Charitable organizations sometimes bundle products with donation requests to raise money. The same bundle may be framed as a thank you gift: “donate $20 and receive a coffee mug” or a charitable purchase: “buy a coffee mug for $20 and the proceeds go to charity.” Charitable purchases work better.

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The Darker Side of Giving: Exploring Implicit Motives that Negatively Shape Prosocial Behavior

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Paper #1: Goal Proximity, Social Information, and Giving: When Norms Backfire
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Paper #2: Exalted Purchases or Tainted Donations? The Effects of Product Incentives on Charitable Giving
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Paper #3: Opting In to Prosocial and Standard Incentives
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Alex Imas, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
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Paper #4: The Value of Sacrifice - Relative Evaluation of Prosocial Behavior
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SESSION OVERVIEW
In 2015, Americans gave over $370 billion, of which the vast majority came from individuals, which drives an important question – what motivates individuals to contribute to charitable causes? In this session, we focus on perhaps a more intriguing question – what reduces individuals’ motivation to contribute time and money to or on behalf of charitable causes?

What motivates people to give less than they would give otherwise? What may lead society to devalue prosocial behavior? And, how might opportunities to behave prosocially through giving reduce participation in unrelated activities? Four papers explore these and related questions as they deepen our understanding of individuals’ prosocial behavior.

The first two papers examine specific information cues that influence donation behavior, sometimes in counterintuitive ways. Lupoli, Morvinski and Amir’s paper challenges established notions that individuals are expected to increase their donation amount, the closer the fundraising campaign is to reaching its goal, and that popularity information positively affects donations. Their paper demonstrates that when the campaign goal has nearly been reached, individuals donate less when they see a large, rather than a small, number of past donors. The paper by Savary, Li and Newman examines how different expectations about altruism, which derive from different framing of the donation offering, affect donation decisions. Specifically, they show that a bundle framed as a “donation with a gift,” as opposed to “charitable giving,” evokes expectations of genuine altruism by causing people to compare the offer to donating without receiving a gift in return, and as a result, they are less likely to donate. The last two papers examine broader aspects of prosocial decisions. Schwartz, Keenan, Imas, and Gneezy’s paper demonstrates another situation where threatening one’s altruistic self-image can be detrimental. Their work shows that people are less likely to opt-in to activities when they are offered prosocial incentives, where payment for work is donated to charity. Specifically, people avoid this type of incentives even when they can keep the earnings for themselves due to the guilt associated with potentially saying no to such incentive offers. In the last paper, Peleg, Lowengart, and Shapiro explore how prosocial behavior is evaluated by society and find that not only the economic value for the beneficiary is considered, but also the amount of self-sacrifice involved in the prosocial activity itself. Such findings may put in question whether social rewards concerns may lead to less effective prosocial responses.

Prior work on prosocial behavior has demonstrated the positive effects of information processing goals on giving, but little is known about how prosocial behavior is negatively impacted by consumers’ implicit motives. Taken together, the four papers present novel findings that further our understanding of the mechanisms by which consumers prosocial decisions are constructed.

The session should be of interest not only to researchers who study consumer prosocial behavior, but also to those who are more broadly interested in decision-making, information processing, and incentive scheme optimization. The session incorporates multiple methodologies and speaks to audiences that include theory-inclined academics, consumers, policy-makers, and marketers.

Goal Proximity, Social Information, and Giving: When Norms Backfire

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
The crowdfunding industry has reached over $34B in 2015 and is growing exponentially (www.crowdsourcing.org). Online fundraisers try to increase donations by providing potential donors with up-to-date information about their campaigns. Two types of information commonly presented are the percentage of the campaign goal that has been reached (“goal proximity”), and the number of individuals who have donated to the campaign. Research suggests that fundraisers would be wise to present these two metrics to potential donors. Indeed, individuals are more likely to donate when campaigns are close to (versus far from) reaching their goals (Cryder et al. 2013). Likewise, information about the behavior of past donors (descriptive norms) has been shown to increase giving. For instance, people are more likely to give when they learn that a large (versus small) proportion of a population has donated (Frey & Meier 2004). Given the effects of goal proximity and descriptive norms on giving, one might expect these tactics to be at least equally effective when implemented simultaneously. In three studies, we observed a surprising interaction: when campaigns are close to reaching their goals, individuals donate more when there are few (versus many) past donors. We find that both impact concerns and perceived average donation by others drive the observed effect. Individuals may perceive their donation as being more impactful if they learn that few (rather than many) people have donated. In addition, individuals who receive information that a small (rather than large) number of people have donated (holding goal proximity constant), may assume that the average donation is relatively larger, which subsequently, affect their own giving amount. Interestingly, those effects strengthen, or manifest only, when the goal has nearly been reached.

