

## Chapter 1

Perspectives on Cooperation in Modern Society: Helping the Self, the Community,  
and Society

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“The time is always right to do what is right” - Dr. Martin Luther King

## **Introduction**

The development of modern society is not a story about war, conflict, and chaos. It is not about how individuals, groups, and countries fought endlessly with each other for the ownership of natural resources, material and immaterial goods. True, societies every now and then face problems that evoke strong tensions between citizens, classes and populations. For example, the past century has seen the threat of world-wide major financial crises (e.g., the 1929 Great Depression), natural resource crises (e.g., the 1974 international oil crisis), intense labor disputes in industries (e.g., the 1980s strikes in the UK), and life-threatening epidemics (e.g., HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 90s). There is no denying the fact that these incidents have all caused (and still are causing) major pains and troubles to society. What seems so remarkable, however, is the ability of modern society to overcome these issues through the continuous efforts of men and women at every level of society. If anything, the story of modern society is about large numbers of citizens cooperating with each other, trying to do something good for the welfare of their community and the broader society of which they are part.

Let us look at some numbers. According to a recent survey, over 93 million adults in the United States participate annually in volunteer activities, from providing companionship to the elderly and terminally ill to offering counseling and tutoring the illiterate (Snyder & Omoto, Chapter 7). In Sweden the majority of citizens wants their national government to increase the expenditure for health care, elderly support, and unemployment policies to help the disadvantaged groups in society (Rothstein, Chapter 12). Contrary to popular belief, international studies show that the rate of tax

evasion in Western Europe is negligible (Elffers, Chapter 10). In spite of the low detection rates of evaders and a tax declaration procedure based on self-assessment, the vast majority of citizens in European countries do want to pay for the maintenance of vital public goods, such as hospitals, schools, and libraries. In the Netherlands, the number of people commuting daily to work by bike, foot, public transport or by sharing a car with others currently nearly equals the number of people taking their car alone, thereby minimizing the costs for the environment (Van Lange, Van Vugt, & De Cremer, Chapter 3). Finally, across the world, communities have found ways to distribute scarce commodities such as water resources among its members through ingenious networks of cooperation and coordination (Biel, Chapter 2; Schlager, Chapter 6).

We have not chosen these examples at random. To the contrary, these examples illustrate the broad array of collective problems in contemporary society that we will discuss in this book. Each of these problems shows the great capacity of individuals to organize themselves, individually and collectively, across different levels of society, to help out in solving problems their communities are facing. These problems, as we will show later, can be classified into two subcategories, (i) common resource problems (saving the environment, energy and water conservation), and (ii) common good problems (financing public services, donating time and money). The first set of problems require citizens' cooperation in the form of restraint to preserve scarce natural resources. The second set of problems require people's help in the form of contributions to create communal goods, such as national health care or labor unions.

Why do people cooperate to promote a better society, and what are the different forms that their cooperation takes? What are the main reasons for individuals to engage in cooperation, and how can this kind of helping be promoted and sustained. This book addresses these important issues by bringing together a collection of contributions from internationally acclaimed researchers working in various social science disciplines. In the forthcoming chapters, they will draw on their research programs to offer new insights into the dilemmas and solutions involving cooperation in modern society. These contributions will reveal that cooperation is much more widespread in Western societies than commonly thought. They will hopefully correct the idea of people as being largely incapable of solving large-scale social problems, a notion dating as far back as Aristotle: “That which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all at the common interest.” (quoted in Jowett, 1943, p. 83; cited in Edney, 1980). This book will convey a more optimistic picture of humanity and its ability to solve social problems, based on recent developments in research and theories about cooperation. Before presenting the book outline and an overview of the chapters, we will first try to define cooperation, and discuss the dilemmas and challenges it poses to modern society.

### **Defining Cooperation**

Cooperation is a special form of helping, which can be distinguished from other forms of helping in several important ways (Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995). First, cooperation generally involves more than just two actors. Through their collective efforts individuals can help the groups to which they belong to, their

community, or they can help society as a whole. There are particular instances where cooperation does take the form of one-to-one helping, such as when people volunteer to provide companionship to a terminally ill person, but even these forms of helping often occur in the context of larger organizations formed to recruit, train, and place volunteers in service to those in need (Snyder & Omoto, Chapter 7). Moreover, a key, and defining, feature of cooperation as a form of helping is that cooperation is primarily designed to alleviate a structural problem in society (e.g., insufficient care for the sick) rather than an incidental problem (helping a friend who suffers from a broken leg). Another characteristic feature of cooperation is that it implies a common interdependence between the people who are offering and receiving help (Komorita & Parks, 1994). Unlike the giver-recipient relationship in a one-to-one helping situation, in a cooperative relation people's efforts not only aid others, but also, to some extent, themselves. This feature of cooperation is perhaps best illustrated by looking at a water shortage, where people by restraining their water consumption to prevent resource depletion help both their community as well as themselves (Van Vugt & Samuelson, 1999). This difference implies an important shift in thinking about the motives for cooperation, from explaining it in terms of pure altruism to a mixture between altruistic and selfish motives (Batson, 1991). Yet another key feature of cooperation is that it is a sustained and ongoing effort to tackle a problem rather than a one-shot spontaneous helping incident (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). This distinguishes cooperation from the traditional bystander intervention type of problems (helping in an emergency; Latané & Darley, 1970). Finally, whereas interpersonal helping usually involves offering direct assistance to somebody in need, cooperation can be achieved either directly (e.g., doing volunteer work and directly giving one's time, effort, and skills to helping those in need) or indirectly (e.g., donating money to

