The Language of Altruism in Late Nineteenth-Century America

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Introduction

This study explores the language of altruism in the context of reformist social thought and literature in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. From its inception, the neologism altruism was understood as a scientific concept, due to its coinage in Auguste Comte's positivism and the term's dissemination in the English language via contemporary evolutionary theory, primarily within a narrative of evolutionary progress promoted by Herbert Spencer. Next to the term's pervasiveness in contemporary scientific discourses and scholarly disciplines, among them sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, and evolutionary studies, altruism also figured prominently in contemporary debates about social reform, for example in religious reform movements, in feminist activism, and in socialist and anarchist thought. Finally, the language of altruism played a central role for late nineteenth-century literature, particularly for various forms of reformist fiction.

The central observation of my study is that the concept of altruism operates within a transdisciplinary field, which accounts for the remarkable semantic flexibility of the term at the end of the century that persists until today: The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines altruism broadly as "[d]isinterested or selfless concern for the well-being of others, especially as a principle of action" and opposes it to selfishness and egoism. Moreover, the dictionary entry associates the term not only with the realms of ethics and psychology, but also with zoological and biological discourses, genetic science, and evolutionary theory. The language of altruism thus encompasses an impressive number of different discourses and disciplines. My study's central argument is that altruism's position in a transdisciplinary field, and the semantic flexibility that results from this position, enables the concept to *reformulate* several different discourses.[1] This means that altruism translates other existing terms and concepts concerned with moral imaginations of the human good into a scientific context and rhetoric, for instance the Christian notion of charity, the sentimentalist concept of sympathy, and the socioeconomic model of philanthropy. It also means that altruism is capable of bridging the gap between a number of seemingly oppositional or incommensurable discourses, most prominently between science and religion. Finally, altruism's capacity for reformulation makes the concept prone for the appropriation of diverging political interests and practices, and thus has wider consequences for late nineteenth-century reformist culture and literature.

[1] The idea of reformulation plays a significant structural role for my analyses. It draws on Thomas Kuhn's model of paradigm shifts and Begriffsgeschichte and is theorized in Chapter 1.

"[A]ltruism – it is an ugly-sounding word, but seems to be the only one available." This statement stems from *Through Nature to God* (1899), a book dedicated to reconciling evolutionary theory with the teachings of the Bible, written by the American philosopher and historian John Fiske. Fiske's quote reveals a number of things about the role of the concept of altruism at the turn of the twentieth century. It voices a complaint on aesthetic grounds: Evidently, Fiske is dissatisfied with the sound of the word, which implies that in his period, altruism was still a novel term, a word that did not yet fit comfortably into his and his readers' lexicon. However, the fact that altruism is an unseemly word, fabricated and unappealing, does not prevent Fiske from ascribing to it a certain functionality and productiveness: Albeit hesitantly, he admits that the "ugly-sounding" word is capable of answering to a problem or a need; it "seems to be the only one available." But available to do what? In Fiske's *Through Nature to God*, the concept of altruism is used to bridge the divide between science and religion. In the following study, I concentrate on this and other claims made for altruism's capacity to *reformulate* a broad variety of social and political positions and reformist interests in the late nineteenth century.

Neologisms are invented, and neologisms are successful, when there is a need for them. And it seems there was a particular need for the concept of altruism in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The period is generally seen as one of rapid social and political transformation, a process that can be summarized with keywords like "urbanization," "industrialization," and "Reconstruction," with the growing significance of the social sciences and the overarching scientific paradigm of Darwinism; the late nineteenth century is furthermore characterized by vast industrial and technological innovation, by expansionism and immigration. Many of these transformations were idealistically and optimistically envisioned in terms of progress – progress that permeated virtually all aspects of human experience.[2] At the same time, however, the period also witnessed an unprecedented level of social inequality and poverty. The ever-growing gap between rich and poor, legitimized by unadulterated *laissez-faire* capitalism, by the widely accepted imperative of competition, and by Social Darwinism, is illustrated by the emergence of the figure of the robber baron on the one hand, and by a severe labor crisis on the other. This, and the formation of nativist groups and the proliferation of scientific racism indicate that the late nineteenth century was not only an age of progress, but was also defined by instability, upheaval, and crisis.

[2] In conceiving of progress as the driving force behind the cultural and socio-political transformation of America in the late nineteenth century, I am following Alan Trachtenberg's classic study *The Incorporation of America* (1982).

There is, in other words, a dialectic at work between a large-scale crisis on the one hand, and a universal belief in progress on the other, a dualism that is also reinforced by the two alternative labels given to the period by historians, "Gilded Age" and "Progressive Era." Out of this dialectic arose a strong desire for social, political, and moral reform. "Reform" can broadly be understood as a gradual, structural transformation, a renewal, or a change of a given state of affairs with the expressed goal to improve it. "Social reform" also refers to historically and locally specific movements and initiatives dedicated either to the *restoration*, or to the *innovation* of particular social or political conditions (cf. Williams 202-204). Reform can be directed at the individual, and, as such, is the expression of a belief in human perfectibility, or it is geared at society, and thus based on the conviction that social and political conditions are not unchangeable, but can be corrected (cf. Claybaugh 2). Usually, reform is differentiated from revolution, which connotes a more radical, wholesale, or rapid transformation of society.

A vast variety of reformist movements emerged in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century: the period saw the formation of clubs and cooperative associations, the emergence of class-oriented social movements like populism and trade unionism, the strengthening of feminist movements of various sorts, agrarian protest, and the advance of political progressivism, but also a significant rise in influence of socialist theories and programs, new and experimental forms of living, and the founding of utopian communities. In addition to this, social reform was also a prime concern of journalists, artists, intellectuals, and literary authors. The emergence of muckraking journalism, an upsurge in the production and popularity of utopian literature, and architectural projects such as the White City in Chicago, each in their own different ways, point to the fact that the cultural and literary landscape in the late nineteenth century was shaped by and contributed to the overall interest in social reform.

The problem this study identifies is that reform itself was in a critical condition in the late nineteenth century. Many institutions which, traditionally, were responsible for organizing civic duties and for providing welfare were in crisis. The model of Christian charity, for example, no longer seemed appropriate or productive in light of the vast socio-political and economic changes in the late nineteenth century. In addition to this, the prerogative of evolutionary theory and the growing importance of other scientific disciplines, like sociology and psychology, threatened the Churches' legitimacy. Similarly challenged at the end of the nineteenth century was the presumed productivity of the concept of "philanthropy." Long praised for its capacity to secure the social and economic order of free

competition, the model of philanthropy, and its symbol and symptom – the benevolent millionaire – came under attack due to a growing visibility of social inequality. The political sphere, too, struggled with meeting demands for government intervention and for greater social security, voiced, for example, by workers, women, and veterans. There was no consensus in contemporary debates over the power of the state, the size and influence of corporations, economic regulation and free market capitalism, working conditions for industrial workers, and the distribution of wealth. Finally, the institution of literature also faced transformations: the advent of literary realism problematized existing ideas about (didactic) reformist fiction. The increasing heterogeneity of society (and with it, an increasingly heterogeneous readership) demanded new representational strategies and techniques.[3] In other words, reform itself was in dire need of reform. The wide-ranging uncertainties about how to work against the various crises at the turn of the century represented a fertile ground for the arrival and the institution of a neologism that held the potential of capturing, arguably even of solving some of the problems discussed above.

It is against the backdrop of the crisis of reform that "Altruism Arrives in America," as the title of an essay from 1956 by literary critic Louis J. Budd proclaims. Budd's essay delineates the neologism's growing significance in religious, ethical, economic, sociological, and literary discourses in the late nineteenth century, and observes that the term "proved useful to many who tried again to assess human nature and to reshape human goals" (40). Altruism was received as a new way of expressing and imagining the human condition and the human good, and it played a significant role in contemporary issues of social reform. In his essay, Budd lists and very briefly sums up theories of altruism by Comte and Spencer; he presents the use of the term in theological texts by Henry Drummond and other representatives of various Christian reform movements; he explains the role altruism played in the formation of utopian movements and utopian literature; he gives an overview of how the neologism shaped late nineteenth-century reformist periodical culture; and he closes his essay by discussing William Dean Howells's incorporation of the language of altruism in his later novels and critical writing. For all these important insights, however, Budd's essay, which only spans twelve pages, is not designed to provide an in-depth analysis of the language of altruism. Rather, it reads as a survey of the "rhetorical asset" (41) the term represented for a short moment in American cultural history. To me, in turn, Budd's survey from the 1950s

[3] See, for example, Ahlstrom and Hopkins for the crisis of the church, Christianson and Sawaya for the crisis of philanthropy, Lammert and Grell on the crisis of the state, and Fluck (1992) and Claybaugh on realism.

presents itself as an appeal to further study: This study's aim is to take up some of Budd's claims and to discuss in more detail some of the primary sources listed in his short essay.

As yet, critics have largely left unexamined the significance of altruism in the American cultural and literary context. A few studies on the neologism's impact in Victorian Britain are available: Thomas Dixon's seminal *The Invention of Altruism* (2008) is a semantic history of the concept and traces its development within nineteenth-century British social, philosophical, and moral thought. My own study draws not only on Dixon's analyses of a rich corpus of archival material, but also on his methodological approach. A second far-reaching examination of the concept of altruism is provided by Stefan Collini's *Public Moralists* (1991), which is concerned, according to the book's sub-header, with the study of "political thought and intellectual life" in Britain's long nineteenth century, and includes a chapter on the "culture of altruism." Both studies are important reference points and inspirations for my own analysis, but neither of them addresses in detail the term's significance in the American context. Furthermore, given their disciplinary affiliations, neither Dixon nor Collini discusses the influence of altruism on literary fiction. My study aspires to close this gap in scholarship.

The body of material upon which my analyses are based is diverse and interdisciplinary. This broad range of text forms and media allows me to provide a cross section analysis of a particular moment in American cultural history and illustrate the institutionalization of the concept of altruism across diverse loci of cultural production. I analyze representations and definitions of altruism in theological studies and books of social science, in reformist magazines and in encyclopedia entries, in utopian, sentimentalist, and realist novels.

Practically speaking, the corpus of this dissertation is also the result of my methodological approach, which I call *reading for altruism*.[4] I began my archival research by looking for publications that explicitly reference the term altruism in their titles, and then extended my exploration to texts and authors who make use of representations, definitions, and constructions of altruism in a broader sense. From there on, the development of my research can be compared to an expedition into the depths of late nineteenth-century culture. My reading for altruism revealed a number of unexpected (personal) connections between writers, readers, and texts: The short-lived Californian utopian community "Altruria" (1894-95) was based on an idea of socialism purported by the economist Laurence Gronlund, who,

[4] This approach is inspired by Nancy Glazener's book *Reading for Realism* (1997). A more detailed account of my method and its underlying theoretical premises is provided in the introduction to Chapter 2.

in turn, was an avid reader of Herbert Spencer's evolutionary theories, and, not incidentally, also a close acquaintance of William Dean Howells, the author of the utopian novel *A Traveller from Altruria* (1893) and its sequels that inspired the name of the community. A frequent visitor in Altruria was Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who was closely related to the movement of Nationalism initiated after the success of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888). Bellamy, on the other hand, became a member in the "Church of the Carpenter," founded in 1890 in Boston by the Christian Socialist William Dwight Porter Bliss, whose acquaintance with Howells, to close the circle, inspired the author to write the Altrurian Romances.[5] The network around the community Altruria features principal characters of the *dramatis personae* of this study and indicates the intricate ways in which their lives and reformist causes were entangled, across the country, and across disciplinary boundaries, by a joint interest in altruism.

In more general terms, the expeditionary course of my research also uncovered an impressive range of social, political, religious, and literary issues, some of which I did not expect to find in the context of debates about altruism. The (initially) more surprising results of my research are, for example, that altruism was an important concept for a certain branch of woman reform, or for a subgenre of Christian reform literature, or for debates about race and eugenics. In my research, the marker altruism and the struggle of definition around the neologism has hence functioned as a key – or as a *passe-partout* – capable of unlocking hidden histories, lost texts, and forgotten authors.

Altruism's capacity to unlock certain historical discourses also explains and validates the suitability of the theoretical and methodological approach taken up in the first chapters of this dissertation, namely that of *Begriffsgeschichte* or conceptual history. In a very general sense, *Begriffsgeschichte* analyzes historical tensions between language and social reality. Reinhart Koselleck, whose work I follow in this dissertation, describes this tension between language and history as follows: "For *Begriffsgeschichte*, language is an indicator for encountered 'reality,' but it is also a factor in the formation of reality" (*Begriffsgeschichten* 99; my translation). This interdependence is especially interesting in the case of the introduction of a neologism, which, according to Koselleck, not only gestures towards future conditions of social reality or defines them, but can also *incite* social change (67). In line with this, I understand the language of altruism to be not only the result or the product of the historical moment around 1900, but also an agent, a constitutive factor in shaping it.

[5] See Kirk and Kirk's 1959 essay "Howells and the Church of the Carpenter" and Hine (1966).

This last point also explains the usefulness of Koselleck's approach for my purposes, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. Next to the fact that Koselleck's concentration on socio-political key terms in what he refers to as the "saddle period" between 1750 and 1850 coincides with the date of the altruism's coinage, it is especially his argument about the future-orientedness of neologisms that is fruitful for my study, emphasizing, as it does, *Begriffsgeschichte*'s notion of concepts as "forces of history" (*Futures Past*, 232). Other important scholarly perspectives that are concerned, in similar ways, with conceptual history or historical semantics, for example, Raymond Williams's *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), a formative work for the field of (British) Cultural Studies, or the studies put forward by thinkers of the historiographical movement of the Cambridge School, such as Quentin Skinner and John Pocock, have likewise put emphasis on the performative dimension of language, and, in more general terms, the fruitfulness of tracing the genealogies of key concepts or "languages" for analyzing social history and social change. These approaches have received a much wider reception in English-speaking scholarship than did Koselleck's.[6] My study contributes to bringing a neglected scholarly perspective, the German tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte*, to the field of American Studies.

Another study that bears similarities to my own project of writing a conceptual history of a key term that is notoriously difficult to define is Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's *The Concept of Representation* (1967). It contains an important statement about the productivity of such an approach: "[A]lthough [*The Concept of Representation*] is about a word, it is not about mere words, not merely about words. For the social philosopher, for the social scientist, words are not 'mere'; they are the tools of [her] trade and a vital part of [her] subject matter" (1). Pitkin further argues convincingly that the disagreements over the definition of a key term do not represent a hindrance to her project. Rather, these disagreements are her actual, main source for reconstructing a concept's meaning. I take from this that the semantic struggle surrounding the concept of altruism itself is the object of a study worth undertaking, because it reveals the historical, political, and social contexts and conditions in which such definitions could arise in the first place.

Begriffsgeschichte, as this brief review shows, is an interdisciplinary project, and, as such, pertinent to the analysis of the diverse body of texts and text forms of this study. The first two chapters provide a conceptual history of altruism, which allows me to carve out its various and competing meanings, which, in turn, are indicative of a larger struggle for the

[6] See the recently published critical compendium by Müller and Schmieder, *Begriffsgeschichte und historische Semantik* (2016), for an extensive discussion of Williams's *Keywords* (699-711), and Dixon (33-40) for a differentiation between Williams's, Skinner's, and Koselleck's approaches.

definition of a variety of social and political position in the late nineteenth century. The following chapters, however, which are dedicated to the analysis of the significance of altruism for literary fiction and literary form at the end of the nineteenth century, operate under different methodological and theoretical premises. They take the findings of the chapters dedicated to a conceptual history of altruism as a point of departure, and expand on them significantly: My literary analyses call attention to a different dimension of the discourse of altruism, a dimension that is indispensable for making sense of its historical significance, and, ultimately, for making sense of the language of altruism *as* language.

Many of the sources analyzed in this study can be classified as what Susan L. Mizruchi has called "border texts," a genre marker that describes the interdisciplinary orientation of nineteenth-century sociological thought and literary fiction. In her expansive study *The Science of Sacrifice* (1998), Mizruchi defines the border text as "a work that at once defines and bridges divisions among professional disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, psychology) and, in turn, between these disciplines and more popular audiences" (14). [7] Due to its investment in translating "sophisticated terminologies into a common language" (16), the border text is a testament to the importance of storytelling and narrative for the rendering of scientific knowledge. Given its prevalence in the border text, the language of altruism is, accordingly, both a literary and a non-literary language. More precisely, it is suitable for conveying a particular form of nineteenth-century popular science writing at the textual margins between literature and sociology.

Mizruchi describes the culture in which the border text emerged and flourished as a "social scientific culture" (4). This is an apt way to capture the historical moment around 1900 in the United States, when many social sciences were beginning to develop into professionalized, academic disciplines, and, as such, were formulating themselves as preeminent means for the mediation of an unsettling modernization process. Importantly, the social sciences shared this task with literature: to reflect on and to represent a social reality that grew ever more complex in a critical time, marked by modernization, industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. My study's focus on configurations of altruism in late nineteenth-century literary fiction is informed by this notion of a shared project of the social sciences and literature, i.e., that of describing, analyzing, and, ultimately explaining human nature and its role within modern social reality.

[7] The border text's main concern, namely to make "complex and controversial social issue accessible to a wide audience" (14), is still visible in contemporary examples. Mizruchi uses *The Bell Curve* (1994) as a more recent representative of the nineteenth-century border text.

This premise about literature's significant relationship with history is most strongly presented in studies published in the context of New Historicism, which assume that literature is only one among many other discourses which, taken together, form a culture. As Stephen Greenblatt posits in his famous essay "Towards a Poetics of Culture" (1987), New Historicism accounts for "the unsettling circulation of materials and discourses that is […] the heart of modern aesthetic practice" (13). Many studies of late nineteenth-century literature that could be aligned with this tradition argue that literary works, especially realist and naturalist novels, provide privileged access to the "social scientific culture," and at least since the 1980s, a branch of scholarship has put special emphasis on how the social sciences, and especially evolutionary science, affected realist and naturalist novelists.[8] It is not only from the field of literary studies that this connection is mobilized, however: Representatives of the social sciences, such as Wolf Lepenies in his conceptualization of nineteenth-century sociology as a 'third culture,' and historians of science, such as Bernard Lightman and Jonathan R. Topham in their analysis of the literary quality of nineteenth-century popular science writing, too, have argued that literature and social science were closely related discourses at the turn of the century.

My literary analyses are in conversation with these approaches, not only because my own research interest is historical, but also in so far as I understand altruism as a concept that negotiates not only between social science and religion, but also between social science and literature. I thus take from New Historicism the notion of an interplay, or a "circulation" (Greenblatt) of a variety of discourses, among them also literary ones, communicated by the language of altruism. The discursive breadth altruism acquires at the end of the nineteenth century thus emphasizes the difficulty in drawing boundaries between the realms of literary fiction and social reform, between literary production, science, philosophy, and social activism.

However, my readings also depart in some measure from New Historicist perspectives, because they highlight that the realm of literature provides different and more complex negotiations of the concept of altruism than the border text can. This has to do with the fact that my analyses focus not so much on literary *representations* of altruism, but rather on how the semantic struggle signified by the arrival of the neologism at the end of the nineteenth century influenced and negotiated literary *form* at the turn of the century. Put differently, rather than conceiving of the literary language of altruism as yet another

[8] For a general introduction to New Historicism, see Veeser. Among many others, Beer (1983) and Levine (1988) can be listed as examples for studies concentrating on the relation of evolution and literature.

discourse that is capable of unlocking history (for example by asking whether literature was responsible for the further dissemination of the language of altruism), I am more interested in analyzing what the language of altruism can teach us about literature and literary form at the end of the nineteenth century. The literary forms I study in Chapters 3 to 5, namely, the sentimental reform novel, the utopian novel, the realist reform novel, and the satirical novel, exhibit very different approaches to the question of social reform, approaches that can be better understood by an analysis of their configuration of altruism.

Rather than providing a final definition of altruism, then, this study seeks to carve out the semantic struggles around definitions of the neologism, and to bring into view the implications of this struggle of positions for reformist culture and literature. This approach differs in great measures, of course, from moral-philosophical, psychological, evolutionary, or (neuro)biological studies concerned with altruism, most of which have an explanation of the phenomenon altruism at heart. The majority of scholarship on altruism engages, in other words, in debates about whether altruism is "possible" or "real." Noticeably, these publications have rather consistently conceived of altruism as a problematic construct, one that represents a major theoretical and methodological challenge to their respective disciplines and perspectives. This is often reflected in the scholarly language used to address the concept: Across the board of publications, altruism is linked with restrictions or associated with qualifiers, like "puzzle" (Monroe 6), "problem" (Seglow 1), or "paradox" (Harbach 9). One particularly remarkable example for this tendency is Lee Alan Dugatkin's popular book *The Altruism Equation. Seven Scientists Search for the Origin of Goodness* (2006), which tells a whole history of how evolutionary science struggled with making sense of altruism, and, as such, proves the tenacity of conceiving of altruism as a problem. To me, more interesting than the puzzle of altruism itself, however, is the way it was dealt with – and continues to be dealt with – in scholarship, public discourse, and literary fiction. While Dugatkin and others are invested in solving the conundrum of altruism by asking "What's in it for the altruist?" (5), my study thus asks "What's in it for people who decide to call something altruism?" at the end of the nineteenth century.

This question, as I will show throughout the following chapters, is loaded, and it is important in its own right. It is crucial to consider, for example, who uses the language of altruism and who does not. At the end of the nineteenth century, as Chapter 1 shows in more detail, it is employed primarily by religious groups, by scientists and intellectuals, and by social reformers. But the language of altruism is also frequently used to express the political

interests of socialists, anarchists, and feminists, as Chapters 2 and 5 explicate. As heterogeneous as the political interests of this group might first appear, my research also reveals that regarding their social status, most of the people who use the language of altruism belong to the middle or upper classes, and most of them are white. Notably absent are voices of racial or ethnic others. As demonstrated above, in my description of the Californian community "Altruria," it was a rather exclusive network of writers that concerned itself with altruism in the United States at the end of the century. Altruism is in many ways a privileged discourse, and, as Chapters 2 and 5 explain, frequently contributes, often in problematic ways, to debates about immigration, race and racism, and eugenics.

My study emphasizes that in the late nineteenth century, altruism was not solely understood as a problem, but also, and often vitally so, as a social fact, a scientific truth, and as a reality. This means that to inquire why people "decide to call something altruism" is also necessarily an investigation of the larger moral and political meanings communicated by the discourse. I understand the language of altruism not only as a code or a (scientific) register. It is also a rhetoric, and, as such, designed to convince those addressed by it of certain moral or political positions. My analyses show that in late nineteenth-century reformist thought and literature, altruism is predominantly employed to imagine, describe, and ignite social and moral visions, many of which are utopian in nature. It belongs to the vocabulary of larger sociological, religious, and literary debates about the shortcomings and the potentials of American society and politics. Because the concept was most often employed as a counterweight to prevailing ideologies of individual liberalism during the crisis of the Gilded Age, the very existence and prevalence of the discourse of altruism, finally, also provides a counter-story to the worn narrative about the predominance of a culture of individualism that is often claimed to define the historical moment around 1900 in the United States.

In the first chapter, ***Reformulations. A Conceptual History of Altruism***, I begin to explore the various and competing meanings of altruism in late nineteenth-century reformist social thought. The first section of this chapter is dedicated to providing the theoretical and methodological groundwork on which my analyses in this and the succeeding chapter rest. In a first step, I critically examine the method and discipline of *Begriffsgeschichte* and read it against the backdrop of Thomas Kuhn's theses about the progress of scientific knowledge in order to explicate the central conceptual tool of this study, namely *reformulation*. The second section discusses Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer's original definitions of altruism and the reception of their work in the United States. The diverging definitions of

altruism presented by Comte and Spencer lead to two pathways of how the neologism was constructed and received at the end of the nineteenth century: In Comte's system, altruism is dependent on a fixed and super-imposed political, social, and moral order. Contrary to this, Spencer conceives of altruism as the teleological endpoint to an automatic, all-encompassing, "cosmic" evolutionary progress. Comte and Spencer's diverging definitions of altruism have further political implications for the American debate on the meaning of altruism at the end of the nineteenth century, which I explore in the last section of this chapter. Because the neologism is most prominently used in the context of religious reform, I focus my analysis on altruism's productivity (or lack thereof) for the goals formulated by the Social Gospel movement and its more radical outpost, Christian socialism.

The second chapter, ***Installments. Reading for Altruism in the Late Nineteenth-century Periodical***, expands on the project of writing a conceptual history of altruism and focuses on how the competing meanings of the neologism are negotiated in the public forum of the periodical. Following a brief overview of late nineteenth-century American periodical culture, I analyze the institutionalization and circulation of the language of altruism in four reformist magazines, all of which carry the header altruism in their titles. I contend that the magazines are paradigmatic for four different ways in which altruism was read for at the end of the century: In *The Altruist* (1885-1917), the concept is posited as the basis for a utopian communal project. *Twentieth Century / Altruria* (1888-1898/1907-1908) uses the term as a header for socialist and anarchist political causes. *The Altruist Interchange* (1893-1897) exhibits in which ways altruism was made productive for woman reform in the late nineteenth century. *The Altruistic Review* (1893-94), a magazine related to the Social Gospel, reflects on the role and function of journalism and periodical culture in general, and on the productivity of the concept of altruism for American reformist culture in particular. My analysis of the public forum of the periodical is meant to point out that altruism has had gained a solid footing in America's reformist landscape by the end of the nineteenth century and to explicate more specific meanings the language of altruism communicated.

Forms. Altruism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel analyzes which role the competing meanings of altruism play for literary form at the end of the century. Instead of continuing the task of writing a conceptual history of altruism, this chapter highlights interdependences between three reformist literary forms, namely the Social Gospel novel, which I read as a representative of the sentimentalist reform novel, the utopian novel, and the realist reform novel, and it interrogates how these interdependences are negotiated by the struggle of meaning around altruism at the end of the nineteenth century. In a first step, I

argue that the sentimentalist reform novel conceptualizes altruism as charitable, benevolent, or sacrificial action or behavior, that is, as an *individual* value. This conceptualization of an individual altruism is enabled by sentimentalist literary strategies of sympathetic identification and didacticism. The second part analyzes the form of the utopian novel, which represents altruism as a *social* ideal constitutive for an alternative (communist or socialist) social order. In the utopian novel, the reader is not emotionally persuaded, but convinced on rational grounds, via a logic of negation, of the superiority of a social order based on altruism. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to showing in which ways altruism relates to reformist realism, a form that inhibits a problematic position in-between sentimentalism on the one hand, and utopianism on the other. The main argument of this chapter is that the problem of reformist realism is further illustrated, arguably even produced by the form's difficulties to navigate between the individual/sentimental and the social/utopian model of altruism.

The fourth chapter, ***Representations. Altruism and William Dean Howells's Reformist Realism*** is at once an expansion of and a case study for the theses about literary form presented in the preceding chapter. William Dean Howells's later reformist fiction is well suited for this task, not only because his *Altrurian Romances* contributed significantly to the dissemination of the language of altruism in the United States at the end of the century, but also because Howells is known as the principal advocate of American literary realism. At the center of interest is Howells's struggle to incorporate his interest in social reform into his aesthetic program of realist literature. I introduce the main tenets of the formal problem of reformist realism, and altruism's role in it, in close readings of Howells's literary criticism in the first part of this chapter. This discussion is followed by a reading of Howells's novel *Annie Kilburn* (1888). I argue that standard readings of this novel, which accuse it of sentimentalist and didactic tendencies, can be complicated by paying attention to the various ways in which the issue of social reform is used to formulate self-reflective statements about literary form. This line of argument will be extended in a formal analysis of the novel *A Traveller from Altruria* (1892), the series of *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* (1893-94), and the novel *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907) in the final part of this chapter. In the sparse criticism available on the Altrurian fictions, they are rather consistently read as utopian romances, and, consequently, as aberrations from Howells's program of realism. My analysis complicates these readings and reads the *Altrurian Romances* as novels that consistently point out their own awareness about their unstable relationship to the utopian form. The main argument of this chapter is that in Howells's later work, the issue of social reform, expressed

in the language of altruism, is linked to self-reflective, ironic statements about a crisis of realist literary representation.

Altruism played a significant role for late nineteenth-century woman's fiction and feminist thought, a collaborative relationship I analyze in my last chapter ***Alliances. Altruism and Nineteenth-Century Woman Reform***. In the second half of the nineteenth century, women writers and women's rights activists began to embrace the language of altruism and made it productive for their larger goal, that of destabilizing institutions or ideologies which were held accountable for female suppression. Among them were (and are) the church, the state, evolutionary science, and, arguably most importantly, the ideology of separate spheres and the cultural model of sentimentality. The collaborative potential of the concept of altruism for woman reform is demonstrated in three sections, each of which is dedicated to one feminist reformer: Elizabeth Cady Stanton makes use of Comte's notion of altruistic womanhood in order to advocate women's indispensable role in public discourse, politics, and society; Charlotte Perkins Gilman employs the scientific language of altruism to (re-)assess women's position within the evolutionary progress and uses it within a larger argument about the necessity of women's economic independence; Margaret Sherwood's *An Experiment in Altruism* (1895), the central literary text analyzed in this chapter, explores the politics of charity and the limits of reform. I read the novel as a satirical critique not only of social reform and its literary representation, but also of the promise of reconciliation the concept of altruism encompasses. This chapter's main goal is to use the analysis of the alliance altruism/feminism in order to trace a historical development away from a women's rights discourse rooted in sentimentalism.

1. Reformulations.
A Conceptual History of Altruism

1. Introduction

In 1897, historian, activist and Christian socialist William Dwight Porter Bliss (1856-1926) published *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform*. In a grandiose gesture, the encyclopedia aspires to be an all-encompassing compendium: According to the subtitle of the second edition from 1908, it comprises "*all* social reform movements and activities, and the economic, industrial, and sociological facts and statistics of *all* countries and *all* social objects" (1; emphasis mine) on more than 1300 pages. And, indeed, the encyclopedia entries cover an impressive range, from general ideas and concepts, like "corruption" and "social contract" to scholarly disciplines like "sociology" and "political economy;" the encyclopedia also features detailed country reports and statistics, as well as biographical blurbs of various personalities connected to the larger issue of social reform, like William T. Stead, Andrew Carnegie, or William Dean Howells. Among the many contributors and revisers of the encyclopedia are Jane Addams, Edward Bellamy, Franklin Henry Giddings, and Theodore Roosevelt, a group of specialists from various disciplines – and representatives of diverging political perspectives – that have been instructed by their editor to refrain from using technical or complicated language to guarantee the encyclopedia's wide popular appeal.

The aim of Bliss's editorial project, as stated in the preface, is "to give on all the broad range of social reform the experience of the past, the facts of the present, the proposals for the future" (iii). These declarations bear similarities to a more famous lexicographical project, namely Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751-1780). According to Diderot's self-reflective article on "encyclopedia," an encyclopedia is a history, a report, and an investment in the future.[9] Diderot claims that the meaning of a certain issue cannot be grasped without the telling of its history, and meaning is always at risk of getting lost if it is not documented for future readers. Furthermore, the underlying incentive of an encyclopedia is not only to crystallize knowledge out of a seemingly endless array of themes and issues, but also to reflect on terminology itself. In fact, these two incentives are inextricably entwined: Diderot

[9] Diderot states that the aim of an encyclopedia is: "…to collect all the knowledge scattered over the face of the earth, to present its general outlines and structure to the men with whom we live, and to transmit this to those who will come after us, so that the work of past centuries may be useful to the following centuries…" (quoted in Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment* Reader 17-18).

claims the knowledge of language and the historicity of words and semantics to be constitutive factors in the writing of an encyclopedia. Because Diderot acknowledges the contingency of language and the contextuality of concepts and words, his self-reflective entry can be read as a founding text not only of the discipline of lexicography, but also of that of historical semantics or *Begriffsgeschichte*.[10]

Bliss's encyclopedia contains a definition of altruism, which indicates that by 1908, the neologism was firmly installed in the American reformist lexicon:

> Altruism. – A term used in sociology and philosophy to denote the benevolent instincts and emotions in general, or action prompted by them; and more specifically used of that theory of life which would make the living for others the central thought of life and the essence of religion. It was first employed by Comte, but has passed into general use. Herbert Spencer says: "If we define altruism as being all action, which, in the normal course of things, benefits others instead of benefitting self, then, from the dawn of life altruism has been no less essential than egoism."
>
> -see also INDIVIDUALISM; SOCIALISM. (37)

The encyclopedia entry is instructive in a number of ways for this chapter's main concern of writing a conceptual history of altruism in American social thought and reformist discourse: *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* presents altruism as a semantically flexible and politically charged concept, and it refers to its original coinage in the works of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. Like any encyclopedia, *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* is, in its reflection and definition of terms and concepts, also a project of *Begriffsgeschichte*. The entry on altruism, therefore, points towards this chapter's methodological approach.

According to Bliss's record, altruism belongs to the critical vocabulary of the fields of social science and philosophy. This definition highlights altruism's function as a scientific or rational update for other, existing terms designed to describe the human good. Altruism is furthermore defined as an instinct, an emotion, and an action at the same time, conceptual entanglements that already hint at the fact that even decades after the invention of the term ca. 1850, it remained difficult to categorize. Finally, the altruistic doctrine of "living for others" is posited as a moral principle – both religious ("essence of religion") *and* rational ("central thought") – underlying a "theory of life," that is, a philosophy, dogma, or ideological perspective. As becomes evident already in the first sentence of Bliss's definition, altruism, at the moment of its coinage and beyond, is conceptually flexible and positioned in a transdisciplinary field. I will argue in the following chapter, that due to its disciplinary

[10] According to Müller and Schmieder's critical compendium (2016), Diderot's encyclopedia paved the way for the theoretical basis of the discipline of historical semantics (30).

mobility and conceptual flexibility, altruism can *reformulate* a number of different disciplines and discourses.

What is more, the two cross-references placed at the end of Bliss's entry, namely "Individualism" and "Socialism," not only emphasize that the notion of altruism as a "theory of life" was more significant for the larger issue of social reform at the turn of the century than its biologist, anthropological, or psychological meanings, but the editorial suggestions for further reading also indicate that the struggle over definitions of altruism was a political one. This argument coincides with my own archival research. As will be shown in the following, altruism is predominantly employed to imagine and describe social and moral visions; the concept belongs to the vocabulary of larger sociological, political, and religious debates. Moreover, my analyses in this and the next chapter reveal that altruism's semantic flexibility allowed for diverse appropriations by varying, often opposing reformist interests. Put differently, the appearance of altruism in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century signified a struggle for the definition of a variety of social and political positions.

Bliss's record furthermore refers to the founding figures of the language of altruism, namely Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. The fact that Bliss relates the definition of altruism provided in Spencer's *Data of Ethics* (1879) – an excerpt of which is reprinted in the entry – with the notion of a "general use" of the language of altruism indicates that it was primarily Spencer's, and not Comte's conceptualization of the term that played a major role for debates about social reform in the United States at the turn of the century. Part of this chapter's goal is, accordingly, to analyze Comte's and Spencer's diverging original definitions of altruism, and to explain the cultural, social, and political conditions for Spencer's comparably greater significance for American reformist culture and discourse.

