



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Sara Bottiroli,
Giustino Fortunato University, Italy

*CORRESPONDENCE
Sara Palermo
✉ sara.palermo@unito.it

RECEIVED 22 November 2023
ACCEPTED 12 December 2023
PUBLISHED 04 January 2024

CITATION
Morese R, Elliott E and Palermo S (2024)
Editorial: The charitable brain: the
neuroscience of philanthropy and giving.
Front. Psychol. 14:1342963.
doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1342963

COPYRIGHT
© 2024 Morese, Elliott and Palermo. This is an
open-access article distributed under the terms
of the [Creative Commons Attribution License
\(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction
in other forums is permitted, provided the
original author(s) and the copyright owner(s)
are credited and that the original publication in
this journal is cited, in accordance with
accepted academic practice. No use,
distribution or reproduction is permitted which
does not comply with these terms.

Editorial: The charitable brain: the neuroscience of philanthropy and giving

Rosalba Morese¹, Elizabeth Elliott² and Sara Palermo^{3,4*}

¹Faculty of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society, USI Università della Svizzera Italiana, Lugano, Switzerland, ²Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom, ³Department of Psychology, University of Turin, Turin, Italy, ⁴Neuroradiology Unit, Diagnostic and Technology Department, Fondazione Istituto di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico (IRCCS) Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta, Milan, Italy

KEYWORDS

psychology of giving, giving behavior, prosociality, altruism, empathy, social cognition, social dynamics, metacognition

Editorial on the Research Topic

The charitable brain: the neuroscience of philanthropy and giving

The “social brain” refers to the idea that the human brain has evolved to be particularly adapted for social interactions and relationships. It encompasses various cognitive and neural mechanisms that enable humans to understand, navigate, and thrive in social environments (Morese and Palermo, 2022). Key components of the social brain include theory of mind (the ability to understand and infer the mental states of others), empathy (the ability to understand and share the feelings of others), and social cognition (the capacity to process and interpret social information) (Morese et al., 2018; Morese and Palermo, 2022). The social brain has evolved because humans are inherently social animals, and the ability to cooperate and collaborate with others has been a significant evolutionary advantage.

Altruism can be seen as an expression of the social brain, as it relies on an individual's capacity for empathy, compassion, and the ability to recognize the needs of others. Altruistic behaviors are often driven by a desire to promote the wellbeing of the broader community. Philanthropy is an expression of altruism in a more organized and often structured manner. It can encompass a wide range of activities, from donating to non-profit organizations to founding one's charitable foundations.

The Research Topic provides a first overview of the knowledge surrounding the multiple ways in which daily life is interwoven with prosocial behaviors. The Research Topic comprises 4 contributions represented by 3 original research articles and 1 opinion paper. To summarize, the editorial contributions published in the Research Topic represent an important first step to open a multidisciplinary discussion on a topic that nowadays has increasingly greater implications for the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

The social brain is particularly relevant during adolescence, as the brain continues to develop, and individuals become more attuned to social and interpersonal dynamics (Sipes et al.). The social brain, prosociality, and compassion are interconnected in the context of adolescent development. The ongoing maturation of the brain, moral development, and peer interactions all contribute to adolescents' increasing capacity for and engagement in prosocial and compassionate behaviors, as they become more attuned to the needs and emotions of others. In innovative research, the Authors investigate a recent model: the domain-general development network (Do-GooD) highlighted in the context of social

cognition and neurophysiological aspects related to compassion and prosocial behavior (Sipes et al.). This novel study provides important insight into the neurodevelopmental basis of prosocial cognition during the formative stage of adolescence.

In an opinion paper, conscious capitalism is read and interpreted through the lens of neuroscience (Palermo). The connection between the social brain and conscious capitalism lies in the idea that our inherent social nature, empathy, and concern for the wellbeing of others can influence the way businesses and organizations are structured and how they operate. Conscious capitalism recognizes that businesses can benefit from aligning their values and actions with the social consciousness and ethical values that the social brain is thought to underpin. In this sense, conscious capitalism can be seen as an approach that acknowledges and harnesses elements of the social brain to create businesses with a greater societal impact and a sense of purpose beyond profit (Palermo). Altruistic behavior increases happiness in individuals and organizations. In a final original article, the Authors investigated this phenomenon across cultures, distinguishing between different kind of cultures based on cultural norms, such as individualistic and collectivist (Weiss-Sidi and Riemer). They first measured dispositions based on different cultural aspects. Then they investigated the important role of cultural orientation on the impact of the use of monetary units related to self and other people. Finally, they study the altruism-happiness association with altruistic behavior in the comparison process of individualistic and collectivist cultures in which interdependence and altruistic behaviors are inherent (Weiss-Sidi and Riemer). The authors propose that individualistic cultures are associated with a more “impure” or self-focussed form of altruism in contrast to a “pure” other-focussed altruism amongst collectivists.

Linked to these suggestions is research on “corporate philanthropy–corporate financial performance” (Chen and Bu). Although numerous studies have been conducted on “the relationship between corporate philanthropy and corporate financial performance (CFP), theoretical analysis focusing on the legitimacy-based mechanism and the moderating role of key executives’ psychological characteristics is scarce” (Chen and Bu, p. 1). “Hometown attachment is a special form of place attachment in environmental psychology, people’s psychological attachment to their hometown and the state of maintaining an intimate emotional connection with it” (Chen and Bu, p. 1). The study proposed by

Chen and Bu draws the Chinese cultural origin in the setting of legitimacy of donations.

In summary, social brain provides cognitive and emotional foundation for human social interactions, including the capacity for empathy and altruism. Altruism is the selfless, individual-level expression of social cooperation and compassion, while philanthropy represents a more organized and often institutionalized form of altruism on a larger scale. These concepts are interconnected through the fundamental human drive to support and benefit others, and they all play a role in shaping our social and cooperative behavior (Auriemma et al., 2020; Morese et al., 2020; Morese and Longobardi, 2022).

Author contributions

SP: Writing—original draft. RM: Writing—review & editing. EE: Writing—review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The author(s) declared that they were an editorial board member of Frontiers, at the time of submission. This had no impact on the peer review process and the final decision.

Publisher’s note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- Auriemma, V., Iorio, G., Roberti, G., and Morese, R. (2020). Cyberbullying and empathy in the age of hyperconnection: an interdisciplinary approach. *Front. Sociol.* 5, 551881. doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2020.551881
- Morese, R., and Longobardi, C. (2022). The impact of physical distancing in the pandemic situation: considering the role of loneliness and social brain. *Front. Psychol.* 13, 861329. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.861329
- Morese, R., and Palermo, S. (2022). Feelings of loneliness and isolation: social brain and social cognition in the elderly and Alzheimer’s disease. *Front. Aging Neurosci.* 14, 896218. doi: 10.3389/fnagi.2022.896218
- Morese, R., Palermo, S., Torello, C., and Sechi, F. (2020). “Social withdrawal and mental health: an interdisciplinary approach,” in *Social Isolation—an interdisciplinary view* (IntechOpen) 3–10. doi: 10.5772/intechopen.90735
- Morese, R., Stanziano, M., and Palermo, S. (2018). Commentary: Metacognition and perspective-taking in alzheimer’s disease: a mini-review. *Front. Psychol.* 9, 2010. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02010