charities that then use the money thus collected to provide assistance and services to the needy). Thus, to summarize these defining features of cooperation as a special form of helping, it would appear that cooperation is a type of helping that can be distinguished from other forms of helping in (i) the number of people who profit, (ii) the common interdependence, (iii) the duration of help, and (iv) the nature of the helping act. This characterization is very much in line with taxonomies of helping situations provided by other theorists (Batson, 1998; Pearce and Amato, 1980; Schroeder et al., 1995).

The features that set cooperation apart from many, if not most, other forms of helping can and do make it quite difficult to approach cooperation from many of the perspectives offered in the traditional interpersonal helping literature (e.g., social exchange and equity theories, Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; bystander intervention theory, Latané & Darley, 1968; empathy-altruism theory, Batson, 1991). Concerns about reciprocity or empathy play less of a role when people decide to help out their communities in a crisis situation than when they want to help a particular individual in need. What other models, then, could account for the emergence of cooperation in society? The dominant theoretical perspective in social scientific treatments of cooperation is derived from the literatures on social dilemmas and collective action. We will discuss these literatures subsequently, and we will show that these perspectives can only partially explain the emergence of cooperation in society.

### **The Social Dilemma of Cooperation**

Social dilemmas are situations that contain a conflict of interests between the private interests of individuals and the broader public interest of society at large. A formal definition of a social dilemma is given by Dawes (1980) who distinguishes two fundamental properties. Social dilemmas are situations in which (i) each individual receives a higher personal outcome for a socially defecting or a non-cooperative choice no matter what other people in society do. However, (ii) all individuals in society are better off if all, or most, people choose to cooperate than if all or most choose not to cooperate. This description of a social dilemma is probably familiar to those readers who are acquainted with the prisoner's dilemma game model (Luce & Raiffa, 1957). But, rather than a dyadic conflict between two prisoners, the problems of interest to us in this book, and to the researchers who have contributed to it, are global and involve many more actors.

#### Examples of social dilemmas

Numerous collective problems in modern society can be recognized as social dilemmas, a point that has been persuasively argued in many articles, chapters, and books on social dilemmas (e.g., Dawes, 1980; Foddy, Schneider, Smithson, & Hogg, 1999; Komorita & Parks, 1994; Liebrand, Messick, & Wilke, 1992; Messick & Brewer, 1983; Schroeder, 1995). For example, in a water shortage, it is convenient for households to use as much water (for personal hygiene, to water the garden) as they can rather than show any restraint at all (and hope that other households will show enough restraint to obviate the need for mandatory restrictions on water usage). However, if too few households in an area reduce their water demands, the water shortage might worsen, leaving everyone in a worse situation than had all exercised some restraint (Tyler, Chapter 4; Van Vugt & Samuelson, 1999). Also, it is personally

attractive for citizens not to pay any income taxes at all, or at least to minimize the amount of taxes that they pay. However, if many people in a society evade taxes (which is currently believed to be the case in some Eastern European countries) there will not be sufficient funding to provide essential goods such as free education, health care, and protection. The net result is therefore that all individuals in society will be worse off than had all paid their full share of income taxes (Elffers, Chapter 10). Similarly, the choice between public and private transport shares the properties of a social dilemma (Van Lange, Van Vugt, & De Cremer, Chapter 3). For most commuters it is personally attractive to travel to work conveniently in their own cars rather than to take the train or bus or other forms of public transit. However, if most people in an area decide to travel to work by car this will create massive problems in terms of traffic congestion and environmental pollution, which will be harmful to all in the community. Again, the net result is that people in a local area are all worse off if most travel by car rather than take a more sustainable transport mode.

### The Present Book

Many other examples of social dilemmas will be discussed in this book, including dilemmas involving overfishing, water irrigation, volunteer service, social movements, the provision of collective health and child care, and dilemmas in work organizations. The breadth and diversity of social dilemmas and forms of cooperation discussed in this book makes it unique both in focus and approach, compared to other review books on social dilemmas (Foddy et al., 1999; Komorita & Parks, 1994; Liebrand, Messick, & Wilke, 1992; Schroeder, 1995; Schulz, Albers & Mueller, 1994). Compared with traditional treatments, this book takes the social dilemma literature a step further by analyzing social dilemmas as-they-occur-in-the-field rather



than by simulating them in lab situations (as earlier books have done). Moreover, an additional distinguishing feature of this book is that it adopts a truly multidisciplinary perspective on these problems, combining the insights from the literatures in psychology, economics, political science, sociology, and environmental science.