In the first part of this chapter, I will provide a revision and critical examination of important arguments put forward within the context of the discipline and method of *Begriffsgeschichte*, explain its suitability for my analysis of the concept of altruism in the late nineteenth century, and theorize the idea of *reformulation* that will play a significant structural role in this and the following chapters of my dissertation. These theoretical and methodological considerations will be followed by an analysis of altruism's origins in the works of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. Not only will I discuss in detail diverging definitions presented by the European "founding figures" of the language of altruism, but I will also examine their reception in the United States at the end of the century by exploring the various and competing meanings and appropriations the concept of altruism received in American social thought and reformist culture in the last part of this chapter.

2. Reformulations: Theory and Method

At least since the 1960s, *Begriffsgeschichte* is known as a method and a discipline of historical science that deals with the historical semantics of concepts, terms, and words.[11] It analyzes the changing and competing meanings of cultural expressions, spoken or written, with regard to their historicity. Operating under the basic premise that language is not only an *indicator* for our encounters with social history, but that it is also a *factor* in shaping this very history, *Begriffsgeschichte* examines, in a very general sense, the historically-conditioned tensions between language and materiality, and can thus be understood as part and parcel of the development known as the "linguistic turn." In the words of Reinhart Koselleck, whose work I largely follow here, political and social concepts are "no mere epiphenomena of so-called real history," but are, in fact, "minted for the registration and embodiments of the elements and forces of history" (*Futures Past*, 232). *Begriffsgeschichte,* accordingly*,* interrogates the political, social, and cultural conditions for how concepts attach meaning in a given historical context, and how those meanings change over time. Because it performs the "measurement and investigation of differences among or convergence of old concepts and modern cognitive categories," *Begriffsgeschichte* can, finally, be seen not only as a method, but also as a "kind of propaedeutic for historical epistemology: it leads to a theory of history" (268).

Begriffsgeschichte – or conceptual history – is an interdisciplinary project. Depending on how broad or narrow one conceives of its objects of study, it can be related to many other disciplines, among them intellectual history or *Ideengeschichte*, discourse history, diachronic linguistics, and cultural and literary studies. Traditional *Begriffsgeschichte,* as coined by Koselleck, Otto Brunner, and Werner Conze in the massive research study *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1972-1997), concentrates on isolated, condensed and "historically conspicuous" (Kollmeier) socio-political key terms that have played leading roles in what is referred to as the "saddle period" between 1750 and 1850, a time of profound political, social, and cultural change that is claimed to be characterized by large-scale processes of democratization, acceleration, modernization, and ideologization (Müller/Schmieder *Begriffsgeschichte und historische Semantik* 285). *Begriffsgeschichte* has repeatedly been

[11] Müller/Schmieder (2016) point out that the discipline was already thriving in the 1920s, but had its institutional breakthrough in the 1960s (23-24). They also delineate various efforts in differentiating the label *Begriffsgeschichte* from that of "historical semantics," and conclude that, usually, "historical semantics" is a header for methodological approaches that are concerned with diachronic language change, while *Begriffsgeschichte* is the analysis of "nodal points" in the development of particular words. According to this differentiation, I am engaging with the method of *Begriffsgeschichte*. For further information, see 18-21.

criticized for its rather problematic politics and for the ways in which it conceives of modernity. According to Jan-Werner Müller, concerns about the discipline's actual "profound antimodernism" were frequently raised, a criticism that can be located mainly in the pronounced influence of controversial figures such as Carl Schmitt and Otto Brunner, both of whom were associated with National Socialism (75). Moreover, *Begriffsgeschichte* has been criticized for its rather exclusive concentration on Europe and its narrow focus on canonical writers, privileged speakers, and elite discourses (Kollmeier). In turn, broader and newer perspectives, sometimes subsumed under the more general header of *historical semantics,* also attempt to take into account the notion of "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt) and address concepts that lie outside the time range of the "saddle period" and outside Western language usage. Metaphors and extralinguistic expressions, such as images, rituals, or habits, are included, and the focus is laid more explicitly on the potential for conflict and debate surrounding (historically specific) definitions of a given term (Kollmeier). Newer approaches of historical semantics also seek to emphasize power relations within historical communicative contexts and focus on that which was "sayable" or "unsayable" in a given historical period (Steinmetz). In this sense, they can be brought into fruitful dialogue with discourse theory and epistemology. Recent studies have, finally, addressed the history of science and have set out to include concepts from the natural sciences into the analytical arsenal of historical semantics.[12]

Taking these valid critical interventions into account, the method of *Begriffsgeschichte* still provides a productive frame for my analysis of altruism in late nineteenth-century reformist thought in the United States. However, there are some potential conflicts in the application of the method, which must be broadened accordingly: Altruism is not strictly speaking, or in any case not solely, understood as a socio-political concept in the nineteenth century, but is in equal measures present in contemporary discourses of science and religion. In fact, these two conditions are related: altruism's position in a transdisciplinary field is indicative of larger trends of an increase in the professionalization and differentiation of several scientific and academic disciplines and discourses in the nineteenth century. This growth in complexity results in a significant semantic flexibility of the term, and, arguably, creates different and more complicated conditions for a *Begriffsgeschichte* than the analysis of a key term of the classical "saddle period" would. In addition to this, many of the sources analyzed in this dissertation are not canonized,

[12] For a general overview of these and other new developments in the field of historical semantics, see Müller (2014) and especially Müller/Schmieder (2016).

standardized or even known texts, but are, in fact, forgotten, un-reviewed (as the socialist and anarchist magazines under analysis in Chapter 2) or misunderstood (as the feminist texts of Chapter 5). I will therefore also analyze meanings of altruism as represented by groups and individuals that can be described as marginalized in the late nineteenth century.

My analysis focuses in great measure on altruism's status as a *neologism* in the United States. I examine my sources with regard to their own reflections on terminology. Many of the texts under analysis in this and the following chapters directly address the newness of the term, for example by including definitions and etymological derivations.[13] Because of this, a careful differentiation between word and concept is necessary. As Thomas Dixon notes in *The Invention of Altruism* (2008), Koselleck's work often remains vague on the problem of how to carefully differentiate between word and concept. In *Futures Past*, for example, Koselleck states: "Each concept is associated with a word, but not every word is a social and political concept. Social and political concepts possess a substantial claim to generality and always have many meanings" (83). While altruism certainly fulfills some of the criteria to qualify as a "concept" in this sense, my analysis will highlight those instances when altruism is privileged over other available words that express similar beliefs, experiences or values, for example self-sacrifice, philanthropy, charity, or benevolence. My approach towards the method of *Begriffsgeschichte* is thus in accordance with Dixon's, who conceives of his study of altruism as an "intellectual history that traces the changing uses of a key word" (37), or as "word history." Dixon limits his research to the study of the language of altruism in Victorian Britain. My analysis, in turn, focuses on the American cultural and historical context, and also expands significantly on Dixon's study by discussing the implications of the arrival of altruism for literary fiction in later chapters.

Finally, this dissertation's focus on the significance of altruism for reformist and political thought requires not only an analysis of how the concept was *understood*, but special emphasis on how it was *appropriated*, for which reformist causes it was deemed productive, and by whom the rhetoric of altruism was used for what reasons. The central thesis this chapter proposes is that altruism's semantic flexibility allowed for diverse appropriations by varying political and reformist interests. I will therefore expand my approach towards the method of *Begriffsgeschichte* to some degree by analyzing the rhetorical potential of the neologism in late nineteenth-century social thought. For this angle of my analysis, I will

[13] It could thus be argued that many writers in the late nineteenth century themselves engage in an activity that can be compared to that of *Begriffsgeschichte*. The concept formation of altruism in the late nineteenth century is an open and experimental activity that already indicates the advantage and the conundrum of a neologism: On the one hand, it does not come with the historical baggage of established terms, and on the other hand, it requires definition and explanation, that is, some sort of historical grounding.

repeatedly draw on Stefan Collini's *Public Moralists* (1991), a study that reads altruism as a "cluster of ideals and responses" (7) to a larger issue of "the primacy of morality" (63) within Victorian intellectual and political thought. In Collini's study, altruism is one of many other "ostensibly non-political values and sensibilities which informed political arguments in [the Victorian] period" (7). My analysis thus responds to one of the main criticisms of classical *Begriffsgeschichte,* namely that it tends to neglect ideological conflicts and political debates surrounding historically specific definitions of concepts, and it concurs with Müller and Schmieder's claim in their recently published critical compendium on *Begriffsgeschichte* (2016): "The history of moral concepts is not political, but the moralization of political discourses is" (27; my translation).[14]

Taken together, Collini's conceptualization of altruism as a "cluster" of values and Dixon's approach of historical semantics allow for reading altruism as both *inventory* and *invention* of moral codes and social visions at the turn of the century. The conceptual frames of invention and inventory, in turn, can be compared to a theoretical distinction in Koselleck's work, namely that between concepts that register *experience* and concepts that create *expectations*. Koselleck introduces this distinction in order to classify concepts according to their temporal relationship to historical reality. It is conditioned upon the principle of reciprocity (language/reality) underlying the theory of *Begriffsgeschichte*: "Reality might have changed already long before the transition brought forth a (new) concept, and in the same way, concepts might have been built that have unleashed new realities" (*Begriffsgeschichten* 29; my translation). It is important to note here that *Begriffsgeschichte* has notoriously remained vague on the exact nature of the mediation between language and reality, a fact that accounts for much of the criticism of the discipline and method (Müller 76).

As it turns out, the distinction between experience and expectation is especially important for Koselleck's discussion of the function of the invention of *new* concepts. Koselleck's admittedly rather sparse discussions of neologisms (which Dixon does not regard in his study) have important implications for my analysis of altruism. In *Futures Past* (1985), Koselleck discusses a number of terms that emerged in the eighteenth century and that end with "-ism," for example "socialism," "conservatism," "communism," and other terms that have in common connotations of movement, action, and program (68-69). These "isms" are

[14] Müller and Schmieder's compendium *Begriffsgeschichte und historische Semantik* (2016) is a call for an interdisciplinary approach (particularly, a cultural studies approach) towards the method of *Begriffsgeschichte*, because it allows for analyzing "semantic substructures that always-already precede concept formations" (27; my translation). In my dissertation, I take these arguments into consideration and aspire to answer to Müller and Schmieder's demand for interdiscplinarity.

remarkable, because they were not based on any common or pre-conceived, lived experiences at the time of their inauguration. Instead, they were (and many of them remained) mere concepts of expectation:

> Since the French Revolution, [the struggle for the definition of political or social positions] has become sharper and has altered structurally; concepts no longer merely serve to define given states of affairs, they reach into the future. Increasingly, concepts of the future were created; positions that were to be captured had first to be formulated linguistically before it was possible to even enter or permanently occupy them. (78)

In the case of the appearance of a neologism, language precedes reality. The coining of new concepts is understood as a gesture towards future conditions that are to be defined, even prompted by the neologism in question. This means that the emergence of a new concept is both indicative of and instrumental for societal change. The "isms" of the eighteenth century, for example, do not only delineate, but also enable a move away from older estate-based or feudal models towards a democratic, modern social order. According to Koselleck, the future-oriented characteristics of a neologism can help along the "transformation of an old into a new reality" (*Begriffsgeschichten* 67; my translation). Neologisms have imaginative potential for societal change; they embody the utopian.

The utopian quality *Begriffsgeschichte* attributes to the nature of neologisms plays an integral role in understanding the various and competing meanings of altruism in the late nineteenth century and beyond. As will be shown, the concept possesses, from its inception, a projective imaginative quality and bears the potential for utopian visions of new social and moral orders. In addition to this, and in a more practical vein, a utopian frame also provides entry points for my analysis of altruism's role as the figurehead for many utopian and reformist movements and literatures in late nineteenth-century America. The argument about an innate utopian quality of neologisms thus opens up a number of points of departure for my analysis of altruism in this and ensuing chapters.

At the same time, however, it is the very logic of the utopian that it always contains its negative, that it is always contingent on the historical situation out of which emerges. The same must be true for the utopian quality of a neologism. While Koselleck presents the "isms" as special cases, he states elsewhere that new concepts always are "virtually" – that is, in all but name – inherent in a given language or a given communicative context prior to their coinage (*Begriffsgeschichten* 22-23). The important objection that neologisms never arrive out of thin air is substantiated by the basic theoretical proposition that underlies *Begriffsgeschichte*: social history and the history of concepts are in a historically conditioned tension with one another, a tension that refers back from one to the other and is thus

unresolvable (13). For all the utopian qualities altruism acquires, the concept always also expresses pre-conceived experiences. Its status as a concept of expectation must be regarded in proportion to the experiential values it expresses.

In order to keep a balance between these two poles of analysis, I propose in this study that altruism is capable of *reformulating* various epistemological perspectives on the human condition and the human good. Altruism's capacity of reformulation, I argue, is based on an inherent tension between its utopian and its experiential values. In my conceptualization of the idea of reformulation, I draw on Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Kuhn's theory can enter into a productive dialogue with Koselleck's approach of *Begriffsgeschichte* in at least three ways: First, Kuhn's approach is a philosophy and a history of science*,* and can thus expand a conceptual history of the concept of altruism significantly, because it is primarily received as a scientific term in the late nineteenth century and beyond.

Second, Kuhn's and Koselleck's approaches share the rejection of a narrative of history as a linear or strictly chronological progress. Koselleck states that *Begriffsgeschichte* "goes beyond a strict alternation of diachrony and synchrony and relates more to the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous (Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen) that can be contained in a concept" (*Futures Past,* 89). Koselleck's reference to Ernst Bloch illustrates the further implications of the distinction introduced above: concepts are charged both with past experiences and with expectations of the future; the method of *Begriffsgeschichte* thus questions the validity of a notion of History with a capital H, and, instead, relies on a theory of historical times. A similar intervention is made by Kuhn's theory, which aims at dismantling the prevalent notion of a linear progress of science. Rather than conceiving of science as "the accumulation of individual discoveries and inventions" (2), Kuhn writes a history of science that is defined by a continual competition between *paradigms,* which are described as "conceptual boxes" (5) for scientific laws, methods, and theories, as frameworks, as established models or patterns, and, finally, by extension, as different ways to view the world.[15] A scientific community usually operates according to and within a paradigm. When confronted with new findings that challenge the order of the existing paradigm, so-called 'normal science' endeavors to incorporate these by adjusting the

[15] Kuhn's concept of the *paradigm*, alongside *paradigm shift*, has become a slogan for describing virtually any sort of larger transformation in a cultural, societal, or political environment. In his *Postscript* from 1969, he expressed concerns about this "global" application of his term and delivers insightful notes of clarification on how to use it properly (175-190). When I (and I will do so only rarely) refer to the term "paradigm," I mean to use it in order to juxtapose competing epistemological and aesthetic orders that are of interest for my study, for example the "scientific" vs. the "religious", the "sentimental" vs. the "realist" paradigm.

paradigm accordingly. However, sometimes 'normal science' encounters surprising discoveries or 'anomalies' that cannot be explained, named, or otherwise incorporated by the laws, methods, or theories available to the existing paradigm. In this case, a crisis ensues, which can only be solved by the conversion of an old, and by the introduction of a new paradigm. The two paradigms in question have become *incommensurable*, and a scientific revolution is completed.

Third, even though Kuhn's model theorizes the history of the natural sciences and not all of its aspects are easily transferable to an account of social history, the problem of the comparability of paradigms concerns the methodology of *Begriffsgeschichte* because it happens on the level of language.[16] According to Kuhn, a scientific revolution occurs when two paradigms become incommensurable. However, the moment of revolution is not crucial for my purposes here; it is rather the moment of *crisis* that enables a productive link with the method of *Begriffsgeschichte*: Kuhn emphasizes how semantic change accompanies the development of a crisis that precedes a scientific revolution. He introduces the concept "reformulation" as instrumental for the duration of a crisis that can – but need not – lead to a scientific revolution. Normal science continuously engages in processes of reformulation of its theories and methods, which serve the "refinement" (34), "clarification" (33), and thus the maintaining or the manifestation of an existing paradigm. In turn, that which brings about a paradigm shift, an "anomaly," by definition escapes reformulation; it is incommensurable with the existing paradigm. This goes hand in hand with a crisis in language, because an anomaly requires "new vocabulary and concepts" (55). This process is complicated by the fact that language itself is both determined by and constitutive of the paradigm, and the result is a breakdown of communication: "Two men who perceive the same situation differently but nevertheless employ the same vocabulary in its discussion must be using words differently. They speak, that is, from [...] incommensurable viewpoints" (199). As a consequence, "translation" (203) is needed in order to manage misunderstandings. As J.G.A. Pocock summarized in 1971, Kuhn's book "has accustomed readers to think of the history of science as essentially a history of discourse and of language" (13). Kuhn's theory thus shares with *Begriffsgeschichte* important assumptions about the interdependence of semantics and history.

[16] For general information about the relationship between *Begriffsgeschichte* and Kuhn's model of paradigm shifts, see Müller/Schmieder (2016) 551-565, and Raphael 14-16. For a more detailed discussion of the problem of "incommensurability" and its implications for the methodology of *Begriffsgeschichte*, see the introduction to Müller/Schmieder (2008).

In line with Kuhn's terminology, I do not intend to use the term *reformulation* to endow the neologism altruism with revolutionary abilities to convert one paradigm to the next. Neither will I liken the arrival of altruism to an encounter with an "anomaly." Instead, I conceive of it as a term that captures the endeavor of adjusting one paradigm to another, that aspires to combine or integrate paradigms that are on the verge of incommensurability, or that are already perceived as incommensurable. In the historical context of late nineteenth-century reformist thought, the various seemingly unbridgeable discourses altruism endeavors to reformulate or reconcile are that between religion and science, radicalism and conservatism, evolutionary progress and revolutionary overthrow. Altruism does not only express utopian or, in Koselleck's terms, expectational values, but also always signifies moral imaginations of human nature and the human good that have a basis in past experiences and pre-existing concepts. Both in the late nineteenth century and today, the term altruism exhibits disciplinary mobility and negotiates between various orders of knowledge and across the board of academic and scholarly disciplines. Altruism's most defining feature – its conceptual flexibility – enables it to reformulate a variety of competing discourses or paradigms, and this makes the concept particularly productive for many interests and issues of social reform in the United States at the end of the century.

3. Founding Figures of the Language of Altruism: Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer

> *Probably no two leaders of thought, whose dates of birth were scarcely a quarter of a century apart, were ever separated by such a stupendous gulf as that which intervenes between Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, and this fact may serve as an index to the rapidity of movement which has characterized the nineteenth century.*
> John Fiske*, Through Nature to God* (1899)

This endeavor of carving out the various and competing meanings of the neologism altruism in nineteenth-century American reformist literature and culture begins with two founding figures: with the inventor of the term, Auguste Comte (1798-1857), and with the person chiefly responsible for the dissemination of the language of altruism in Britain and the United States, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).[17] In their respective conceptualizations of altruism,

[17] Dixon asserts Spencer's status as "by far the most influential theorist of altruism in nineteenth-century Britain" (183). Budd notes how Spencer's lecture tour in the United States in 1882 contributed to his international popularity and success (41). Hofstadter (1944) elaborates more generally on Spencer's popularity and influence in his chapter "The Vogue of Spencer," 31-35.

both Comte and Spencer take a scientific, that is, a sociological or evolutionary approach to ethics and morality, an important premise for the ensuing "linguistic success story" (Collini 60) of the neologism. However, their theorizations of altruism differ crucially. In Comte's account, the concept allows for the imagination of an alternative, communal, quasi-utopian order, while for Spencer, altruism plays an important role within a more mainstream liberal-reformist discourse of evolutionary progressivism. I argue that the analysis of Spencer's and Comte's conceptualizations of altruism leads to two different pathways of how the neologism was constructed and received in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century.

The origins of those two pathways can be reconstructed by looking at Comte's and Spencer's respective intellectual backgrounds and the political implications their works and personas have invoked over time. Comte is most frequently associated with nineteenth-century utopian socialism, represented by the works of Henri de Saint-Simon (Comte's teacher), Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen.[18] His work was hailed as a precursor to Marxism, even though Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx remained skeptical about the scientific and political merits of Comte's theories. Yet, his work was influential – if only per negation – for what Marx and Engels later called "scientific socialism."[19] Comte's utopian vision, as will be shown in more detail below, was grounded in the scientific study of the human condition, or, as he himself called it, in "positivism." This, and the fact that he invented the term "sociology," is why Comte is often credited as being a forerunner of the social sciences. He shares this particular reputation with Herbert Spencer, even though Spencer, throughout his work, strongly disagreed with Comte. Spencer's early work grappled with Scottish moral sense philosophy and theories of utilitarianism. The biggest influence on his work, however, was evolutionism, especially the theories put forward by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. Spencer is best known for translating some of the findings of evolutionary biology to the study of societies. This transfer would later provide the basis for the perspective of Social Darwinism. [20] Although Spencer's relationship with Social Darwinism is much more complicated than is usually accounted for, Spencer is frequently associated with laissez-faire politics and often described as a proponent and promoter of a moral ideal of liberal individualism.

[18] For further information about Utopian Socialism and its influence on nineteenth-century social science and politics, see Picon.
[19] In a letter to Ferdinand Tönnies, Engels writes in 1895 that Comte was "a genius and mystic in one" and formulates both praise of and reservations about Comte's positivist philosophy. Marx was less generous in his judgment of Comte's theories. For further information, see Picon, as well as Manuel and Manuel's chapter on Comte (717-734).
[20] See Bannister (34-56) for a detailed account of Spencer's relationship with (Social) Darwinism.

As will be shown in the following, an analysis of the different ways in which Comte and Spencer conceptualize altruism sheds light on some of their general ideas about morality and progress, society and the self, and therefore possibly allows one to reach conclusions about contrasting political theories, and about diverging self-conceptions of the young discipline of sociology. In Comte's work, altruism is embedded in a utopian vision of a communal society that Comte called "Religion of Humanity." Comte's ritualistic and very particularly designed new social order enables the cultivation of human sympathy and altruism. What is more, the highly regulated Religion of Humanity does not only promote a universal kind of altruism, but also fosters human progress in a more general sense. In Comte's theory, one can thus broadly conclude, moral *progress* is contingent on a fixed, superimposed political and social *order*. In turn, Spencer's theory approaches the issues of morality and progress vice versa: In his account, moral *order* is contingent on an independent evolutionary *progress*. Spencer understands altruism as a principle that feeds into an ongoing, all-encompassing, "cosmic" process of evolution. Altruism is the logical finale to a narrative of evolution that is, however, contingent upon the primacy of egoism on the part of the individual. Contrary to Comte, Spencer's theory does not impose a utopian order that makes altruism the ethical ideal. Altruism is the product, not the cause of evolution. The competing definitions of altruism prompt central methodological questions that were of great importance to early self-conceptions of the social sciences both in Europe and in the United States: Are theories about social groups, facts, structures, or systems ultimately reducible to theories about individual human behavior? Or can individual behavior be explained via (independent) large-scale social factors? Altruism, and the diverging definitions of the neologism by Comte and Spencer, can, not least, be understood as a battleground for these larger methodological disputes.

In more general terms, the debate around the meaning of altruism is indicative of a larger struggle for positions about how to scientifically conceive of ethics and of society in a modern world. In the following, I will interrogate, in line with the methodological apparatus of *Begriffsgeschichte*, the political, social, and cultural conditions for how the concept of altruism attached meaning in Spencer's and Comte's accounts, and I will begin to inquire how those meanings exhibited potential for (mis)translation and (mis)appropriation in the reception of the neologism. In my analysis of the struggle for positions around altruism, I will focus on its capacity of *reformulation*; that is, I will not only analyze its potential to envision new moral values or a new social order, but also pay close attention to pre-existing experiences the concept aims at expressing. Comte's and Spencer's own definitions of

altruism are enigmatic and at times, plainly inaccessible. The following discussion of the term's origins will, accordingly, only rarely consist of close readings of their work, and rather focus on the dissemination and the reception of the neologism, not least because such an approach further highlights the conflict and debate surrounding the definition of altruism in the nineteenth century and beyond.

3.1 Auguste Comte and the "Religion of Humanity"

Auguste Comte is known as the innovator of the philosophy of positivism, as an early theorizer of the history of science, and as the inventor of the discipline of sociology. His oeuvre is broad, and its reception in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century has a complicated history. Comte's early *Cours de Philosophie Positiviste*, written and published between 1830 and 1842, earned him praise by a variety of intellectual and literary figures, among them John Stuart Mill and Alexander von Humboldt, George Eliot and Harriet Martineau. Comte's influential proclamation of the epistemological perspective of "positivism" inspired the onset of a number of philosophical and reformist movements in Europe, Britain (see Dixon, 54 ff.), and in the United States.[21] The *Cours* is often characterized as a history of science (Manuel and Manuel 720). Comte's "Law of Three Stages" – one of the few theories that continue to be influential in scholarship on and about Comte – proposes that any science progressed first from a theological into a metaphysical, and finally into a "positive" state. According to this law, Comte developed a detailed hierarchy of the sciences, which culminated in his positioning of the philosophy of positivism (and, later, the discipline of sociology) – the empirical study of observable phenomena which assumes that society, like nature, underlies certain laws that can be observed, studied, and analyzed – as the highest, purest, most relevant science. A progressivist agenda can already be detected in Comte's early work, and would play a more important role in his later studies. As Manuel and Manuel sum up: "The drama of the [*Cours*] was the struggle of positivist, nonmetaphysical, and nontheological truth with the remnants of antiquated intellectual forms

[21] Chiefly responsible for Comte's success was an endorsement by John Stuart Mill, and a summary and translation of the *Cours* by Harriet Martineau. Her condensed version of the *Cours*, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (1853), exceeded Comte's text in accessibility and style to such an extent that it was translated back into French, and was read more widely than Comte's original book (Pickering 524). For more information about the immediate reception of Comte's theories in the United States, see Hawkins *Positivism in the United States*, and Cashdollar, who also emphasizes that Comte's work was mainly received through British intermediaries in the United States (93.

which still sought to corrupt it." (720) It is for this reason that Comte's *Cours* is read as a founding text for the discipline of sociology.[22]

Because of the impact of Comte's *Cours*, altruism was and arguably still is associated with Comtean positivism. However, Comte did not yet use the neologism in the *Cours*, but, instead, introduced altruism – derived from the formula *vivre pour autrui* and meant to denote the entirety of other-regarding sentiments – to his readership in his later studies, *Catéchisme Positiviste* (1852) and *Système de Politique Positive* (1851-1854). This later work, in which he not only asserts the (gendered) primacy and dominance of feeling over reason, and of art over science, but also proclaims the coming of a new humanistic religion that will govern and organize society, inspired very different responses among Comte's readership and disciples. His millennialist "Religion of Humanity", which can be described as a cult, as a quasi-utopian conglomerate of archaic catholic roots and scientific ideas, puzzled his contemporaries and critics, who first read the work as a token of Comte's religious mania or of a mental illness and later rejected it on account of his "melancholic" state (Manuel and Manuel 720-21). In fact, Comte suffered various nervous breakdowns after his initial success, which he himself referred to as "cerebral disturbances," and which have significantly shaped his further work (Lepenies 23). During the time when he wrote the *Système*, Comte also suffered from heartache: His unrequited love (or rather, his fanatic obsession) for the poet Clotilde de Vaux, whom he elevated to the status of a saint, would dramatically change how he thought and worked. The sharp discrepancies between his early and later studies have puzzled not only his contemporaries, but also his critics: Manuel and Manuel refer to Comte's "two careers" (719) and Lepenies speaks of a "fission" in Comte's biography, which resulted in a divide of positivism (25).

Altruism is introduced *not* in the context of the successful *Cours*, but in the four-volume-heavy speculations of a fanatic, as Dixon also stresses (41-42). The complicated context of the word's inauguration begs a number of important: How can one account for the fact that Comte put so much weight on religion, if his whole earlier work was dedicated to doing away with it? In which ways does altruism connote religious values? How is the coining of the concept of altruism gendered? Why did the history of the dissemination of the term altruism – notwithstanding the difficulties in classifying Comte's later work, and regardless of the significant alienation and irritation Comte produced in his readership – turn out to be a "linguistic success story" (Collini 60)?

[22] For a more general and more detailed discussion of Comte's role in shaping the discipline of sociology, see Harbach (1992), Gane (2006), and especially Lepenies (1985).

Altruism is conceptualized in at least in two ways in Comte's theory: On the one hand, he defines altruism as an ethical maxim that will be institutionalized in his humanistic religion. In fact, Comte's theory of altruism is consistently accompanied by an ethical plea: The "chief problem of life" is the "subordination of Egoism to Altruism" (*System of Positive Polity* 122) – a problem that, according to Comte, would be solved with the coming of the Religion of Humanity. On the other hand, altruism is embedded in a "cerebral theory" (Comte's way of describing an early form of phrenology) and is defined as a sentiment that can be scientifically proven to be innate to human nature. The term altruism thus replaces or reformulates other existing concepts that describe human nature and the human good, for example the Christian notions of charity and benevolence, concepts that, unlike altruism, have theological, metaphysical, decidedly unscientific connotations. This means that Comte defined altruism twofold; both as a *moral principle* with reformist and utopian qualities, as a thing worthy of philosophical, religious, and political considerations, and as a *sentiment,* as a thing worthy of scientific study.[23]

Collini's 1991 study on political thought and intellectual life in Victorian Britain approaches altruism in terms of its reformist and moral implications and thus provides further insight into the moral-political element of Comte's twofold conceptualization of the term. Collini sees the reason for the linguistic success story of altruism to lie in the fact that the concept was received as a much-needed response to an increasingly important Victorian discourse on morality as such. Collini's study is, first and foremost, dedicated to doing away with the prevailing assumption that conversations about morality in nineteenth-century Britain were influenced primarily by ideologies of liberal individualism, backed up by underlying notions of the primacy of selfishness or egoism. Rather, as Collini claims, moral discourse in the nineteenth century in Britain was marked, in equally great measure, by an "obsession with a role of altruism and a concern with the cultivation of feeling" (62). In fact, the very "exhaustiveness of the dichotomy of egoism and altruism" can be identified as a "pattern of moral assumptions fundamental to the thought of Victorian intellectuals" (67). Generally, Collini sees the novelty of the neologism manifested in its capability to foster debates about "the primacy of morality" in political thought among Victorian public intellectuals, and his study is therefore a helpful source for understanding the reformist or political dimension of a "culture of altruism." Collini's study does not, however, include a detailed discussion of the term's scientific connotations, which is a second important way in

[23] Dixon presents this ambiguity inherent in the concept in more detail: he distinguishes between "psychological altruism," "behavioural altruism," and "ethical or ideological altruism" (4).

which the neologism was read for in the nineteenth century, in a culture defined by a rarely questioned faith in science. [24]

Dixon's chapter on Comte, in turn, which is also dedicated to carving out the success of *The Invention of Altruism* (2008), focuses more on the term's association with positivism, and therefore provides further information about the second angle of Comte's twofold conceptualization of altruism. Dixon argues that altruism was initially taken up by British readers not as "a political idea," but primarily as "a term of scientific ethics" (50). Comte's later work was advertised to be the "first truly scientific theory of human nature" (50). His "cerebral theory" set out to prove that altruism was inherent in humans, and this discovery, as Dixon states, stood in direct opposition to the moral framework Comte grew up with: He wrote under the assumption that the Catholic Church had taught that humans are by nature selfish and sinful, and that any charitable or benevolent, that is, any altruistic action toward one's neighbor was a sign of God's grace, was, in effect, God's making (50). Altruism, introduced as a term of modern biology, was now capable of debunking the idea of original sin and allowed for a reconsideration and a reformulation of morality and human agency, detached from dogma, doctrine, and superstition.

Arguably, Comte's arguments rest on somewhat shaky grounds, considering that the concept of altruism is introduced within a system that is named *Religion* of Humanity. Many have argued that this religious framework, even though it is reformulated in humanistic and scientific terms, can be seen as a rejection of the primacy of positivism previously claimed by Comte. Mary Pickering, in turn, does not see Comte's indebtedness to a religious order as a contradiction. In the first of the three volumes of her *Intellectual Biography* (1993-2009), Pickering argues that the divide between Comte's early and later work is exaggerated by critics, that he "never intended for sociology to be 'objective' or purely empirical" (4) in the first place, and that his earlier, allegedly soberer work, was already heavily tinted with political activism and religious reform. She also emphasizes the immense influence of the French Revolution, and shows how its aftermath, a "chaos of ideas, uncertainties, and social and political divides" (3), inspired Comte to various attempts at reorganization and repair, of which the proclamation of the Religion of Humanity was merely the most pronounced example. Pickering convincingly argues that religion was, for Comte, first and foremost a political principle of order. In addition to explaining that religion was, in Comte's vision,

[24] For example, Collini reflects on the terminological shift - "of the eighteenth-century debate about 'Self-Love' versus 'benevolence' into the nineteenth-century idiom of 'egoism' versus 'altruism'" (67), but he claims that it was caused by the Protestant revival and a rise in agnosticism in Britain and does not address the rise of the scientific paradigm in detail.

"reduced to its essential function of regulating" ("Comte, Auguste" 522), Pickering also reminds us of the fact that after the revolution, many tried to find substitutes for Christian religion. Comte's invention of a new religion should not be regarded more eccentric than, for example, the "Cult of Reason" issued by the French revolutionaries (*Intellectual Biography,* 8-9).

Comte's cult can also be described as a cult of womanhood. Earlier in his life, he had debated with John Stuart Mill over the "great biological-sociological" issue of woman's emancipation and woman's rights in a long letter exchange. They disagreed. Comte held steadfast to his convictions, namely that woman was man's inferior, both biologically and intellectually, and refused to recognize female emancipation, "neither as a fact nor as a principle" (quoted in Lepenies *Between Literature and Science* 26). This view would not really undergo any transformations, but his encounter with Clotilde de Vaux – the "incomparable year" of longing, of love letters, and also of lunacy on Comte's part – would influence him to grant women a very special, if not by any means emancipated role in the positivist religion.[25] Comte staged women, whom he believed to be *natural* altruists, as essential "moral agents" (Pickering "Comte, Auguste" 520) for establishing the altruistic society. However, this did not mean that they were to be granted the right to vote or any access to education in his scheme. Even though the virtue that upholds Comte's system and that guarantees social progress is altruism, which is consistently gendered as female, his utopian order did not leave room for feminist progress. The way in which Comte's theory of altruism was gendered will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Even though many contemporaries were skeptical of Comte's vision, rightly identified as a highly-regulated, quasi-totalitarian, or even autocratic system, his work, and especially his definition of altruism, proved to be attractive for contemporary reformers, and not only for those who called themselves "Positivist" and positioned themselves as direct followers of his doctrines. Comte's work already makes visible the potential for reformulation the concept of altruism ultimately acquired. First, it is introduced and received as a scientific term, as part and parcel of Comte's larger project: the promotion of positivism, the scientific study of human nature and morals. The neologism's *expectational* values (Koselleck) are furthermore underscored by the progressivist design of Comte's studies; they can be read as proto-evolutionary theories, but they also bear strong millennialist and obvious

[25] Much has been written about Comte's relationship with Clotilde de Vaux. The most interesting account is provided by Lepenies, who reads Clotilde's influence on Comte as the reason for the breach in positivism and as "a bizarre episode in the history of the social sciences" (*Between Literature and Science* 34). He also discusses in detail how Comte shifted his interest toward literature and poetry after making the acquaintance of Clotilde, and how this interest has resulted in a different style of writing.

utopian tendencies.[26] Altruism has a decidedly utopian quality in Comte's work, because it is introduced in a text that proclaims the coming of a new social and moral order; it functions as the basis for an imagination of a radically different social and political system, defined and sustained by cooperation and the devotion of the individual to the other. Even though Comte's scientific doctrine developed into a religion, and even though the theological and the positivist overlap in his later work, this evidently did not stop the language of altruism to permeate Western language usage. The opposite is true; it could be the key to explaining the tenacity and success of his neologism: a concept that, through its capacity for reformulation, mediates between religion and science.