In Study 1 (N=12,265 campaigns), we analyzed aggregated data from a popular fundraising website, Kickstarter.com, and found a significant negative interaction between goal proximity and number of past donors on the average amount donated across campaigns.
When campaigns were under 54% complete, there was no relationship between number of donors and giving. However, above 54%, this relationship was significantly (and increasingly) negative. This result held with and without covariates and transformations to account for data skewness.

In Study 2 ($N=571$), we obtained causal evidence for the interaction seen in the Kickstarter data. In this 3(Past Donors: many/few/no-information) x 2(Goal Proximity: close/far) between-subject laboratory experiment, undergraduate student participants learned that they would be entered into a lottery for $20, and that, prior to selection of the winner, they could choose to donate $0-$20 to a real charity campaign that is committed to saving the lives of malnourished children. They then received the manipulation in the form of a pie chart and written statement explaining that 86% (23%) of the campaign goal had been reached, and that there were 1,023 (23) previous donors (no-information treatment did not specify number of previous donors). Results: There were no main effects of goal proximity or past donors but there was a significant interaction ($F(2, 565)=3.94, p=.02$). When close to the goal, participants in the few treatments donated significantly more than those in the many treatment ($M_\text{few}=$14.06, $M_\text{many}=$11.30, $p=.01$). The average amount donated by those in the no-information treatment was in between those of the other conditions ($M=$12.97). When far from the goal, however, there was no effect of the past donors manipulation on giving. Participants in the many treatment gave slightly more than those in the few treatment but the effect was not significant ($M_\text{few}=$12.08, $M_\text{many}=$13.52, $p=.19$). The no-information treatment amount was once again in between the other conditions ($M=$12.27). Similar results occurred when analyzing the probability of giving.

In Study 3 ($N=709$), we examined potential mechanisms for the effect and also tested progress-focus (accumulated versus remaining goal progress) as a potential boundary condition (Koo & Fishbach, 2008). In this Study 2 (Past Donors: few/many) x 2 (Focus: accumulated/remaining) between-subjects design study, participants received the same charity campaign and past donors manipulations from Study 2, but everyone saw only the close goal proximity information. We manipulated progress-focus by either presenting (visually and textually) the percentage of the goal already funded (86%)—as was displayed to participants in Study 2—or the remaining percentage left to be funded (14%). Following the donation decision, we measured the perceived impact of donating on reaching the campaign goal using 3 items adopted from Ryder et. al. (2013). We also measured other motivations for giving that could potentially account for the effect: perceived average donation, importance placed on campaign, perceived importance others place on campaign, anticipated positive and negative emotions, likelihood of reaching the goal without one’s donation, perceived need, and moral responsibility. Results: Replicating Study 2’s results, those in the few conditions donated more than those in the many conditions ($M_\text{few}=$13.66, $M_\text{many}=$12.11, $p<.01$). We observed no main effect of progress-focus, nor an interaction effect, and therefore collapsed across progress-focus. Importantly, a bootstrap multiple mediation analysis containing all potential mechanisms revealed a significant indirect effect of perceived impact on reaching the campaign goal ($\beta=.41, 95\% CI[0.24, 0.58]$), while no other measure mediated the effect. Analyzing the probability of giving revealed virtually identical results. Together, our results suggest an intriguing phenomenon whereby information about many (as opposed to few) past donors negatively affects giving when the campaign goal is near. This effect is mediated by the perceived impact on reaching the campaign goal such that when the campaign is nearly being reached, information about few (as opposed to many) past donors causes people to think that their donation will have a larger impact, leading them to increase their donation.

This work contributes to theory on goal gradient motivation, norms, and giving by providing the first demonstration that descriptive norms for giving (i.e., many others donated) can sometimes lead to less giving. Our results also have a practical implication: If fundraisers display information about goal proximity, they may be better off emphasizing a small number of past donors (when applicable), at least when the campaign is getting closer to reaching its goal.