### **Classic Perspectives on Social Dilemmas**

Many of the massive problems confronting our modern society are almost impossible to solve, at least if one assumes that individuals act upon their immediate self-interest (this is often referred to as the “rational” choice). Why indeed would rational citizens pay taxes if they realize that their contribution of a few extra dollars per year does not make much of a difference in the maintenance of hospitals and libraries? Why would anyone leave their car at home knowing that the pollution their car use causes is negligible? Inherent to these examples are two characteristics that, according to the social dilemma literature, prevent any “easy” solutions to these problems (Messick & Brewer, 1983; Platt, 1973). One is the social dimension of the problem, that is, the problem is being caused by large numbers of people and therefore requires the cooperation of many for it to be solved. The other is a temporal dimension. Whereas the positive effects of a selfish act are immediately available – one has more money to spend by not paying taxes – the negative effects of a selfish act are dispersed in time -- the national health care system will not immediately cease to exist if one underpays his or her taxes this year. These features make the set of problems that we are considering in this book very difficult to solve. That, at least, is the conclusion of two seminal scientific works that have inspired modern thinking about social dilemmas.

They represent the two classes of problems that are central to this book -- common good problems and common resource problems.

### The Logic of Collective Action

The first work is a book written in 1965 by the economist, Mancur Olson, with the title “The Logic of Collective Action.” In this book, Olson challenges the notion that individual and group interests always coincide and argues instead that individuals will not contribute to achieve a common good for the group if they can avoid it. They would rather not make any personal costs themselves to achieve the good, and prefer them to be carried by other group members. This is the principle of “free-riding” which is of crucial importance in understanding collective action problems. In his work, Olson uses the example of labor unions to illustrate this idea. Employees may be greatly in favor of having a union to represent them in negotiations over wages and working conditions with employers. However, they have no interest individually in paying the costs of union representation and would rather “free ride” and let others pay for this service. As each employee will have the same preference, free-riding will be widespread and union activities could cease to exist, leading to a situation which is worse for all employees. This is the collective action problem, which is functionally equivalent to the social dilemma that was defined earlier. This dilemma can only be overcome, according to Olson, if free-riding is prevented, for example, by making union membership compulsory or providing selective incentives for members versus non-members. In his own words “it is certain that a collective good will not be provided unless there is coercion or some outside inducements” (p.44).

### The Tragedy of the Commons

The second important work to evoke interest in social dilemmas was a Science article by Garrett Hardin (1968) entitled “the Tragedy of the Commons.” This title refers to a parable he used to describe a class of problems for which no technical solution is possible. According to the story, a number of herdsmen share a common pasturage (the commons) where they can graze their cattle. The tragedy starts when an individual herdsman realizes that by increasing his stock by just one animal, he can provide his family with more meat. Because the costs of this action are shared by all herdsmen, the consequences will be futile, so he argues. However, at some point in time, all herdsmen decide to increase the size of their herds, and suddenly the commons is overcrowded leading to overgrazing, erosion of the pasture, and ultimately to the loss of the commons as a resource for the whole community of herdsmen. This end is inevitable according to Hardin (p.1244): “Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.” In his article, he uses this metaphor to describe the collective problems of modern society, in particular with regard to overpopulation and environmental pollution. According to Hardin, there is no other option for society than to solve these problems “through coercion, mutually agreed upon.” In practice, this solution implies that authorities must be established and rules must be enforced to limit people’s freedom in the commons.

## **Accounting for the Emergence of Cooperation in Society**

Olson's and Hardin's analyses provide powerful insights into the dynamics underlying many of the collective issues and challenges that modern society is facing, including resource depletion, overpopulation, and tax evasion. They have inspired an enormous research literature on social dilemmas/collective action problems in all the social science disciplines, including economics, political science, sociology, and psychology. The assumption of a conflict between the narrow private interests of citizens and the broader public interest makes a lot of intuitive sense. But does it tell the whole story? The stories that are told present a rather gloomy picture of humanity and of people's ability to solve collective problems. It seems that people are basically self-centered and do not voluntarily help out their social group or community unless they are forced to through coercion and punishment. This pessimistic view goes at least as far back as the works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who considered a totalitarian state the only viable solution to the problems of society (Hobbes, 1651/1939).

But, how can we reconcile this Hobbesian perspective on cooperation with the examples provided earlier in the introduction, from which it appears that, in fact, many people in our society today do offer help to others and to society by doing volunteer work, by saving water, by using sustainable forms of transport, and by supporting health care programs for the poor? Moreover, how can we reconcile them with the results of numerous experimental studies revealing that individuals can and do cooperate to save resources and to create public goods (for overviews, see Foddy et al., 1999; Komorita & Parks, 1994; Liebrand, Messick, & Wilke, 1992)? The

points of view that we put forward in this book involve a fundamental shift in thinking about the motives underlying cooperation. Why people cooperate for the benefit of the collective is not simply determined by a calculation between the immediate costs and benefits of cooperation. It is also influenced by a variety of different norms and values that people bring into these dilemma situations.

### Classification of Forms of Cooperation

To understand what these considerations are, however, we should first try to make a distinction between different forms of cooperation that people can engage in for the benefit of society. They can be categorized in terms of the nature of the problem involved as well as the level of the activity needed to solve it. A comparison of the two stories above shows, first, that cooperation can be directed either towards the preservation of scarce resources (as in the common resource problems, as exemplified by Hardin's tragedy of the commons), or to the creation of public goods (as in the common good problems, as exemplified by Olson's characterization of union membership). These two classes of problems require different kinds of behavior from citizens if the problems are to be solved. What is required from people to solve the problems of scarce common resources is restraint. In solving common good problems, however, what is required of people is that they take action in the form of donating their money or their time to establish a collective good. The difference between these classes of problems has been well-documented in the social dilemma literature (Messick & Brewer, 1983; Komorita & Parks, 1994), but it is not entirely clear what the psychological differences are between the two behaviors and how that influences the potential for solutions.