3.2 Herbert Spencer and "Cosmic Progress"

Comte's work resonated more profoundly in Britain than in the United States. It was Herbert Spencer who introduced altruism to an American readership in the late nineteenth century. In his works *Principles of Psychology* (prominently in the second edition from 1871/1872), *The Study of Sociology* (1873), and, most extensively, in *Data of Ethics* (1879), Spencer re-contextualizes Comte's neologism – even though he repeatedly had to fend off accusations of being a follower of Comte, an alliance he vehemently rejected (Dixon 202, Cashdollar 149-150) – within his version of evolutionary theory. Spencer, whose works can be held responsible for a delayed, but all the more forceful popularization of Darwinist thought in the United States, conceptualized evolution as a gradual progression from simple, undifferentiated homogeneity to complex, differentiated heterogeneity, which was, in turn, mirrored by the development of society. However, Spencer's narrative was only one – if, arguably, the most popular one – of many evolutionary theories that circulated in the nineteenth century. According to Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club* (2001), Spencer's definition of evolution as "continuity," and of evolutionary change as "progress" (210), crucially differs from Darwin's proposal of natural selection, which rather supports an idea of "randomness […]as *the* fact of nature" (199). Kuhn also observes that "the abolition of that teleological kind of evolution was the most significant and least palatable of Darwin's suggestions" (171). In turn, Spencer's version of understanding evolution as synonymous with an all-encompassing automatic process was more agreeable. Of course, the notion of a

[26] In the American context, Comte's "Religion of Humanity" can be related to a millennial strain of Evangelicalism. Harp (1995) discusses Comte and American nineteenth-century liberalism.

"cosmic," independent development raises several important questions about human moral agency that were heatedly discussed by Spencer's contemporaries and that remain an important topic in the reception of Spencer's evolutionary thought until today, and not only in debates about Spencer's association with the ideology of Social Darwinism. These larger questions about ethics and evolution can be traced by analyzing Spencer's use of the concept of altruism.

In Spencer's work, altruism is at once identified as a sentiment, a psychological concept, an ethical norm, an educational concern, and an action-guiding principle; the term is often (and often quite clumsily, as his contemporary reviewers already observed) paralleled with related concepts and terms, like reciprocity and sympathy, with the ethical perspective of utilitarianism, and with notions of progress and civilization in a wider sense.[27] Despite or because of these conceptual entanglements, the term had significance for Spencer's psychological, sociological, and political works; his theories of altruism had great influence on his followers and readers, and his popularity guaranteed a wide dissemination of the language of altruism in Britain and the United States.

In *Data of Ethics* (1879), which provides an extensive discussion of altruism over the course of four chapters, the concept is broadly defined as "all action which, in the normal course of things, benefits others instead of benefiting self" (231). Importantly, Spencer claims that "altruism has been no less essential than egoism" in the evolutionary process.[28] Spencer further distinguishes between *unconscious* and *conscious* acts of altruism, the former of which are governed by instinct, or by general laws of procreation and the welfare of offspring. Spencer's already broad conceptualization of altruism becomes almost amusingly general when he, finally, defines *unconscious* altruism as "loss of bodily function" (231) and exemplifies this claim with the detachment of an egg, of a fetus, or of breast milk. *Conscious* forms of altruism, in turn, are based on an involvement of "emotion" (232) and on sympathetic identification. Spencer delineates a development from unconscious forms of altruism – prevalent in what he conceives of as less-developed species – to conscious forms of altruism in mammals and humans; this development, in turn, is described analogously to an evolution from parental or familial altruism to social altruism and welfare. Spencer

[27] Dixon delineates a development in Spencer's use of the concept. Spencer began by conceptualizing the term as a "sentiment" in *Principles of Psychology*, described it as an educational ideal in *The Study of Sociology*, and, finally, in *Data of Ethics*, conceives of altruism as a term that describes a "kind of action" (200). On contemporary reactions on these different conceptualizations, see 201-202.

[28] This famous statement is also reprinted in *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* discussed in the introduction of this chapter.

concludes that "self-sacrifice […] is no less primordial than self-preservation" and that "altruism has been evolving simultaneously with egoism" (233).

Spencer's very general – and generous – definition of altruism, however, comes with a warning: In fact, the main objective of *Data of Ethics* is to debunk an excessive altruism as harmful and counterproductive for evolutionary progress. Now coming from a psychological perspective, Spencer argues that "symptoms" of altruism, alternatively called "neglect" or "regardlessness of self" (220), are low energy, loss of enjoyment of entertaining or relaxing activities, lack of spirits, in short: depression. This presupposition, namely that altruistic individuals are unhealthy and unhappy, already suggests that excessive altruism is not something desirable or promotable in Spencer's theory. In fact, as Spencer further states, the psychological condition of an altruist has evolutionary consequences: a depressed and self-neglecting individual has severe difficulties with procreation. Subscribing to the Lamarckian argument that psychological conditions are hereditary, Spencer claims that altruistic individuals are, due to their "physical degradation resulting from years of self-neglect" (197), infertile, unattractive, and ergo unequipped for marriage, and unfit to further altruism in the long run. These examples already indicate that the concept of altruism poses a problem to Spencer's evolutionary logic: There is not really a meaningful place for the concept within his framework of progress and fitness, the idea of altruism, almost ironically, is not adaptable, it does not really *fit*.

If one looks at the moral-philosophical component of altruism in *Data of Ethics*, this suspicion is corroborated: Altruism is first introduced in opposition to and in conflict with its antonym "egoism." Accordingly, the titles of Spencer's introductory chapters, "Egoism Versus Altruism" and "Altruism Versus Egoism," amplify the notion of a conflict, of a battle between the two concepts. It is not a surprise, then, that Spencer's often-cited statement on altruism, namely that "ethics has to recognize the truth…that egoism comes *before* altruism" (217; my emphasis), has often been read as manifesting egoism's dominance or superiority over altruism in ethics. With regard to Spencer's broad definition of altruism as "loss of substance", and to his overall narrative of an evolutionary progress towards "harmonious cooperation" (*Data of Ethics* 24), and, finally, to his following positioning of egoism as a means towards an (altruistic) end, however, the crucial word in the phrase, "before," does not only insinuate egoism's dominance over altruism, but has to be understood in a temporal sense as well. As Spencer explains in the conclusion to his chapter, "egoism *precedes* altruism in order of imperativeness" (227; my emphasis). Egoism is thus presented here as a

precondition or a means for reaching the higher goal of altruism, understood as the end point of a larger, evolutionary progression.

What, exactly, is the moral value of altruism in Spencer's theory? The two concluding chapters of his section in *Data of Ethics*, despite their promising titles "Trial and Compromise" and "Conciliation" only further underline the indecisiveness about how to settle the previously staged conflict between altruism and egoism. In the first of these two chapters, Spencer again exposes the absurdity of an excessive altruism, but this time, he puts the cart before the horse: Because he assumes that the human race is progressing towards perfection, and society to peace and harmony, the altruistic principle "becomes less and less practicable as men approach an ideal form, because the sphere for practicing it continually decreases" (256). In an interesting way, Spencer thus conceptualizes the opportunity for altruistic action (always defined as action that also provides egoistic pleasure) as something that will be fought about, as a rare commodity. The second concluding chapter, "Conciliation," finally, again relativizes the idea that altruism and egoism are related to one another in "permanent antagonism," and argues that the two concepts should be understood as harmoniously coexistent, as finally merging into one once evolution has been completed.

The discussion provided in *Data of Ethics* leave Spencer's definition of altruism difficult to grasp. Dixon convincingly argues that this has to do with the fact that there is significant confusion about the difference between "good will" and "good action" in Spencer's definitions of altruism, which led to "certain conceptual difficulties" (201). Is altruism a feeling? an action? – these questions were already asked by his contemporaries. Apart from these conceptual problems, however, there is also the problem of Spencer's often invoked and rarely defined altruistic "end point" of evolution. How, exactly, should one picture this so-called "equilibrium" that is the basis for so many of Spencer's moral-philosophical arguments? The utopian telos of Spencer's evolutionary narrative is, at least in the chapters on altruism and egoism, not in any way defined, a problem later noted by his critics: Charles Horton Cooley, for example, states, somewhat ironically, in 1920: "The process is conceived not as continuously evolutionary but as tending towards an ideal condition of moving equilibrium, in which the relations of men to one another will be morally adjusted and we shall all be as happy as we can reasonably desire" (141). Next to obvious conceptual difficulties and the prominent Lamarckian conviction that character traits are hereditary, Spencer's vague idea of a utopian endpoint of evolution was the main reason for the scientific unsoundness of his theories. At the same time, however, their teleological direction made Spencer's theories extremely attractive for social reformers.

The utopian telos of Spencer's cosmic progress reinforces larger questions around ethics and evolution: Can one read for any reformist or utopian qualities of altruism within Spencer's logic, if the assumption is that society develops according to independent and inevitable laws? Many of Spencer's critics would disagree, and, instead, qualify his as a conservative or even reactionary system. For example, Arthur E. Jones, in his still influential essay *Darwinism and its Relationship to Realism and Naturalism in American Fiction* (1950), reads Spencer's theories in line with William Graham Sumner's more radical attitude towards a deterministic Social Darwinism. Richard Hofstaedter's classical study *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (1944), too, focuses on the conservative conclusions Spencer's theses lend themselves to: "…all attempts to reform social processes were efforts to remedy the irremediable, that they interfered with the wisdom of nature, that they could lead only to degeneration" (7). To understand the evolution of ethics as part of the evolutionary process as a whole, according to Hofstaedter, thus means to defend the status quo.[29] Frank Christianson, in his book on philanthropy, sympathy, and altruism in literary realism, is likewise skeptical about a reformist quality of altruism in Spencer's work, because it "implicitly calls for a non-interventionist response to the failings of capitalism, based on [Spencer's] liberal organicist model by which a higher pattern of social interaction – an altruistic stage – marked by cooperativism would eventually emerge from the foundation of the competition-based capitalist stage" (49). In light of Spencer's reputation as a proponent of a Social-Darwinist notion of the "survival of the fittest" and the corresponding political implications of conservatism, it would be easy to dismiss his use of the term altruism as a vulgarization of Comte's original definition, because it is devoid of reformist qualities – it is imagined, that is, as a concept that works in line with the existing social and economic order, and not as a concept designed to subvert it.

However, Spencer's definition of altruism evidently played an important role for a large number of social reformers, despite or precisely because of the inherent ambiguity of his definition of the concept. In opposition to the interpretations of Spencer's naturalistic logic summarized above, Jackson Lears argues that "[t]o most Americans, Spencerian positivism was not a bleak necessitarianism but a secular religion of progress, a social scientific version of the optimistic, liberal Protestantism which pervaded the educated

[29] Arguably, it is not a coincidence that even today, most available editions of Spencer's work are introduced or edited by avowed liberalists or libertarians. For example the edition of Spencer's *Principles of Ethics* by *LibertyClassics* - a publishing imprint associated with Liberty Fund, Inc. - is widely circulated in American university libraries. The introduction is by Tibor R. Machan, an avid defender of Ayn Rand's work. Liberty Fund, Inc., according to the bibliographical index, is dedicated to "the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals."

bourgeoisie" (22). The concept of altruism played a big role in promoting this "religion of progress." In addition to this, Spencer also influenced more radical branches of America's reformist landscape. As will be shown in more detail below, his narrative of evolution as a development towards more heterogeneity and interdependence was embraced by socialist groups, who reformulated Spencer's system into one of social cooperation. In the discussion of woman reform in Chapter 5, I will demonstrate that Spencer also influenced feminist activists and woman reformers, even though he was, at least in his later years, a firm opponent of suffrage and female emancipation, as Steven Shapin points out.

The fact that Spencer's own definite position on the moral value of the concept remains difficult to grasp did not stop the language of altruism from spreading. To the contrary: The very interpretative openness of Spencer's all-encompassing moral philosophical system might be responsible for the conceptual flexibility altruism came to obtain. This semantic flexibility, in turn, allowed for various appropriations of the concept for diverging political interests in the nineteenth century and beyond. Altruism could at once function as the watchword for a socialist agenda, both in the interpretation of evolution as an increase in cooperation, and in the promotion of the idea that human nature is inherently altruistic, while conservatives and promoters of laissez-faire politics could hold steadfast to the conviction, likewise strongly expressed in Spencer's theory, that an excessive altruism harms the smooth progress of evolution, that egoism always precedes altruism "in imperativeness." Altruism was thus, from its inception, capable of reformulating between opposing reformist and political positions.

3.3. Comte and Spencer: Conclusions

Begriffsgeschichte posits that neologisms embody the utopian; they enable an imagination of alternative social and historical realities. Both in Comte and in Spencer's account, altruism is a concept that creates such utopian *expectations:* For the first time, they made available a term that reformulates epistemologies of the human good previously expressed in religious or sentimental terms only, which also means that for the first time, it could be scientifically argued that altruism is innately human. What is more, the neologism was also frequently employed to imagine visions for a future, utopian social order. In Comte's case, this order is fixed, superimposed, and designed; in Spencer's model, it comes in the disguise of an evolutionary development with an undefined utopian endpoint. At the same time, the

neologism altruism also registers pre-existing moral codes, or *experiences* in Comte and Spencer's account. In Comte's theory, altruism is not released from religion, despite its scientific connotations. Spencer, in turn, re-reads Comte's neologism, arguably rids it of some of its potentially radical connotations, and embeds it in a familiar narrative of automatic progress. Altruism thus oscillates between the two poles of analysis suggested by the method of *Begriffsgeschichte*: It is a concept that registers experiences and that expresses expectations. This oscillation, in turn, allows altruism to reformulate between incommensurable paradigms, for example between the religious and the scientific.

The overview above also indicates that the question about how to make sense of altruism in Comte and Spencer's differing accounts emphasizes diverging (self-) perceptions and conceptualizations of the role and function of the social sciences and of politics in the nineteenth century. According to Bannister, Comte and Spencer represent different models, and their reception represents a development of the science of sociology in the United States: "Antebellum social science, inspired by Comte and often linked with communalism, was radical and utopian. During the 1860s the movement turned conservative, trading utopian vision for the more patient study of *social laws*. It was in this climate that Spencer first entered the mainstream of American social science" (66; emphasis in original). Bannister's reference to Comte's "communalism" and his radical utopianism, and his characterization of Spencer's model as "conservative" and utilitarian indicates that nineteenth-century discussions around the establishment or definition of social science are deeply entangled with politics. In fact, the analysis of the different coinages of altruism in Comte and Spencer's work and the ensuing appropriations and diverging interpretations of the concept by contemporaries and critics has shown that the neologism was a central agent in a wide-ranging ideological struggle for positions about human moral agency and responsibility in a changing, increasingly secular modern world. Comte and Spencer conceptualize altruism as the basis for an imagination of two diverging societal and political models. As Charles D. Cashdollar summarizes, "when they came to the political implications of their beliefs, Spencer was more concerned with the protection of the individual; Comte's allegiance was to the social group" (147). Both models were widely celebrated at the time – and also widely criticized: Comte's "Religion of Humanity" was denounced for its authoritarianism, and Spencer's evolutionary theories can – and indeed, have been – utilized to support an unjust social Darwinism. Reading for altruism thus sheds light not only on Comte and Spencer's position on social science, but also on their different, arguably incompatible political stances.

4. Altruism in Reformist and Social Thought: The American Debate

Spencer's model was significantly more successful in the United States than Comte's utopian vision, and it was Spencer's definition of altruism that played a major role in American reformist discourse.[30] There are several reasons for this difference in popularity and influence. Spencer's grand narrative of gradual evolutionary progress helped to spread an optimistic message of hope, it conformed with the advance of political progressivism at the turn of the century, and it was, generally speaking, more suitable for the overall program of liberal, gradualist reform in the United States. Comte's more rigid utopian model, in turn, demanded systemic or revolutionary change; it entailed the architecture for a whole new society. While Spencer's reformist model was in line with and even supportive of the prevailing socio-economic and moral order of American liberal individualism, Comte's model was not only a harsh critique of the existing social system, but the expression of a desire to change, maybe even to overthrow it.[31]

The comparably greater influence of Spencer's model can also be contextualized with Werner Sombart's famous essay "Why Was There No Socialism in the United States?" (1906), which has had lasting influence on political thinkers and historians up until today.[32] Sombart's decision to entitle his essay with a question was motivated by his puzzlement about the relative weakness of the socialist movement in America. He shared with other eminent European socialists an optimistic faith in the inevitability of socialism: based on the predictions of leading Marxists, the United States ("the country with the most advanced capitalist development" Sombart 15) should have long developed a socialist tradition (Lipset and Marks 16-20). In his efforts at answering the question his essay poses, Sombart suggests various reasons for the failure of socialist parties and concludes that competing – and, according to Sombart, explicitly American – ideologies, such as the widespread diction of upward mobility or the myth of the classless society had significantly more traction in the United States than did the worker's movement. An overall perception of economic

[30] Hawkins (1938) concludes, too, that nobody approved of Comte "without reservations" (103) in the United States, because his "Religion of Humanity," deeply colored by Catholic doctrines and principles, was incompatible with American Protestantism. A notable exception was the positivist Henry Edger (1820-1888), who founded a "Comtist Colony" in New York City in the 1850s. Throughout his lifetime, Edger struggled with finding other "converts" (25-26).

[31] Comte himself did not consider his scheme utopian. The distinction I am making here can certainly be complicated; a more differentiated account of Comte's social-utopian inclinations can be found, for example, in Cashdollar (1989).

[32] See, for example, Lipset and Marks (2000).

prosperity, a strong democratic tradition, and the absence of a feudalist past made the United States hostile towards an emerging socialist tradition (Sombart 106-110).

Sombart's diagnosis can, to a degree, further explain why Comte's utopian vision, which was associated with socialism by his contemporaries, was less influential in the United States than Spencer's model of progress and growth. But Sombart's essay can also be complicated by my ensuing analysis of the struggle over the meaning of altruism in American reformist discourse: Sombart placed little emphasis on religion and religiosity. The frequent use of the concept of altruism as a substitute or synonym for socialism in the United States shows, however, that religion played a major role for the American socialist tradition. As Kirk and Kirk succinctly state, "the tone of the social thought in the 1880's and the 1890's … was Christian rather than Marxian" (*Howells and the Church of the Carpenter* 188). Sombart also does not discuss the pervasive influence of evolutionism and social science. But, as will be shown in the following, the religiously motivated arguments about a cosmic progress towards altruism have played a major role for American socialists.

Because my research has revealed that altruism appears most often in religious contexts, the following section will address how Spencer's (and, to a lesser degree, Comte's) original definitions of altruism were discussed within American religious reformist circles. On the one hand, the language of altruism was deemed suitable to bridge a perceived divide between science and religion. On the other hand, the concept was particularly useful within the so-called Social Gospel movement and its more radical outposts. Here, the concept of altruism was frequently appropriated for the political perspective of (Christian) socialism. The ensuing discussion is not exhaustive and will be significantly expanded in the succeeding chapter, in which I analyze the institutionalization of the discourse of altruism within late nineteenth-century reformist periodical culture.

4.1 Competing Epistemologies in Academia and Popular Science

Adaptation and adjustment were not only the main scientific principles underlying the new findings of evolutionary theory, but they were also on the agenda of the church in the United States at the end of the century. Most religious reformist agendas were stipulated by new confrontations with modern, scientific thought. The increasing popularity and influence of evolutionary theories, which brought about new conceptions of progress and time, the emergence of the discipline of sociology, which delivered new insights into the relationship

between self and society, and a growing professionalization of historical research both within and outside of newly initiated theological seminars raised questions about the Bible's authenticity and its religious legitimacy. The rise of secularism encouraged both clergy and theologians to rethink religious epistemology. Modernity steered the churches into crisis and inspired and accompanied various endeavors of adaptation of religious values and practices to the scientific paradigm. In these and other strategies of reformulation, American Protestantism slowly came to accept evolutionary theory, sociology, and Biblical criticism, and was eager to incorporate those new ideas into their respective doctrines of brotherly and neighborly love (Hopkins 123). In this context, altruism was a concept that was deemed capable of translating or reformulating epistemologies of the human good. As Heather Curtis points out, "[e]ven in the late nineteenth century, when then 'battle' between evolution and Christianity is supposed to have been particularly fierce, many American theologians were, in fact, actively striving to reconcile scientific developments and Christian doctrines" and for them "scientific investigation and theological reflection were complementary rather than competing endeavors" (85). This becomes evident if one analyzes the ways in which Protestant scholars embraced evolutionary theory and the concept of altruism.

The Department of Social Ethics at Harvard Divinity School was a prime locus of the conflict between science and religion at the turn of the century. The department, a combination of "secular aims and theological ideals" (Vidich and Lyman 53), was what we today might call an interdisciplinary research institution; it began to adopt positivist techniques of interpretation and historicization in the study of Christian ethics. The curious disciplinary affiliation of the Department of Social Ethics testifies to the ways in which theology approached the new confrontations with scientific thought. Vidich and Lyman describe the Department of Social Ethics as an idiosyncratic mixture of European philosophies, among them evolutionary theories by Darwin and Spencer, Christian socialism, the Social Gospel movement, and new economic theories, all of which were "redefined to make them relevant for the American condition, and particularly to the fundamental ideas of Puritan theology and their restoration as secular values" (54). "Christian Sociology," as MacKanan calls this new direction in theological research and teaching, was practiced not only at Harvard Divinity School, but also in the seminaries at Andover and Hartford in the 1890s (129).

The scientifically coded language of altruism, alongside Comte's positivism and Spencer's evolutionary theory, entered academic discussions in this and other theological departments and seminaries. For example, it was frequently featured in the academic journal

of the Andover Theological Seminary, a graduate school affiliated with Harvard Divinity School. *The Andover Review* was the mouthpiece for a more liberal-minded branch within the department.[33] The editors of the journal were self-proclaimed "liberal" theologians.[34] Their liberalism is expressed in an open acceptance of positivism, the evolutionary paradigm, an interest in social reform, and in new scholarly and academic directives: "Theology is the science of God," declares the editor in the first issue of *The Andover Review* in 1884 (2). In scholarly practice, conceiving of theology as a science means, for example, the skeptical investigation of the authenticity of presupposed historical events in the Bible, or the interpretation of Biblical stories as allegories. In more general terms, it also means that "all claims to truth, in theology as in other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority" (1), as Gary Dorrien summarizes. In *The Andover Review*, the term altruism is, accordingly, used to express Christian virtues in a detached and scientific manner. For example, it is featured in the essays "Christianity and its Modern Competitors" and "Theism and Evolution" (6.14, 1886) which is concerned with Comte and Spencer's secular social ethics.[35] The journal's use of the concept of altruism is illustrative, arguably even constitutive of the theological approach of a scientific, liberal theology promoted at Andover.

The concept of altruism bridges disciplinary divides. Evidently, it proved suitable for the larger aims of the theological academic community: to speak in a detached, scientific manner about religion and about its own scholarly discipline, to show awareness of the growing competition with the natural sciences, and to strengthen efforts at bringing into fruitful collaboration a variety of disciplines: theology, sociology, and evolutionary theory. Moreover, in *The Andover Review*, the term altruism is featured in discussions of social problems and social reform, which were the second main focus in the journal (Mott 4; 298), for example in essays on the rise of socialism and on the labor question. Many liberal theologians were affiliated with the reformist Social Gospel movement, and vice versa. I will return to the significance of the concept of altruism for the Social Gospel movement below.

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[33] For more information about *The Andover Review*, see Mott 4; 395-400; for a history of the Andover Theological Seminary, see Miller *Piety and Profession*, 134-153.

[34] In the context of religious reform, Ahlstrom defines liberalism as "both a certain generosity of charitableness toward divergent opinions and a desire for intellectual 'liberty'" (779), and further states that "with regard to human nature, [liberals] emphasized man's freedom and his natural capacity for altruistic action" (779). It is interesting that Ahlstrom's definition of liberalism is inextricably bound up with altruism, especially because the term was often used as a synonym for socialism.

[35] Further examples of the prevalence of the concept of altruism in academic discourse are, for example, Francis Greenwood Peabody's *The approach to the social question* (1909), *Jesus Christ and the Christian character* (1906), and *The religious education of an American citizen* (1917). Other contemporary works of theology that address the evolutionary paradigm are, for example, James Bixby's article "Morality on a Scientific Basis" (1893) and George Harris's *Moral Evolution* (1896).

Even more influential for the dissemination of altruism than its employment in academic debates about the principles and the future of liberal theology was its use in more popular scientific studies that sought to harmonize evolutionary studies and the dogmas and principles of Christianity. John Fiske (1842-1901), Professor at Harvard, philosopher, religious thinker, and historian, dedicated his work to the reconciliation of evolutionary theory with the teachings of the Bible. According to Robert Bannister, Fiske was the "leading spokesman" for "American Spencerianism." His intellectual path led him "through revivalism to positivism, and finally Cosmic Theism" (63-64); in his first major work, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874), he delivered an overview of positivist thought, including an in-depth discussion of Comte's work. But even though Fiske embraced Comte's positivism in this early work, he later became hesitant about pledging his allegiance to him. This hesitation had political reasons: As Bannister states, "[i]n the Cambridge of the sixties, positivism alone was enough to win one a reputation for religious radicalism" (Bannister 64) – an implication Fiske tried to avoid.[36] In his own proposed "cosmic" philosophy, Fiske, accordingly, committed himself to following Spencer's thought, which would continue to be a strong influence on his work.

Fiske makes substantial use of the term altruism in his later publication *Through Nature to God* (1899). This book was marked and received as a scholarly, scientific study, yet rendered in an accessible language and can thus be understood as a form of popular science writing. The text features Biblical and mythical stories, poetry, and other literary references and tells a plot of human advance from the Jurassic Period to the age of industrialism. The "cosmic" telos Fiske's text aims to convey is thus mirrored in its form.[37] *Through Nature to God* is dedicated to Thomas Huxley, an English biologist and philosopher whose endeavors at policing misreadings of Darwinian evolutionary theory earned him the nickname of "Darwin's bulldog."[38] According to the preface, *Through Nature to God* is meant as a direct response to Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics" (1893), a text so influential – not only for Fiske's work, but also for other contemporary approaches towards ethics and evolution – that a brief introduction is required.

Huxley's essay, against which Fiske's theory of altruism is posed, makes many important interventions into popular (mis-)conceptions about evolutionary theory; most

[36] For more information about the scandal of Fiske's appointment at Harvard, see also Cashdollar (172-173) and Hawkins, who states that Fiske's readings of Comte had "led him to heterodox opinions in religion, for which he was later almost expelled from college" (*Positivism in the United States* 67).
[37] Historians of science have used the term "evolutionary epic" to describe this form of nineteenth-century popular science writing. See Lightman and Secord for further information on the evolutionary epic.
[38] For further information about Huxley's Darwinist approach, see Gilbert.

importantly, it criticizes the popular Spencerian notion of an independent and all-encompassing "cosmic progress" by declaring that the physical world and the moral world are two separate domains. Huxley differentiates between a "cosmic" or natural and an "ethical" process, thus deconstructing the prevalent (Spencerian) notion that evolution is inherently ethical, or that the evolutionary process follows an altruistic design. While the evolution of the natural world is governed by a struggle for existence, ethics cannot be understood as part of this underlying logic of struggle. Rather, they lie outside of it; they develop according to different, in fact, oppositional rules and laws. Ethics are neither caused by the evolutionary process, nor do they complement it, but instead, they constitute themselves by working against it.

Huxley's differentiation of an ethical and a natural evolutionary progress makes it difficult, if not impossible, to read for altruism – a word that is conspicuously absent in Huxley's text. Huxley, who was, not coincidentally, known as Comte's "most vigorous critic" (Cashdollar 164), argues that only an "artificial" force of culture, virtue, and ethics can keep the otherwise egoistic, self-interested human nature in check, and he repeatedly defines the ethical behavior of the individual as the product of self-restraint and sacrifice. According to Huxley's theory, something akin to altruistic behavior can therefore only be conceived of as something learned, trained, or nurtured, but not as something innate. In other words: In Huxley's theory, there is no conceptual or logical room for a position about an inherent, natural goodness in human nature. Paradoxically, Huxley's work is important for an understanding of how central a role altruism played in larger philosophical, religious, and political debates about ethics and evolution precisely because he did *not* employ the language of altruism.

Fiske's discussion of altruism in *Through Nature to God* is, in fact, not a response, but a complete refutation of Huxley's ideas. [39] First, Fiske debunks Huxley's divide between Nature and Culture, and argues instead in favor of a truly cosmic whole, of a continuity between the two evolutionary principles as proposed by Herbert Spencer: "I think it can be shown that the principles of morality have their roots in the deepest foundations of the universe, that the cosmic process is ethical in the profoundest sense" (79). Secondly, Fiske's

[39] Another famous opponent of Huxley's theories was Petr Kropotkin, whose work was influential for the anarchist movement in the United States. His study *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, first published in installments in the British journal *Nineteenth Century* between 1890 and 1896, harshly criticized Huxley's insistence on defining the natural world as driven by a relentless and brutal struggle. According to Kropotkin's observations, the result of several scientific expeditions to Siberia, natural life was not defined by competition, but by cooperation, a phenomenon he described with the phrase "Mutual Aid," but also occasionally called altruism. See Dugatkin and Dixon for further information on Kropotkin's theory of altruism.

cosmic process is defined by moral progress that can be read along the lines of an increase in altruistic behavior on part of the individual or the community. In the course of evolution, according to Fiske's scheme, egoism ceases, and altruism increases (105). Fiske concludes that evolution itself exists solely for moral ends. In other words: Evolutionary progress and altruism are one in Fiske's theory.

In all this, Fiske's desired consolidation of religious truths and scientific reasoning – exemplified and partially enabled by his use of the word altruism – remains somewhat unbalanced or unilateral. In his preface, Fiske states that his study is interested in discrediting "Materialism" and in placing "Theism" upon "a firmer foundation than it has ever before occupied" (xi). God is claimed to be immanent in evolution, and "cosmic progress," according to Fiske's scheme, also means that nature mirrors the design of a benevolent God, and that man, the ethical animal, becomes more and more God-like (124) in the course of evolution. It is thus all the more interesting that Fiske's text, despite its substantial dedication to theism, was marked and received as a scientific study in the late nineteenth century. Altruism, albeit firmly embedded in a religious framework, negotiates not only between the scientific and the religious, but arguably also manages to make a deeply religious text appear as a scientific study.

Fiske was not alone in his endeavor to write an evolutionary theory that was compatible with theism. Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond's immensely popular *The Ascent of Man*, and Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution*, both published in 1894, inspired international responses – both praise and criticism – by clergymen, journalists, scientists, and theologians alike (Dixon 284, Curtis 82-83).[40] Despite their popularity, however, many contemporary reviews testify to the fact that their texts did not hold up to the scientific standards of the time. A particularly harsh example is the aptly named book *Pseudo-Philosophy at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (1897) written by the English musicologist Ernest Newman (published under pseudonym), who criticizes the Spencer-inspired religious evolutionists for their method, which he finds guilty of "reducing science to the grotesque" (127). However, the main motivation for Newman's criticism is his disagreement with the religious scientists' larger agenda of reconciling evolutionary science with religious belief. Newman, whose larger mission seems to be to point out the irrationality of theism in general

[40] Drummond was influential for the Social Gospel movement because of the success of his Lowell lectures at Harvard. Drummond also made extensive use of the language of altruism in his book. As its title already indicates, his text casts itself as a rewrite of Darwin's *The Descent of Man.* However, it becomes apparent quickly that Drummond's theory of evolution is rather influenced by a Spencerian narrative of progress than by Darwinian contingency. Drummond's main thesis, similar to that of Fiske, is that "[t]he path of Progress and the path of Altruism are one" (36).

(which might explain his preference for refraining from publishing the text under his real name), concludes that Drummond's, Kidd's, and, by implication, Fiske's studies are not worthy of the adjective "scientific." Instead, he defies their theses as a "re-hash of the old theistic apologies for God, simply translated in the language of modern evolution" (119).

Interestingly, this angle of criticism, namely that theistic evolutionary theories are nothing more than simple translations of religious values in a scientific hue, was, to some extent, shared by American religious writers, but for very different reasons: They expressed their reluctance to accept the new scientific paradigm. In an 1884 article in the religious journal *New Englander*, called "The Substitutes for Christianity proposed by Comte and Spencer," American philosopher and educator Julia H. Gulliver complains about the ways in which both Comte and Spencer's philosophies are based on the assumption that Christianity is "archaic," and "obsolete" (246). However, as the essay argues, the all-encompassing systems proposed by Spencer, Comte, and also by Fiske, are, in fact, rather unconvincing reformulations: When "[s]tripped of their extravagancies, both Positivism and Cosmism seem to be selections from Christianity rather than its rivals" (258). Gulliver meticulously debunks Comte and Spencer's new humanistic systems as "vague and empty abstraction" (252), their scientific rhetoric as idle talk, and the doctrines presented in the new world systems, indeed, as a "re-hash" of old, Christian truths.

In light of this criticism, believers in Christianity also accused the recent talk about altruism of being old wine in new bottles. Poet, author, and editor Margaret Elizabeth Sangster writes in 1894 for the *Congregationalist*: "The thing for which the word [altruism] stands has always been in existence and in practice ever since to do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you fell in golden syllables on the ear of a listening world. And that was long ago" (275). In the same year, in a short review for the *New York Evangelist*, an anonymous author calls attention to the fact that the "mystic" word altruism, used by the "Fiske school of philosophers" in order to "describe their crass conception of conscience," is, in the end, "nothing but another name for the unselfish desire to do something for others," or, in other words, the "Christian rule of benevolence" (4). A reverend named George McDermot, writing for a Catholic journal in 1898, discards the language of altruism as the "Jargon of 'Ethical' Dilettanti" and claims that it is a poor substitute for "the charity of Christ" (613). All three quotes exemplify a strong reluctance towards accepting scientific terminology – and science, in general – as something capable of capturing new truths. In extension, they also reject the idea that human goodness can stem from anywhere but God.

