises influence scientific endeavors is by justifying values that then serve to identify topics that are important for scientific investigation.

Sorokin's integral perspective incorporates ideas from religious and philosophical traditions within the frame of reference and practice of social science (Jeffries, 1999, 2005; Johnston, 1995, 1996; Sorokin, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1998a). From the value perspective derived from these sources Sorokin's integralism places the value of goodness and its specifications in concepts such as altruistic love, virtue, forgiveness, and solidarity at the center of theoretical development and empirical research. In addition to their obvious sociological importance, the critical perspective defines these concepts as relevant to sociological analysis because of their historical importance in major traditions of thought.

The focus on altruism and solidarity expressed in these ideas includes elements of notions of the good as expressed in other traditions. Examples are the focus on realizing justice and equality in various varieties of feminist thought (Collins, 1998; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 2004; Risman, 2006), Alexander's (2006: 3-22) emphasis on the importance of justice in civil society, and sociological perspectives that explicitly link sociological practice to combating unjust domination and oppression (Feagin and Vera, 2001).

The value premises formulated within the critical perspective provide topics for the practice of science in its professional form, ends to be sought through policy science, and topics for engagement with general and specific audiences in the dialogue of public sociology (Jeffries, 2005).

The Policy Perspective

Policy sociology focuses on solutions to problems. In this sense it provides instrumental knowledge of the means to reach a particular goal (Burawoy, 2005a, 2005b). This form of sociology entails external discourse with non-specialists who are involved in the creation or implementation of policy. The purpose is to present or to advocate applications of sociological knowledge in policy.

Sorokin (1998b: 302) specifically advocated the formation of a policy/applied sociology to obtain and develop knowledge regarding the "cultivation of amity, unselfish love, and mutual help in interindividual and intergroup relationships." Research in this form of sociology can focus on the individual, such as studies of good deeds (Thompson, 1954) or of therapy (Lunden, 1954) as means to increase altruism, or on the institutional level, such as studies of altruistic education in various religious communities (Arnold, 1954; Krahn, Fretz, and Kreider, 1954).

Sorokin's writings contain a detailed and diverse program of applied sociology directed toward the increase of altruism (Johnston, 1998; Nichols, 1999; Weinstein, 2000). In a detailed theoretical statement of general policy Sorokin (1948) maintains that reconstruction toward altruistic love must include fundamental change in individual personalities, society, and culture. If all three are not changed, then change toward greater altruism will be ineffective. Such change should begin with individuals then intentionally be engineered from micro to meso to macro levels of society and culture. This movement from individuals to groups of increasingly larger sizes gives impetus to the development

of policy sociology at diverse levels of analysis. Other descriptions in Sorokin's writings of the means through which the goal of increasing altruism can be accomplished are his analysis of the techniques of altruistic transformation (Sorokin, 1954a) and of the means through which the altruism of those who hold power in government and various nongovernmental organizations can be increased (Sorokin and London, 1959).

A work by Oliner and Oliner (1995) presents a detailed theoretical analysis of the social processes that promote altruism. Four processes are viewed as important means to increase altruism toward those in the immediate environment: bonding, empathizing, learning caring norms, and practicing care and assuming personal responsibility. At a more macro level of analysis, a second set of four processes are viewed as the means through which altruism toward groups outside the immediate environment can be promoted: diversifying by interacting with different others, networking by working with diverse others, resolving conflicts, and establishing global connections. These group-oriented approaches potentially extend to all of humanity. Strategies and conditions to implement both the micro and macro level processes are presented and analyzed.

A classical example of policy sociology and its relation to the other forms of sociological practice is the "settlement sociology" of the period between 1885 and 1930 (Deegan, 1988; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 2002). This involved individuals with a sociological perspective and/or training living in disadvantaged neighborhoods and attempting to combat and alleviate subjective, relational, and societal dissociation by constructing "neighborly relations." This program of attempting to create altruistic relations and solidarity was grounded in theory and research, an ethical orientation toward social life, and the formulation of social policy that was presented to various publics in efforts to achieve progressive social change (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 2002). A comparable altruistic policy orientation is described in Alper and Nichols (1981) analysis of policies in the legal and criminal justice system that are designed to further a sense of community. These entail legal policies such as mediation, arbitration, restitution, and community service intended to promote reconciliation and the recovery of victims. Parallel efforts to create more altruistic relations and solidarity through policies in the justice system are described by Kurki (1999) and by Nicholl (1999).

Public Sociology

Public sociology involves dialogue with audiences that are not part of the academic community. These audiences may be either specific groups or the more general public. This form of sociology is directed toward informing and initiating dialogue with these publics regarding sociological knowledge and understanding of significant problems and issues (Burawoy, 2005a, 2005b). In the most general sense public sociology involves external discourse with non-specialists in all walks of life. Discourse is at the least technical level with the purpose of communicating sociological knowledge and understanding to the broadest possible audience, for the sake of the common good. A Task Force on the Institutionalization of Public Sociology was formally established within the American Sociological Association in 2004 (Hossfeld and Nyden, 2005).