A second distinction that should be made is between cooperation that results from individual efforts of citizens or from the collective efforts of groups of citizens. For example, in a water shortage people can decide to voluntarily restrain their use or they can support and empower authorities to deal with the resource crisis. Similarly, in a common good crisis, people can decide to help out by making a voluntary contribution (a financial donation) or they can help set up authority structures to enforce contributions from people (in the form of tax regulations). These forms of restraint and of action can be regarded as distinct forms of cooperation, an individual and a collective one. Moreover, individual efforts can at times occur in collective contexts, as when organizations are formed to provide volunteer services; in such cases, the actions of individual volunteers constitute individual efforts, but the aggregated efforts of the volunteer service organization represents a collective effort. This distinction between individual and collective effort parallels the differentiation made in the psychological literature between individual versus structural solutions (Messick & Brewer, 1983), the latter of which may be more effective but also more difficult to implement.

These different categories of cooperation can be depicted in a 2x2 matrix, defined by the cross-classification of problems of restraint versus action and individual versus collective efforts, as illustrated in Table 1. This classification provides the logic behind the division of labor among the chapters in this book, whereby we will move from problems with an emphasis on individual restraint (e.g., use of sustainable transport) and collective restraint (e.g., design of water regulating authorities) to matters of individual action (e.g., volunteer work) and collective action (e.g., maintenance of the welfare state).

Table 1. Classification of Forms of Cooperation

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	Type of activity	
	Restraint	Action
Individual	individual restraint	individual action
Level of activity		
Collective	collective restraint	collective action

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**Motives for Cooperating: The Self, the Group and Society**

Why would people make any voluntary efforts to save resources or to create common goods for the good of others in their community or for society at large? Or, why would people support and cooperate with authorities in managing these problems? If we were to follow the scenarios presented by Hardin and Olson, we would conclude that strategies to promote voluntary cooperation are doomed to fail, because nobody is really interested in pursuing a collective cause at the cost of their personal welfare. Solutions therefore require coordinated, collective actions from people and they should consist of laws and rules to enforce cooperation. There are several problems with this proposition as will be outlined below, and as will be illustrated in detail in the chapters to follow.

### Individual Cooperation in Modern Society

There is a considerable amount of empirical research on individual cooperation -- conducted in the laboratory as well as in the field -- which clearly shows that the pursuit of individual self-interest is importantly constrained by concerns about the welfare of others and about the group as a whole (for an overview, see Van Lange, Van Vugt, & De Cremer, Chapter 3). These concerns are believed to originate from three different sources: the self, the group, and the society to which people belong.

First, there are important individual differences in the extent to which people assign weight to their self-interest versus the collective interest. For example, a majority of people cooperate on a voluntarily basis in dilemma situations because they are equally concerned about the outcomes for others as they are about themselves. Individual to individual variation in this concern is known as social value orientation (Messick & McClintock, 1968), and this psychological construct has been found to influence decisions in common resource as well as common good dilemmas .

In terms of group characteristics, it appears that people are much more willing to cooperate when they consider themselves part of a group rather than when they see themselves as a distinct individuals. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), in highly cohesive groups people define their self-concept primarily at a collective level rather than at a personal level. This suggests that solutions to collective problems in society might be found in stressing the common fate or identity between individual group members (Brewer & Kramer, 1986).



Finally, self-interest appears to be constrained by prevailing norms in society about fairness and justice (McClintock & McNeel, 1966). Norms of fairness in many modern societies prescribe that resources and goods ought to be allocated on the basis of equality or need rather than on the basis of personal merit and wealth. Thus, people can be expected to cooperate with their community when they feel that their contributions aid others who are in need of help.

### Relation to Chapters

Motives related to the self, the group and society seem to influence many of the voluntary cooperation activities discussed in this book. For example, individual value differences determine whether people frame the decision to travel by car versus public transport as an accessibility problem or as an environmental problem (Van Lange, Van Vugt & De Cremer; Chapter 3). People with a prosocial value orientation see a transport dilemma primarily as an environmental issue, and they are more willing to reduce car-use than people with individualistic or competitive orientations. Moreover, people appear to engage in volunteer work for a number of different personal and social motives (Snyder & Omoto; Chapter 7), some of which appear to be more self-centered (personal development, esteem-enhancement), and others more other-oriented in nature (humanitarian values, community concern). Group-based motives also play a key role in explaining individual actions to help the collective. In one of the chapters of this book, evidence is reported about a link between group identification and political protest (Klandermans; Chapter 9). People who identify strongly with their peer group (i.e., the elderly, farmers, ethnic groups in South-Africa) are more prepared to take political action on behalf of their ethnic group than those who do not identify strongly. Finally, as an example of the importance of

societal values, a Swedish survey has revealed that people are more willing to contribute money to sustain a national health care system if it is provided on an equal basis to all members in society regardless of income or need (Eek, Biel, & Garling; Chapter 11).