**Exalted Purchases or Tainted Donations?**

**The Effects of Product Incentives on Charitable Giving**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

The present studies demonstrate a robust framing effect - offers framed as charitable purchases result in more charitable giving than materially identical offers framed as donations with a gift. To explain this result, we suggest that subtle changes in framing give rise to different expectations about altruism. Specifically, when a bundle is framed as a “donation with a gift,” it evokes expectations of genuine altruism, and people spontaneously compare the offer to donating without receiving a gift in return. In contrast, when an offer is framed as a “charitable purchase,” it is less likely to evoke expectations related to pure altruism and it may be perfectly acceptable (and perhaps preferable) to receive a gift.

Because people find actions that violate their expectations about their own altruism distasteful (Newman and Cain, 2014), when the offer is perceived as less than purely altruistic, people are less likely to donate. Therefore, our primary hypothesis is that a charitable purchase should encourage more donations than an otherwise identical offer framed as a donation with a gift. Moreover, these effects should be mediated by differences in people’s beliefs about how altruistic others would feel if they accepted the offer. Four laboratory experiments and two field studies provide support for these predictions.

**Study 1a:** 412 participants saw an identical bundle framed as either a Charitable Purchase(CP) or Donation with Gift(DWG). In the DWG condition, the offer was: “Donate and receive a gift in exchange: Currently this organization is selling candles for $3.00.” Participants rated the offer along seven dimensions (i.e. Charitable, Helpful, Purchase: Currently this organization is selling scented candles for $3.00). In the CP condition, it was framed as: “Make a Charitable Purchase currently this organization is seeking donations in the amount of $3.00. In exchange for your donation, you will receive a thank-you gift of a scented candle” (adapted from Holmes et al. 2002). In the CP condition, it was framed as: “Make a Charitable Purchase: Currently this organization is selling scented candles for $3.00.” Participants indicated their choice (yes/no). Perceived altruism of the offers was measured on a subsequent page, where people rated the offer along seven dimensions (i.e. Charitable, Helpful, Selfish(r)). As predicted, participants were more likely to accept the offer when framed as a CP (61.9%) than when it was framed as a DWG (38.1%, $p<.001$). Participants rated the CP offer as more altruistic than the DWG ($M_{\text{charitablepurchase}}=75.7, SD=19.9$ vs. $M_{\text{donationwithgift}}=65.3, SD=24.4, F(1, 400)=22.3, p<.001$). Bootstrap analysis indicates that the measure of perceived altruism fully mediated the framing effect ($\beta=.76, SE=.19; 95\% CI=[.42, 1.15]$).

**Study 1b** was a conceptual replication using a Likert scale instead of a choice. As before, participants were more likely to accept the offer when it was framed as a CP ($M=4.6$) than when it was framed as a DWG ($M=4.1, p=.02$). The CP offer was rated as more altruistic compared to a DWG ($M_{\text{charitablepurchase}}=78.5$ vs. $M_{\text{donationwithgift}}=70.6, p=0.000$), and perceived altruism fully mediated ($\beta=.21, SE=.06; 95\% CI=[.10, .33]$).

**Study 2** used materials identical to 1b, but was conducted in a campus lab and participants completed a thought-listing protocol after the other measure. Again, participants were more likely to ac-
cept the offer when it was framed as a CP ($M_{charitablepurchase}=5.5$) than when it was framed as a DWG ($M_{charitablepurchase}=4.7, p=.006$), the offer was more altruistic when it was framed as a CP ($a=.89, M_{charitablepurchase}=7.75$, vs. $M_{charitablepurchase}=6.46, p<.001$) and perceived altruism mediated ($\beta=.21, SE=.07, 95\% CI=10.50$).

We hypothesized that when an offer is framed as a DWG, people are relatively more likely to spontaneously compare it to donating and not receiving a gift in return (i.e., “genuine” altruism). To test this, coders blind to condition and hypothesis categorized the thought-listing responses. DWG participants mentioned that the presence of the gift was negative—that they did not receive the gift more often than CP participants did ($P_{donationwithgift}=33\%$ vs. $P_{charitablepurchase}=18\%, p=.034$). According to our hypothesis, this in turn should predict rating the offer as less altruistic, which leads to decreased likelihood of accepting the offer. A serial mediation analysis confirms this causal chain, ($\beta=-.25, SE=1.8, 95\% BCCI=-.83,-.04$).