4.2 Popularizing (Christian) Socialism

The question that guides the next part of this chapter is to what extent the concept of altruism was understood as a suitable header for actual reformist practice. In light of a growing visibility of social inequality, a dramatic increase in poverty, and the pressures and disruptions of the new urban-industrial experience, religious groups in the United States were beginning to seek a response to the problematic consequences of urban industrialization by developing a new theological framework. Occasionally called the "Third Great Awakening," the Social Gospel movement was primarily directed at societal reform. Particularly the issues of immigration, growing labor unrest, and the increase in urban poverty can be identified as the main objects for several reformist projects within and departing from Protestant denominations.

The Social Gospel was not a homogenous movement. Ahlstrom differentiates between a general, heterogeneous move towards a more "liberal theology" usually referred to as the Social Gospel, and a more radical sub-movement, sometimes called "Christian Socialism," which was primarily concerned with opposing politics of laissez-faire and questioning evolutionary ideologies of competition (789). Ahlstrom stresses the coalitional interrelation of the Social Gospel movement with the advancing social sciences. Not only was the movement influenced by the new scientific paradigm, but it also "drew political science, economics, and sociology to its service, and, whenever possible, sought to provoke in all social scientists a regard for the ethical implications of their work" (796). Charles Howard Hopkins's *The Rise of the Social Gospel Movement* (1940) a classic and still influential study, in turn, divides the Social Gospel movement into four historical phases, spanning from the beginning of the Reconstruction period to the First World War. Hopkins, too, concentrates on the influence of the new discipline of sociology on religious doctrine. Towards the high phase of the movement, which Hopkins situates as developing concomitantly with an advancing political progressivism between 1880 and 1900, Protestant theologians now claimed that God's Kingdom was to be realized on earth by re-interpreting it as the "end result of an almost inevitable progress" (122), that is, as the (teleological) end point of evolution. Practicing clergymen worked in coalition with theological scholars, who published rational exegeses in academic texts to circulate and popularize the new Social Gospel, according to which the immanence of God could be both seen in and achieved by the solidarity of men and women. Personal salvation thus became a social project.

The establishment of a cooperative brotherhood, and the insistence on an amalgamation of the sacred and the secular was formulated as the primary frame of reference for reformist action within and outside the Church. For example, the Social Gospelers promoted a new image of Jesus as a working carpenter, a "Jesus of Labor" (McKanan 199) that was instrumentalized in the Church's fight for better working conditions. The urban wilderness in New York or Chicago was likewise a frequent referent in religious texts, like William T Stead's *If Christ Came to Chicago!* (1894), a journalistic and sensational account of urban poverty, and Josiah Strong's *Our Country* (1885), a formative text for the movement. Strong argued for the importance of a "new theology of the social" in light of increased "collective encounters" (McKanan, 125), an expression he used not only to address the new urban social sphere, but also particularly the rise of immigration.[41]

Theistic-evolutionary theories about an inevitable progress from egoism to altruism, like those presented by Fiske and Spencer, were highly influential for the Social Gospelers' endeavor to reform Protestant doctrine and to promote an ideal of social cooperation. Liberal clergymen, among them James T. Bixby, Unitarian minister and Professor of theology, Washington Gladden, Congregational pastor and one of the leaders of the Social Gospel movement, and George Harris, a professor of theology at Andover Seminary, all claimed that God was not external to nature, but immanent in the evolutionary process itself. This, they argued, was made visible in the countless ways in which the evolutionary progress was driven not by selfishness, but by regard for others (Curtis 85). The argument of an evolutionary progress towards altruism had larger political and reformist implications, as Curtis summarizes, because it "provided powerful ammunition for critiquing laissez-faire capitalism and for promoting an alternative economic order based upon the 'natural' ideals of equity and justice" (84). The notion of "cosmic" progress was productive for the agenda of the Social Gospelers, because it spurred belief in an innate human goodness, which, in turn, was understood to be the basis for a more equitable (often socialist or communist) moral, social, and economic order. American socialists at the end of the century made a case for prioritizing cooperation over competition.

[41] Josiah Strong's work, notably *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885) and his various reformist projects "constituted the core program of the Social Gospel movement" (Ahlstrom, 798-799). Walter Rauschenbusch applied hermeneutic techniques of liberal theology, influenced by the German theologian Albrecht Ritschl (Hopkins, 220), and promoted the key concept of the "Kingdom of God on Earth", for example in his influential theological study *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907). For more information, see, for example, MacKanan, 123-124.

In more general terms, the American left found it necessary to create a scientific basis for their political claims, as Mark Pittenger shows in great detail in his study *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought* (1993). However, while the German socialist tradition was indebted primarily to a Darwinian model of evolution, American socialists looked for a less radical alternative, one that would neither offend Christian believers, nor challenge in too violent a manner the institution of American democracy (25). As it turned out, they found this alternative in Herbert Spencer's evolutionary theory. To be sure, Spencer is an unlikely ally for the cause of promoting a political perspective of socialism, not least because his own views on politics were diametrically opposed to those of the socialists. To Spencer's great dismay, his optimistic notion of a universalistic, inevitable, and, importantly, teleological progress towards ever more heterogeneity was reformulated into a narrative of growing collectivism, centralization, and cooperation.

A universal altruism, to recall Spencer's theory, was the endpoint of this development, an argument picked up, for example, by John Bates Clark in his 1886 economic study, *The Philosophy of Wealth.* Clark was convinced that harsh competition would cease once a certain level of interdependence has been reached. People would become more altruistic (Budd 42). He shared this conviction with Richard T. Ely, first Secretary of the American Economic Association and founder of the Christian Social Union in the United States, and an important leader of the Social Gospel Movement (Budd 42). Both Clark and Ely were reluctant to fully commit to the label of "socialism" (Pittenger 34), but it was Spencer's teleological view of progress, above all, that made possible the appropriation of the word altruism for socialist ideas and ideals.

Another text that exemplifies in which ways Spencer's definition of altruism figured for formulations of socialist thought in the United States at the end of the century is *The New Economy* (1898), lawyer and activist Laurence Gronlund's last book and in many ways a summary or synthesis of his main ideas. Gronlund's text is an appeal for the establishment of socialism, alternatively referred to as the "Cooperative Commonwealth," which is also the name of Gronlund's first, and, arguably, most influential study from 1884. In line with Spencer's definitions of egoism and altruism, Gronlund proposes that the path to this Commonwealth requires "to moralize egoism" and "to rationalize altruism" (*The New Economy*, 9). This means that Gronlund is aiming for a compromise here, one that is in line with Spencer's unresolved conflict between egoism and altruism: In Gronlund's new, socialist order, "pure altruism" – a total sacrifice of self for the common good – will not be imposed. Rather, it will foster a moderate egoism that leaves the "right to care for self and to

pursue our own interests" (67) intact.[42] While in this and many other instances, Gronlund's ideas about ethics and evolution are closely in line with Spencer's, his notion of a "rational" altruism also expands his teacher's account significantly: According to Gronlund, a rationalized altruism is enabled by developing altruism, which "at present is purely a sentiment and a very weak motive force," into an "inexorable…law" (69). By stating the necessity of a differentiation between a definition of altruism as sentiment on the one, and as ethical principle on the other hand, Gronlund responds to the criticism about the significant conceptual difficulties, and, arguably, to the shortcomings of Spencer's definition.

Next to (Christian) socialist theories, pamphlets, texts, and sermons, altruism also inspired the imagination – and often the founding – of utopian spaces and experiments in communitarianism. Examples for this can be found in the rise in production and popularity of utopian literary fiction, first and foremost Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), a novel that inspired a number of real-live endeavors at communal living and was highly influential for the movement of socialism at the end of the century. William Dean Howells's *A Traveller from Altruria* (1893), too, motivated reformers to found utopian communal projects. "Altrurian" communities and associations were founded in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, in New York City and in Boston (Budd 50). The most important, and, due to the regular publication of a journal, *The Altrurian*, also the most famous of those communities named "Altruria" was planned by a small group of reformers in San Francisco, and was built in 1894 near Santa Rosa, California.[43]

The differing appropriations of altruism can be established by the various political affiliations proclaimed by and ascribed to the eponymous Californian community. In a short article, one of its founding members, the former Unitarian minister Edward Biron Payne, describes the leading principles of the utopian colony to be "fraternal coöperation" and focuses much of his advertising essay on reassuring his readers on the practicability of the endeavor. His text is an "outline of aims, plans, and methods" that aims at proving that "Altruria no longer designates merely a new Utopian dream" (168). It is possibly for this reason that Payne claims the community to be "essentially and in a marked way democratic"

[42] Gronlund's choice to employ the Spencerian language of altruism in his theory is also indicative of his general reluctance to fully submit to Marxism, a reluctance he himself addresses in *The New Economy* (63). Gronlund's "Commonwealth" is a combination of German socialist thought and Spencer's evolutionism, but the latter is much more present in the text. Instead of promoting the importance of Proletarian struggle, and of concentrating on the working class, Gronlund decided to shift the focus of his text on the "nonrevolutionary materials of Spencerian social organicism and teleological universalistic evolutionism" (Pittenger 7). His notion of a "rational" altruism plays into this shifting of focus.

[43] For more information on the Californian community Altruria and its founder Payne, see Hine and O'Connor. Budd provides a short overview of other Altrurian communities, one of which is analyzed in detail in the succeeding chapter of this study ("Printing Utopia").

(170). Even though Payne was an avid reader of Gronlund, and his definition of altruism was probably influenced by socialist theories, altruism is, in Payne's promotional essay, claimed to be synonymous with an ideal of democracy. In turn, one of the commentators of the community provides a very different perspective on the community's politics, and, by extension, also a different meaning of the concept of altruism. The socialist activist and journalist Morrison Swift, one of Altruria's many visitors, describes the community as a "refuge for those strained and tired by competition or defeated by struggle" (643). Swift laudably defines the community's focus on common property as outright "socialist," a term he, throughout his short text, relates to the community's focus on a "broad and practical altruism" (643) In the differing descriptions of the community, one can see, again, that altruism seems to be an appropriate header both for politically radical and for more liberal and progressive endeavors at reform.

Altruria at Santa Rosa did not outlive the turn of the century. It dissipated after a mere year in 1895 (Hine 112). The members of the Altrurian colony based their social and moral order on Gronlund's – that is, by implication, on Spencer's – model of gradual reform, and the failure of the utopian community can be seen as indicative of larger problems with applying a Spencerian idea of altruism to socialist politics. The promise Spencer's model presented to Gronlund and his followers, and I would argue that the utopists in *Altruria* can be counted among them, was "subverted by its own underlying incompatibility with revolutionary and egalitarian thinking" (7), as Pittenger concludes. Spencer's optimistic narrative of inevitable progress made it also difficult to address "crucial theoretical questions about political and social struggle," and finally led to a "disarm[ing of] the movement in the face of a 'progressive' political order that could absorb some of its tenets as reforms" (7). Spencer's model was ultimately unsuitable for the various efforts at creating a revolutionary American socialist tradition, and, by extension, the concept of altruism undercut the socialist cause in the long run. This suggests that the strategy of calling a political program altruism might be limited; the failure of the utopian program and the conceptual problems within Spencer's underlying theory of gradual reform indicate that the number of competing appropriations of altruism make it difficult to ascribe to it political force or a definite political function.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on *Begriffsgeschichte* and the history of science, the first part of this chapter has theorized the neologism altruism as a concept capable of *reformulation*: The language of altruism negotiates between various orders of knowledge, primarily between science and religion. In the United States, the language of altruism was taken up by religious reformers interested in reconciling the teachings of the Bible with the new scientific paradigm of evolution. While many of them embraced altruism's semantic flexibility and considered it useful, others were skeptical, even dismissive of the term. These terminological debates, as will become evident also in the following chapters, register both the competition *and* the collaboration between science and religion at the turn of the twentieth century.

The second part has carved out the origins of the language of altruism in the works of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, and it has demonstrated that their diverging definitions of the term have had further political implications for the American debate on the meaning of altruism at the end of the nineteenth century. To summarize the importance of the concept of altruism for the socio-political and cultural climate in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, it is instructive to once more return to W.D.P. Bliss's entry in *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (1908) discussed in the introduction of this chapter. Altruism arrives in the United States not only as a new way of expressing and imagining the human condition and the human good, but it is even more prominently understood as the basis for a philosophical perspective, a "theory of life." The struggle over the meaning of altruism always involves fundamental questions about the potential composition of society, and about the moral principles that underlie social structures. In almost all accounts under analysis in this chapter, altruism – "to live for the other" – is understood as the moral doctrine underpinning a social vision that puts the group before the individual, cooperation before competition, and the Other before the Self.

Altruism is thus closely related to one of the cross references Bliss lists at the end of his entry, namely to "socialism," which Bliss defines as "the general tendency to develop a communal or cooperative organization of society in place of the existing competitive state of society" (1162). This chapter has shown that altruism was most often used as a watchword and a slogan for Christian socialist movements and programs, for example in the establishment of utopian communities, in academia and in popular scientific thought, and in various other attempts at managing the humanitarian crisis of social inequality at the turn of the century. The term proved attractive for many people who wanted to express and practice

communist or socialist reform, because it was framed by new scientific theses about evolution, and, most importantly, because it was embedded in religious discourse. My analysis of the significance of altruism for socialist thought has illustrated and emphasized the decidedly religious character of some socialist theories in the United States at the end of century. A second conclusion this chapter has drawn is that the appropriation of the language of altruism for political ends was only partially effective, however, especially because American reformers concentrated mainly on Spencer's progressivist creed, on a system which, ultimately, was incompatible with the perspective of socialism.

The "Vogue of Spencer" (Hofstaedter) in late nineteenth-century America is a suitable segue to the second cross reference provided in Bliss's encyclopedia record, namely that of "individualism." Individualism is, at least since Alexis de Tocqueville's formative *Democracy in America* (1835-1840), a key word in most cultural and historical accounts of America or Americanness. It is also an ideology that has been rather consistently claimed to have been especially radical or "rugged" in the period of the late nineteenth century, for example in important studies by Louis Hartz, Alan Trachtenberg, or Robert Bellah. In the entry featured in Bliss's encyclopedia, individualism is defined as a political category, namely as "the tendency to oppose State interference in the affairs of the individual" (717). Bliss's definition of individualism can be read in line with some of the positions purported in the later works of Herbert Spencer, such as his famous *The Man Versus the State* (1884) or the introduction to the essay collection *A Plea for Liberty* (1891), from which Bliss frequently quotes in his lengthy entry on "Individualism."

Bliss, then, positions altruism as a synonym for socialism and as an antonym to individualism – and Spencer, whose definition of altruism is centrally quoted in his encyclopedia entry, seems to be capable of being a spokesperson for both perspectives. My chapter has emphasized that this is not necessarily a paradox; the prevalence of the discourse of altruism only highlights that the line between Progressivist and more radical political perspectives is often rather difficult to draw. Finally, this also means, however, that the very *existence* of the discourse of altruism suggests that standard accounts of the Gilded Age, which are often condensed by general statements about the primacy of liberal individualism, are incomplete. Even though the immense influence of the rationale of individualism cannot be denied, the very prevalence of the language of altruism complicates the perceived supremacy of an egoist base for nineteenth-century conceptualizations of the human condition, and of an individualist base for the socio-economic and cultural order in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

2. Installments.

Reading for Altruism in the late Nineteenth-Century Periodical

1. Introduction

Among the divers [sic] agencies conducive to more or less good or evil among men, the journal plays no paltry role. (...) [T]here can not well be imagined an agency whose power and influence would be so widespread as the press.
Hazlitt Alva Cuppy, *The Altruistic Review* (1893)

In the first editorial of his newly established magazine *The Altruistic Review*, Hazlitt Alva Cuppy celebrates the medium of the periodical for its appeal to the wider field of social reform. Twice, he refers to the form of the journal as an "agency," thus officially endowing it with the capacity to act on behalf of a certain pressing issue: that of moral and social reform. The agency that is Cuppy's journal is claimed to be "conducive to more or less good or evil among men"; that is, it is designed to exert moral influence and power, thereby providing a service to humankind. While the actual merits of *The Altruistic Review*, which only ran for two years, are, of course, hard to measure, it is true that the cultural and social significance of the periodical press can hardly be overstated at the end of the nineteenth century, especially for the circulation of reformist issues. As this chapter will show, periodicals also played a crucial role in the dissemination of the language of altruism.

The first chapter of this study has begun to explore the various and competing meanings of the neologism "altruism" in reformist social thought in the United States at the turn of the century. This chapter expands on the project of analyzing the language of altruism by way of *reading for altruism* in four reformist magazines, all of which carry the header altruism in their titles. It is dedicated to investigating the institutionalization and circulation of the discourse of altruism. The form of the periodical is suitable for this kind of analysis for two reasons: First, the periodical is often theorized as a "social text" (Price and Smith 3), or as a public forum, that is, as an ongoing and (fairly) open conversation between writers, editors, reviewers, publishers, and readers.[44] Understood in this way, an analysis of the language of altruism in magazine articles and editorials, in reviews and debates, can shed light on how a larger reading public understood, used, and negotiated the new term, arguably

[44] According to Price and Smith, the term "periodical," broadly encompasses newspapers, magazines, reviews, weeklies, etc., that is "all publications that are issued at intervals that are more or less regular" (9). In the following, I will use the terms "periodical," "magazine," and "journal" more or less interchangeably.

more so than the texts under analysis in the first chapter, which are, for the most part, scientific and religious studies and often directed at a more specialized or trained readership. Second, the term altruism appears with increasing frequency in the serialized form of the periodical. Via this strategy of repetition, provided by the form of the periodical, the discourse of altruism is popularized and institutionalized, week after week and month after month.

As reflected in the title, the methodological approach for this chapter is inspired by Nancy Glazener's *Reading for Realism* (1997), a study that acknowledges the interconnection between periodical culture and literary forms, and, as such, also partly influences the succeeding chapters of my study. Assuming that the generic marker "realist" is not a coherent entity, but rather a category "whose construction has varied historically" (2), Glazener conceives of the construction of the category "realism" (and in fact, of the classification of fictional forms in general) as the product of a "complex social enterprise" (2) that manifests itself in the institution of the late nineteenth century magazine – more precisely, in a number of periodicals surrounding the "literary authority" (5) of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Glazener describes the activity of classifying "realism" in periodicals of the *Atlantic* group as an ongoing conversation between authors, reviewers, editors, and readers, and thus as paradigmatic for a general public debate about the construction of genre. It is Glazener's goal to explore genres as "public registers of interpretation" (16) and to explain, how realism was "read for" (3) by late nineteenth-century readers. Based on Richard Brodhead's notion of "the literary," Fredric Jameson's conceptualization of genre as a literary institution, and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction, Glazener's analysis of how genres "affect the packaging, marketing, and public reception of books" (5) is written under different theoretical premises than my own study.[45] Nonetheless, I find Glazener's definition of realism as "a term that acquired a repertory of uses as a result of its competing appropriations"

[45] For Jameson's idea of genre as a literary institution, see *The Political Unconscious*, 106. For Brodhead's understanding of literature as a social institution, see *Cultures of Letters*, 107-115. The influence of Bourdieu is most prominent in Glazener's definition of realism as an "establishment form" (11), a qualifier the genre earns not due to an "inherent bourgeois characteristic" of the realist form (an enduring assumption of many Marxist studies on realism, from George Lukács to Fredric Jameson), but due to its promotion in the elitist magazines of the *Atlantic* group (12), which, as Glazener claims, were deeply invested in techniques of cultural stratification. They consolidated notions of bourgeois privilege, taste, and distinction. These important premises are not explained in detail. However, it could be criticized, or it should at least be noted, that they significantly shape and influence much of Glazener's analyses and her theoretical and methodological approach. Glazener is thus reading for realism with a specific lens, an approach that is certainly necessary due to the immense corpus she covers in her study. My critique is based on the fact that Glazener only partially reflects on her reading lens. Not incidentally, I think, she arrives at conclusions about the characteristics of realism that are similar to many other critical approaches. Realism, in Glazener's account, is in the end identified as a structure that is active in "legitimating class-stratified cultural authority" (12), which indirectly supports the well-established notion of realism as a co-opted, even a corrupted genre.

(13), as well as her method of carving out the competing meanings of realism from the vast archive of the nineteenth-century periodical press compelling for my own project of reading for altruism.

As has been shown in the introductory chapter, altruism, like realism, is a highly adaptive term, a concept that, too, acquired a "repertory of uses." In order to identify the public debate around altruism, and in order to carve out its political and reformist implications, I will focus my analysis on four late nineteenth-century periodicals, all of which carry the header altruism in their titles.[46] I read the four magazines as representative of different discourses on and about the neologism, as paradigmatic for four main ways in which the term was read for: *The Altruist* (1885-1917) positions altruism as the basis for a utopian communal project; *Twentieth Century / Altruria* (1888-1898 / 1907-1908) appropriates altruism for promoting various political causes, among them socialism and anarchism. *The Altruist Interchange* (1893-1897) sheds light on how the term figures both in a contemporary debate around the contested principle of philanthropy and, more importantly, on the role it played for a particular notion of woman reform in the late nineteenth century. Finally, *The Altruistic Review* (1893-94), a magazine dedicated to the Social Gospel movement, exhibits not only how the concept of altruism integrates and reformulates scientific and religious discourse, but also shows how pervasive the language of altruism has become in the public periodical press, and, by extension, in American reformist culture at large.

I will first provide a short overview of late nineteenth-century periodical culture and its relationship to social reform. These preliminary remarks will be followed by detailed analyses of the four magazines introduced above. Not least because of the sheer size of this corpus, however, I want to be clear on how exactly I will read for altruism: I am interested in finding out what role the term played for the agenda of social reform, or rather, which promises and potentials for reform the term entailed for the people using it. While it would certainly be worthwhile to carve out other interesting underpinnings of the term, for example its affective dimension, or larger philosophical disputes the concept has spurred, I am particularly interested in asking why and how it was understood and made useful by the editors (and sometimes by the readers and contributors) of the four magazines at hand.

[46] I have retrieved those magazines from various archives, and apart from Budd's 1956 essay "Altruism Arrives in America," there is, as yet, no critical discussion available on this body of texts. I was able to look through the entirety of *The Altruist Interchange* at the Andover Theological Library, Harvard University; I examined available issues of *The Altruist* and *Twentieth Century* at Widener Library, Harvard University; in addition to this, I was able to review the first two issues of *Altruria* at the New York Public Library. *The Altruistic Review* is the only periodical that has been made available in digital form.

2. Social Reform and Late Nineteenth-Century American Periodical Culture

In various efforts at periodization, America's nineteenth century has been simultaneously described as the "Age of Periodicals" (Underwood) and the "Age of Reform" (Hofstaedter).[47] In his seminal study *A History of American Magazines*, published in five volumes between the years 1930 and 1968, Frank Luther Mott argues that the form of the periodical experienced a "spectacular enlargement and increase in effectiveness" (2) in the two decades preceding the turn of the century. It is usually claimed that the magazines' "spectacular enlargement" was enabled by technological and economic developments; both Mott and Underwood explain how the availability of the steam-powered printing press and the continuous development of new publishing technologies made magazines more affordable and thus accessible to a much larger readership in the course of the nineteenth century. The 1880s and 1890s witnessed the introduction of the so-called 10-cents-magazine, and with it, an arising mass market for periodicals.

Next to demonstrating in which ways the magazine market was enlarged, Mott also observes an increase of the magazines' "effectiveness" in the task of observation of culture and politics. This already hints at the second large paradigm of interest here: the central importance of issues of social reform. According to Mott and others, America's increasingly active periodical culture mirrors the larger, conflict-laden cultural context of the Gilded Age, which was characterized, above all other things, by an unprecedented visibility of social injustice and social inequality. The rise of unadulterated laissez-faire capitalism in the Reconstruction Era culminated in extremely divided social demographics at the turn of the twentieth century. The Gilded Age, understood as a moment of social crisis, thus posited threats to social cohesion and represented processes of large-scale disintegration. As a response to these developments, a myriad of social reform movements, many of which had existed since the antebellum period, began to occupy a prominent place in public discourse. Social reform and print culture can thus be read as related issues at the end of the century. Amanda Claybaugh argues that social reform depended on print: "Reform differed from earlier modes of social benevolence, such as charity, in its belief that social problems must be represented before they can be solved" (2). One could, therefore, rephrase the above stated endeavor at periodization in assessing America's late nineteenth century as an "Age of Reformist Periodicals."

[47] See also Cyganowski, who calls the post-Civil War era a "golden age of American magazines" (35).

At the same time, it is difficult to subsume the period under such a header, mainly because both America's periodical culture and the larger issues of social reform represent highly fragmented and diversified objects of study in the two decades preceding the turn of the century. An illustration of this point is, again, Mott's study, which can be read as a taxonomy presenting the variety of reformist publications available in the United States at the end of the century. The general move toward diversification and specialization of an almost endless number of publications – regional, religious, special interest magazines – also applies to the subfield of reformist periodicals. In his chapter "Social Issues," Mott lists several movements that "joined in forcing the serious consideration of social issues upon the American people" (190) at the time between 1885 and 1905. Even though Mott is aware of the "risk of overclassifying" (190), the five categories he presents as an ordering structure are an instructive starting point for thinking about the various ways in which American periodical culture engaged with issues of social reform. Mott classifies late nineteenth-century reformist periodicals according to their causes: organized charity; Marxian socialism; non-Marxian socialism, of which Christian Socialism is given special attention in a separate chapter of his book; Populism, and, interestingly, the promotion of the then newly-institutionalized discipline of sociology (190-191).

However, this effort at classification, as Mott himself repeatedly admits, remains but an attempt, due to the vast variety of reformist impulses represented in the periodicals listed. Not only the more overtly political and critical periodicals, often summarized under the header of "muckraking" journalism, find way into Mott's chapter, but so do periodicals that engage with reformist issues that can be characterized as more "liberal," or less radical in their agenda, and that have been influential since the mid-century, such as temperance, women's rights, and civil service reform (209). It is difficult to uphold an argument of coherence in light of such vast heterogeneity, even though some scholars claim that the issue of reform was, in fact, understood as cohesive by the contemporary reformers themselves, because there often was significant overlap both in personnel and in interest (Claybaugh 21). The concept of altruism, as the following analyses of the four periodicals will show, appears across the lines of a large range of reformist interests. In all four magazines, it is used as a universal umbrella term for very diverse reformist issues. It spans many of the categories evoked in Mott's study. In my reading for altruism in those magazines, I will draw attention to the concept's capacity to represent a panorama of issues of social reform in America's late nineteenth century.

Similarly diverse as the range of reformist publications are the ways of assessing the "effectiveness" (Mott) of their reformist approaches. Many publications that study American periodicals of the nineteenth century refer to Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" in theorizing the public reading sphere (Claybaugh, Noonan), and claim that the progressivist press was capable of forming values of national or cultural coherence, or of establishing a "reading republic" (Warner). On the other side of the critical spectrum are those studies which center their analyses of nineteenth-century periodical culture more on the construction of a mass-readership and a mass-market and accompanying strategies of cultural distinction, often by focusing on an increased influence of advertising (Trachtenberg, Garvey). Trachtenberg seems to be particularly suspicious of a desired "effectiveness" of the periodical that attempts to "do good." In his seminal study *The Incorporation of America* (1982), for example, he reads Jacob Riis's influential photojournalist text *How the Other Half lives* (1890) as an exposition, and, ultimately, as an exploitation of the urban poor. "The other half," according to Trachtenberg's reading, is presented as "spectacle" and "mystery" (126); formally, Riis's text is compared to the contemporary trend of "slumming," which makes the visiting of poor (and often immigrant) quarters of a city, guided as reformist endeavor, into little more than a touristic attraction (126).[48] Trachtenberg debunks the reformist agenda of Riis's text as a strategy of appeasement for the bad conscience of his middle-class readership.

While the reformist periodical press was thus often conceived of as a form that could be instrumentalized to actively work for the public good, many reformist periodicals were also criticized and questioned in terms of their desired effectiveness, and not only by a diverse array of critical scholarship: The genuineness and effectiveness of social reform was already called into question by contemporaries.[49] In this context, Louis J. Budd diagnoses a "crisis" in America's "reform tradition" (40) at the turn of the century. The problem introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation, namely that reform itself was in dire need of reform at the end of the century, and that the arrival of the neologism altruism can be understood as a response to this crisis, is further carved out in this chapter: Why and how was the concept of altruism made productive within the form of the periodical? In the following analyses of the four magazines, I concentrate on the claims made for altruism's capacity to reformulate reformist interest, to reform, that is, reform itself.

[48] Many middle-class reformers, in the quest of finding out "how the other half lives," extended a sensationalist interest into actual expeditions and intrusions into the spaces of the urban poor. On the phenomenon of "slumming" in the nineteenth century, see Dowling (2007) and Koven (2004).

[49] See for example Waugh (2015), who provides a succinct overview of criticism that interprets the reformist impulses of the late nineteenth century as instances of "social control" (2-5).

3. Printing Utopia: *The Altruist* (1885 – 1917)

Alcander Longley's periodical *The Altruist* (1885-1917) functioned as an organ for a utopian community in a secluded rural area in Missouri.[50] Longley, born in 1832, was introduced to communitarianism and utopianism at an early age and had been part of a Fourierist community, the North American Phalanx, from 1853-54 (Guarneri 389). In the following decades, Longley, who never lost patience with or faith in an ideal of an alternative, communal way of life, would found a number of utopian communities, among them "Friendship" (1872-77), "Principia" (1881), "Mutual Aid" (1883-87) and the "Altruist Community" (1907-1910), all of which struggled with low membership numbers and were short-lived. Longley's earlier utopian experiments were still loosely based on Fourier's visions, but he became more and more disappointed in the individualism within Fourier's system, particularly in its reliance on "capitalist investment, private property in shares, and allocations of community to individual separated members' 'pecuniary interests'" (Guarneri 389). Consequently, Longley committed to communism in the late 1860s.[51] Because he now no longer insisted only in mutual assistance and cooperative labor, but also, and vehemently so, in common property, however, Longley had an even harder time recruiting middle-class members. Throughout his life, he tried to rectify this circumstance by publishing periodicals designed to promote his vision of communitarian life. Accordingly, his print ventures not only tell the story of the various communities Longley founded, but they also, in a more general sense, testify to the longstanding search for the right utopian form that defined his life and writing.

Longley's periodical *The Communist* ran from 1868 until 1885 and was then re-named *The Altruist*. One could read the name change simply as a pragmatic choice, as Budd does, when he calls Longley's adoption of altruism a strategy, representing a "permanent relief of Marxist expropriations of his first nom de guerre" (44). In fact, as has been explained in the introductory chapter, it was a prevalent scheme to use altruism as a makeshift, or even as a cover up for more radical political terms, like communism, socialism, or anarchism. However, Longley's article "Our Removal and New Departure," printed in the first issue of the newly-renamed *The Altruist* (April 1885), introduces more explanations for the necessity of this reformulation. First of all, the article testifies to the failure of Longley's utopian

[50] see also my short discussion of the community *Altruria* in Santa Rosa, California in the preceding chapter.
[51] Next to his journal, Longley published at least two studies on Communism. *Communism: the right way, and the best way, for all to live* appeared in 1880, and *What is Communism?* was published in 1890 at the Altruist Community.

"Mutual Aid Community," established in 1883 near a small village named Glen Allen in Bollinger County in Missouri. At the time, the community was facing two major problems, namely impending insolvency, and, more importantly, a lack of members. In addition to this, the article also demonstrates a problem with the community's location in the "comparative wilderness" of Glen Allen. Despite its remoteness, the community received and reviewed "numerous reformatory exchange papers" (*The Altruist* 8.1,2) and thus managed to stay informed about current national and local reformist movements. But according to Longley, a move to the city of St. Louis was an inevitable step in helping the larger issue of reform in a more "peaceable and more practicable" (2) manner. "Life in the Communities" had become obsolescent; the community's secession from the social order is now claimed to be "entirely out of keeping with the inventions of labor-saving machinery and scientific discoveries which now require a combination of large numbers of persons closely together" (2). The group's subsequent move to an urban environment is thus justified by access to industry, business, and science; the city is stated to offer better chances at education and more efficient ways of spreading reformist ideas.

Put differently, the article states that industrialization and progress do not come to a halt, not even in a utopian community in the woods of Missouri. The article "Our Removal and New Departure" therefore first and foremost calls for the need of an update, for a modernization of utopian communal living at the end of the century. The accompanying name change of the magazine, from *The Communist* to *The Altruist*, is inextricably related to this demand. In the magazine, the new header altruism holds the promise of encompassing an updated access to the issue of social reform and utopian communal living, a turn away from notions of romantic retreat and rural seclusion. Altruism is a suitable banner for the community's "New Departure," because it relates the utopian or reformist endeavor to an idea of the modern and the urban, evoked, among other things, by the categories of "science" and "business" in the article. A second article of the *The Altruist*'s first issue, "Our Change of Name," in which Longley provides further and more explicit explanations for the name change, substantiates this reading:

> Wishing to extend the circulation of our paper more widely and also to assist all other reforms as much as we can, we have adopted the name of ALTRUIST instead of COMMUNIST, as being not only more general in its application to all progressive and reformatory movements, but also as more explicitly expressing the fundamental principle of the common interest which we advocate […] (*The Altruist* 8.1,1).

First of all, the term "altruist" is chosen because of its "*general*" applicability "to *all* progressive and reformatory movements," the adoption of the term allows the paper "to assist

all other reforms" [emphasis added]. In line with the conceptualization of altruism presented in the introductory chapter of this study, the advantages of its conceptual flexibility are spelled out here: altruism is claimed to be a *passe-partout* for all things concerning social reform. In addition to this, the expressed interest in "all progressive and reformatory movements" can be seen as a case in point for the perception of coherence of reformist culture, even though this culture was, in fact, highly diverse and specialized in America at the end of the century (Claybaugh 21). Prominent reformist issues that are featured in this and later issues of *The Altruist* are temperance, prohibition, and women's suffrage; generally, it is dedicated to furthering cooperation, communal living, and the principles of communism. Altruism is here claimed to be a catchall term for a vast variety of reformist interests. Second, altruism is claimed to be able to "more explicitly" explain the "fundamental principle of the common interest" which the community "advocate[s]." Altruism is thus presented here – tellingly, in legal rhetoric – as a concept with which the political perspective of communism can be both understood and practiced. This notion is supported by the fact that each issue of *The Altruist* features a section called "Articles of Agreement," which consists of a manifesto and a list of rules, guidelines, and organizational matters that are to enable and secure everyday live in the utopian community. Finally, altruism also seems to be better suited to bring across the magazine's selling points: the term is purposefully chosen, because it promises "to extend the circulation of our paper more widely." This claim for a particular marketability of altruism points towards its connotations with newness, trendiness, and the modern.

Altruism is thus endowed with at least three qualities – universality, practicability, and marketability – in the first issue of the re-named periodical. In this and following articles, these three qualities are reiterated, and lent cultural and professional legitimacy by a number of sources, all of which, as I argue, help in the task of installing and institutionalizing the new discourse of altruism. The first instance of such an installment is the addition of the dictionary entry, printed below the article "Our Change of Name" cited above: "Altruistic. —The following is Webster's definition of this word from which we have taken the name of our paper: —'Regardful of others; proud of or devoted to others; opposed to egoistic" (8.1,1). The editor thus strategically provides the periodical's new name with the authority of the language archive that is Webster's Dictionary.[52] At the same time, however, this very maneuver could also be read as a case in point for the term's relative obscurity in the year

[52] Dixon dedicates large parts of the first chapter of his study on the incorporation of the term altruism into everyday language use by describing and analyzing how the word entered the *New English Dictionary* in 1884 (13-33). See also my discussion of W.D. P. Bliss's *New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* in Chapter 1.