### Collective Expressions of Cooperation in Modern Society

What about the second claim made by Hardin and Olson that, because voluntary helping is unlikely to occur on a large scale, common resources and goods can only be maintained through a system of coercion and exclusion? An implication of this approach is that, in dealing with problems of scarcity, society must have massive punitive systems in place, punitive systems that restrict freedom in the commons and that punish defectors. Intuitively, this seems to be a fruitful method to solve collective problems, but is it workable and, more importantly, is it desirable? Again, this claim is based on the erroneous idea that people are driven only by narrow self-interest, and will not do good for society unless they are forced to. But, do people want a system of coercion imposed upon them and their society? And, are they uncooperative without such a system?

Contrary to this totalitarian view, in designing systems to promote collective action and restraint, people have a general dislike for adopting authorities that remove people's decisional freedom. Autocratic systems are considered undesirable by most people, even in the face of a crisis situation (Orbell & Wilson, 1978; Rutte & Wilke, 1985; Van Vugt & De Cremer, 1999). Not only are such systems very costly and extremely difficult to maintain (after all, who will guard the guards?), people also resist them because they negatively affect people's evaluations of the society to which

they belong, their social group, and, ultimately, themselves. As suggested by the group-value model (Tyler, Chapter 4; Tyler & Lind, 1992), people support and cooperate with authorities not just to the extent that they provide favorable outcomes, but also to the extent that they give citizens a fair and respectful treatment. A coercive system is inadequate in achieving these goals, because it conveys to citizens that they are basically untrustworthy and dishonest, and therefore cannot make their own decisions. Psychologically, there may be something wrong, or at least self-defeating, with coercion because it threatens people's self-determination and it creates an atmosphere of distrust among citizens. Accordingly, it inhibits people's self-respect, and the pride they take in their group membership.

These concerns are extremely important for citizens in modern democratic societies who wish to be free and respected, and be able to influence the political process (Edney, 1980). Following social identity principles, it seems that these feelings are particularly strong when people feel attached to their community and to society. People with strong group affiliations appear to be extremely concerned about the status of their group and about their own position within the group (Tyler & Lind, 1992). In this regard, they are particularly sensitive to treatment by authorities as it influences their impressions about their personal status as well as the status of the group as a whole (vis-à-vis other groups in society).

Thus, in the design of institutions to promote collective restraint and collective action in society, it is important to recognize that people can and do look at broader issues than just their narrow self-interest. Even though punitive systems might be necessary to manage common resources and goods, people seem to want to have a "voice" in

designing these structures. Moreover, they want authorities to respect their rights and freedom as well as the rights of the groups to which they feel associated with. Thus they are wary of any external authority (Ostrom, 1990). These are the conditions under which people in modern society will cooperate with authorities in managing crisis situations (Edney, 1980).

This presents an altogether different picture on collective cooperation than the one painted by Hardin. Rather than through the “mutual coercion mutually agreed upon” solution of Hardin, modern democratic society enforces cooperation through mutually agreed upon collaboration, or so it seems to us and to researchers who have examined these issues.

#### Relation to Chapters

The importance of this alternative view is clearly illustrated in the chapters in this book devoted to collective action and to collective restraint. First, Tyler’s survey findings suggest that, during a Californian water shortage, citizens’ willingness to empower and comply with water authorities depended upon the fairness of the authorities’ procedures (Chapter 4). Hatcher, Thebaud, & Jaffry present evidence that the compliance of fishermen with quota restrictions is in part shaped by their feelings of involvement in fishery policies (Chapter 5). Finally, in a comprehensive analysis of the literature on irrigation systems, Schlager shows how important it is for communities to create their own authorities and design their own rules for resource management (Chapter 6).

The chapters on collective action present similar evidence and lead to similar conclusions. For example, an analysis of tax-payers' motivations suggests that tax evasion is more likely to occur when people feel treated unfairly by the government ("others are fiscally better off"; Elffers, Chapter 11). Further on, Rothstein argues that people's support for the universal welfare state -- as a solution to a common good dilemma in society -- can be understood in terms of the fact that a welfare state treats all people equally, and, thus increases the solidarity between the members of society (Chapter 12).

### **A Relational Perspective on Cooperation**

Let us now try to integrate the various perspectives on cooperation that we have introduced, and try to present a more comprehensive picture of people responding to the threats and dilemmas of modern society. To do so might help to pave the way for a different set of solutions to collective problems than the ones suggested by earlier theorizing and research. First, there is the traditional instrumental perspective on cooperation, arguing that people will not voluntarily reduce their car use, restrict water demands, or donate to common goods unless they are forced to, or unless it is made personally attractive to cooperate. Therefore, if society considers these issues important, it should restrict the decisional freedom of its citizens or create a system of rewards for cooperation and punishments for non-cooperation. We think that this perspective is simply too narrow to be a productive source of solutions to the challenges facing contemporary society. As we have illustrated, and as the research to be discussed in the forthcoming chapters of this volume suggests, people in modern democratic societies do not want coercion and punishment instilled upon them.

Moreover, we have pointed to numerous demonstrations of the fact that, in the absence of any direct threats or personal gains, cooperation occurs systematically at all levels of such societies. To understand why people cooperate, sometimes at great personal costs in terms of time and finances, we must look at other motives beyond direct self-interest. As we have suggested, many of these motives are embedded in people's self-evaluations and in the evaluations of the social groups to which they belong.