Study 3 investigates why differences in perceived altruism affect donation likelihood. To do so, we replicate the framing effect documented in earlier studies (using a different charity, gift and donation/purchase amount), and measure three potential mechanisms: social-signaling. “If I accepted this offer, other people would see me as”; perceptions of the organization. “In light of this offer, I see The Water Project organization as” and self-signaling. “If I accepted this offer, I would think of myself as.” Responses to all three measures were on a 7-point scale (1= Purely selfish to 7= Purely altruistic). As before, people were more likely to accept the offer when it was framed as a CP ($M_{donationwithgift}=4.96, M_{charitablepurchase}=4.44, p=.004$). Only the measure of self-signaling (i.e. how people would perceive themselves) was affected by the framing, and it mediated the effect of framing (DWG vs. CP) on willingness to accept the offer ($.08, .04; 95\% CI=.02 to .19$).

Study 4 is a field study, conducted at a farmers’ market. Participants were exposed to an identical product-donation bundle (a bottle of water/$1), which was framed either as a DWG or CP, depending on condition. People who heard the offer framed as a CP were more likely to accept it ($P_{donationwithgift}=48.2\%$ vs. $P_{charitablepurchase}=75.99\%, p=.002$).

Study 5 is a large-scale field study in which door-to-door solicitors approached roughly 1,400 households offering a product-donation bundle (bag of microwave popcorn/$1.50). The two focal conditions were framed as a DWG (for every $1.50 donated the participant received a $0.75 bag of popcorn), and a CP condition (for every bag of popcorn purchased for $1.50, $0.75 was donated to charity). Households were 8% more likely to accept the offer in the CP condition (29.19%) than in the DWG condition (21.01%, $p<.05$).

The present studies suggest that the framing of an offer plays a key role in determining how donation-product bundles are interpreted. Specifically, we suggest an important theoretical distinction between offers framed as “donations” versus identical offers framed as “purchases.”

**Opting In to Prosocial and Standard Incentives**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Optimizing incentive schemes to increase effort provision is an important design question for firms and other organizations. However, standard self-benefiting monetary incentives have been shown to backfire in certain contexts (e.g. Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). To overcome this detrimental effect, prior work has demonstrated that “prosocial incentives” – where individuals work and their payments go to a charitable organization – can be more effective than standard incentive schemes, particularly when the stakes are low (Imas, 2013; Yang, Hsee & Urminsky, 2014). However, it remains unclear whether prosocial incentives are effective in prompting individuals to participate in an activity or task in the first place.

We examine the effectiveness of prosocial incentives for participation decisions in field and online settings in which the incentivized activity can be avoided; participants can disregard the invitation to do the activity or shut off the browser. In contrast, participants in prior laboratory studies exploring prosocial incentives have already agreed to participate in the activity by showing up; the decision to opt-out is either cumbersome or costly. We also introduce an optional prosocial incentive (i.e., individuals can choose to forego the standard incentive and give to charity instead). From the perspective of standard economics, an optional prosocial incentive should be appealing because people can select into the task both if they prefer to work for the standard and prosocial incentive. However, from a psychological perspective, this type of incentive may be less appealing than a standard incentive of equal size because individuals prefer to avoid situations in which they may have to directly turn down a charity solicitation (Dana, Weber, & Kuang, 2007); they would prefer to keep the money rather than donate it, but the psychological cost of saying no to the donation request may deter them from engaging with the activity in the first place.

Study 1. In a field experiment, households (N=951) living in a neighborhood with almost no door-to-door recycling collection received an invitation letter to participate in a program to recycle at a nearby drop-off center. In the letter, households were offered one of three levels of cash rewards ($2.50, $12.00, or $25.00), and a message with either a donation option message: “if you prefer, you can also donate this money to an environmental cause” (optional prosocial incentive) or no donation message. One extra condition offered an “acknowledgement” only (no cash or donation option). Our main measure was the proportion of households who recycled with the program. Results: When there was no donation option message, households were 1.1% more likely to recycle for every $2.50 increase in rewards ($p<.01$). However, when a donation option was included, households were less likely to recycle as the reward increased ($p<.01$) – in fact, at $25.00, zero households showed up to recycle. The optional prosocial incentive was completely avoided when the incentive was large.