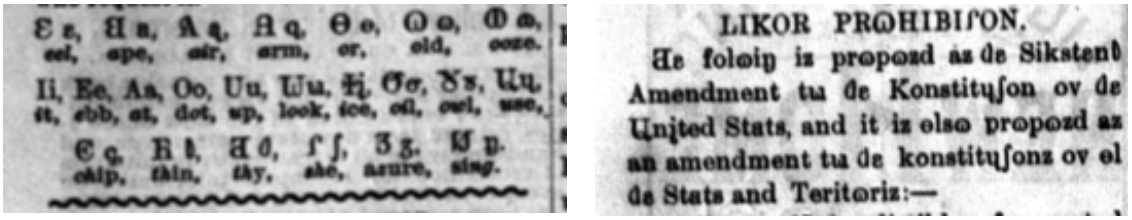
1885. In fact, Budd claims that Longley was the first person to adopt the term altruism as a "trademark" (43) for a periodical in the United States. This circumstance raises an important question: If a dictionary entry is still deemed necessary, and if Longley adds the entry under the assumption that the term still requires definition and explanation, does this not paradoxically contradict all other claims made previously about its universality, its practicability, and, by extension, also its marketability? I propose that Longley's official introduction of the term altruism is not only meant to promote a certain communal life-style, but also to advertise the new language of altruism itself.

A different kind of advocacy for the term altruism is delivered from the field of medicine in an article printed in the editorial of the issue of September 1886. A physician named Jos. Rhodes Buchanan proposes that altruism is "the highest evolution of hygien [sic] and substitute for the pathology and therapeutics of medical colleges" (8.8, 1), thus linking the term to the realm of medical experimentation and to the thriving school of phrenology.[53] Buchanan locates altruism in "the upper portion of the brain…which connects man with the higher world," a location most precarious: Since it is responsible for a person's happiness and health, its "destruction by disease produces total paralysis" (1). While Buchanan's proposition, so far, has been rendered in terms of scientific inquiry, the potential cause for "disease" stems from a different source, and is, surprisingly and arguably also somewhat inconsistently, claimed to be located in the realm of economics and politics: "I may add that [the upper portion of the brain's] impairment in competitive society is the chief source of ill health" (1), Buchanan concludes, not without recommending that only the secluded life at a communist community would guarantee a patient's physical and emotional integrity. A separation from mainstream society, exemplified in the community "Mutual Aid," is here prescribed on doctor's orders. Buchanan's short article is featured in the magazine at a time when the membership numbers of the community were already declining. Due to the fair amount of absurdity in Buchanan's argument it is possible to read his contribution as humorous irony. But it is much more likely that his article is meant to function as an endorsement of Longley's utopian project. At the same time, Buchanan's professional, medical opinion lends authority to the new language of altruism.

In addition to the legitimization rendered by the dictionary entry and the expert opinion of a medical professional, *The Altruist*'s endeavor at institutionalizing a discourse of altruism is also very much present on the materiality of the page. Not only is altruism

[53] The author of the article is – probably - Joseph Rodes Buchanan, a professor of physiology known for coining the discipline of psychometry.

presented as a motto that provides practical instructions for utopian living, but its utopian quality is also radically spelled out in a different feature of the magazine. Large parts of the magazine are printed in what Longley calls “Phonetic Spelling”:



(*The Altruist* 8.1, 4)

Budd and Grant both disregard Longley’s fascination with experimental printing as an unnecessary hobby, which had the additional disadvantage that it further alienated his already dwindling number of readers and followers. I, however, read the representation of this new alphabet or language as one of the most interesting aspects of the journal, namely, as a dramatization of Longley’s reformist ambitions, as a way of printing utopia.

Longley’s phonetic spelling, while still familiar enough to be legible, has the effect of a defamiliarization of viewing patterns and reading habits, and, quite literally, represents a radical reformulation of the symbolic values of script, print, and, arguably, language itself. Even if it were true that Longley’s phonological experiments produced alienation in his readers, it does not automatically follow that they are to be read as a failure. Rather, I suggest that the alienating effect of Longley’s alternative spelling be understood as deliberation. Support for this kind of reading is provided by Elizabeth Carolyn Miller’s study *Slow Print* (2013), which analyzes and theorizes the problematic relationship between late nineteenth-century radical politics and mass print culture in Victorian Britain. Miller argues that late nineteenth-century radicals and anticapitalists eager to promote their socialist, anarchist or communist agendas faced the problem of having to rely on a decidedly capitalist form, namely the medium of the periodical, whose logic of mediation was in danger of undermining the political values it aimed at expressing. In her introduction, Miller sums up the core issues of her study by asking: “Did print function as a synecdoche for capitalism, wordlessly conveying the values of mass production, homogeneity, and invisible labor? Could this capitalist technology[…]be used to produce anticapitalist political effects?” (6). Her analysis centers on William Morris’s print work of the 1880s and 1890s, which exhibits various strategies of defamiliarization, for example, departures from typological standardization, a dedication to small-scale print, and a limited circulation. Miller reads these alienating effects

as a response to the problem of how to convey radical political messages in a medium that is decidedly un-radical. She concludes that Morris's print works enact a kind of "utopian space on the page" (Miller 37), and are, ultimately, to be understood as attempts to create an alternative, separate socialist printing sphere away from the mainstream print market. Arguably, the phonological experiments printed in the issues of *The Altruist* can be understood as a similar form of *slow* print. Like William Morris, Longley might have wondered whether standard print would undermine his utopian projects, and, consequently, used the feature of phonetic spelling in order to construct a printed *other* space from within and against the capitalist form of the periodical.

Admittedly, this argument is somewhat in conflict with the main desired function of Longley's magazine: The endorsement of his utopian project and the recruitment of new members. After all, Longley's is, first and foremost, a (capitalist) language of advertising, expressive of the wish to convince more people to withdraw from mainstream society and join the community. The concept of altruism is chosen not for its exclusiveness, but rather for its universality and its marketability. These arguments are repeated in a later issue of the periodical, of December 1886. This reiteration, provided in the form of a reader's letter, can be understood as yet another attempt at installing the language of altruism. The correspondent begins his letter by stating that he likes the word altruism for its recentness and "because it covers the entire ground" of modern liberal and progressive reform (8.9,1). Again, the modern tone the periodical is claimed to take on by adapting the neologism is connected to its general applicability. However, the correspondent emphasizes that it is not only the term's newness that makes it attractive:

> But the word Altruist is not only new, but carries with it the highest and noblest conceptions, and purest thoughts of all the religions and philosophies of all times and climes[…]It commends itself at once to the reason, the sympathies and the best sentiments of human nature – in short, it is a refined and scholarly term expressive of genuine Good-Samaritanism" [sic] without the hackneyed hypocrisy connected with the abuse of that phrase. (8.9, 1)

Altruism is said to be able to relate to reason, sympathy, and sentiment, thus taking up also the points raised by the physician Buchanan, who attempted to use the term in order to bridge a gap between the medicine of phrenology and the political perspective of communism. The respondent praises altruism for its ability to cross and negotiate epistemological and disciplinary boundaries. Furthermore, its universality is reiterated, this time not only referring to the landscape of social reform, but in fact, to a sort of universal humanism: The language of altruism reaches across *all* "religions and philosophies," of *all* "times and climes." Finally, the term's ability to reformulate between disparate discourses is related to an ongoing

competition between science and religion: Altruism's "scholarly" connotations serve as a "refined" update for the "hackneyed hypocrisy" of Christian doctrine. Altruism is privileged over the available, but now obsolete religious vocabulary of "disinterested benevolence," as the letter continues, and it is also deemed capable of replacing the "false" economic rhetoric at display in phrases like "promoting every interest according to its relative value" (1).

The letter echoes the editorial of the first issue of *The Altruist* in its praise for the benefits of the term, and can therefore serve as a summary of the way in which altruism is constructed and advertised throughout the periodical: The concept functions both as a unifying umbrella term, and as a reformulation of a number of disparate discourses. Altruism is claimed to be a universal header for a larger issue of reform, it is the basis of a program of reformist practice, or a guide to proper behavior within the (utopian) community, and it is a term whose newness in the 1880s, ascertained by a dictionary entry, holds the promise of enlarging the periodical's readership. Altruism is held up as a modern update of previously existing notions of social reform and communal living, and it reformulates existing Christian vocabulary. If one takes into consideration other aspects within and surrounding the periodical, namely alternative approaches to language and repeated "real-life" endeavors to establish an alternative way of communal life, altruism is made productive here as a concept that allows for the imagination of a utopian social order. In all this, altruism is both the object of and an agent in an ongoing project of advertising: The periodical tries to advance the language of altruism, and, at the same time, the concept is deemed capable of reformulating a broad number of reformist interest, and thus of modernizing the failing utopian community.

And yet, this particular reformulation was not crowned with success. As it turns out, the letter printed in the December issue of 1886 functions both as a laudation and a lamentation. Placed next to an article that reads "Twenty Men and Women Wanted" which summons the (presumably small) readership of the periodical to take action and join the community at risk of extinction, the letter that praises the potency of the word altruism can, at the same time, be read as a testament to its unproductiveness. The article is also a desperate attempt at advertising, or a final recruitment. For Longley's "Mutual Aid Community," whose move to the city of St. Louis has been the central theme of *The Altruist*'s first issue of 1885, continued to have only a handful of members. It would, in fact, be the last of Longley's utopian projects that involved other people than himself and his family (Morris and Kross 213). As W.D.P. Bliss states in the entry on the Altruist Community in his *New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (1908), the utopian project remained but "[A] small attempt at community life" (29). Louis J. Budd agrees that Longley would not be able to show any "startling results"

(44) in establishing a viable alternative to America's individualist and inequitable social order during his lifetime, neither with his utopian experiments, nor with his publications. One of Longley's last recorded endeavors at founding a utopian community – the "Altruist Community" – consisted, according to a newspaper article of 1909, of "himself and…an elderly woman stricken with paralysis and rheumatism, bed-ridden but enthusiastic" (quoted in Grant 43). The community of two occupied one dilapidated house in St. Louis, and would soon be disbanded. However, Longley's printing office remained in place, and *The Altruist* would continue to be published regularly until 1917 – a year before Longley's death in 1918.

4. "All Sides of all Questions": *Twentieth Century* (1888-1898) and *Altruria* (1907-1908)

For the largest part of its duration, the weekly periodical *Twentieth Century* had the subtitle "A weekly radical magazine." Its political agenda, namely, the promotion of socialism and anarchism, is at the forefront already in its early volumes, but it becomes all the more apparent towards the end of its term. In fact, it becomes strikingly obvious when the magazine, after a hiatus of seven years, reappears in 1907 in the form of a monthly under the name *Altruria*. I read the adoption of the term altruism as an end point of an increasingly radicalized political agenda represented in the magazine. In my analysis, I will delineate the magazine's development and suggest several explanations for the adoption of the term altruism. The periodical makes productive use of many of the associations the concept altruism evokes (associations that have been summed up in the analysis of Alcander Longley's magazine *The Altruist* and that can also be contextualized with Auguste Comte's definition of the term), even though altruism is not a core concept in the early issues of the magazine. At the time of the periodical's resumption in 1907, it becomes apparent that altruism is capable of reformulating not only reformist interests, but also more explicitly political values and attitudes. The term advocates distinctive socialist-utopian ideas and ideals in *Twentieth Century / Altruria*.

The periodical was initiated by Hugh O. Pentecost (1848-1907), a minister, editor, lawyer, and lecturer known for his unorthodox opinions, which he usually delivered in the form of sermons in an anti-denominational church he founded in New York City. Among other things, Pentecost supported Henry George's Single Tax land reform, and he publicly spoke in defense of the four executed anarchists in the Haymarket Affair of 1887. The

publication of the sermon "Four more men murdered," in which Pentecost openly committed to the anarchist cause, amplified an already stark division in his congregation and resulted in his resignation from his position as minister in a Baptist church in New York City (Helms). After this, Pentecost founded a new church and launched the weekly periodical *Twentieth Century* in 1888. He ran its initial volumes under the mottos "Devoted to Secular Religion and Social Regeneration" and "Hear the Other Side." As these headlines already imply to some extent, *Twentieth Century* was dedicated to establishing a dialogue between religion and science. This politically motivated endeavor at reconciliation is not only apparent in Pentecost's editorials, but also in many other features of the magazines: Recurring contributors with diverse backgrounds provided articles that were usually political, scientific, or philosophical in style and theme and often engaged in religious and evolutionary thought. The centerpiece of the magazine was a report of an address Pentecost delivered, every Sunday, in New York City at the headquarters of the magazine. These addresses dealt with a variety of issues that can be described as politically radical; examples of recurring topics are labor reform, anarchism, and the denouncement of the death penalty. Pentecost's "Address" was delivered in religious rhetoric and can be compared to the form of the sermon in terms of theme, style, and performance. Finally, the magazine also entailed short fiction, poetry, and book recommendations, all of which revolved most frequently around encounters between science, religion, and politics. As Pentecost states in an early issue of the periodical:

> Editorially the paper is progressive in theology and social economy. It advocates a religion that embraces all that is good and true and a political economy that makes for exact justice and brotherly love between man and man. It declines to give its religion a name, however, because it will not be limited by a name, and it has no economic hobby (2.12, 89).

This refusal to "give a name" is repeatedly stated in the early issues of the magazine. I read this as an articulation of a search for a reformulation, as an implicit need to find a way to express a conjuncture of science and religion in the context of social reform or, as Pentecost calls it in the header of his magazine, of "Social Regeneration."[54] Could altruism – a concept that is located in-between those discourses, and a term the magazine ultimately adopts – be the name that allows to "advocate a religion" and a "political economy," that gives substance to an undefined desire for establishing a secular, humanist religion that bears reformist potential? In the paragraph quoted above, Pentecost's wording alone is reminiscent of Comte's proclamation of a "Religion of Humanity." Pentecost's evocations of "brotherly

[54] I have not been able to find out if the periodical and Pentecost himself can be counted among the Christian Socialist movement. Pentecost repeatedly insists on a departure from traditional Christian doctrine (Helms), but to my knowledge, he did not openly identify with Christian Socialism.

love" and the insistence on the theological and economic progressiveness of the periodical further corroborate the suspicion that one can read for altruism here already.

There are more ways in which Pentecost's periodical can be related to Comte's conceptualization of altruism, even though the term itself is not mentioned at this early stage of the periodical's publication history. While Pentecost's proposed religion that "embraces all that is good and true" remains nameless, his periodical *does* have a name, a name that signifies a larger mission, which can be contextualized with Comte's "Religion of Humanity" too. As Pentecost states in the same issue of the magazine:

> THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, as its name indicates, advocates all healthy advance toward the establishment of the coming universal religion of truth, justice and love, and the reorganization of society upon what I believe to be an ideal basis, viz.: that of co-operation among free men…That is to say, we desire to assist in educating the people in the principles of the new political economy as rapidly as possible (2.12, 90).

With this prognosis of a coming of a "universal religion of truth, justice and love," that will enable the desired "reorganization of society," a connection to Comte's "Religion of Humanity" can be made that goes beyond the level of rhetoric. Like Comte, Pentecost formulates a utopian belief in the "healthy advance" of society that would lead to a paradisiacal reign of "truth, justice and love." While Comte laid altruism as the basis for the coming of the new religion, and believed, in line with his proto-evolutionary or millennialist theory, that utopia would manifest itself if people acknowledged altruism's dominance over egoism, Pentecost more vehemently articulates a need for action. He provides practical advice by stressing the importance of education of the people in the field of "the new political economy." This call reinforces the periodical's general mission to reconcile religion and rational science, because the "ideal basis" of "cooperation among free men" is not located in religious doctrine, but in the discourses of science, politics, and economics: The "coming universal religion" has a materialist basis; "the new political economy" can directly be identified with socialist and anarchist thought in the periodical.

Twentieth Century was sold in 1892 and Pentecost quit his editorial office (Mott 178). Daniel O'Loughlin, who took over the editorship in 1895, changed Pentecost's motto into "United Intelligence and Material Equality," which manifests a development that was some years in the making: The later volumes of the magazine are decidedly more radical in rhetoric and tone. Mott and Howard Quint, in his 1953 study *The Forging of American Socialism*, both classify the magazine's political orientation as Fabian Socialist; Quint also states that O'Loughlin was one of a few middle-class supporters of the People's Party, whose demands concentrated on such various issues as the eight-hour day, state-ownership of some

institutions, and the proscription of the 'Pinkerton'-police (225). In many contributions of the magazine, the tone is satirical in its condemnation of capitalism; Marxist thought and utopian ideas feature in the political and fictional columns, respectively. Strikingly, however, the religious dimension of the periodical – a prime concern of Pentecost's – is less prominent in these later volumes.

Instead, a different topic is on the forefront: Literature. Not only is there an increase in publication of literary texts in serial installments (for example, the periodical features the novel *A Peasant's Story of the French Revolution* by the French writer duo Erckmann-Chatrian in the late 1890s), but *Twentieth Century* also makes available critical discussions of contemporary fiction, mostly of utopian literature. In 1898, outspoken socialist (later anarchist) Leonard D. Abbott provides literary criticism of works by William Morris and Edward Bellamy, among others, in the section "Studies in the Literature of English Socialism" (*Twentieth Century* 10.25, 8-10). Bellamy himself contributed texts to the magazine (Mott 178). This can be contextualized with a general influence of (utopian) literature on the development of American socialism in the late nineteenth century, which is exemplified by the popularity of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888). Not only did the novel inspire a notable upsurge in the production of utopian literature in the United States at the end of the century, but it also famously influenced the public's imagination of a socialist alternative to the existing capitalist order; the forming of a number of socialist clubs that aimed at translating Bellamy's utopian fiction into fact is just one of many other examples.[55] As Quint argues in his chapter "Bellamy Makes Socialism Respectable," Bellamy's influence on the development of American socialism can hardly be overstated; according to a plethora of reviews and responses Quint lists in his study, Bellamy was hailed first and foremost as a social prophet, and only secondarily as an author of literary fiction (73). The public figure Edward Bellamy plays a similar role in *Twentieth Century*.

The influence of utopian literature on the development of late-nineteenth-century American socialism allows for a first important statement to be made about the magazine's name change in 1907: *Altruria* is the name of the utopian land in William Dean Howells's fictional trilogy, of which the first part, *A Traveller from Altruria,* was first published in 1888, and which ended with *Through the Eye of the Needle* in 1907. The periodical's renaming into *Altruria* can therefore be read in line with a larger discussion about the influence of

[55] See Quint for a summary of the history and political agenda of the Nationalist network (72-102).

imaginative utopian literature on politics and the development of socialism within the United States at the end of the century.[56]

Interestingly, however, the editors of *Altruria* do not acknowledge this literary reference. Rather, the concept of altruism functions as a combat term for the promotion of what the editors call a "sane radicalism" (*Altruria* 1.1, 4). This ethos of "sanity" is defined by broadness, openness, and tolerance by the editors, who claim that *Altruria* "will offer a free platform to liberals and radicals of various shades, it will endeavor to become a chain uniting all humanitarians in one body, working together whenever they can, and working separately whenever and wherever they must" (4). The periodical, accordingly, exhibits a conversational or dialectical structure: Many representatives of diverse political groups, marked as liberals, radicals, conservatives, and anarchists, among others, engage in dialogue or in so-called symposia, in which current issues are weighed and discussed, in which viewpoints are debated from opposing perspectives.[57] The editors of the periodical also openly invite reader responses. In line with this debate-like approach, the periodical is not dedicated to one detectable theme. Instead, it promotes a wide variety of reformist interests, among them evolutionary science, immigration and nativism, monogamy and free love, charity and eugenics. With their promotion of "sane" radicalism, the editors attempt to abstain from propaganda, and wish to guarantee that no viewpoint on any controversial issue remains uncommented or unchallenged.

An illustrative example of the periodical's methodological and political approach of open debate can be found in the second issue of *Altruria*'s first volume (1907). Here, two opposing viewpoints on immigration restriction – an issue at the focus of public attention at the turn of the century – are presented, and both revolve around a legitimation of the science of eugenics. Discussions revolving around an already strong nativist sentiment against immigrants, especially from Eastern Europe, became more and more scientific in nature at the end of the century. According to Peter Schrag, the early years of the twentieth century

[56] An extensive discussion of utopian literature is provided in Chapter 3; Howells's utopian novels are discussed in Chapter 4. In addition to this, a connection between *Altruria* and Longley's *Altruist* can be extended to a claim about the history of American socialist thought. In delineating the development of nineteenth-century American socialism, Howard Quint states that: "To establish a direct organizational relationship between the early utopian societies and the socialist political movement of the latter decades of the nineteenth century would be difficult if not impossible. Yet the two should not necessarily be sharply divided from the other, since the utopian spirit and in particular its ethical ideals were to permeate the American reform, labor, and radical movements for many years to come" (6). The employment of the concept of altruism in the two magazines – from its utopian connotations in Longely's community, to its use as a rhetorical tool that reformulates notions of socialism and anarchism in Altruria – can possibly function as an "organizational" link between a tradition of mid-century American utopianism and the socialist and anarchist political struggle that was at the heart of public discourse at the end of the century.

[57] Among many others, *Altruria* features the feminist Voltaire de Cleyre, the anarchist activists Morrison I. Swift and Bolton Hall, and the poet Sadakichi Hartmann (Longa, 18).

witnessed a resurgence of Gregor Mendel's genetic laws, the introduction of intelligence testing, the creation of the Eugenics Society and the American Breeders Association, and various other efforts at so-called "race-betterment," all of which backed up a thriving resistance against immigration (7-10). Eugenics provided new abilities of racial cataloging and promised new ways of monitoring the "progress" of the nation.

The editors of *Altruria*, William J Robinson and Victor Robinson, deliver the first argument. Titled with the question "Should Immigration be restricted?" their article argues in favor of open borders and of welcoming foreigners, who, after all, have "made this country what it is" (1.2,4), as the authors later claim. The article is mainly preoccupied with the medical inspections prospective immigrants had to undergo at the ports and borders of the United States.[58] Conceding that any "country is justified in exercising some kind of supervision over the quality of its immigrants" (4), the authors admit that prospective immigrants that are infected with contagious diseases (leprosy, consumption, yellow fever, and cholera) can and should be denied access to the United States. Examiners who establish other medical criteria for restricting immigration, however, are harshly criticized for their lack of attention to scientific standards. The editors argue that many of these exams are not conducted for the "sanitary supervision" of potential newcomers, but are, in fact, guided by misinformation and ignorance, as much as they are motivated by prejudice and contempt. The article, in short, is dedicated to debunking the application of the science of eugenics in the context of immigration as "bosh" (4) talk, a task that is further given weight by the fact that both editors were medical professionals.[59]

As it turns out, the article's deconstruction of the underlying ideology of racism and nativism in the science of eugenics is necessary, as the response to the editors' article shows. In it, a recurring contributor named Harold Palmer, who represents conservative, often reactionary views in the periodical, argues that immigration is "One of the Greatest Dangers." The anxieties presented in his essay are both introduced and framed by the discourse of eugenics. Palmer believes that a failure to establish immigration restriction would have devastating results: "Our blood as a nation will be deteriorated" (6), as he states in the opening paragraph of his essay. In the course of the article, he enlists common racial

[58] Immigrants were tested for fitness and sickness at Ellis Island and other places between 1891 and 1924. See Yew (494) and Zenderland. See also Schrag (77-79).

[59] William J Robinson was Victor Robinson's father. Both were medical doctors and specialized in sexology and urology. William J Robinson was an advocate of the birth control movement and published widely on the issue. Both Robinsons published on the political perspective of anarchism until the 1910s; after this, they published only their medical research.

prejudices, among them the immigrants' supposed illiteracy, their alleged inclination to crime and insanity, and the fact that a continuing arrival of uneducated foreigners would further propel the already severe labor problem by lowering the wages. It becomes apparent that Palmer, in line with the science of eugenics he consults, believes that not only the immigrants' diseases are contagious, but, in fact, virtually everything about them: Their "poor physique" threatens to lower "the general physique of the nation." The newcomers' higher birth rates result in the fact that "our social characteristics are being threatened with extinction." In short, Palmer presents an uncompromising eugenicist and nativist viewpoint, spiked with the appropriate vocabulary: "blood" and "deterioration", "hordes" and "swamps" abound in his article.

It is exactly this kind of eugenicist argumentation and rhetoric that the editors' previous opinion piece is directed against. The two opposing viewpoints read like a classic dialectical essay, with an important difference: There is no conclusion provided. To deduce from the editors' more tolerant viewpoint, then, that they generally distance themselves from the discourse of eugenics would be premature. In the same issue that features the debate about immigration, one of the editors writes a biographical sketch of Ernst Haeckel, in which he praises the leading German eugenicist, who would later exert immense influence on the *Rassenlehre* of German National Socialism, as one of the "greatest men of the second half of the 19th century" (1.2, 10). In a later issue, the editors of *Altruria* lament the fact that the *American Journal of Eugenics,* with whose editors the Robinsons seem to have cultivated a neighborly friendship, and which they deem "an interesting, clean, valuable and mechanically attractive journal" (15) is in danger of being discontinued.

How can the interest in and cautious support for the increasingly influential discourse and practice of eugenics, which is, after all, most often and most commonly discussed in terms of political conservatism, the status quo, with *laissez-faire* and Social Darwinism, be conciliated with an otherwise pronounced interest in anarchism and socialism? How can eugenics and altruism work, as they so often do in the periodical *Altruria*, on the same page?

The periodical *Altruria* bears witness to the fact that the attraction of the ideology and movement of eugenics was all-pervasive at the turn of the century. It is not incompatible with, but, to the contrary, incorporated into the magazine's larger calls for social justice and social equality. Many studies, such as Ordover's *American Eugenics* (2003) or Luczak's *Breeding and Eugenics in the American Literary Imagination* (2015) focus on the historical pervasiveness of eugenicists arguments, but only partially address the fact that eugenics, evidently, also held in store promises for political groups that can roughly be described as

dissenting the status quo. However, eugenics functioned as the guiding discourse across the spectrum of political perspectives, as D.J. Kevles states: "Socialist, progressive, liberal, and conservative eugenicists may have disagreed about the kind of society they wished to achieve, but they were united in a belief that the biological expertise they commanded should determine the essential human issues of the new, urban, industrial order" (76).

Kevles's quote also emphasizes that the link between the science of eugenics and anticapitalist political perspectives can be established via a shared utopian paradigm. The pervasive discourse of eugenics is based on a belief in the perfectibility of mankind, a utopian belief which likewise permeates the discourse on altruism in *Altruria*. "The world is slowly but surely getting better and is steadily advancing towards the millennium" (1.1, 6), as the editors pronounce in an early issue. Conforming to the evolutionary theory of Herbert Spencer, which is praised and reviewed throughout the periodical, *Altruria,* in line with the utopian overtones the word carries, calls out a teleological endpoint of an altruistic future. It does not take much to come from here to eugenics, which can be understood, too, as a "utopian ideal[s] of organizing a perfect society" (Luczak 4). As will be shown in the analysis of *The Altruist Interchange* below, and in more detail in Chapter 5, the discourses of eugenics and altruism often overlap, mainly because of a shared belief in the betterment of humankind and society.

Altruria's ethos of debate, as can be concluded from the preceding analysis, constructs the concept of altruism as one that enables dialogue between – and tentatively bridges – a vast variety of political issues, including even reformist interests that do not, at least not at first glance, appear to be consistent with the overall goal of promoting a political perspective of anarchism or socialism. *Altruria* is thus truly a continuation of the project launched by the periodical's predecessor *Twentieth Century*. The genealogy between Hugh O. Pentecost's encouragement of dialogue and debate in the 1880s and the Robinsons' later "sane radicalism" is directly established in an obituary notice for the recently deceased Pentecost, an excerpt of which reads as follows: "Knowing that all intellectual progress comes only thru [sic] the discovery and renunciation of error, it would seem as tho [sic] at different times [Pentecost] had advocated almost every opinion that obtained any currency" (1.4, 8). With the introduction of the conceptually flexible term altruism in 1907, Pentecost's motto "Hear the Other Side," first issued in 1888, is dramatized in *Altruria*'s call to regard "All Sides of all Questions." The short duration of *Altruria*, which was disbanded a year later in 1908, however, points to the fact that this call for granting *every* opinion currency, this demand for uninterrupted debate and free conversation remained itself a utopian wish.

Arguably, it also shows that the potential for reformulation inherent in the concept of altruism was sheer endless – and, possibly, thereby also limited and limiting.

5. "Unsentimental" Woman Reform: *The Altruist Interchange* (1893-1897)

The periodical *The Altruist Interchange*, as its name already implies, functioned as a forum for and as a means of communication between various reformist projects and philanthropic organizations that can be subsumed under the header of woman reform. In columns entitled "Fresh Air Mission," "The Nursery Department," and "Flower Mission," the quarterly featured calls for philanthropic activities and reports of their success, short stories, poetry, appeals for political participation and advice on how to sew baby socks. Since the periodical focuses on social issues that were, in the nineteenth century, usually presented, discussed, and often solved by women, "woman reform" seems a suitable label to describe the overall agenda of *The Altruist Interchange*. In her 1996 edited volume on women's role within the American periodical press, Kathleen Lee Endres defines the larger archive of women's periodicals as "communication networks" (xvi) and shows that they were, more often than not, concerned with a wide variety of reformist issues, such as temperance, suffrage and woman's rights, religious reform and dress reform. This diversity did not only concern the subject matter, but also the political perspectives of their editors, however: "The women who edited these publications did not always speak in a 'feminist' voice" (xvii). The label "woman reform," then, does not exclusively refer to feminist reform.

For even though *The Altruist Interchange* was published by and for women, feminist issues – defined as such issues that are concerned with women's suffrage, women's rights, and women's emancipation – are suspiciously absent in the magazine. As Aleta Feinsod Cane and Susan Alves explain in the introduction to their edited volume on women and American periodical culture, the periodical press was an important, maybe even indispensable medium for the propagation of women's issues and women's liberation. Quoting from Margaret Fuller, whose career was very much defined by the periodical press, Cane and Alves define the periodical as "the only efficient instrument" not only "for social and political advocacy," but also "for the critique of gender roles and social expectations" (1). Similarly, Fraser, Green, and Johnston emphasize in their study on gender in British Victorian periodical culture that the "promotion of broader social justice issues through the periodical press…also served as a mechanism for promoting the interests of women" (146), that in the nineteenth

century, an ostensible focus on social reform often served the purpose of introducing and preparing feminist concerns. One reason for the marginalization of feminist issues in *The Altruist Interchange* could therefore be that its short duration (*The Altruist Interchange* appeared every three months from 1893 to 1897) did not allow a shifting of the preparatory focus on broader social issues into the promotion of a pronounced feminist agenda. A more probable cause for the absence of feminist issues, however, is the disagreement about suffrage and women's rights among the women that made up the editorial staff.[60]

My analysis of *The Altruist Interchange* explores which role the concept of altruism plays for the periodical's overall mission to publicize, to institutionalize – and finally to *reform* – woman reform in the late nineteenth century. As will be shown, *The Altruist Interchange*, like *The Altruist* and *Altruria*, constructs altruism as an umbrella term for a diverse range of reformist issues. However, the periodical's use of altruism differs in great measures from the two magazines previously discussed. *The Altruist Interchange* is not ostensibly interested in using the concept in order to discuss politically radical ideas and contents or to otherwise instigate ways to imagine and practice a utopian alternative. Rather, altruism is here related much more closely to notions of gradual, of "liberal" reform, influenced to a great extent by the term's association with the fields of science and politics. It is a Spencerian understanding of the term that is in focus, which conceptualizes altruism as feeding into an ongoing process of evolution, as a concept that works in line with, not against, the existing social and economic order. Stripped of its revolutionary or radical potential, the word altruism is often used synonymously with "philanthropy" and "charity" in *The Altruist Interchange*. It is, furthermore, a sort of "practical" altruism that is promoted in the periodical. What implications does the editors' conceptualization of altruism have for the reformist agenda of the periodical?

In the first issue of the periodical (January 1893), the editors of *The Altruist Interchange* provide a long and detailed explanation of the meaning of the concept of altruism, which serves a number of purposes I will discuss below:

> ALTRUIST – we assume that everyone knows what the term signifies, yet perhaps some would rather be dealt with as the man who was asked if he knew Latin, and replied, "Yes, but treat me exactly as if I did not!" Altruism, derived from *alter*, another, in contradistinction to *ego*, I, is simply the opposite of egoism. They are the two branches of the philosophy known as Utilitarianism, which accepts happiness as the end and aim of human life. The egoistic form of

[60] The chief editor, Adaline W. Sterling, was engaged in the suffrage movement (she edited the periodical *The Woman Voter* from 1916-1917). Another editor, Mrs. William Starr Dana, who would later publish under the name Frances Theodora Parsons, was likewise active in the movement. On the other side of the spectrum, Mrs. Arthur M. Dodge gained fame with the publication of a controversial essay that argues against woman's rights (1914). She also functioned as the president of a leading Anti-Suffrage Organization. For more information on Sterling, Dodge, and Parsons, see Endres and Lueck; especially 454-459.

> the theory (individualism) makes each man's personal happiness his aim and his ultimate test of Right; the Altruistic form points to the happiness of others, and therefore of the greatest number, as this ultimate test. The progress of thought has been from a self-regarding point of view to a more generous and benevolent.
>
> The French philosopher, Comte, first used the world Altruism; and Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill established it in the English tongue. We are not concerned with the fine analytic divisions of thought in regard to the Happiness Theory, as Utilitarianism, in general, is called. Some philosophers are altogether opposed to it as a basis of ethics; but it is what mankind instinctively accepts. And Altruism, or thought recognizing the general laws of conduct and setting aside impulsive self-gratification for the greatest good of the greatest number, "alone can enable us to live in the highest and truest sense" (3).

Altruism is defined despite the stated assumption that "everyone knows what the term signifies" – a contradiction that has been observed in Longley's periodical as well, which includes a dictionary entry while at the same time making claims on the universality and marketability of the term. On the one hand, the insistence on the term's high degree of familiarity observed in the opening sentence of *The Altruist Interchange*'s definition can be read as a case in point for its relevance and currency in discussions of social reform at the end of the century. But the fact that this statement is followed by two paragraphs that aim at explaining the concept's meaning also indicates that it might still be very difficult to determine in 1893.