### Cooperation and the Need to Belong

One important motive that runs through the different research programs presented in this book is a desire to be attached to, or connected with, other people. In every society, people are concerned about how they are tied to other members in their community. Positive social connections make it more likely that people will do something for the collective welfare, whereas negative social connections will make it more likely that people act for their personal welfare. These relational needs are not necessarily altruistic. Indeed, they may involve a mixture of altruistic and selfish concerns. For example, people may save water during a shortage, because they care a lot about their community, because they feel respected members of their community, or because helping makes people feel good about themselves (e.g., Snyder, 1993; Snyder & Omoto, Chapter 7). People may spend their free time helping the elderly for ideological reasons, or because it looks good on their résumé, or because it enhances their self-esteem. It is widely documented that social and group affiliations strongly affect people's self-evaluations and, hence, their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). From this relational perspective it therefore seems quite "rational" for

people to contribute to the welfare of the community and society they feel associated with it.

### **Cooperation in Modern Society: Solving the Puzzle**

Does this relational perspective on cooperation, and its emphasis on the benefits accruing to individuals from their involvement in doing good for others, bring us any closer to solving the common resource and common good dilemmas of modern society? These are very complex problems indeed, and it is therefore impossible to come up with any quick and easy solutions. This has been well-noted by Edney (1980) in his influential article in the American Psychologist about commons problems: “If technological solutions are often unworkable because of their inherent insufficiencies, or because consumers do not like to use them, if changes in morality are difficult to create, if democratic administrative measures are unreliable, and if egalitarian principles and free choice are to be preserved, how are scarce resources to be saved over extended periods?” (p. 133).

### Aims of Book

We do not claim that this book will deliver a definite answer to this question. It seems unlikely that the problems that water, food and energy shortages, and the pollution of our environment bring to our society, will easily disappear in time. Similarly, with an increasingly aged population there is going to be an intense pressure on the budgets of states and communities with regard to the provision of public services, such as health care and elderly care. If anything, this book hopes to show, firstly, that these various problems can be brought back to the same fundamental conflict between the private

interests of citizens and the broader public interest – the conflict that can be referred to as the social dilemma.

At the same time, however, the subsequent chapters will reveal that this “dilemma” is not necessarily experienced as a dilemma by all people. Indeed, many people in modern society do cooperate for the welfare of society by making voluntary efforts, for many other reasons beyond their immediate self-interest (concerns about the community, personal growth, self-esteem), and their efforts should not go unnoticed or unrecognized, either in understanding where solutions to society’s problems will come from, or in constructing theories about human’s motivations for action.

Granted, authority structures will sometimes be needed to regulate citizens’ behaviors in the commons situation, as several of the chapters in this volume on collective action and restraint will make clear. However, in modern democratic society, these forms of regulation can only operate effectively if they are endorsed and willingly accepted by the public. The recognition of this state of affairs will require a fundamental shift in thinking about the role of authorities. This shift in thinking represents the third objective of this book.

Rather than through coercion and punishment, authorities must achieve their goals through improving relations with the public, so that citizens feel “moved” or “inspired” to cooperate, rather than “forced” or “obligated” to comply, for the collective good. The subsequent chapters will show ways in which these ends can be achieved, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in the selection of authority structures and the design of policies, and the importance of the fairness and



neutrality of these procedures. These contributions will show the interconnection that exists between the different levels of actors involved in solving collective problems: the macro-level, the functioning of authorities; the meso-level, the functioning of communities, and the micro-level, the functioning of the individual self. The interplay between these levels needs to be considered, because changes at each of these levels will have important consequences for the others. For example, dissatisfaction with authorities will have a negative effect on how people evaluate the community they are living in, and, accordingly, on what they would like to do for their community.

This requires a multidisciplinary approach to the study of cooperation with inputs from specialists on authorities and institutions (political scientists), communities (sociologists), and on the self (psychologists, micro economists). To stimulate a scientific discussion between these disciplines can be regarded as the fourth, and perhaps most fundamental, aim of this book.

### **Organization of Book and Overview of Chapters**

The chapters in this book are organized following the taxonomy of cooperative activities that we presented earlier (in Table 1). They are distinguished according to the nature of the problem (restraint-action), and the level of activity involved (individual-collective). After the second introductory chapter of Part 1 (i.e., Chapter 2), which provides a systematic comparison between the different research literatures on cooperation, we will introduce in Part 2 four chapters on common resource

dilemmas, or, problems involving restraint (i.e., Chapters 3 to 6). Part 3 consists of six chapters with a focus on common goods dilemmas, problems involving action (i.e., Chapters 7 to 12).

Each of the chapters in Parts 2 and 3 is devoted to a particular collective problem in modern society, and discusses the results of a research program conducted in that domain. In the first chapter of Part 2 (Chapter 3), the emphasis will be on determinants of personal restraint to save environmental resources (taking environmentally desirable transport). In Chapters 4 to 6, the emphasis will shift towards collective restraint when we start to look at the design of authority structures to manage common resource pools (overfishing, water irrigation). Part 3 will be focused on the analysis of common good problems in society, or, problems, requiring individual or collective actions from citizens. The central theme in Chapters 7 and 8 is on individual actions (volunteer work, organizational citizenship behavior), whereas the remainder of the chapters focuses on various forms of collective action (support for the welfare state, national health care, tax paying).