Study 2. Participants (N=1,345) were hired from an online labor market to verify whether a series of URLs were working. After finishing, they received their payment code, so they could leave the task and collect their compensation. They were also invited to participate in an optional bonus task that involved searching for additional images to complete a research database. In this invitation, participants were randomly assigned to either receive a standard incentive for their work, a non-optional prosocial incentive (their work was directly tied to a donation), or an optional prosocial incentive as in the field study (they could choose to donate their standard incentive after finishing the task, or to keep it). There were two levels of payment for their work ($0.01 or $1.00), generating 6 experimental conditions. Results: At the high incentive levels, compared to a standard incentive, participants were less likely to opt-in when an optional prosocial or non-optional prosocial incentive was offered ($OR=0.59$ and $OR=0.17$, respectively ($p<.01$). At the low incentive levels, people were less likely to opt-in for non-optional prosocial incentives than for standard incentives ($OR=0.46$, $p<.01$); there was no difference between the optional prosocial and standard incentives.

We use a hurdle model to examine behavior at the intensive margin: people worked harder under prosocial incentives (vs. standard) when the amounts were low, consistent with previous evidence. Finally,
we conducted a mediation analysis which showed that reported feelings of guilt partially explained why people were less likely to opt-in when offered a high prosocial or optional prosocial incentive (vs. standard) – Indirect effects: $b=0.059, 95\% CI [0.027,0.115]$ and $b=0.013, 95\% CI [0.002,0.038]$, respectively. This is consistent with previous evidence showing that people feel less happy when they have the option to donate their money instead of just receiving it for themselves (Berman & Small, 2012).

Study 3. Using the same setting and invitation as in the previous study, participants ($N=916$) were randomly assigned to either receive £1.00 for searching additional images (high standard incentive), receive £1.00 and have the option to donate 10% of it to charity (partial donation option), receive £0.90 and donate £0.10 (partial donation), or receive £0.90 (low standard incentive). Consistent with the previous studies, we again found that people were less likely to opt-in when they had the option to donate their earnings, even a small part of it ($OR=0.64, p<0.02$). We also found that offering a high standard incentive was directionally more appealing comparing to offering the partial donation or the low standard incentive, though the results were not significant at the 5% level.

Across studies, our findings suggest that offering prosocial incentives may not be an effective tool to attract people to participate in a task when they have the option to avoid it, i.e. motivating extensive margin decisions. Furthermore, we find that increasing the incentive level does not make the option to donate more appealing, as would be suggested by a standard economic model in which people can self-select into work depending on the type of incentive. Furthermore, our findings suggest that people avoid optional prosocial incentives due to the guilt associated with potentially saying no. These results have implications for contract design and policies aimed at improving selection and recruitment.

The Value of Sacrifice - Relative Evaluation of Prosocial Behavior

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consider a case in which two individuals, Alice and Bob, donate money for a noble cause: while Alice donates $50, Bob donates $100. Naturally, we may expect that Bob will receive a higher social evaluation for his prosocial act as he donated twice as much as Alice. However, what if it is also known that Alice earns a weekly wage of $500, while Bob earns $1,500 per week? Would society then evaluate these acts differently? In this paper, we show that besides evaluating the economic value of one’s contribution, society also values the sacrifice per se (i.e., cost) involved in the prosocial behavior even though the benefactor’s sacrifice does not help the respective beneficiary.

In previous studies evaluating prosocial behavior and the sacrifice one has to make when the acts are costly, the sacrifice itself is commonly imposed to justify the selfless intentions of the benefactor (Ariely et al., 2009; Berman et al., 2015; A. Gneezy et al., 2012; Olivola & Shafir, 2013) we provide evidence that the prospect of enduring pain and exerting effort for a prosocial cause can promote contributions to the cause. Specifically, we show that willingness to contribute to a charitable or collective cause increases when the contribution process is expected to be painful and effortful rather than easy and enjoyable. Across five experiments, we document this ‘sacrifice effect’ and show that the observed patterns defy standard economic and psychological accounts, and identify a mediator and moderator of the effect. Experiment 1 showed that people are willing to donate more to charity when they anticipate having to suffer to raise money. Experiment 2 extended these findings to a non-charity laboratory context that involved real money and actual pain. Experiment 3 demonstrated that the martyrdom effect is not the result of an attribute substitution strategy (whereby people use the amount of pain and effort involved in fundraising to determine donation worthiness. Moreover, while the sacrifice effect also known as the “Martyrdom Effect” (Olivola & Shafir, 2013) has been studied in the context of prosocial behavior, it has never been compared with the resultant economic value of the prosocial act to the beneficiary.