Altruism is first defined etymologically. The repeated reference to Latin, first in the representation of a dialogue with an imagined reader who, despite his learnedness, demands to be treated as someone who needs support in deciphering the meaning of the term, and then in the note on the word's root, *alter*, point not only towards a gesture of a certain intellectual training on the part of the editors, but also suggest that altruism was still understood to be a neologism at the end of the century.[61] It is also noteworthy that the imagined reader is defined as male. An important request issued throughout the periodical (which will be discussed in more detail below), namely that women should not only obtain knowledge about social science and political economy, but also learn how to communicate it, is already implicit in the female editors' explanation (and their humorous schooling of the imagined male reader) of the concept of altruism.

Although Comte is credited with the coining of the term, the editors neither relate altruism to Comte's positivism, nor to his Religion of Humanity, but instead delineate a genealogy of the philosophy of utilitarianism in their etymological derivation of the concept's

[61] Ironically, in his coinage of the term altruism, Comte himself was reprimanded for "break[ing] one of the cardinal rules of respectable neologizing" (Dixon 49) by combining a Latin root with a Greek ending.

meaning. More precisely, they refer to "*two* branches of the philosophy known as Utilitarianism," one of which attests to the primacy of individualism, which "makes each man's personal happiness his aim and his ultimate test of Right," and one which, by pointing to "the happiness of others, and therefore of the greatest number," is claimed to be altruism. While it is not too difficult to relate the former "branch" noted by the editors to what is commonly subsumed under the header of utilitarianism, the term altruism is rarely found in definitions of the philosophical tradition, and, arguably, seems somewhat misplaced. However, if one historicizes the editors' claim, some aspects of their definition become more graspable.

The editors' utilitarian definition of altruism can be substantiated by Stefan Collini's argument about a common misconception of the intellectual and moral-political climate at the end of the century as one that was solely based on a philosophical belief of individualism.[62] Collini instead claims that late nineteenth-century politics and culture were rather shaped by an "exhaustiveness of the *dichotomy* of egoism and altruism" (67; my emphasis). The editors' reference to "two branches" exemplifies this very argument. In addition to this, Collini's prime example for his claim about a prevalent contrast between egoism and altruism happens to be the work of one of the main proponents of the philosophy of utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill, who, even though "his work may seem likely to be awkwardly resistant to being accommodated" within Collini's larger argument, in fact showed an "intense commitment to altruism" (68). Utilitarianism and altruism are thus not necessarily perceived as opposite perspectives on morality in the late nineteenth century. Next to John Stuart Mill, a second contemporary source, likewise mentioned by the editors, substantiates the claim about the compatibility of the philosophy of utilitarianism and the moral perspective of altruism: Herbert Spencer relates his definition of altruism to Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers in *Data of Ethics* (250). As Dixon points out, Spencer had accused Bentham of promoting a "pure" altruism (even though the confusion and error inherent in this argument was already observed by his contemporaries), a straw man argument used to strengthen his own claim of the need for a compromise between altruism and egoism. It is thus very likely that the definition provided in the editorial of *The Altruist Interchange*, with its focus on "two branches" of utilitarianism, is influenced by this debate, and that the editors of the periodical derive their meaning of the concept of altruism directly from Spencer's writings.

[62] A more elaborate discussion of Collini's study *Public Moralists* (1991) is provided in Chapter 1.

The editors' dedication to a Spencerian definition of altruism is also reflected in their employment of evolutionary rhetoric. Examples for this abound in the periodical, as in the paragraphs cited above: Of the "two branches" that are claimed to make up the philosophy of utilitarianism, the "altruistic" branch is deemed superior not according to some religious or ethical doctrine, but because "the *progress* of thought" has naturally led to a gradual supplanting of altruism over egoism. The editors thus echo Spencer's theory of altruism and embed their definition of the term within an identifiable frame of an all-encompassing evolutionary progress. Rhetorically, the editors also engage in psychological discourse: For example, utilitarianism is represented as an approach that "mankind *instinctively* accepts," and altruism is defined as the rejection of "*impulsive* self-gratification." The conspicuous use of this kind of psychological and biologist vocabulary indicates that the editors of *The Altruist Interchange,* next to citing theories and figures related to the field of political economy, read altruism also as a term of popular contemporary science.

In fact, the focus on social science and political economy, already present in the definition of altruism provided in the editorial, is of utmost importance for how *The Altruist Interchange* conceives of its reformist agenda: It is claimed to guarantee the periodical's mission to deliver new "impetus and direction" for the modern woman who wishes to engage in reformist activities. Like the two periodicals discussed above, *The Altruist Interchange* calls for an update and a modernization of reform. As it turns out, the main argument made throughout the magazine, namely that sensible, reasonable, and effective reform is contingent on an alliance with the discourses of science and politics, is not only present on the level of (evolutionary) rhetoric, which permeates most of the writings published in the periodical, but it is made rather explicit in a quote in the magazine's first issue: "Women wish to go, without sentimentality, to the roots and causes of social difficulties and apply their work intelligently. It is decidedly good for them to study social science, as it […] shows them what lies beneath our immediate surface-needs" (4). Underlying this statement is a belief, common among reformers in the late nineteenth century, that simple charity, understood as almsgiving, is not enough, but that a "cure" is needed, that modern reform should pay attention to both causes and consequences when dealing with social ills. This modern approach to reform is informed, according to the periodical, by knowledge and scientific expertise, and is not influenced or propelled by "sentimental" emotions.

However, the magazine's rejection of the label of sentimentality also has important implications for how it conceives of modern *woman* reform. John Waugh's 2014 study on the contemporary reformer Josephine Shaw Lowell (1843-1905), whose efforts at organizing,

synthesizing, and professionalizing social reform show many parallels to the concerns expressed in *The Altruist Interchange*, provides context to these claims. Lowell became known for installing a movement called "Scientific Charity" and founded the "Charity Organization Society" in 1882.[63] Waugh historicizes Lowell's work and writing by delineating a short history of nineteenth-century woman reform in the United States. From the early 1800s to the Civil War, as Waugh summarizes, American philanthropy was decidedly feminized; women did not only shape, but, were, in fact, chiefly responsible for the establishment of social welfare: "[T]he foundation for American women's public role in this area was provided by their social role as the nation's moral overseers" (7). This "powerful cultural belief" in woman's greater moral capacities, her greater emotionality and sensibility, was often subsumed under the paradigms of domesticity and sentimentality.[64] In the context of the critical situation of the Gilded Age, Lowell expressed doubt and criticism of the value of sentimentality for her reformist agendas. Lowell's notion of scientific charity was based on the belief that in order to alleviate poverty, an approach informed by business (organization) and science was needed.

Like Lowell, the editors of *The Altruist Interchange* put stark emphasis on a scientific approach toward charity. Despite the periodical's occasional stress of a rather old, and tenacious stereotype of a feminine influence, or the possibility of a feminization of male-dominated politics,[65] sentimentality is decidedly *not* the category that lies at the structural core of the periodical's modern approach to (woman) reform – and, accordingly, also not at the core of the editors' definition of altruism. Altruism was, both in Comte's and in Spencer's account, deemed to be more pronounced or more prevalent in women than in men. In claiming this, Comte and Spencer reformulated already-existing notions about women's alleged greater sensibilities in biological or evolutionary language registers. But the magazine's construction of altruism does not make use of this updated argument of woman's moral superiority. Rather, as has been pointed out above, altruism is related to notions of

[63] See Himmelfarb's excellent and extensive discussion of the British forerunner of this reformist trend, the Charity Organization Society, in her *Poverty and Compassio*n (185-206).

[64] Lori Ginzberg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence* (1990) can be mentioned as an example of a large strand of scholarship on woman's writing and woman reform, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Ginzberg argues that the "celebration of women's moral excellence" manifested in their pivotal role in the issue of social reform, went so far as to reflect "an ideology that conflates ideas about femininity with ideas about morality itself" (1). Ginzberg analyzes woman reformers during and after the Civil War, and claims, that already here, woman reform transformed from a focus on sentiment and moral suasion to one of organization and corporation.

[65] For example, it is proposed in the first editorial that the goal of the periodical is to encourage women to "infuse into the technics of Political Economy an element which corresponds to what we call 'expression,' or feeling, in art" (4). "Feeling" and "expression" are said to enable a female, that is, a compassionate and humane perspective on the problems of social injustice and social inequality. Sentimentality is here claimed to be an access point for women to the male-dominated public sphere.

organization, professionalism, and scientific expertise. There are two articles that illustrate this focus on professionalism and on science, respectively:

In the editorial of the magazine's first issue, in which the editors explain its purpose, present its structure, and announce its novelty, they claim its unique selling point to be its "business-like tone." This is likewise true for the reformist organization at heart of the magazine, named *The Needlework Guild of America,* which provided columns and reports for the periodical, and whose members were also in part responsible for publishing and editing it. The *Needlework Guild* mobilized women to share the fruits of their household labor in city-wide and state-wide guilds so as to better distribute the products of their charitable domestic work. The format had a British forerunner, which first made "serviceable" for the cause of reform the otherwise "listless and aimless occupation" (4) of knitting.[66] This means, on the one hand, that the bourgeois pastime and artistic practice of knitting is endowed here with a functional, with a reformist purpose. On the other hand, the editors insist that the organization is not called the "needle*woman*'s guild, but the needle*work* guild for every woman" (5). This qualification is especially important if one takes into consideration that the editors of the magazine (and, presumably, its readers, too) belonged to a socioeconomic group that could afford to knit for charity in the first place. It is noteworthy, too, that the editors consistently stress the organizational aspect of their charity work, or, more generally, the precondition of a business-like attitude for their reformist endeavors. In addition to this focus on female work and labor, the *Needlework Guild* is also alternatively referred to as a "union" and a "confederation" (5). It is described as a "central directing power" which allows for a "systematic arrangement" of the needlework to be donated. Accordingly, each guild is organized in a unit of five persons, "Presidents, Secretary, and three directors; Vice-Presidents and a Treasurer may be added by a town or village branch" (5). The abundant political rhetoric used to describe the organization of the guild, and, of course, the general associations the very concept of the "guild" evokes, show that female domestic work is here connected to ideas of professionalism and to notions of political association and participation.

The Altruist Interchange constructs the guild, and not the domestic space, as the locus of productive woman reform. By making herself familiar with the male-dominated discourses of politics and science, and by forming political associations, the reformist woman is called to partake in the public sphere. The repeated and diverse calls for a political or scientific, that

[66] *The Needlework Guild of America* is still active today, as is its British forerunner, known today as *Queen Mother's Clothing Guild*. See http://www.nga-inc.org/index.htm and http://qmcg.org.uk/history/.

is, for an unsentimental approach towards the issue of reform, in fact, legitimize the magazine's title. Altruism is capable of knitting together both discursive fields presented in the magazine. Again, one can observe the concept's capacity to reformulate accesses to reform that are considered outdated, unproductive or, in this case especially, coded as female and sentimental.

A different kind of expertise is performed in the journal's focus on the science of eugenics. In their introduction of the American *Needlework Guild,* the authors create a direct lineage to their English forerunners, coated in a eugenicist language of heritage and progeny. "[T]he vibration of the Saxon race-strain in our English cousins" will now be continued by the American heirs. Moreover, their most precious values, "thrift" and "providence for [the] household" are guaranteed by "blood" from "still older Teutonic races" (1.1, 5). Already here, in this first issue, it becomes apparent that underlying the woman editors' reformist self-conception is a eugenicist belief in the inheritability of character traits like thrift and diligence. As it turns out, this scientific truth does not only apply to "good," but also underpins anxieties about the potential inheritability of "bad" character traits, among them criminality, laziness, and mental disorders, all of which are, according to the periodical's approach of a "practical" altruism, conceived of as social ills most desperately in need of reform.[67]

In the introductory editorial to the issue of July 1897, which is dedicated to a discussion about the care of persons with disabilities and mental disorders, the editors' fascination with the science of eugenics and its relationship with 'practical' altruism becomes visible. In the article, the editors warn that what they call the "taint of preventable imbecility" is "gaining stronger and stronger hold upon our vitality." With the term "vitality," the editors refer to the mental health of the nation, over which they, as Anglo-Saxons, claim ownership via the possessive pronoun "our." The authors continue to recommend "celibacy" and life in an isolated asylum to the "Feebleminded," measures that are claimed to be the only remedy for the threat of "this self-multiplying stream" (1). These recommendations, alongside the use of a dismissive rhetoric familiar from nativist anxieties over immigration, already point to the direction the periodical is, ultimately, going to pursue. An article in the same issue of 1897, which is seemingly dedicated to providing the readers with insight into life and work at an asylum, reveals the editors' eugenicist agenda: They conclude that the medical method

[67] Newman convincingly argues that the anxiety about (racial) degeneration developed concomitantly with the idea of evolutionary progress, and that it was especially prevalent in discourses on and about woman reform and womanhood, because "white elites" felt they had to protect "white women, precisely because they began to hold this group responsible for the development of new race-and-sex traits…" (30). Chapter 5 will discuss the so-called "race suicide" theory in more detail.

of "asexualization" (6) — that is, forced sterilization — must be accepted as a "necessary evil" (6) in the task of preventing the procreation of the mentally ill or intellectually challenged. Written in an almost clinical language, and supported by the inclusion of statistics, the editors use scientific language and methods to authorize their claims. This scientific code, however much it guises the agenda as legitimate, does not manage to coat the inhumanness of a practice much advertised at the end of the nineteenth century. The main benefits of forced sterilization, are a reduction in "expense and troubles." The method is, in other words, less costly. The "practical" altruism promoted in the magazine, therefore, also means to apply the "utilitarian principle" in order to decide upon whose life is, in a literal sense, worth living.

The Altruist Interchange's view on eugenics can be seen as a point of departure for the criticism Gilded Age reformers – and thereby also Gilded Age *woman* reformers – have rightly received. In this context, Waugh provides a concise, but substantial overview of a critical tradition, stemming mostly from the 1970s and 1980s, and often referred to as "social control theory." The main claims brought forward within this critical perspective are that many Gilded Age reformers, in their various efforts at "doing good," in fact only ensured "the unequal relation of power between those who have and those who don't" (4), that the benevolence and goodwill practiced and promoted in late-nineteenth century reform often disguised its main interest: to make the poor behave within the system, to ensure the status quo, and to exert social control over the underprivileged and undeserving. In the context of a discussion of the British Charity Organization Society, which bears many similarities to American efforts at scientific charity, Gertrude Himmelfarb summarizes the main claims put forward by proponents of the social control theory (to which Himmelfarb's study itself partly belongs) as follows: "[C]harity is seen as a means of pacifying the lower classes and forestalling revolution, visiting as a 'cultural assault upon the working-class way of life,' and 'moral reformation' as the imposition upon the poor of those 'middle-class values' and 'self-help mentality' that would keep them in bondage to the established order" (200). Arguably, many reformist endeavors at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond were more successful in appeasing rich reformers' troubled conscience than in providing sustainable support to the poor.

The impetus of "social control" defining much nineteenth-century reform was, arguably, carried to the extreme in the emerging fascination with the science of eugenics, exemplified also in *The Altruist Interchange*. In fact, Waugh notes that scholars adherent to the social control theory concluded that "welfare's oppressive tendency was nowhere as

strong as in so-called 'scientific charity'"(4), because it "cloaked in the language of business and social science" (5) an otherwise anti-humanitarian interest in conserving class difference, white privilege, and, in the case of eugenics especially, racial and sexual "purity." *The Altruist Interchange*'s negotiation of the "problem" of the "Feebleminded" discussed above illustrates this, and it also shows how the language of science supported the task of exerting social control: Eugenics, according to Luczak (2015), "shrouded its ideology in an aura of scientific respectability. Relying on biometrical evidence, on the newly developing science of statistics and on genealogical and hereditarian charts, eugenicists argued that they simply could not be wrong" (5). The article discussed above incorporates all of the methods enumerated by Luczak, and illustrates how the rise in importance of the context of science, hailed throughout the periodical, has unsettling consequences for assessing the reformist projects promoted in *The Altruist Interchange*.

To conclude, the "utilitarian" definition of altruism provided and practiced in the periodical shows the extent to which the concept of altruism was also utilized for interests of social control. *The Altruist Interchange* shares with the two periodicals previously discussed an understanding of the concept as a semantically flexible term that enables "interchange" and communicative consolidation between a number of diverse reformist issues. It also has in common with *The Altruist* and *Twentieth Century/Altruria* a decided focus on the professional and scientific connotations of the term, which allows for the establishment of an approach of woman reform that is "unsentimental." However, altruism's utopian overtones are here repeatedly applied to an ideal of a purified, perfect society that summarizes the ideology of eugenics. As Franz Boas has famously asked in his 1916 warning about the moral dangers of the "science" of eugenics: "Have we a right to give to our modern ideals the stamp of finality, and suppress what does not fit into our life?" (476). The analysis of *The Altruist Interchange* has shown that the woman editors believed that right was theirs, and they and others exercised it under the header of altruism.

6. "Drawing Balance": *The Altruistic Review* (1893-1894)

"*The Altruistic Review* is an attempt to organize the good impulses of the world" (1.1,1), states its editor Hazlitt Alva Cuppy in the first issue of his new magazine. Like the three periodicals discussed above, *The Altruistic Review*, a journal published monthly in Chicago between 1893 and 1894, functioned as a forum for a heterogeneous array of reformist

organizations and movements. However, as this analysis will show, this "attempt to organize" does not only define the periodical's thematic focus. It also concerns its form. In its expressed interest in appealing to the reformist spirit of the time, later in the editorial called an emphasis on "the altruistic and the humanitarian," the periodical stresses the importance of providing both *record* and *review* of an increasingly diversified reformist printing press. Recognizing that the "varied quantities of publication which flood our country" are in desperate need of order and classification, *The Altruistic Review*'s program is, according to its first editorial, which is designed to explain its aim and focus, one of summary (record) and commentary (review) of contemporary reformist writing, or, in short, of "all that's worth remembering" (1). The following analysis of the periodical will focus on the various strategies of organization and collection exhibited in the magazine. It will also show that *The Altruistic Review*'s self-description as review marks an attempt to fix and to install the discourse of altruism as instrumental for the task of regulating a highly fragmented and diversified reformist landscape at the end of the century.

Altruism is, in the periodical, often used synonymously with "humanitarianism" and therefore conceived of as a broad concept, unifying a number of reformist and humanitarian projects and aspirations. These aspirations are often embedded in a framework of "cosmic" evolutionary progress. As in the quote of the beginning of this section, altruism is often described as an "impulse" or a "force," a semantic field that brings to mind the evolutionary and psychological language of Herbert Spencer, who prognosticated that the world is continuously becoming more altruistic. In addition to this, the concept of altruism is most prominently used within the context of the Social Gospel, a religious movement that endeavored to solve the social problems of the time by approaching questions of social injustice with Christian ethics. The periodical is openly dedicated to this religious reform movement. [68] As is explained in more detail in Chapter 1, protagonists of the Social Gospel movement, in their desired transformation of Christian doctrine into a more "liberal theology" (Ahlstrom), also cooperated with the advancing social sciences. This context clearly shapes the editor's use of the concept of altruism. Accordingly, *The Altruistic Review* conceives of altruism as a rational reformulation of religious values like benevolence and neighborly love. In the editorial of the journal's first issue, Cuppy notes the Christian overtones of the concept. The values held up and promoted in the periodical, namely the

[68] This focus is furthermore underlined by the endorsement of various Unitarian ministers: Both Henry Drummond and Walter Rauschenbusch contributed articles to *The Altruistic Review* (see volumes 3.1. and 3.2, respectively). For an overview of the Social Gospel movement and its use of the concept of altruism, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

"doctrine of the brotherhood of man," otherwise known as altruism, is not really news, as Cuppy concedes: "The Sermon on the Mount is full of it" (3).[69] By emphasizing the "altruistic and the humanitarian" (1), by choosing the header altruism, the periodical, accordingly, is not "grasping a new truth," but rather a "truer apprehension of an old truth's meaning" (3). These words frame the ways in which the magazine makes use of the concept of altruism for promoting a religious agenda.

Next to the focus on the Social Gospel movement and an implicit allegiance with the Spencerian camp of evolutionary theorists, the periodical repeatedly makes reference to the importance of transatlantic relations in the issue of social reform. It also exhibits a focus on woman reform. Female writers are frequently featured.[70] The issues addressed in *The Altruistic Review* are broad and diverse; there is no overarching theme of interest to be detected in the magazine. Rather, the magazine makes its interest in the form and function of the *review* itself its focus.

The Altruistic Review exhibits a consistent structure. In each introductory editorial, current political issues and social problems are discussed. The interests represented in these editorials are extremely varied; the editor discusses the labor crisis, racism, (social and biological) evolution, and many other topics. The introductory part is followed by a biographical sketch – "from an Altruistic Standpoint" – of various persons who "have devoted [their] life or [their] best energies to the good of [their] fellows" (1.1,1). Among the altruists presented, over the course of the periodical's duration, are Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Walt Whitman, and William T. Stead. These biographical sketches can, in a way, already be read as reviews, as reassessments of a personality or a biography from a reformist, or altruist, perspective.

In fact, the remainder of the periodical consists almost exclusively of reviews. At the heart of the *Altruistic Review* is a section called "Winnowings," which makes up more than a fourth of each magazine. The section is one of selection; in it, other periodicals, newspapers, and journals are scanned for contributions that revolve very broadly around the issue of social reform. Among the magazines reviewed on a regular basis are the *North American Review*, the *Review of Reviews*, *The Forum*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Arena*, and *The Cosmopolitan* – all of which can be counted among the most popular and most prestigious periodicals in

[69] The Sermon on the Mount was a central text for the Social Gospel Movement, because it called for the necessity of social salvation, of creating a Kingdom of Heaven on earth.
[70] Suffragist Frances Willard (1839-1898), president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, repeatedly contributed articles to *The Altruistic Review*. She became associate editor of the journal *Our Day*, which merged with *The Altruistic Review* in 1895.

the United States at the end of the century.[71] Sometimes, the review section also covers smaller publications, like the journal *Our Day*, with which *The Altruistic Review* would later merge.[72] The section "Winnowings" is thus aptly named: the review section aims at separating the wheat from the chaff among an increasingly complex and ever-growing mass of reformist writing. The remaining articles of the periodical, among them the section "The Altruist Corner," summarize and list notices of current events in reform organizations and provide book reviews. All of these reviews are claimed to "exist for the better expression of man's and woman's energies along the lines of the altruistic and philanthropic" (1.1, 35).

What *The Altruistic Review* lacks in original content or in "news" proper, it makes up for in reviews. In fact, the primary concern of the periodical is not to provide a new angle towards the issue of social reform, but to shed light on the increasingly complex and disorienting mass of contemporary reformist writing itself. Accordingly, the periodical focuses on the role of the press in furthering humanitarian and altruistic causes. Among other things, this interest manifests itself in recurring contributions by and about the British journalist William T. Stead. Stead, who lived in Chicago at the time of *The Altruistic Review*'s circulation in 1894, was known as a pioneer of investigative (or muckraking) journalism. He edited the sensationalist newspaper *The Pall Mall Gazette* and founded the popular journal *Review of Reviews* in 1890. According to Laurel Brake and James Mussell, he advocated a "government by journalism" (1) and launched several (successful) military campaigns through the medium of the periodical.[73] In a more general sense, his work demonstrated how the press could be utilized to influence public opinion. Stead was also the son of a minister, and his widely successful *If Christ Came to Chicago!* (1894), an account of life and politics in the city of Chicago, and a documentary of its social problems, among them most prominently poverty, prostitution, and alcoholism, exemplifies how his reformist approach was not only contingent on an idea of investigative journalism, but also thoroughly informed by his religious morals. These themes play an important role in *The Altruistic Review* as well. Stead's person and his text, respectively, are the topic of two "Altruistic" biographical sketches featured in the periodical in 1894. Throughout the periodical, Stead is hailed not only as a reformer, but he is even more so praised for his contributions to modern

[71] See Glazener, *Reading for Realism*.
[72] *The Altruistic Review* merged with the magazine *Our Day: a record and review of current reform* into *Our Day, the Altruistic Review* in 1895. The joint venture ended already a year later. The project "Our Day" merged with a different magazine, the Pulpit Herald and was renamed into *Twentieth Century Monthly*.
[73] An extensive discussion of Stead's life and the influential text *If Christ Came to Chicago!* is provided in the 2012 essay collection *W.T Stead, Newspaper Revolutoinary* edited by Laurel Brake, Roger Luckhurst, and James Mussel. For Stead's religion and how it influenced his writing, see especially John Durham Peter's essay "Discourse Network 1912" (166-180).

print, to a "New Journalism." It is likely that Stead functioned as a sort of mentor to Cuppy, who would himself make a career as a publisher and, later, as the director of the University of Chicago Press in 1896.

Arguably the most prominent issue discussed in *The Altruistic Review*, however, is the role of reformist journalism itself. As briefly discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Cuppy believed the periodical to be a moral "agency" indispensable for the larger issue of social reform, and heretofore neglected in terms of its significance and appeal (3). The forum that is Cuppy's journal, of course, is set up to remedy this fault. Examples for this kind of reasoning abound, and can be found not only in the editorials and sketches, but also in the reviews themselves. In a review of an article previously published in the periodical *The Forum*, for example, Cuppy praises a notable increase in "the application of ethics" in newspapers and journals, a progress he defines, in religious rhetoric, as "the purification of the press" (1.6, 252). In addition to this, Cuppy provides a lot of meta-information on how to establish and organize a periodical; in every issue, he includes and invites reader responses that assess not only the success of *The Altruistic Review* (not all of the comments printed in the reader's section are favorable), but also to the very idea of a reformist journal itself. This focus illustrates that it is not only altruism, but, rather, the "agency" of the press that is hailed as an indispensable organ of reform. As the name of the journal already indicates, it considers the form of the review *itself* altruistic.

The second organizational principle that both describes and defines the magazine, namely the notion of keeping *record*, functions in a similar vein:

> Those of us who believe that goodness has not entirely departed from the land should use every opportunity to collect statistics about the kind and generous acts of men. For some cause vice is tabulated, classified and numbered. The world is told how many murders have been committed, how much expended to damn men's souls. A sickening array of facts confronts us in the statistics of crime. Now is the altruist's time to find out the good deeds of the race, to draw balances. Our eyes would stand out with astonishment at the large number of efforts for human good, if such facts could be obtained. (2.1, 45)

In this excerpt, printed in the "Altruist's Corner" section of a later issue, many core interests of the periodical are addressed. First of all, the article calls attention towards the importance of raising statistics – of providing a record of the "good impulses of the world," to recall a phrase of the journal's first editorial. The modern field of statistics is further outlined with the methods of tabulation, classification, and numbering, all of which place the periodical's agenda and rhetoric in close vicinity to the emerging discipline of sociology, and, more precisely, to an empiricist or positivist approach towards the social sciences. This dedication to the scientific method is further illustrated by the stress on "facts" and numbers. The article

also testifies to the abundance of statistical data available on "vice" – on poverty, prostitution, and crime – social problems that were on the front pages of many a (reformist) newspaper at the time.

The Altruistic Review, in turn, now tries to apply this method of classification, or of "winnowing," for "kind and generous," or altruistic deeds. Its aim, namely to record, to name, to organize, and to collect the reformist spirit of the time, is described as an act of "drawing balance." This short paragraph thus shows that the concept of altruism provides an appropriate vessel for a modern, that is, an organized or scientific approach towards reform. But even more explicitly so, altruism itself functions here as an ordering principle: It is the altruist who is capable of giving both review and overview of "the large number of efforts for human good." It is the altruist who can draw balance.

At the same time, the article is also a reflection on the necessity of publicity, of the public form of the periodical itself. Because what else is *The Altruistic Review*'s praised practice of keeping record and providing review, if not an endeavor at collecting statistics about "the kind an generous acts of men"? The two organizing principles of record and review are discussed here on a self-reflective level. But there is even more to this: The above cited paragraph was copied, in its entirety, in an advertising for Cuppy's newly established magazine, published in the journal *Advocate of Peace* in 1894. The words cited above are thus not only a self-reflection on the significance of the form of the review, but they are themselves part of a review. In other words, the advertising for Cuppy's magazine printed in a different journal is a *review of a review*. On the one hand, this circular reiteration shows again that the periodical's "altruistic" content, the collection of various reformist texts and writings, and reform organizations, is inextricably – even doubly, in this case of this review of a review – bound up with its form. The activity of keeping record and review is in and of itself claimed to be altruistic. On the other hand, the repetitive and reproducible structure of review also indicates that with the publication of *The Altruistic Review*, the discourse of altruism has become self-reflective. It has received a fixed place in America's reformist landscape at the end of the nineteenth century.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has expanded on the first chapter of this dissertation and has further explored the various and competing meanings of altruism in American culture and literature at the turn of the twentieth century. More precisely, I have analyzed how the discourse of altruism was institutionalized in late nineteenth-century American culture by way of reading for altruism in four reformist magazines: *The Altruist* (1885-1917), *Twentieth Century / Altruria* (1888-98/1907-08), *The Altruist Interchange* (1893-97), and *The Altruistic Review* (1893-95). The increasing frequency with which altruism is made useful within the form of the periodical is indicative of a more general installment, or institutionalization, of the language of altruism at the end of the century.

Concerning their use of the concept of altruism, the four magazines all conceptualize altruism as an umbrella term, which is deemed capable of organizing into a whole a large and heterogeneous array of reformist issues. However, my analysis of the periodicals also highlights more specific ways in which the neologism altruism was read for in the late nineteenth century. In *The Altruist*, the term is introduced as the fundamental moral principle underlying the politics of a utopian-communist project. In addition to this, the language of altruism holds in store a number of promises for Longley's communal project: it is characterized by universality, practicability, and marketability. The journal *Twentieth Century / Altruria* uses altruism to promote a slightly different and more political agenda, namely the propagation of socialist and anarchist thought. On a different level, my analysis of this magazine has also shown that the term's semantic flexibility is suited for the magazine's promotion of an ethos of debate and dialogue. Altruism was also an appropriate header for reflections on contemporary woman reform, as the analysis of *The Altruist Interchange* has shown. Even though the term is not explicitly linked to the larger cause of female emancipation in this magazine, its scientific connotations helped in furthering an idea of modern woman reform. In Chapter 5, this connection will be analyzed in more detail. Finally, *The Altruistic Review* uses altruism for self-reflective debates about the role and function of journalism and periodical culture for the larger issue of reform.

In addition to this, some of the magazines analyzed in this chapter also paid considerable attention to literary publications. *Twentieth Century* frequently featured literary criticism and literary fiction. Furthermore, its adoption of the name *Altruria* testifies to an influence of literature on the periodical's politics, even though no explicit reference to William Dean Howells's eponymous utopian novels is made. *The Altruistic Review,* too,

features numerous authors and literary works, among which Howells's *A Traveller from Altruria* (1894) stands out. The novel is reviewed in an article called "A New Utopia" in 1894, and it is contextualized with the myriad social problems of the time – the further enrichment of the rich, the plight of the working class, the oppression of the poor. "Is there any remedy for the existing condition of things?" (*The Altruistic Review* 3.4, 187), asks the reviewer, and proceeds to claim that Howells – whom he understands to be an "eminent novelist, poet, and social philosopher" (188) to offer just that: Howells's novel, large parts of which are copied in the review, is defined as a "suggestive book," as a text that offers real solutions to the problem of inequality. In line with the religious focus of *The Altruistic Review*, the reviewer furthermore focuses primarily on the Christian message of Howells's Altrurian romance, and, accordingly, reads altruism as the "prevailing law," and Jesus Christ as altruism "personified, glorified" (188).

The review is timely: *A Traveller from Altruria* had just appeared in book form when the review was published in October 1894. Neither is it the first time that Howells's texts are attended to in *The Altruistic Review*. Earlier issues had already featured summaries and excerpts of Howells's series *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* (1893-94), and always did so shortly after they originally came out in the *Cosmopolitan*. Pleased with the fact that Howells's social fiction is published "in a magazine which has a circulation of nearly half a million" (2.2,70), the reviewers of *The Altruistic Review* arguably themselves contributed to the popularization of Howells's ideas about altruism by paying them such extensive attention. What is more, next to undertaking marketing for Howells's novels, *The Altruistic Review* is also responsible for their packaging, providing them with a genre marker ("a new utopia"), and thereby making available a "public register of interpretation" (Glazener). The magazine, very much according to its reformist and moralistic aspirations, is therefore not only instructive for how to read for altruism, but it is also responsible for the popularization and classification of reformist literary fiction.

The reviews of Howells's Altrurian Romances point towards an important link that has not yet been explicitly addressed in this chapter, but that has accompanied my analyses and shaped my approach, namely that between the periodical form and literature. As many scholars have argued, nineteenth-century conceptualizations of literature are inextricably linked to periodical culture. This link is visible on many levels. It is the basis for the argument that has inspired the methodological approach for this chapter, namely Nancy Glazener's claims about the dependence of genre formation on the periodical press. It is also, arguably more overtly, established by the fact that in the nineteenth century, the majority of literary

fiction was first published serially in the form of the periodical, a privileged medium not only for the publication of journalism, but also of novels, poetry, and drama. In addition to this, most literary writers were also deeply engaged with periodical culture, as editors, reviewers, publishers, and, of course, as readers. As Laurel Brake writes in her study about nineteenth-century British periodical culture, "the attempt to create a clear-cut dichotomy between literature and journalism belied the involvement of almost all Victorian writers with the periodical press, as contributors, editors and/or proprietors" (xii). The same is true for the American context.

Not surprisingly, the overlap between the arena of periodical culture and the arena of literature also becomes strikingly visible in the *dramatis personae* of this dissertation. Many people referenced and mentioned in this chapter – for example, William Morris, Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells – and most of the figures that are featured in preceding and succeeding chapters of this dissertation – for example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and, again, William Dean Howells – were active in both arenas. This further emphasizes the interconnection between literature and periodical culture. It also demonstrates that literature was responsible for the dissemination of the language of altruism and for the discursive breadth the concept acquired at the turn of the twentieth century. This is also true vice versa: By 1893, as Hazlitt Alvah Cuppy states in *The Altruistic Review*, "Altruism has become something next to a fad" (107). As will be shown in the succeeding two chapters, this "fad" was not merely present among reformers. It also shaped the literary imagination of the time.

3. Forms.
Altruism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel

1. Introduction

The first two chapters of this dissertation have established that the appearance of the neologism altruism on the American scene responded to wide-ranging uncertainties about the complexities of modernity. Put differently, the last chapters have posited a crisis of reform in late nineteenth-century political, cultural, and scientific thought – a crisis to which the emergence of the neologism altruism reacted and which it tentatively tried to resolve. It has been established that it could do so because of its inherent capacity for reformulation: Altruism is a transdisciplinary and semantically flexible concept; it can respond to and bridge a number of perceived disciplinary and epistemological divides.

In this chapter, I extend my analysis of the various meanings and appropriations the term altruism received in the late nineteenth century by asking how the semantic struggles signified by the arrival of the neologism influenced literary form at the turn of the century.[74] Literary representations of altruism cut across the board of genre conventions, but, perhaps not surprisingly, they are most prominent in fictions that exhibit reformist agendas to varying degrees, such as the sentimentalist reform novel, the Social Gospel novel, the realist reform novel, the socialist propaganda novel, and the utopian novel. Generally, representations of altruism are linked to imaginations of human nature and the human good that are diametrically opposed to prevalent ideologies used to legitimize the realities of unprecedented socio-economic inequality in the United States at the end of the century: the political and moral perspective of liberal individualism, the scientific paradigm of Social Darwinism, and the theory of utilitarian ethics. A utopian impulse, or a reformist interest, thus unites most of the literary (and, as has been shown previously, also many of the non-literary) forms that engage with the concept of altruism.