The final part of the book comprises one concluding chapter, which provides a commentary on the preceding chapters and the field in general.

The structure of the book is shown in the diagram below (Table 2).

Table 2. Overview of Chapter Contents

Part 1	Part 2		Part 3	Part 4	
Introduction	Common Resources		Common Goods	Commentary	
	Individual restraint	Collective restraint	Individual action	Collective action	
Chp1-2	Chp3	Chp 4-6	Chp 7-8	Chp 9-12	Chp 13
Cooperation:	-transport	-water shortage	-volunteering	- political action	Conclusion
State-of-the-art		-irrigation	- organization	-tax evasion	
		-overfishing	citizenship	-social services	
				-welfare state	

Below, we provide a brief synopsis of each of the chapters, as well as the issues that are raised in them.

Part 1: Introduction

The next chapter in this Introductory Part addresses some methodological considerations in social science research into cooperation. In it, Anders Biel examines the similarities and differences between different research paradigms that have been used to study social dilemmas in society. Economists and social-psychologists tend to study these problems by simulating them under highly controlled conditions in the laboratory with small groups of people (usually students).

To what extent are the results from these experiments generalizable to the massive problems society is confronted with? What can we learn from these studies about cooperation? Political scientists' work stems from a different research tradition. Their research efforts tend to be focused on collecting case materials of local resource systems (irrigation, forestry, ground water basin), usually in closely knit rural communities in developing countries. But, can the knowledge from these (often vivid) illustrations of small scale resource systems be used to understand the massive problems of energy conservation and pollution in urbanized and heterogeneous societies like ours? Biel shows that both the experimental and field approach make certain assumptions about human decision-making that are difficult to meet in these large-scale problems.

## Part 2: Individual and collective restraint in common resources

Chapter 3, the first of Part 2 of this book, presents an overview of a research program on transport decisions (as a form of individual restraint). The authors of this chapter -- Paul Van Lange, Mark Van Vugt and David De Cremer -- argue that the decision to take the car rather than other more environmentally desirable forms of transport (public transport, carpool) meets the formal definition of a social dilemma. They subsequently use a social dilemma approach, which is based on experimental and field research, to analyze the properties of the decision situation and to propose a set of solutions to promote sustainable transport. Four strategies are discussed by the authors to tackle car use, (i) promoting awareness of the problems of excessive car use, (ii) softening the dilemma by providing rewards or punishments (e.g., road pricing), (iii) eliminating the dilemma (e.g., installing parking prohibitions), (d) scale reduction. This latter approach consists of a program of activities to empower local

authorities to manage transport problems in their area. This solution is considered to be the most effective by the authors, because it reduces (psychologically) the size of the transport crisis and, accordingly, makes it a more manageable problem.

In Chapter 4, Tom Tyler addresses two important issues concerning collective restraint: (i) when do citizens empower authorities to regulate dilemmas?; and (ii) when do citizens comply with the authorities' regulations? The key to these very important questions can be found, according to Tyler, in the way citizens evaluate their treatment by authorities. If people believe they are treated fairly and respectfully by authorities they are more likely to cooperate. Evidence is provided from two surveys, including one about Californian citizens' responses to regulatory water authorities in a shortage. But why do citizens care about procedural fairness? According to Tyler, this is so because authorities, as representatives of a community, convey information via their procedures about the status of the community (pride) and people's standing within the community (respect). In his contribution Tyler indeed shows that procedural fairness by authorities increases feelings of respect and pride among citizens, and that these feelings enhance cooperation in a resource crisis. This suggests quite a different role for authorities in social dilemmas than merely a coercive role. Through their procedures, authorities can actively shape people's identity and commitment to their community.

Chapter 5 addresses the problem of overfishing by UK fishermen. In their contribution, Aaron Hatcher, Olivier Thebaud, and Shabar Jaffry present an economic perspective on the social dilemma of overfishing, and discuss various solutions. Because the introduction of property rights is not viable in managing fish capacities,

authorities have to rely on regulatory arrangements such as imposing restrictions in the number of vessels, the fishing time, or fish quota. Compliance with these rules is vital because the system is difficult to monitor and it is financially very attractive for fishermen to violate these restrictions. Rather than through deterrence per se, the authors claim that a normative change is also needed to make fishermen comply. They present a model which includes, in addition to expected costs and benefits of violating, information about social norms, morality, and the perceived legitimacy of the regulatory system. This model was tested in a study among fishermen in the UK. A first important observation is that only a minority of fishermen cooperated with the system by not exceeding quota restrictions. Secondly, in addition to concerns about detection and punishment, non-violators differed from violators in that they felt they were more involved in the fishery management and expected other fishers to comply as well. This analysis clearly shows the importance of social-psychological factors in shaping collective and personal restraint to overcome the fishery dilemma.