To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to investigate how the trade-off between the economic value conveyed to the beneficiary and the sacrifice of the benefactor affects the social evaluation of prosocial activities. In particular, we are the first to measure this trade-off as it appears in different forms of a contribution (i.e., financial donations and volunteer work). In two studies, we explored the importance of sacrifice signaling in the overall social evaluation, and whether this evaluation changes due to information regarding the beneficiary’s needs. We found that society’s evaluation of the benefactor’s sacrifice accounts for approximately 35% of the evaluation of the economic value of the contribution for the beneficiary. Moreover, when the evaluator is being primed towards the beneficiary’s need, (i.e., for monetary donations or volunteers), the importance of the said need increases.

In order to measure how prosocial behavior is evaluated by others in the context of self-sacrifice, we conducted two online choice-based conjoint studies. Participants in both studies were asked to choose the most prosocial scenario out of three scenarios characterized by a benefactor’s prosocial behavior: offering a monetary donation and volunteering, in addition to information regarding the benefactor’s resources (his or her available time and monetary resources). The resources were introduced as a signal for the benefactor’s sacrifice. Each attribute (i.e., monetary donation, volunteer work, working hours as a proxy for available time, and income as a proxy for monetary resources) was presented at one of four levels: low, medium-low, medium-high, and high. Each respondent viewed 14 different combinations of the three scenarios and selected what they believed to be the most prosocial one. In Study 1 ($N=465$), we explored prosocial evaluation in a non-informative environment in regard to the beneficiary’s needs, whereas in Study 2 ($N=431$), we provided participants with information regarding the beneficiary’s specific needs. Participants were informed that a beneficiary needed either a monetary donation (treatment 1) or volunteers (treatment 2).

We analyzed the combined results of both studies by employing a hierarchical Bayes analysis for individual-level estimation. The estimation yielded 0.80 RLH (i.e., root likelihood as model fit), which is significantly above a baseline level (0.33 for a random choice of 1 out of 3 concepts). Specifically, in Study 1, we analyzed the average attribute importance evaluation given by all the respondents and found that the importance of the economic value of the prosocial acts (i.e., monetary donation and volunteer work) summed up to 65% of the overall evaluation compared to 35% of the resources or sacrifice. Furthermore, we calculated the social reward for the interaction between the prosocial behavior and resource at each level (e.g., small donation when income is low). Our results suggest there are two significant trends wherein both a greater contribution and a lower level of available resources are associated with greater social evaluation (all $p<.01$). The results of the non-informative evaluations in Study 2 were not significantly different from the informative evaluation conditions in Study 1. Also, providing information that the beneficiary was in need of money significantly increased the importance of monetary donations. However, information that the beneficiary was in need of volunteers did not increase the importance of volunteer work. Our studies reveal that prosocial behavior is evaluated by...
society in a relative manner. That is, not only is the economic value for the beneficiary considered, but also the amount of self-sacrifice involved in the prosocial activity itself. The greater the self-sacrifice involved, the greater is the reward given by society. Moreover, an evaluation might change due to information regarding a beneficiary’s needs. Notably, this reward scheme may eventually lead to ineffective prosocial activities. As benefactors may care about the social reward they gain, they may also increase their sacrifice even if it is found to be unnecessary as far as the beneficiary is concerned. These findings might explain ineffective behaviors such as wealthy people who volunteer their time to do simple tasks (e.g., washing dishes at a shelter) or less affluent people who chose to make significant monetary donations. The benefactor’s choice to contribute with the scarcer resource will increase that sacrifice and, therefore, the social reward. However, the contribution’s value could decrease as far as the beneficiary is concerned, considering the alternative options for contribution.

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