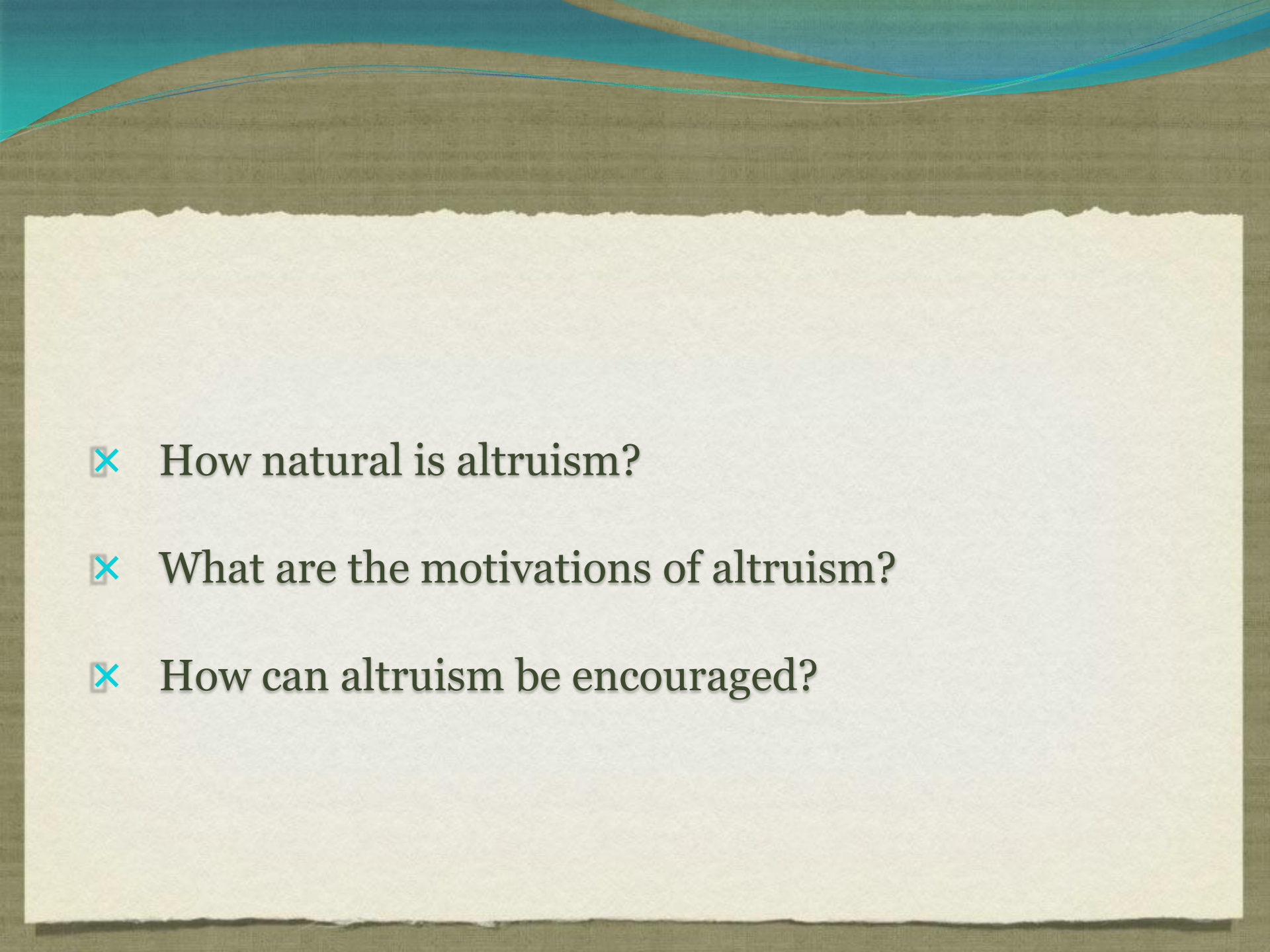


The Psychology of Altruism

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- ✕ How natural is altruism?
 - ✕ What are the motivations of altruism?
 - ✕ How can altruism be encouraged?