In Chapter 6, the political scientist Edella Schlager presents an overview of the literature on common pool resources drawing upon research by Elinor Ostrom and colleagues. Schlager argues that the management of resources, such as fisheries, forests, groundwater basins, and irrigation systems pose pervasive social dilemmas as it is impossible to exclude people from using them. In contrast, however, to Hardin's assumption that such dilemmas must be extricated by an external governmental authority, she proposes that common pool users often organize themselves to sustain these resources. After reviewing the available literature on different resource systems, her conclusion is that "institutional arrangements designed by resource users are often

times carefully crafted to the specific situation, and in many instances they outperform centralized government management.”

### Part 3: Individual and collective action in common goods

Chapter 7, the first of Part 3, looks into the motivations to do volunteer work as an example of how individual actions might contribute to a better society. Mark Snyder and Allen Omoto, two social/personality psychologists, offer an insight into their program of basic and applied research to examine what are the dominant motives of people to engage in volunteer services to help out people with HIV/AIDS. Their analysis is guided by what they call a “functional” approach which essentially proposes that volunteering (and other forms of pro-social action) can be understood better if we look at the various psychological motivations (or functions) that it serves. The results of their research suggest five different functions which can be served by volunteering, (i) demonstration of one’s values (a humanitarian obligation to help), (ii) community concern (to act for the benefit of one’s own community or other communities in need of help), (iii) seeking knowledge (understanding about AIDS and how people cope), (iv) personal development (helping provides a challenge), and (v) self-esteem (feel better about oneself by volunteering). These motivations influence critical events in the “life history” of a volunteer, including the initial decision to seek out opportunities to be of service, the commitment to a course of helping as a volunteer, and the sustaining of these pro-social actions over an extended period of time. The researchers’ recipe for motivating various forms of individual and collective action in society is a straight-forward extrapolation from the findings of their research “identify the motivations that activism can service, engage these functions, and stir people to action”.

In Chapter 8, the emphasis shifts towards individual cooperation in the work place. The question here is: How can workers be motivated to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBS) to promote a better work environment? The key to answering this question, according to organizational justice theorists Russell Cropanzoni and Zinta Byrne, lies in the norms of justice that are active within the organization. They make a distinction between distributive justice (e.g., the fairness of the workers' pay), procedural justice (the fairness of the rule determining the pay), and interactional justice (the quality of the interaction between worker and manager). The latter two forms of justice, according to the authors, are particularly important in shaping the quality of relationships within any organization. Procedural and interactional justice influence workers' commitments to the organization, and increase their trust in and cooperation with the organization.

Chapter 9 addresses the collective action problem of participating in social movements. In this contribution, Bert Klandermans argues that a simple cost-reward approach is insufficient to explain social protest, and that researchers should take into account three core psychological processes that set in motion collective protest: feeling of injustice, efficacy, and identity. The latter factor is particularly important as it determines the difference between an individual action and an action on behalf of the group the person is affiliated with. Klandermans presents the results from survey studies on political protest among members of three different disadvantaged groups in society: (i) the elderly and (ii) farmers (in the Netherlands), and (iii) ethnic groups (in South-Africa). Each of these studies reveals that identification with a particular group (both emotionally and cognitively) is a prerequisite for political action on



behalf of that group – defined, for example, by membership of political organizations -- regardless of the personal costs involved.

The remaining three chapters of Section 3 address the vital question for modern society how to promote support and cooperation with political authorities in providing common goods for all citizens. In Chapter 10, Henk Elffers, a law psychologist, investigates the tax system in Western society. In spite of the fact that tax officers do not audit tax returns too often, and detection of fraud is rare, a considerable number of people seem to comply to a considerable degree with the tax system and pay the appropriate level of tax. In order to understand why this happens, Elffers points to the influence of personality factors and factors associated with the system (the fairness of the system, and the ease of spotting fraud) that promote tax compliance. His main conclusion is that an efficient tax system is not just based on coercion, but on communicating fairness and public involvement as well.

In Chapter 11, written by the social psychologists Daniel Eek, Anders Biel , and Tommy Garling, the focus is on the provision of national health care and child care. After showing that these problems share the elements of a public goods dilemma they conclude that these require collective actions from the government rather than individual actions in order to be solved. Subsequently, they present survey and experimental evidence from which it appears that people are more willing to support these welfare systems if they are provided on an equal basis to all citizens, rather than on the basis of need or personal wealth (the rich get more).

The final contribution of this section comes from Bo Rothstein, a political scientist from Sweden who provides a comprehensive analysis of the “universal welfare state” as a solution to many common good problems in society. Why are people in countries operating this system so supportive of a welfare state that imposes such high tax levels on citizens to provide goods, like a free health care, education, and employment policies? Rothstein argues that this is, because it is a non-selective system in which each citizen is entitled to receive benefits. Other than most selective or non-universal welfare systems, the welfare state promotes solidarity between citizens at all levels of society and it avoids stigmatization and prejudice of disadvantaged groups. Moreover, because services are accessible to all citizens there is less need to build a costly monitoring system to avoid cheating.

#### Part 4: Commentary

Finally, in the last chapter of this book (Chapter 13), David Messick, a social-psychologist, comments upon the previous chapters, linking theory and practice in understanding cooperation in modern society, and providing directions for research and policy. Drawing upon personal observations of natural dilemmas (e.g., traffic situations) and his own research experience, he argues that the key to solving dilemmas lies in understanding the formal and informal rules that guide people’s actions.

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