For public sociology to flourish the topics studied by sociology must be important to the betterment of society. They also must be relevant to the audiences that compose publics (Burawoy, 2005a, 2005b). The scientific investigation of altruism and the communication of sociological findings and understandings on this topic should have wide appeal to a variety of publics. Ideas such as altruism, prosocial behavior, altruistic love,

and forgiveness relate to the daily lives and concerns of individuals regarding their close relationships, marriages, families, work relationships, and the more general state of society and culture.

The approach to these topics from a policy perspective of how these aspects of individual and social life can be increased gives added impetus to a viable public sociology emerging from studies of these different facets of altruism. A developed policy sociology transmitting valid scientific knowledge regarding these various aspects of altruism can directly relate to the desires of individuals to participate in a creative way in attaining positive change for the betterment of their own lives and the general welfare of society. A public sociology focused in this manner would follow in the tradition of the “people-centered” humanist sociology advocated by Lee (1978: 87-102). It would also provide meaningful solutions to some of the links between personal “troubles” and social and historical “issues” stressed by Mills (1959: 3-24) in his vision of the contribution sociology can make to public understanding.

Conclusion

This article has presented a vision of what a field of altruism and social solidarity could potentially involve. An additional perspective on the nature of this field and how it could contribute to the discipline and to society is provided by the science of psychology. In the last decade a fundamental new orientation has developed in this discipline, growing from the pioneering work of Martin E.P. Seligman. Generally identified as “positive psychology” it represents a shift from a focus on trying to understand and find solutions to mental illness and various pathologies of thought and behavior in a “disease model” to a focus on human strengths, virtues, and other positive characteristics. This shift in focus is regarded as making a direct contribution to understanding what is best in human emotions and traits and how society can support the psychological flourishing of individuals. This new perspective in turn provides increased awareness of how the problems studied in the disease model can more effectively be prevented (Seligman, 2003, 2005). The importance of this focus on the positive for sociology and a call to action is stated by Seligman (2003):

The third pillar of positive psychology is the study of positive institutions and positive communities. Sociology has languished in the same way as psychology; it has been mostly about disabling conditions, the “isms”—racism, sexism, and ageism—and how the isms ruin lives. Even if we were to get rid of all those isms, we would still only be at zero. So positive psychology and positive sociology need to ask, “What are the institutions that take human beings *above zero*?” (p. xvii)

New currents of thought are also developing at the present time in the discipline of sociology. Most prominent among these is the widespread interest in Burawoy’s (2005a, 2005b) model of public sociology. Because this model is both systemic and comprehensive its potential influence in transforming the discipline is enhanced. His model is one in which each of the four forms of sociology are equally important and interdependent in their invigorating and creative effects on disciplinary practice and its end products. In this systemic model it is the critical form of practice that must present and justify visions of the good as potential foci of the endeavors of professional, policy, and public sociology. In interrogating and defining the good and advocating its study within this systematic model critical sociology brings the discipline closer to the current situation in psychology. Here the study of both positive and negative has advanced the understanding

of each, and also the application of scientific knowledge in policy and in public dialogue. There can be little doubt that part of public sociology must be dialogues about the good and the positive. The developing field of the study of human rights (Blau and Moncada, 2005) within sociology is an aspect of this focus on the good and the conditions of its realization. Another is the potential development of the study of altruism and solidarity as a recognized field of specialization.

The intrinsic scientific and public relevance of altruism and its obvious value in a world beset by individual and intergroup discord and violence indicate the importance of developing this field of study within sociology. For a number of sociologists, especially those still pursuing graduate studies or in the early years of their careers, the updating of knowledge about altruism, the testing of relevant hypotheses, and the separation of claims that are speculative from those with a basis in empirical science promises to be an engaging and rewarding undertaking. Moreover, much of the promise associated with an increase in concerted research on altruism and social solidarity comes from the potential for applying the findings from this work: in the formulation of social policy, in educational reforms, in clinical contexts, in dialogues with various publics, and wherever sociological practice stakes its claims. As this field develops and is more clearly defined it can increasingly be the topic of undergraduate and graduate courses in sociology departments. The distinguished sociologist Robin Williams (2006) pioneered such a course at the University of California-Irvine.

It is important to move the discipline of sociology to the forefront in theoretical development and empirical testing in this vital area of scientific investigation. This article is simply a first step in suggesting the content and characteristics this field could potentially manifest. Fully explicating its nature will always be a process that can yield great benefits to the discipline and to society with sufficient work and effective exercise of choice regarding the nature of the field. At this point we may simply observe there is a lot of work to do, and we really need to get started on it together.

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