This chapter analyzes how the crisis of reform, to which altruism responds, is negotiated on the level of literary form. In so far, the approach of *Begriffsgeschichte* or conceptual history, which has shaped my analyses in the first two chapters and provided their conclusions, only

[74] The differentiation between the markers "form," "genre," and "mode" is notoriously difficult, and it is not the goal of this chapter to theorize these terms. By "form," I generally refer to the organization, arrangement, or framework of a literary text, and I use the terms "forms," "genre," and "mode" rather interchangeably in the following.

partially influences my discussion and my readings in this chapter. Instead of *reading for altruism*, that is, instead of focusing on representations of the word itself, this chapter will focus on what role the competing definitions and appropriations surrounding the concept of altruism played within late nineteenth-century literary fictions.

The literary forms under discussion in this chapter – namely, the sentimental reform novel, the utopian novel, and the realist reform novel – exhibit very different approaches to the question of social reform, approaches that can be better understood, I argue, if one analyzes how they configure and conceptualize the concept of altruism. In a general sense, the sentimental reform novel is typically invested in reform of the *individual*, while the utopian novel is typically invested in systemic reform of the *social*. In the sentimental novel, the concept of altruism is primarily understood as a personal value, as a concept that describes individual charitable, benevolent, or sacrificial behavior, rooted in the tradition of Christian humanism. The utopian novel, in turn, uses altruism to imagine and describe larger societal goals and perspectives and configures it as an ideal of an alternative moral, social, and economic order, influenced by new technological-sociological perspectives on society, and by an expressed commitment to socialism. In a first step, I argue that that the formal particularities of sentimentalism are particularly well suited for expressing the idea of an individual altruism. Second, I will show that the utopian novel is a privileged form for the representation of altruism as an ideal of an alternative (utopian) social order.

The relationship between altruism and reformist realism, however, the third literary form under analysis in this chapter, is fraught with a number of difficulties. This stems from the fact that the very idea of "reformist realism" is in and of itself a problematic construct: Most definitions of reformist realism revolve around a struggle with the question of how a novel can convey reformist or educative messages, while staying true to the aesthetic principles of realist representation, namely, to represent things 'as they are,' in an objective, detached, non-didactic manner. I conceive of reformist or social realism as a form that is wedged in-between sentimentalism on the one hand, and utopianism on the other. This in-between position reformist realism inhabits is further illustrated, arguably even produced by realism's difficulties to navigate between the individual and the social model of altruism. Altruism and literary form are thus inextricably connected: Through the lens of the competition surrounding the meaning of altruism, the struggles and problems of reform in literature in the late nineteenth century are thrown into relief. The formal problem of the realist reformist novel can be better understood if one looks at the competing meanings and appropriations of altruism in the nineteenth century.

The introductory theses just presented are general and need some context and some methodological and theoretical backing, because there are, of course, other important ways of thinking about the relationship between altruism and literature. One influential critical perspective on this relationship is presented in the work of the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, which is representative of the so-called "ethical turn" in literary studies. Both in her book *Poetic Justice* (1995) and in *Upheavals of Thought* (2001), Nussbaum conceives of literature as ethical guidance, claiming that literary works can evoke reflections on moral behavior on the part of their readers. Nussbaum analyzes the novel's role in refining its readers' emotional self-understanding in terms of others, in shaping moral consciousness, and, ultimately, moral norms. As Nussbaum states in *Poetic Justice*, she believes that "thinking about narrative literature does have the potential to make a contribution to the law in particular, to public reasoning generally"(xv).

Nussbaum's model of influence has, in the meantime, received a number of critical updates. For example, Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), a study of the relationship between novel reading, empathy, and altruism, sets out to question "the contemporary truism that novel reading cultivates empathy that produces good citizens for the world" (xv). Equipped with various newer theoretical and methodological approaches, among them affect theory, cognitive studies on literature, neuroscience, and reader-reception theory, Keen's study presents a more differentiated view on Nussbaum's "truism." She debunks some of the connections drawn in Nussbaum's work by pointing out that there is a lack of scientific evidence for an actual "real" altruistic effect of novel reading. But even though Keen and others have offered compelling critiques of Nussbaum's model of influence, many of these more recent studies are nonetheless still invested in analyzing whether novels can produce sympathy (or, by extension, altruistic behavior) on the part of their readers or not.[75] That is, they subscribe to a didactic conceptualization of literature.

In turn, my project is *not* primarily interested in further pursuing the question whether literature can function as a locus for moral guidance. Instead, I am invested in analyzing altruism's relationship to literary form, in exploring how different genres and forms conceptualize individual and social ideals of altruism. More precisely, I want to find out how the novel form *itself* reflects on the issue of how to represent individual and social reform and on the ideal of narrative influence. Winfried Fluck's essay "Fiction and Justice," which

[75] Keen is primarily interested in finding out "what a habit of novel reading does to the moral imagination of the…reader" (xxv). A similar research interest guides Rae Greiner's work on "sympathetic realism" (2009, 2012), which is dedicated to show how the faculty of a (cognitive) sympathy was "designed to cultivate in readers distinctly sympathetic modes of thought" (9).

challenges Nussbaum's work more consistently than the studies mentioned above, helped me pave the way for my dissociation from Nussbaum's model of influence, and for a formulation of my own methodological and theoretical approach. Based on premises of reception aesthetics, Fluck introduces the idea of a "transfer" between text and reader. Against this backdrop, Fluck criticizes Nussbaum's model of reading, because in it, "the transfer between text and reader remains a one-way street" (398), and he further observes that "the assessment of whether fiction can serve as [a] model for just conduct cannot be grounded on fiction's potential for making us empathize with characters" (399). Even if Nussbaum's model of sympathetic identification and influence works, as Fluck argues, it can do so "at the cost of a dated mimetic aesthetics" (401). Nussbaum's model is problematic because it is predicated on an "eighteenth century version of moral sentiments as a common link of humanity" (399) that came under attack with the advent of literary realism at the end of the nineteenth century.

Not only do I take up Fluck's criticism of Nussbaum's model as a point of departure, but I also, as has been implied above already and as will be shown in the following chapter, subscribe in more general terms to his conceptualization of *Funktionsgeschichte*, or the history of the changing functions of literature. A literary text's function is, according to this perspective, inextricably related to its aesthetics, and more specifically, its formal appearance: "Social and pragmatic functions can only be realized through a particular organization of the text itself" ("Why We Need Fiction" 378). I aim to carve out in which ways the arrangement – or the form – of a literary text responds to certain aspects of social reality, particularly, of course, to the struggle of positions summed up in the various and competing meanings of altruism.

As will be shown below, and in more detail in the next chapter, the "empathy-altruism-hypothesis," the idea that the strategy of sympathetic identification provides instruction for and affects moral improvement on the part of the reader, was already severely problematized in the nineteenth century by the new program of realism. A critical reflection on Nussbaum's model of narrative influence is, in other words, already laid out in the very novels she analyzes. What is more, it was challenged at the very moment when altruism, a concept designed to replace the model of sympathy, appeared on the American scene. The appearance of the neologism altruism thus signified a shift away from the model of sympathetic identification, and, concomitantly, a shift in reformist writing.

To an extent, these assumptions overlap with some of the claims put forward in Frank Christianson's study *Philanthropy in British and American Fiction* (2007). Christianson argues that realist authors depended on the "uniquely modern" (11) figure of philanthropy, because it

allowed them to reformulate the prevailing concept of sentimentalist sympathy, a literary strategy they deemed unproductive for the new challenges that arose in the context of modern economic and social structures in the late nineteenth-century. I agree with Christianson's call for the necessity of an analysis of realism's effort to redefine and update the concept of sentimentalist sympathy, and I take this it as a premise for my analyses in this and the following chapter of this dissertation. Despite this significant overlap, however, Christianson's research interests also differ significantly from my own. First, his study focuses strongly on the relationship between philanthropy, realism, and new schools of economic thought, whereas my own analysis is more influenced by the ways in which sociological and evolutionary thought influenced literary form at the end of the century. Second, and more importantly, Christianson does not provide clear-cut terminological demarcations between the concepts philanthropy, altruism, and sympathy, but ties the three terms together to what he calls "the altruistic imagination" (17). [76] This creates a number of problems. Christianson's study does not reflect altruism's use as a synonym for socialism. Accordingly, altruism's potentially radical undertones are – possibly misleadingly so – subscribed to the concept of philanthropy, which becomes evident in Christianson's extensive discussion of the relation between philanthropy and contemporary theories of political economy (42-54). Instead of solely conceiving of philanthropy as a concept that works in support of the capitalist order, Christianson focuses more on its potential "to mark the place of alterity – a non-capitalist, non-competitive arena" (12), a compromise that strikes me as only partially productive and that could likewise be solved by a more consistent differentiation of the concepts of philanthropy and altruism. Finally, and related to this, the lack of conceptual distinction between philanthropy and altruism also leads to a neglect of the latter's important utopian component, which, as I will argue in detail below, is not only influential, but constitutive for reformist realism at the end of the century.

The following chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I analyze narrative approaches to altruism in the genre of the Social Gospel novel, which I read as part of the larger tradition of the sentimentalist reform novel. The second part is dedicated to an analysis of the significance of the concept of altruism for late nineteenth-century utopian literature. Both the

[76] A more differentiated view on the concept of philanthropy, which helped me to complicate Christianson's account, is presented in Francesca Sawaya's book *Patronage, Philanthropy, and the American Literary Market* (2014). Sawaya focuses much of her analysis on detailed accounts of the meanings and practices of philanthropy at the turn of the century, and conceptualizes philanthropy, in frequent reference to Karl Polanyi's groundbreaking work on the rise of the market economy, as an "intervention" (3) needed in order to enforce, legitimize, and maintain a utopian "fiction of a free and self-regulating market" (1). Philanthropy is thus distinguished from other modes of benevolent morality and is defined as a socio-economic practice that "highlights both the failures of the market and the constructedness of the notion of that market" (8). Literary studies, as Sawaya further argues, have too often relied on an undifferentiated idea of the free market – a criticism that could be extended to Christianson's book. Sawaya's work is also helpful for a conceptual differentiation of philanthropy from altruism.

Social Gospel novel and the utopian novel can be conceptualized via their (competitive or cooperative) relation to the reformist realist novel, which, finally, is the object of study in the third part of this chapter. The goal of this chapter is to highlight interdependences between sentimentalism, realism, and utopianism, interdependences that are negotiated by the concept of altruism.[77]

2. Altruism and/in the Social Gospel Novel

As has been established in the previous chapters, the concept of altruism was most productive for the reformist interests expressed in the Social Gospel movement. To recall: the heterogeneous religious reform movement, which included both liberal-progressive and more radical socialist political perspectives, was a reaction to a crisis of the Church. This crisis, in turn, was a result of the shifting context of urban industrialism and the concomitant rise in poverty and social inequality and, with it, an increased awareness of threats of social disintegration. On the other hand, the Social Gospel movement responded to the loss of the Church's legitimacy due to the rise in importance of the scientific (evolutionary) paradigm. [78] The Social Gospel movement embraced the concept of altruism, because it was capable of answering to both aspects of the church's crisis: It could be used as a counter-argument to Social-Darwinist and liberal-individualist legitimations of social injustice and helped in the larger project of reformulating the Puritan doctrine from the individual to the social. At the same time, altruism was also capable of bridging the divide between religion and science. Altruism, as will be shown in the following, also played an important role for the literary genre that emerged out of and was instrumental for the development of the Social Gospel movement: the Social Gospel novel, a highly popular literary form at the end of the century.

[77] In the parts dedicated to the Social Gospel novel and the utopian novel, I occasionally draw from literary examples in my genre discussion. I chose to use two classic representatives of the respective genres, Charles M. Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1897) and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888). I am aware of the fact that these texts are usually considered to be formative for the establishment or development of the genres they are classified within, and that a discussion of the genres might also benefit from less canonical examples. In Chapter 4, which builds on the findings of this chapter and is designed to illustrate and to extend them, I analyze representations of altruism in William Dean Howells's novel *Annie Kilburn*, which is often categorized within the canon of the Social Gospel novel, and in his *Altrurian Romances*, which are usually read as utopian novels. Howells's texts both reinforce and complicate the arguments about altruism and literary form presented in this chapter. It should also be mentioned that since this chapter is very much in conversation with the succeeding chapter on Howells's reformist fiction, it could not altogether be avoided that it is a particularly Howellsian realism that is of main interest in this chapter, too.

[78] See Craig, Ahlstrom, and my discussion in Chapter 1.

Charles M. Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1897) is usually considered the prime referent of the genre of the Social Gospel novel. It will also serve as an example for the genre's approach towards altruism discussed in this chapter. *In His Steps* was an immensely popular bestseller at the time which, owing primarily to its well-known motto "What Would Jesus Do?", enjoys popularity among adherents of Evangelical Christianity up until today.[79] The novel represents a panorama of contemporary issues of societal reform, particularly those of temperance, poverty, and prostitution, while it also negotiates the necessity of reform within the Church. *In His Steps*, accordingly, tells the story of a Protestant reverend, Henry Maxwell, and various members of his congregation who, after having been called out about the hypocrisy of their doctrine and religious practice, about their failure to do good in light of pressing social grievances in their congregation, challenge themselves to live in accordance with "what Jesus would do" for a year. The plot of *In His Steps* is an experimental application of the doctrine of the Social Gospel, which claims that salvation is no longer something the members of the congregation strive for in heaven. Rather, it becomes something that has to be realized on earth. This experiment is conducted by the characters' intent to walk "obediently in His steps" (189): In a series of acts of imagining Jesus's probable actions and judgment, the diverse group of characters – typical representatives of middle-class society (next to the reverend, the main cast of the story consists of a singer, a newspaper editor, a novelist, an entrepreneur, among other types) – does altruistic deeds, and thereby manages to bring about reform first in the congregation, and then in the town's poor quarters.

Like most Social Gospel novels, *In His Steps* relates to the older traditional form of *imitatio Christi*.[80] The act of imagining Jesus, which is understood as the basis for any altruistic action, is enabled by a repeated, almost formulaically narrated process of identification. This emphasis on identification is already apparent in the motto that frames the novel: "What Would Jesus Do?" The significance placed on imitation and identification positions *In His Steps* unmistakably in the literary tradition of the mid-century sentimental novel. Arguably best summed up by Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous dictum to "feel right,"[81] sentimental literature

[79] The novel is often claimed to be one of the most commercially successful novels in America in the nineteenth century, selling more than 8 million copies and exceeding even the sales of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel was frequently adapted – in comic-, screen-, and theater-form, it was serialized and translated into 23 different languages (Smith, 202). As recently as in 2010, Sheldon's novel was adapted into a movie: *What Would Jesus Do?* translates *In His Steps* to a modern-day California.

[80] The Social Gospel novel refers to Thomas á Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi* (1418) both in terms of form and in terms of content. For a discussion of the influence of this text on the genre of the Social Gospel novel, see Jackson (23-25).

[81] Towards the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe made her famous exclamation that to "feel right" (570) allows for individual moral agency. This dictum has been used as a telling example for the interdependence of morality and emotions in the sentimental novel in a large body of secondary literature available on the topic.

engaged heavily with a conceptualization of sympathy as "social practice" (Forman-Barzilai, 12), derived mainly from Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*. Smith famously defined sympathy as the capacity to imagine one's self in another's position.[82] Due to the centrality of the factor of imagination, Smithsonian sympathy had particular relevance for the literary movement of sentimentalism – by definition concerned both with the imagination and the communication of feeling. Sentimentalist sympathy had an expressed educative purpose and placed the idea of propriety at its thematic and structural core. In the sentimentalist tradition, sympathy – the driving force behind the processes of identification described above – is that which allows for moral judgment and that which is believed to produce altruism in the reader and thereby, finally, to bring about social reform.[83] The process of sympathetic identification is thus, within sentimental literature, idealistically claimed to have an expressed social and political function both within and outside the text.

This claim is made repeatedly in the novel, for example in a chapter that introduces the character Felicia, a young woman saddened by the conditions her poor neighbors have to live in, but insecure about how to react to their misery. Felicia experiences her call to follow the life of Jesus after having attended a play in Chicago. After the play, Felicia and her naïve and careless sister Rose talk over the scene they were most impressed by: an attempted suicide by a damsel in distress, who is rescued from throwing herself off a bridge in the last minute by the warning call of a little girl, dressed in rags expressive of a "repulsive poverty" (194). The scene on the bridge is followed by a depiction of the home of the poor little girl who saved the suicidal lady, the slum tenements in East London. Felicia, unlike her sister Rose, who is merely impressed and amused by the sensationalist play, cannot help comparing the scenes with one another, and furthermore draws connections between the play and the "real" tenement houses that are located outside the theater hall in Chicago:

> In reality the scenes on the bridge and in the slums were only incidents in the story of the play, but Felicia found herself living those scenes over and over. She had never philosophized about

[82] In *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*, Smith explains the mechanisms of the sentiment of sympathy as follows: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation… It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them"(9). Sympathy, or as Smith alternately calls it, "fellow-feeling" (10), is achieved "by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (9). Accordingly, to sympathize is to imagine oneself in another's position.

[83] Jane Tompkin's influential *Sensational Design* (1985) explores the sentimentalist text's political potential for (feminist) interventions with her notion of the novel as cultural work. Kristin Boudreau (2002) focuses her work on carving out the sentimentalists' understanding of sympathy as "the most widespread and influential instrument of…assimilation of difference" (x), a conceptualization of sympathy's reformist potential that was especially important for the abolitionist cause.

> the causes of human misery […]. But she felt intensely, and this was not the first time she had felt the contrast thrust into her feeling between the upper and the lower conditions of human life. (195)

Later, these considerations inspire Felicia to take a pledge to walk "In His Steps," to join the religious reform movement led by Maxwell. The quote above illustrates that Felicia does not make this decision based on rational choice – it is not the result of extensive philosophizing about "the causes of human misery." Instead, Felicia is moved to change her life by feeling a feeling so intense that it allows her to understand the suffering in the scene, and even such an abstract thing as the socioeconomic gap between rich and poor, "the contrast … between the upper and lower conditions of human life," itself. The importance of "feeling" for Felicia's moral judgment and succeeding action is overstated in the paragraph's threefold repetition of the word: Felicia "felt intensely," she "felt" human misery "thrust into her feeling."

Furthermore, all of Felicia's feelings and succeeding conclusions and actions are the result of the effect of the play she has seen. Not only do the "incidents in the story of the play" make Felicia feel something real about the human condition, but she immerses herself in the fictional world of the play, she continues to "liv[e] those scenes "over and over." The scene can therefore be read as a self-reflective commentary about the process of sympathetic identification, unleashed by the "story of the play." What is more, it is not just any play that has this effect on Felicia, but it is, earlier in the scene, classified as a "melodrama full of startling situations, realistic scenery and unexpected climaxes" (193). Felicia's conversion, therefore, also illustrates the underlying politics and aesthetics of the novel *In His Steps* itself; it posits that art (the play, the novel) needs melodrama, is depended on the mode of the sentimental (on feeling, on sympathetic identification) in order to be able to move people to change.

The novel's formal and thematic sentimentalism can be discerned also with regards to other characteristic features of the genre, for example its representation of excessive emotions, that is, of sentimentality par excellence. Women (who are representatives of a Victorian notion of *True Womanhood*) break out in tears, men faint, reverends have visions, and deaths, referred in their brutality as "supernatural events" (67), are narrated in a manner melodramatic and sensational.[84] Further, the text has an unabashed didactic mission, which is not only apparent in the fact that the novel's characters are repeatedly summoned to religious and sentimental ideals of sacrifice and suffering, but, more importantly, in the extension of the above-described processes of sympathetic identification from the level of representation to a desired effect on the reader. According to Winfried Herget, the sentimental text can be seen as "a rhetorical

[84] For a definition of the "Cult of True Womanhood" see Welter, 152.

construct whose aim it is to affect the reader [...] by means of pathos" (4). In the sentimental novel, sympathy is used as a means to pursue a moralistic purpose. *In His Steps*, however, even goes a step further: The reverend's sermons, which constitute a large part of the novel's story, are often directly addressed at the reader. Moralistic preaching is an important structural element of the Social Gospel novel, not only on the level of content, but also in numerous direct didactic addresses to the reader.

In the majority of literature available on the genre, the Social Gospel novel is classified as quasi-propagandist literature designed to popularize the teachings of the movement. The ascribed status of propaganda has led to related arguments about the form's overt political purpose, which is claimed to have resulted in undisguised didacticism and in a low literary quality of these texts.[85] Susan K. Harris, for example, argues that *In His Steps* "operates more in the realm of the dramatized tract than literary narrative," because the cast of characters "seems strikingly homogenous" and none of them develops any "psychological depth" (107). Next to this, the plot of a Social Gospel novel often remains formulaic. Finally, and most importantly, religious and social reform in the Social Gospel novel relies on an overrepresentation of emotionality and is dependent on a process of sympathetic identification, a process that is often already implied in the subjunctive mode of the novels' respective titles. All of these formal features indicate that the Social Gospel novel is part of a larger tradition of sentimentalist writing.

Some efforts were made to acquit the genre from the long-standing charge of sentimental indoctrination. For example, Robert Glenn Wright's study *The Social Christian Novel* (1989) reads Social Gospel novels more generously as "socially conscious literature" (xii) and proposes to conceptualize it with an approach "by triangulation" (xvi): He locates the genre in-between the sentimentalist, the utopian, and the naturalist tradition. A different argument holds that the Social Gospel novel can be read in the context of literary realism, because it typically represents Jesus as a man of the late nineteenth century, thus making him (and his principles) real or realistic and encouraging readers "to assume a God intimately concerned with the ordinary, everyday life" (Roberts 48). Others have subscribed to this reading by arguing that the novels' negotiation of popular, contemporary reformist projects like that of the Settlement and the reformist press, or their engagement with the notion of the experiment, gesturing towards the documentary in their descriptions of the urban scene, should be read as

[85] See Hopkins (140), Sudermann (45), and also Davies, who goes so far as stating that the novel *In His Steps,* which he reads as an exemplary text for the genre as a whole, is so invested in religious politics that its literary merits are virtually non-existent: "With it we hit rock bottom fom [sic] a literary viewpoint" (353).

cases in point for endowing these texts with the label "realist."[86] Gregory S. Jackson's study *The Word and Its Witness* (2009) carves out various intersections between the realist and what he calls the "homiletic" novel,[87] by arguing that "the aesthetic innovations of literary realism emerged not only from a cosmopolitan embrace of scientific empiricism but also from [a] homegrown, indeed parochial, heuristic tradition of Protestant homiletics" (14). While Jackson's call for a necessity of reassessing the "spiritualization of American realism" and the values underlying traditional definitions of American realism in light of the influence of Protestant reform at the end of the century, is, at times, very convincing and also in line with many of the arguments presented in this chapter, Jackson neglects to sufficiently address the didactic, arguably even propagandistic (and hence ideologically problematic) form of the Social Gospel novel.[88]

These efforts to complicate the classification of the genre have merit, and are important, especially if one keeps in mind that what is subsumed under the header "Social Gospel novel" is a very heterogeneous array of texts. Certainly, any classification according to genre is dependent on the selection of texts. Some surveys include not only religious or religiously themed novels in their canon, but also utopian novels, like Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and Howells's Altrurian romances, as well as his "social novels" *Annie Kilburn* and *A Minister's Charge*. Other canonizations are dependent on the religious affiliation of the texts' authors; many Social Gospel novels were written by clergymen or theologians. The surveys by Suderman (1966), Hopkins (1940), Smith (2007), and Lewes (1989) all provide different canons of the Social Gospel novel. Acknowledging the difficulty in making general statements

[86] See Suderman and Davies.

[87] Jackson defines the homiletic novel, broadly, as "Protestant narrative", as "broad spectrum of parabiblical materials (4). He traces the influence of "homiletics" back to the Calvinists, and situates the Social Gospel novels of the late nineteenth century as the "climax" or culmination of a larger development in American literary history.

[88] Neither 'pedagogy,' nor 'didacticism,' or 'propaganda' are mentioned as entries in Jackson's index. While he rightfully points out that the homiletic novel, as a "powerful form of mass media" (159) aspired to perform a "kind of communal collective bargaining" (159) and to "foster social engagement through particular acts of reading" (158), that is, through personal address of the reader, and through the model of "identification" (165, 181), he only tentatively addresses the fact that these are exactly the structural features that make it rather difficult to place the genre formally within the poetics of realism. This becomes especially apparent in Jackson's endeavor to read the homiletic novel as capable of debunking the argument put forward in Mark Seltzer's influential *Henry James and the Art of Power* (1984). Here, Jackson misreads Seltzer's Foucauldian notion of "policing." In arguing for the Social Gospel novel's replacement of a "punishing, omnipotent, all-seeing God" (184) by a benevolent one that encourages devotion and sacrifice, thus promoting "moral self-reformulation" (161) on the part of its readers, Jackson claims that "…the homiletic novel naturalizes what Seltzer calls the 'criminal continuity' between authorial vision and social control as part of the reader's projected self-transformation as an agent of social, moral, and spiritual reform" (184). However, Seltzer's notion of "policing" has not much to do with an idea of punishment, but rather describes an Althusserian notion of interpellation and self-control. Jackson's argument about the Social Gospel novel's appeal to "self-transformation" therefore, in fact, does not work against Seltzer's theory, but in favor of it.

about a literary form so diverse, I argue that an analysis of altruism in the Social Gospel shows that the genre is still deeply invested in the mode of the sentimental.

On the one hand, altruism figures in the Social Gospel novel as an ideal of social cooperation. Next to Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1897), other late nineteenth-century religious reform novels, such as Katherine Pearson Wood's *Metzerott, Shoemaker* (1889), Archibald McCowan's *Christ the Socialist* (1894), the journalistic account *If Christ Came to Chicago!* (1894) by William T Stead and its sequels, Albion W. Tourgee's novel *Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist* (1890) and many others have in common references to the sermon of the Mount, sometimes extended to the early Christians' socialist background, emphatic references about an establishment of a "brotherhood of men" that often stands in stark contrast to the socio-economic realities and complexities of the time and, most importantly, a longing for the uncorrupted, innocent good in humankind, as exemplified by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In his discussion of the Social Gospel novel, Suderman claims that both the religious reformist movement and its accompanying literary genre engaged in a "movement away from exclusive emphasis on individual salvation and individual altruism to an increasing emphasis on social salvation" (46). In the novels, the desired movement towards social salvation was often thought along the lines of contemporary evolutionary theories of altruism, like those presented by Spencer, Fiske, and Drummond, which approved of and supported Christian values of (self)-sacrifice, cooperation, and sympathy. Socialist theories – often summed up with the header altruism – likewise influenced the religious movement and its novelistic expression.

But the Social Gospel novel did not only focus on altruism as an ideal of social solidarity. In fact, it was also, more often than not, understood as an individual behaviorist ideal of sacrifice and suffering. Suderman's assessment of the aspired movement away from "individual altruism" to "social salvation" that defines the Social Gospel movement's project of renovation must, I think, be complicated in the context of novelistic expression. A closer look at how this transformation was believed to come about by those who tried to make it come about, i.e., authors of Social Gospel novels, reveals that the idea of reform expressed in the Social Gospel novel was geared primarily to the individual. Robert Craig claims that, by and large, the Social Gospelers "believed … that human nature is sufficiently plastic to allow for the creation of a new social order through individual conversion and benevolent action" (13). This "individual conversion," in turn, was not so often believed to come about by institutional or systemic change proposed in contemporary sociological studies, but it remained rooted in Christian ideals of self-sacrifice and personal suffering, paired with an underlying utilitarian ethos or belief that the good society is the result or sum of the behavior of individuals.

Sentimentalism, as it so happens, is a privileged mode for representing (and, arguably, for enabling) "individual conversion" on the part of the reader. Although the genre occasionally embraces a sociological, that is, an allegedly neutral, objective, or scientific perspective on this issue, and while altruism is occasionally represented as an ideal of a new social order, or as an idea of an evolutionary increase of cooperation, the Social Gospel is, overall, still heavily invested in religious idealism and sentimentalism. Altruism is present in the form of the Christian doctrine of redemptive self-sacrifice in the imitation of Christ, in renouncing of selfhood for the sake of the Christian community, and in a stylized elevation of suffering. And this kind of individual altruism is reflected in the form of the sentimental Social Gospel novel: Altruism is preached as an ideal that the individual should strive for, which accounts for the novel's didacticism. Reform is believed to come about via a mode of conversion that rests on a belief that the novel's moralistic message can result in the education of the individual and that it can foster a sacrificial, personal, or individual idea of altruism through reading. The Social Gospel novel therefore testifies to a belief in fiction's power to cultivate altruism in its readers, and with it, to the productivity of a mode of conversion for reformist writing.

However, to many this kind of sentimentalism, and the sacrificial, religious ideal of altruism, seemed somewhat, if not very, dated at the end of the century: Not only did the emerging genre of literary realism challenge sentimentalist approaches towards reform – a larger problem to which I will return later – but it also was considered unproductive for the project of reform desired by proponents of the Social Gospel movement itself: In his influential book *The Rise of the Social Gospel* (1940), Charles Howard Hopkins sums up the larger context of the church's crisis that resulted in the formation of the Social Gospel movement with the following quote: "[S]ociology forced religion to a more realistic appraisal of its task" (321). However, Hopkins expresses serious doubt whether the Christian reformers were, in the end, well-equipped for this task and criticizes the Social Gospel's project – tellingly, in literary terms – for having ideologically remained in the realm of the "naïve and sentimental," for ultimately lacking "the stamp of realism" (325). That is, the sentimentalist approach towards reform no longer corresponded to the demands of an increasingly secular modern age.[89]

[89] Ilana Blumberg's study *Victorian Sacrifice* (2013) is helpful for this argument, even though her focus is on the British novel of the mid-century. Blumberg starts out with the claim that "the Victorian imperative of self-sacrifice posed a challenge to the ethical imagination" (1) already in the mid-century. Accordingly, she delineates a development from the moral principles of self-denial and sacrifice to the idea of a secular altruism, and argues further that this transition affected novelistic form – from sentimentalism to ethical realism – in nineteenth-century Great Britain.

3. Altruism and/in the Utopian Novel

The success of William Dean Howells's *Altrurian Romances*, which will be discussed at length in the succeeding chapter of this study, produced a number of imitators, sequels, and ripostes. One example is the 1895 short utopian novel *Altruria* by Titus K. Smith, which, in many ways derivative of Howells's original text, describes a communist settlement named Altruria located in a small county in Iowa. According to Louis Budd, Smith was a businessman, which explains the pronounced focus on agriculture, industry, commerce, and money in the text. In turn, the short novella *A Brief History of Altruria*, serialized in 1895 and 1896 in *The Cosmopolitan* and written under pseudonym by the magazine's owner, the entrepreneur John Brisben Walker, tells the history of an old, isolated Dutch-English colony in the Congo, a utopian space, "wrought upon by…altruism" (224). Finally, Howells's Altruria (and the socialist-utopian dream connected to it) is made the topic of satirical contemplation in the short story "An Adventure in Altruria," featured in the collection *Stories that End Well* (1911) by novelist Alice French (Octave Thanet). These three examples illustrate not only the success and influence of Howells's utopian trilogy, but they also, more generally, inspire the question that guides the following part of this chapter: how and why did the idea of altruism take hold of the utopian literary imagination in the United States at the turn of the century?

If one conceives, in accordance with Fredric Jameson, of utopias as diagnostic interventions, as a direct reaction to social misgivings and deficits, it hardly comes as a surprise that there was a notable upsurge in the production and popularity of literary utopias in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. About 160 to 190 utopian novels were published between the years 1888 and 1900 alone.[90] Arguably, the most influential of these was Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), not only because it marked the beginning of a trend of utopian writing at the turn of the century, but also because the novel affected the development of American socialism: it inspired the formation of various clubs, parties, and the influential political movement of Nationalism.[91] Bellamy's novel can be seen as a representative response to two major developments that defined the late nineteenth century, namely a crisis of unprecedented social and economic inequality and a universal dedication to science and progressivism (see Chapter 1). On the one hand, *Looking Backward*, which, alongside the majority of contemporary utopian fiction, envisions a socialist industrial future, reacts to the larger problems of the socio-economic crisis of the Gilded Age, and to an

[90] For an overview, see Sargent (1979).
[91] See Quint (1953), Pfaelzer (1984), and also my discussion in Chapter 2.

increasingly unbearable situation of social and economic injustice by imagining an "other" to capitalism and liberal individualism. On the other hand, Bellamy's future utopia tells a tale of technological and scientific advance, and, in so doing, is also a testament to the eponymous era's universal belief in scientific and evolutionary progress.

As the last chapters have established, the increasing significance of the concept of altruism can be seen as a similar reaction to the paradigms of crisis and progress that describe the social and cultural context of the United States in the late nineteenth century. In fact, the very arrival of the neologism corresponds to and can be read in line with an increasing influence of utopian thought, for three main reasons: First, the concept of altruism describes an effort at imagining an alternative social order. Both in Comte and in Spencer's accounts, altruism is conceptualized as the basis for ideal social and moral visions, either in the utopian-socialist scheme represented in Comte's thought, or in more liberalist-teleological approaches influenced by Spencer's theories, and, finally, as a combination of these two larger strands: Chapters 1 and 2 have shown that altruism functioned as a watchword of radical forms of (Christian) socialism, communism, and anarchism, political perspectives that are typically the object of utopian imaginations. Altruism also has, since its inception, connoted ideas of scientific and evolutionary progress, equally important elements and engines of utopian visions at the turn of the century. Finally, it can be argued that altruism, by nature of its status as a neologism, itself embodies the utopian: According to the approach of *Begriffsgeschichte*, neologisms have imaginative potential for societal change. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines utopia as both a literary genre and an idea that goes beyond fiction, a political principle, an alternative, ideal social order: Utopia is "an imagined form of ideal or superior (usually communistic) human society; or a written work of fiction of philosophical speculation describing such a society" (348). The last chapters have shown that altruism was a key concept for the formation of communist or socialist communities, or other alternative forms of living imaginations in the late nineteenth century. But the idea of altruism also often delivered the "raw material"[92] for literary utopian imaginations.

How, then, is altruism configured and represented in the utopian novel of the late nineteenth century? Unlike the sentimentalist novel discussed above, which stresses an individual altruism of personal sacrifice, the utopian novel configures altruism in systemic terms, as a marker for a variety of social and moral visions. Most often, altruism is thus understood as the basis of an ideal (utopian) order – labeled socialist, communist, or otherwise

[92] Jameson defines "utopian raw material" as the central social or political issue at stake in a utopia or a utopian novel (*Archaeologies of the Future* 13).