Animal Altruism

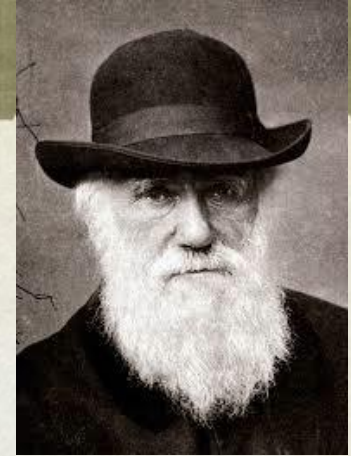


- Animals often share food to make sure that weaker members of their group are fed, even when they have to sacrifice their own food e.g. vampire bats regurgitate blood from a night's hunting and give it to group members who have failed to feed.
- Vervet monkeys warn group members of a predator's approach, even when it endangers that individual's chance of survival.
- Animals often partner up with members of unrelated species. It's not uncommon for an animal from one species adopting those of another.
- Bonobos (with chimpanzees, human beings' closest primate relatives): extremely peaceful and egalitarian, they are happy to share food with strangers (and human beings) and behave altruistically to members of other species .

Explanations of Altruism: Psychological Egoism

- ✗ There is no such thing as 'pure altruism.' It is rooted in self-interest – rewards such as increased respect and status, a better afterlife, or to 'feel good about ourselves'.
- ✗ A disguised selfishness – we do good things because we want to look good in the eyes of other people, and so gain status.
- ✗ Reciprocal altruism – we do good things as a strategy to try and make sure that people will help us when we are in need.
- ✗ Could this explain a soldier jumping in front of grenade to save his comrades?
- ✗ Could it be the result of 'moral behaviourism' – a habitual response?

Neo-Darwinian Views of Altruism



- ✗ Since we are made up of genes whose only need is to survive and reproduce, altruism cannot be 'natural.' It must involve self-interest, however indirect.
- ✗ Altruism could be a 'leftover' trait from when we lived in small groups with people who we were genetically related to. We behave as if we still live in these groups, helping people who we're no genetically related to.

Kin Selection

- ✕ Studies from Game Theory have shown that people are feel more altruistic to others who resemble them facially, or have the same (or similar) surnames to them. Is this due to genes?
- ✕ Vested interests: your survival depends on other members of your group.
- ✕ Does this explain 'animal altruism'?

‘Costly signalling’ - Display of Resources (leading to increased reproduction)

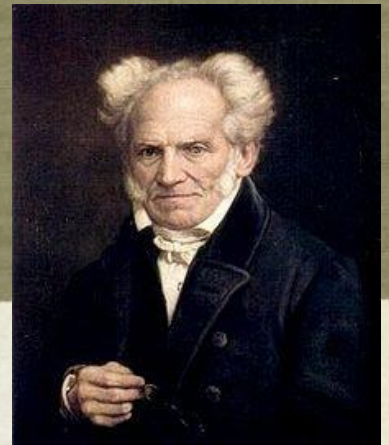
- ✗ ‘Costly signalling’ - altruistic behaviour is a show of ability, confidence and wealth, which makes a person more attractive to the opposite sex and increases reproductive possibilities.
- ✗ Research has shown that good hunters have higher reproductive success and more adulterous relations even if they themselves receive no more of the hunted meat than anyone else.
- ✗ Holding large feasts and giving large donations could be a way of demonstrating one's resources. Heroic risk-taking could also be a ‘a costly signal of ability.
- ✗ Do women find altruistic men attractive?

Daniel Batson's 'Empathy-Altruism' hypothesis



- ✗ "Feeling empathy for [a] person in need evokes help [that person] in which these benefits to self are not the ultimate goal of helping; they are unintended consequences" (Batson & Shaw 1991, p. 114).
- ✗ Four major motives of or altruism: to benefit one self (egoism), to ultimately benefit the other person (altruism), to benefit a group (collectivism), or to uphold a moral principle (principilism).
- ✗ So true altruism can exist, when it stems from genuine empathy.
- ✗ Empathy is variable - it varies in intensity from person to person.

Schopenhauer



- Why are people prepared to sacrifice their lives for others? Because at that moment he or she realises that they are connected to the person in need - because we are part of the same network of being or consciousness.
- ‘Universal compassion is the only guarantee of morality...My own true inner being actually exists in every living creature as truly and immediately as known to my consciousness only in myself. This realisation is the ground of compassion upon which all true, that is to say unselfish, virtue rests and whose expression is in every good deed.’ Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*.
- Empathy stems from the fundamental manifestations of the interconnectedness of human beings (and all life forms). Altruism occurs when we act on this empathy.
- In a sense, altruism is natural.

Important Points

- If altruism is a natural aspect of human nature, there is no reason to be dubious about people's motives
- Since the most important aspect of altruism, appeals for donors should be designed to cultivate empathy (e.g. through personal appeals, human stories)
- Empathy is fragile and can easily be disrupted - so it is important to treat donors very sensitively and respectfully
- Since empathy also has a 'self-congratulatory' aspect (although this may not be primary) it is important to address this too (e.g. by boosting the self-esteem of donors, making them feel special)