– as an alternative to the model of industrial capitalism and correlating ideologies of liberal individualism and Social Darwinism. Jean Pfaelzer observes a development from the individual to the social in late nineteenth-century utopian thought and literature which can be contextualized with the development from an "individual" to a "social" altruism delineated in this chapter: "[U]topianism worked successfully against nineteenth-century individualism, because the popular (socialist) utopias were responsible for a shift in emphasis from development of individual characters to the development of the society as a whole" ("The Impact of Political Theory on Narrative Structures" 130). But how is this transported to the reader? While the sentimentalist text exhibits didacticism and techniques of sympathetic identification in order to make its reader understand, convince, or feel altruism, the utopian novel, stressing altruism as a social ideal, requires and exhibits different literary strategies. What kind of affordances does the form of the utopian novel make for discussions about a "social" or systemic ideal of altruism? Four points will be raised in the following.

First, utopias work according to a logic of negation, as Jameson states in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005): "[A]t best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment," he states, and further suggests that "therefore the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively" (xiii). Utopias explore that *which is not*, and in doing so, utopias always also examine that *which is.* Put differently, utopian novels present an *ideal*, and this presentation always implicitly involves a process of critical reflection about the *real*, about the realities of contemporary society. Jameson's concern in the introductory remarks of his book lies in theorizing the societal and political function of the utopian text. This function, in turn, is specified throughout his book: Jameson maintains that it "is a mistake to approach Utopias with positive expectations," as they are not "blueprints for bourgeois comfort," but "diagnostic interventions" (12). One can conceive of the utopian novel, then, as a form that is endowed with an expressed reformist or educative purpose: It is the real world that is made the object of critical reflection via the juxtaposition of an ideal world.

By the logic of negation, late nineteenth-century utopian literature positions altruism as a counter-argument against prevalent ideologies of liberal individualism. A scene in Bellamy's *Looking Backward* exemplifies what kind of altruism is configured in his utopia: When conversing about those members of society that are incapable or unfit – either mentally or physically – to fully partake in the "industrial army," the work force that constitutes Bellamy's political and economic order, the utopian traveller Julian West assumes that those people incapable of self-support must rely on the altruism of others, that they are "objects of charity." In response, Dr. Leete, the representative ambassador of the utopian space, does not only

renounce the idea of charity, but claims that, in fact, the very idea of "self-support" is unthinkable and "impossible" (63) in the utopian society. Mutual dependence is that which constitutes society, the idea of self-support, of liberal individualism, is inconceivable in a "civilized society" (63-4). This means, on the one hand, that there is no such thing as "individual" altruism (or, by extension, charity or philanthropy) in Bellamy's utopian space, but instead, altruism is presented as that which constitutes the moral and the social. It also means that society is that which determines whether humans are good or bad, egoists or altruists. And this is where the reformist impetus of Bellamy's text comes in: By the logic of negation, the novel posits that human nature can fulfill its altruistic potential only if utopia is made possible.

Contrary to the prevailing ethical perspective of utilitarianism, which posits that society is the sum of the moral behavior of the individual, altruism is conceived of as a principle of selflessness that not only benefits, but establishes and makes possible the collective nature of society as such. In the critical language of Émile Durkheim, altruism is thus conceptualized as a social fact: It is not only at the basis of morality or social solidarity, but is, in fact, *constitutive* of the social.[93] Jean Pfaelzer, alongside others, stresses the influence of socialist thought on late nineteenth-century utopianism. She rightly points out that "[u]ltimately, faith in utopianism (and most likely faith in socialism) rests on a belief in the perfectibility of our social behavior" (*The Utopian Novel in America*, 21). However, it must be added to this assessment that altruism is a concept that not only designates *faith* in the perfectibility of our behavior, but that, beginning in the late nineteenth century, provides sociological *evidence* for it. In utopia, altruism is not a value to be desired, or a virtue to be trained. In utopia, altruism *is*.

Second, the dialectics of negation that defines utopia is contingent on the fact that most utopian novels – and *Looking Backward* is no exception - consist almost entirely of dialogue. Typically, a utopian novel engages in a description of an unknown world that is meant to implicitly critique a known world. This can be described as an educative process, which is usually mediated by the figure of the utopian traveller, a character who "jumps" into a 'brave new world' (Fluck *Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* 275; my translation), for example by time travel, and, from here on, gradually learns about utopia, usually from argumentative dialogues with

[93] Durkheim famously theorized altruism in his 1897 book *Suicide*, which is often considered to be one of the first sociological monographs. Here, Durkheim conceives of altruism as "social fact," that is, as a value and social structure which is subject to its own, independent set of rules. Durkheim's defines altruism as the opposite of rational self-interest, meaning that an altruistic act does not benefit an individual or a group of individual, but the collective nature of society as such. Altruism forms the fundamental basis of social life. Durkheim's sociological approach is not mentioned in any of the historical sources analyzed in this dissertation, which is why I decided against discussing it in more detail here.

representative characters of the utopian space.[94] In *Looking Backward*, the time traveller West is educated about, and, ultimately, convinced of the benefits of the utopian social and economic order in lengthy conversations with the older and wiser Dr. Leete, and sometimes with other representatives of the utopian space. With the utopian traveller, the reader learns about utopia. Importantly, however, it is not identification with the utopian traveller that transports the message of the text to the reader. Rather, the fictional dialogues are designed to illustrate to the reader the contemporary situation at the end of the century, while, at the same time, providing them with fodder for the imagination of a better future. The message of the utopian text is not established via emotional persuasion, but knowledge about the utopian space is gained via the Socratic method.[95] If altruism is the moral core of the utopian space, the reader is thus educated about it on rational or logical grounds.

Third, the focus on dialogue, as well as the desired function of the utopian text, namely education by the logic of negation, also explains some of its other formal particularities. Instead of plot the utopian novel provides plans, instead of a story it arranges a "guided tour" (Jameson 213) through the institutions, the features of daily life of the utopian land. This naturally raises a number of questions about time and narrative in the novel: Utopian novels are not primarily designed to tell a story. For example, they usually do not delineate any character development. *Looking Backward* features a romance plot between West and his utopian host's daughter Edith, but it is poorly written, and ostensibly irrelevant. West finds out at the end of the novel that Edith is, in fact, the great-granddaughter of his (obviously long-deceased) nineteenth-century fiancée, who is, not surprisingly, also named Edith. This points to the fact that Edith, alongside most other characters that are featured in the novel, is a stock character, is there to fulfill certain functions, for example, to keep the reader interested, or to make imaginable the extent of the time travel. Bellamy's romance plot is a vehicle only and takes place at the margins of the text; the core of the novel is description – an enumeration or a map of utopia. A utopian novel aims at fanning out various facets of the new society, like customs, morals, and institutions, but nothing really *happens*: Time stands still in utopia.

In fact, stasis is another defining formal feature of the utopian text. "Considered as a final or definitive social ideal, the utopia is a static society", as Northrop Frye states in his essay "Varieties of Literary Utopias" (31).[96] An achieved utopia is by definition immutable, and

[94] As Fluck argues in extensive detail, the dialogical structure of the utopian text is hierarchical (*Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* 276). I will return to his work on the significance of dialogue in the utopian novel further below.
[95] In fact, Plato's Republic is, in many anthologies and theories of utopian literature, considered to be the first utopian text. See, for example, Manuel and Manuel (10-16).
[96] Frye's essay must be read in the context of his critical position. In line with his formalist approach, Frye reads the dialectical structure of the utopian text as an expression of ritual: "The utopian romance does not present

therefore resistant to progress or change. The notion of the utopian space as a safe haven against the contingencies of historical progress has also been observed by Ernst Bloch, who states that "[n]o fresh questions…appear in the margin anymore, the island, although a future one itself, is largely insulated against the future" (478). In its critique of existing social ills, a utopia exhibits an extreme idea of progress, while it, at the same time, has no conceptual or logical room for progress once it is achieved. Utopia, then, can be understood as a work that posits the end of history, an idea that is, arguably, in conflict with the fact that altruism is embedded into a variety of progressivist evolutionary narratives at the end of the century.

On the level of narrative, however, utopia's characteristic plotlessness and emphasis on dialogue poses a problem for a conception of the utopian novel *as* a novel, as narrative, and this leads me to my fourth point. If standard definitions of plot – the sequence of incidents, events, actions, and the development of characters over time – cannot be comfortably applied to a typical utopian text like Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and if plot is understood as the main feature of narrative, this raises the important question whether utopia is narrative at all.[97] In fact, the utopian novel has for this reason been defined as non-literary, and, instead, classified as satire, as "Staatsroman," or as allegory, as a work of political theory, or as a textbook of socialist and communist propaganda (Claeys 2).[98] Utopian novels seem to be utterly incompatible with realistic storytelling, not only because of their representations of fantastical and unattainable societies, but also because of their formal makeup. It is no surprise that any analysis or theorization about utopia either begins or ends with a discussion about fiction, and about the potential and promise of fiction.

The question that arises out of this larger argument is, whether altruism can be represented in realist form at all. It has become clear that the utopian novel is a privileged form for representing social order and social organization, and, related to this, it is a privileged form for representing and purporting the ideal of altruism understood as social fact. Does this mean

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society as governed by reason; it presents it as governed by ritual habit, or prescribed social behavior, which is explained rationally" (27). My own approach departs from Frye's in great measures, because it is my goal, primarily, to historicize late nineteenth-century utopian literature and its relationship with altruism.

[97] Peter Brooks famously defined plot as "[t]he design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning" and narrative, in turn, as "one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality: man's time-boundedness, his consciousness of existence within the limits of mortality" (xi).

[98] Phillip E. Wegner is skeptical of the assessment of the binary used to conceptualize the utopian text - between "static description" one the one and "narrative" on the other hand and, instead, conceives of the literary utopia as an "in-between form" (xviii). He proposes that description itself serves as "action of plot," that utopia's "specific representational activity" performs discourse and enables world-making. Together with its orientation towards the future, the literary utopia's in-betweenness "account[s] for the cultural pedagogical force of utopian texts" (xix).

that the social model of altruism can only be expressed in the utopian form? These questions will be addressed in the following.

4. The Problem of Reformist Realism

The agenda of social reform influenced and co-constructed the literary movement of realism, and it did so both in terms of a reinvestigation of concepts of literary form and in the announcement of a desired societal function of the realist literary text. As Amanda Claybaugh argues in her 2007 book *The Novel of Purpose*, American literary realism developed out of a larger Anglo-American tradition of reformist writing and within a transatlantic literary print market. In Claybaugh's account of the relation of reform and realism, the reformist project of the nineteenth century is a product of two larger developments of the end of the eighteenth century, namely the Enlightenment and the rise of evangelicalism. Particularly, the former's faith in social improvement and in human perfectibility and the latter's revision of the Puritan doctrine of predestination into one of social salvation have resulted in the emergence of reform, understood as a substitute and an update of other modes of social benevolence, like the Christian conception of charity (21). Contrary to the prevalent idea, expressed in the model of Christian charity, that social ills are inevitable, pre-determined, and immutable, reform exhibits a faith in the possibility of individual improvement and social transformation.

It is here that Claybaugh draws a connection from reformist writing to literary realism: Both rest on a "faith that transforming readers was a necessary step in transforming the world" (34). She further argues that the specific purpose of reform is already inherently bound up with the form of the reformist realist novel: "Novels of purpose" share with reform the assumption that "social problems must be represented before they can be solved" (2), an assumption that differentiates the nineteenth-century realist reform novel from the reformist didactic novel of the eighteenth century and the sentimentalist novel, and that accounts for the necessity of new representational techniques and practices. According to Claybaugh, novels of purpose are not only novels that have indoctrination or education on their agenda, but also those that are "strategic rather than committed" (34), that take reform itself as their subject matter. Claybaugh's analysis, accordingly, focuses on how realist authors borrowed forms and strategies of reformist writing and how they re-worked them according to the new idea of a "purposeful" realism. Reform and realism share the aspiration to make visible, to reveal what was heretofore unseen. This creates the desired educative effect on the reader.

The question of how exactly a realist text, dedicated to representing reality according to the doctrine of faithful verisimilitude, can transport a moral message and inspire social change is at the core of the "problem" of reformist realism under scrutiny here. Since it has been established in the earlier parts of this chapter that both the sentimental and the utopian novel relate in important ways to altruism, the question that guides the remainder of this chapter is whether (and how) the various meanings of altruism, and, indeed, the very fact that the discourse of altruism appears and gains momentum concomitantly with the advance of realism in the late nineteenth century, can elucidate the problem of reformist realism. Before I can do so, this formal problem has to be explained and established.

Scholarship of the last decades has theorized and conceptualized the realist novel in a number of different ways. There is, for example, a long tradition that investigates literary realism's complicated relationship to an ideal of mimesis or verisimilitude; there are studies that engage in Marxist ideology critique and set out to expose realism as a complicit form of the bourgeoisie; there are structuralist and poststructuralist theories that put realism's relationship to language under scrutiny; there are studies of a sociology of literature that focus primarily on realism's situation within the (literary) marketplace.[99] All of these theoretical perspectives certainly have influenced, to higher or lesser degrees, my own understanding of realist form. However, the premise of this part of this chapter, namely, that late nineteenth-century reformist realism defines itself from within and against sentimentalism and utopianism, requires a focus on the idea of genre as a construction via differentiation. I have therefore primarily examined theories and scholars that work with the notion that realism is a form that is defined by demarcation, or in opposition to other genres and forms.[100]

The ensuing review of scholarship that defines realism by differentiation highlights and explains realism's complicated relationship with sentimentalism and utopianism. Ultimately, I will argue, however, that realism must be understood as a form that incorporates, not isolates, these other literary forms. For this argument, it is instructive to turn to Fluck's theorization of realism within a history of changing functions ("Funktionsgeschichte"). In *Inszenierte*

[99] This brief list of critical approaches towards realism is, of course, not exhaustive.

[100] Both Fredric Jameson's latest study on literary realism, *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), and Nancy Glazener's *Reading for Realism* (1997) have, despite their vastly differing theoretical orientations, been instructive for my thinking about the method of defining realism by demarcation from other forms. Jameson conceives of realism as a genre defined primarily by opposition and negation from other literary forms, but ultimately claims that it thrives on the very oppositions it cannot incorporate. Realism is a "consequence" (26) of tensions. As has been explained in more detail in the introduction to my second chapter, Glazener claims that the production of the genre category "realism" is an ongoing negotiation and the result of debate. She further states that definitions of realism are almost always relational, that the construction of realism is contingent on a demarcation from other genres, like the romance and sentimental fiction.

Wirklichkeit (1992), *Das kulturelle Imginäre* (1997) and other works, Fluck argues that realism is a literary system that can only be conceptualized within a complex set of constitutive factors. At the end of the nineteenth century, accordingly, realism is defined by new intellectual efforts to understand and to represent reality, and by endeavors to conceptualize human experience as an empirical or positivist category. On the other hand, realism is influenced by new forms of mediating experience and by a new literary model of communication. Finally, realism has to be positioned within the context of the Gilded Age, defined by the cultural, social, and economic hegemony of the gentry and their continuing attachment to Victorian morals (*Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* 10). Fluck emphasizes that these factors cannot be effectively separated from one another, a condition for his conceptualization of the realist novel as a form that constantly relocates and adjourns those interdependencies.

Fluck ascribes a reformist impetus to realism. Most important for my purposes of discussing realism's relationship with social reform, accordingly, is his focus on the (desired) function of realist literature to raise awareness about deficiencies in society's endeavors to fulfill its civilizational potential (20). Realism is understood as a literary system that defines itself by an appeal to its readers' common sense and by encouraging them to become rational, integrated members of American society. Fluck, referring at times to an influential essay by Heinz Ickstadt,[101] sees this educative purpose, which is to be distinguished from a didactic one, realized in new conceptualizations of the novel as a place for communication and dialogue: In the advance of the realist movement, most pronouncedly voiced in the United States by William Dean Howells, Fluck observes a growing suspicion towards a previously prevalent conceptualization of literature as an ideal or as an exemplary field of symbolic action ("Verhaltensmodell"), and a gradual transformation of the realist novel into a space of communicative interaction ("Kommunikationsraum"). In the model of communication, experience is understood as a process and as the result of various and competing acts of interpretation of reality which, in turn, ensure realism's desired function as a moral impulse (33).

The new model of communicative interaction depends upon realism's differentiation from other genres and literary forms. Fluck uses large parts of his analysis of a wide-ranging selection of late nineteenth-century novels to illustrate how realism rejected didactic and sentimentalist literary strategies in particular, for example by avoiding the inclusion of an instructive narrator or of a morally authoritative protagonist, or other instances of narrative

[101] Ickstadt (1983) reads the new (realist) conceptualization of the order of the novel as "the idea of social order symbolically enacted" (79).

control. Instead of sympathetic identification, the realist novel stresses interaction (28), and, accordingly, deals with various (and increasingly complicated) constructions of reality in a dialogic manner of constant renegotiation (12). The necessity (and difficulty) of communication is therefore not only a prominent theme on the level of plot in many realist novels, but it is also conveyed in the dialogic form of the novel itself. The replacement of an outdated exemplary or ideal model of literature by the model of communicative interaction signifies the reader's liberation from his or her infantilism (23), at once testifying and responding to a growing complexity within society at the end of the nineteenth century. According to this view, the gradual development of the novel into a form of communication and conversation is an indicator to the progress of literary history.

4.1. Realism versus Sentimentalism

Up until the second half of the nineteenth century, reformist fiction was typically rendered in the mode of the sentimental and with its main literary strategy, namely that of sympathetic identification. Within the discourse of sentimentalist literature and its criticism, sympathy is often theorized as a tool that is capable of bridging the gap from self to other, as a faculty that enables assimilation or equalization.[102] The model of sentimental sympathy thus presumes a relationship of similarity, or at least entails the claim of being capable of establishing similarity or commonness. The desired effect of sympathetic identification, seen as a crucial structural feature of the sentimentalist text, is dependent on the imagination of a quasi-homogenous mass of recipients and readers, one that shares a common paradigm of values, norms, and beliefs. And it was precisely this imagination that lost its hold in the context of modern urban industrialism at the end of the century. A homogenous mass of recipients is difficult to imagine in a time defined by an ever-increasing complexity of social relations. Because of the evident limits of sympathetic imagination, the faculty of sympathy had already come under attack in the mid-century. It was debunked as an outdated model for reformist realism at the end of the century.[103]

[102] Boudreau (2002) states that sympathy and related concepts like charity or sensibility were "the most widespread and influential instrument" (x) used for the creation of social bonds and expresses concern about this very assimilative power of sympathy by stating that the sentimentalist use of sympathy is "tantamount to the erasure of all differences between spectator and spectacle" (83) and identifies a danger of forging (racial) equality. Hendler (2001) provides an interesting distinction between sympathetic imagination and sympathetic identification, the latter being claimed as problematic for similar reasons as those put forward by Boudreau.

[103] It should be noted that the stark distinction between realism and other genres is particular to the American context. As Claybaugh notes, the label realism was applied to a much wider body of texts in Victorian Britain

Like Claybaugh's work on the novel of purpose introduced above, Frank Christianson's study on philanthropy in British and American literature (2007) overlaps with some of the assumptions that guide my analysis of altruism and the novel, as has been discussed already in my introduction. Christianson analyzes a "deeper, homologous relationship" between late nineteenth-century reformist writing and literary realism (2). In his introductory chapters, he provides a detailed history of the various changes in philanthropic forms and practices in nineteenth-century Anglo-American culture and their bearings on the realist novel. He delineates a development from a rhetoric of sympathy to that of the modern "phenomenon" of philanthropy, a transformation he sees as both part and parcel of "the gradual emergence of new political, economic, and class structures" at the end of the eighteenth century (11), and a transformation that is paralleled in literary realism's "exploration of the capacities and limits of the sympathetic experience, its quest for epistemological impartiality, and its reliance on social taxonomies as a primary means of organising its subjects" (32). Christianson thus rightly claims that realism must be understood as a form that defines itself primarily by its rejection of the concept of sentimentalist sympathy. This rejection, in turn, is motivated by an increasingly differentiated or heterogeneous socio-economic order in capitalist industrialism.

Other critics have observed other reasons for realism's efforts at differentiation from sentimentalism: For example, Glazener proposes that realism's rejection of sentimentalism and sensationalism was primarily motivated by the fact that the latter encouraged a form of "addictive reading" (94-95), an affective investment and immersion into the text that was considered harmful and that realism tried to curtail by promoting new reading conventions, influenced by standards of middle-class taste, distinction, and refinement (96-98). Alfred Habegger, in turn, stresses the significance of contemporary ideologies of gender roles in realism's rejection of sentimental modes of writing in his *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* (1982). According to Habegger, nineteenth-century realism developed out of its "adversary or corrective relation to a major type of novel, women's fiction" (106). Michael Davitt Bell, too, emphasizes the importance of dissociation from gendered literary forms in contemporary conceptualizations of "realism."[104] As the title of his influential study *The Problem of American Realism* (1993) already indicates, American realists were

(42). This is especially important in the context of Howells's critical writing, which was meant to establish an American literary tradition. See also Fluck *Das kulturelle Imaginäre*, 8, for a discussion of the importance of American writers to establish realism as a particularly American genre.

[104] Bell consistently puts the marker "realism" in quotation marks, because he is primarily interested in finding out the function of the contested term "realism" and the purposes it served for the people using it at the end of the nineteenth century.

consistently confronted with a "problem" of how to define their literary program against existing gendered cultural ideas about art, the imagination, and literary form.

The critical perspectives that define realism by binary opposition just introduced have been challenged convincingly in William M. Morgan's illuminating study *Questionable Charity. Gender, Humanitarianism, and Complicity* (2004). Morgan complicates the argument that realism is the result of polarized gender politics and questions the prevalent narrative that male realist writers in the late nineteenth century defined their "cultural fictions about manhood" (4) against female sentimentality. Throughout his study, Morgan instead emphasizes the interdependence of literary genres at the turn of the century. His book, accordingly, sets out to "reconstruct the significance of the social project of sentimentalism to Gilded Age debates about ethics and sociability" (3), and argues that realism is a form that not merely rejects sentimentality, but that incorporates and "modernizes" sentimentalist ethics and aesthetics (2). Morgan delineates a movement away from sympathy towards what he calls "complicity" – defined as a "subtle understanding of the ways that solutions to social problems might not be solutions at all" (2). This means, first, that in Morgan's account, the realist novel is conceptualized as a form that embeds sentimentalism as a "residual cultural formation[s]" (8), and, second, that the merits and limits of sympathy in particular, and of social reform in general, are constantly reflected within realism.

Morgan's insistence on acknowledging the importance of tracing residues of sentimentalism within realism is important, and in line with my own research interest in carving out not only the distinctions, but also the interdependences and overlaps between literary reformist writing at the end of the century. I also think, however, that one important "residual cultural formation" is consistently overlooked in studies on reformist realism, including those reviewed and discussed above: namely, the influence on the realist novel exerted by utopianism.

4.2. Realism versus Utopianism

There is a tendency of neglect for the utopian paradigm in studies that analyze late nineteenth-century reformist realism. To exemplify this claim, I want to return once more to Claybaugh's study. She discusses realism's negotiation of sentimentalism in most detail in an attentive reading of Mark Twain's novels *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* (1889). Claybaugh reads Twain's novels as "divided by the very question of purposefulness," that is, as troubled by their own relationship with social reform. According to

Claybaugh's reading, *Huckleberry Finn* both conforms to and undermines conventions of reformist writing: The novel simultaneously endorses and rejects literary strategies of sentimentalism exhibited in a negotiation of the genre of antislavery narrative (163). According to Claybaugh, Twain's main critical point of departure is that "sentimentalism posits a shared humanness that does not in fact exists" (178), and that sentimentalism relies on the affective response of sympathy that is no longer a suitable means for reform. *A Connecticut Yankee*, in turn, probes the issue of social reform itself and extends Twain's project of critiquing sentimentalism into exploring "the potential – and the limits – of *institutional* reform as well" (emphasis added, 176). Claybaugh's analysis sheds light on how both of Twain's novels debate the merits and limits of sentimentalism. Importantly, however, *A Connecticut Yankee* is also a novel heavily indebted to utopianism, something Claybaugh does not consider in her analysis.

Utopianism, as has been established in earlier parts of this chapter, lends itself particularly well to critiquing institutional or systemic problems and was therefore a popular instrument in the larger project of social reform. Importantly, however, the utopian novel is usually considered to be anything *but* realist. There is a long critical tradition, going back at least to Northrop Frye, that classifies the utopian novel, in its exposition of dreams, desires, and wishes, as romantic fiction or as romance. Frye defines utopia as "speculative myth" (25) and registers a wide-ranging influence of the pastoral tradition for utopia's characteristic return to notions of "the simplified society" (40). Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible* (1986), which is part of this tradition, observes that "[c]entral to utopian fiction, and to the entire mode of romance, is the alternative world imagined by the author. What in the realist novel would be considered 'mere' background setting becomes in traditional utopian writing the key element of the text" (36).

However, I would argue that Moylan's statement – which can be seen as representative for a larger strand of criticism – is slightly misleading, because the realist novel, and particularly the reformist realist novel, is never only invested in considering society as "mere" background setting. It is as much about an imagination of the social than it is about the representation of individual experience, a larger argument to which I will return below in my conclusion. In addition to this, the classification of utopian fictions under the header of romantic literature often depends on its use of fantastical formal features, like that of time travel. It should be noted, however, that while the "jump" into the new (and by definition, impossible) utopian world is - necessarily - often represented in fantastical terms, the depiction of the utopian place itself is realistic in style.

Unlike many other scholars of nineteenth-century American literary realism, Winfried Fluck conceives of utopianism as an extension of the realist project. Positioning realism within his larger conceptualization of literary history as a history of changing functions, he argues that as much as realism can be seen as a form that constantly re-defines itself in ongoing conversations with sentimentalism or the romance, it also does so in relation to the utopian novel. Fluck conceives of utopianism as a "radicalization" of the realist project because it shares with realism "the attempt to build an exemplary civilization within the experimental field of fiction" (*Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* 304-5; my translation). To achieve this goal and to make the new order plausible, familiar, and imaginable, the utopian novel heavily draws on the conventions of realistic storytelling.

However, as the title of Fluck's analytical chapter on the utopian novels *Looking Backward* and Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*, "Control and Regression: The Transformation of the Realist Project in the Utopian Novel" (my translation), already indicates, utopia also represents a definite departure from the realist project. Fluck understands the model of communication present in the utopian novel as a retreat to an older literary model of symbolic control. Instead of stressing a conversation between equals, the dialogical structure of the utopian novel is defined by hierarchization (276), by the formulaic conversation between a layman and an expert. No longer does the reader learn by experience, but the political message of the utopian text is rendered in lectures and instructions. When dialogue becomes a principle, as it does in the utopian form, Fluck states, the realist project is bound to fail. Accordingly, instead of "adjustment," utopianism signifies a "break" with American society (274). Instead of placing emphasis on processes of exploration, the utopian novel exhibits modes of inspection or sightseeing (279), and instead of fiction, the utopian novel is rhetoric (280).

If one conceives of realism as a form that critiques, via a logic of negation, that *which is* by pointing to that *which is not,* if one, that is, understands realism as a form that is interested in providing an objective and critical position on reality as such, this also means that utopian novels are in many ways closely related to the desired function of the realist reformist text. While utopia, therefore, can be assigned a realist *function*, it is still the case that utopia also necessarily breaks the mold of realist *form*. It is difficult to disagree with this assessment, and it is not the goal of this chapter to do so. Rather, the complicated relationship between realism and utopianism on the one hand, and the relationship between realism and sentimentalism on the other, can be better understood by looking at how those forms conceptualize competing ideas of altruism.

5. Conclusion: Realism and Altruism

As the revision of important scholarship above demonstrates, reformist realism is a precarious form. Put differently, altruism – a concept that, as previous chapters have illustrated, negotiates and reformulates the reformist landscape in the United States at the turn of the century and thus summarizes issues of social reform and moralistic, political, or educative messages – poses a formal problem to realism. When engaging with altruism, realism is always in danger of drifting off either into the sentimental mode, or into the utopian mode. In the majority of scholarship reviewed above, realism is therefore defined *ex negativo*, by differentiation and demarcation of the literary forms of sentimentalism and utopianism. Both literary forms are considered incongruent with the aesthetic principles of realism: the objective, neutral, positivist, or true-to-life representation of reality. An analysis of altruism sheds light on the struggles and problems of reform in realist literature in the late nineteenth century.

Because of this formal problem, the suspicion arises that reformist realism is an impossible, arguably even a utopian form. And yet, it exists, in the writings of William Dean Howells, Edith Wharton, Charles Chesnutt, Mark Twain, and Rebecca Harding Davis, to only name a few realist writers concerned with issues of social reform, with the representation of altruistic characters, and with calls for altruistic action. In realist fiction, altruism is posited as a critical and political stance towards contemporaneous societal relations. On the one hand, the binaries reviewed above – realism versus sentimentalism, and realism versus utopianism – can be better understood by an analysis of the relationship of altruism and literary form. On the other hand, I also want to propose that the binaries, are, ultimately, only partially useful, and that it is maybe not wholly productive to conceive of realism as a form defined by opposition only. Rather, analyzing the relationship of altruism and literary forms suggests that both modes – the utopian and the sentimental – are part of realism. At the moment, this argument can only be made tentatively and in rather general terms. It will be expanded and explained in much more detail in the next chapter.

Altruism, as the previous chapters have shown, has from its inception been defined both as a sentiment and a social theory. In Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer's formative accounts, altruism is, on the one hand, a psychological concept that scientifically describes the moral makeup of humans, and, at the same time, it is posited as an ethical maxim, as the basis for an imagination of an alternative social or moral order. This twofold conceptualization of altruism is not only at work in Comte and Spencer's original definitions, but also in the competing

appropriations of the concept of altruism in reformist and political culture at the end of the century, as Chapters 1 and 2 have shown.

For the emerging discipline of sociology, in which altruism is theorized in the late nineteenth century, the twofold conceptualization of altruism prompts central methodological questions: Are theories about social groups, facts, structures or systems ultimately reducible to theories about individual human behavior, as expressed in a utilitarian view? Or can individual behavior be explained via (independent) large-scale social factors, a perspective promoted, for example, by utopian socialists at the end of the century? These two larger questions, which describe and constitute the crisis of social reform in the United States at the end of the century, concern not only political and social disputes, but they also inform literary form.

Above, I have established that literary forms in the late nineteenth century deal with the idea of altruism in different ways: the sentimentalist Social Gospel novel configures the idea of altruism primarily in terms of religious notions of sacrifice and personal suffering. It is an *individual* altruism that is in focus in the sentimentalist tradition, and reform is, according to the utilitarian ethical perspective, contingent upon the good behavior of the individual. This conceptualization of an individual altruism goes hand in hand with distinct sentimental literary strategies, for example, didacticism, sympathetic identification, and direct addresses at the reader. The sentimentalist text promotes altruistic behavior via a mode of conversion. The utopian novel, in turn, conceptualizes altruism as a *social* idea or as social fact. In line with contemporary utopian-socialist theories, social and individual reform is contingent on a systemic transformation of society. In the utopian novel, the reader is not emotionally persuaded, but convinced on rational grounds, via a logic of negation, of the superiority of a social order based on altruism.

Both of these modes – sentimentalist emotional conversion and utopian dialectical conviction – are rejected on aesthetic grounds by the formal principles of reformist realism. In turn, the problem of reformist realism ensues out of this rejection of reformist literary strategies, and a simultaneous desire to incorporate both ethical perspectives delineated above. On the one hand, realism is concerned with the representation of individual experience, as classical theories of realism have proposed at least since Ian Watt's influential *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). However, realism's preoccupation with the reflection and representation of social reality, as articulated maybe most famously in Georg Lukács' *Studies in European Realism* (1950), is equally important for understanding the form.[105] Realism can therefore be understood as a form

[105] Watt and Lukács are named here as representatives of larger critical and theoretical perspectives on realism.

that is invested in representing the individual and society, or better said, to represent the individual *in* society.

Reformist realism oscillates between individual and social approaches towards reform. Realist novels that depict different facets of a complex and heterogeneous society, such as Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886), William Dean Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), or Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), are concerned – albeit in very different ways – with the necessity of systemic and social reform on the thematic level. Indeed, the very attempt at representing social order and social organization can be understood as a reformist gesture, and is, in the aim at providing an overview of the social, necessarily related to the utopian mode. At the same time, realist novels also zoom in on individual characters' quests for truth or moral improvement, or on their various attempts at orientation in a complex social environment. The aim of providing insight into an individual's contemplations about society and about the possibility of social reform is likewise reformist in gesture, but is necessarily rendered, at least to some degree, in the sentimental mode of identification.

The reformist realist novel is concerned with larger questions about the complex situation of the moral individual in society. And altruism – understood as a concept capable of bridging a vast variety of reformist approaches – answers exactly to these kind of questions in the context of a crisis of reform: At the turn of the century, altruism represents a functional equilibrium between self and society, and is therefore a suitable lens for analyzing realism's efforts representing the individual in society. In extension, it can be argued that altruism likewise influences realist form: the two configurations of altruism in literature, sentimentalism and utopianism, are part and parcel of reformist realism. Rather than arguing that realism relates to sentimentalism and utopianism exclusively in binary opposition, in a mode of *competition*, I suggest that it might be more productive to think of the relationship as one of *collaboration*. The merits and limits of sentimentalist and utopian conceptualizations of altruism are reflected within realism itself. Thereby we can learn something about realism by looking at altruism: Realism is aware of its problem with altruism, and works with it in recognition that it cannot solve it. These tentative conclusions will be explored in more detail in the analysis of William Dean Howells's reformist literature that is the subject of the following chapter.

4. Representations.
Altruism and William Dean Howells's Reformist Realism

1. Introduction

In 1888, William Dean Howells published a review of Edward Bellamy's best-selling utopian novel *Looking Backward* in his column for *Harper's Magazine.* Howells's verdict is mild: While he concedes that the novel's "didactic aims" give "pause to the doctor of literary laws" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 91) – a profession which Howells mockingly assigns himself – Bellamy's utopianism is not condemned, but excused, for the novel has had "extraordinary effects" on "the public" (91). Howells, who reads *Looking Backward* against his own aesthetic principles of literary realism, argues here that the novel's moral message is so important that it trumps its formal shortcomings.

The review of *Looking Backward* was written at a time when Howells's own writing became more and more concerned with issues of social inequality, religion, and politics. Many biographers and critics emphasize Howells's shock and alarm about the 1886 Haymarket Affair in Chicago as a turning point in his literary and critical work, leading him to write his so-called "economic novels" starting in the late 1880s, among them *Annie Kilburn* (1888), *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), and *A Traveller from Altruria* and its sequels (1892-1907).[106] Howell's reformist realism has been discussed primarily in terms of its social function, which is conceived of as "critical realism" (Carter 190), as symbolic enactment of an underlying ideal of a "right shape of society" (Ickstadt 77), as a form whose (desired) function is to raise awareness about deficiencies in society' endeavors to fulfill its civilizational potential (Fluck, *Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* 20), or as "novels of purpose" (Claybaugh 7).[107]

In the following chapter, I will demonstrate that Howells's growing interest in issues of social reform, particularly in those put forward by the Christian socialists, can be traced via his increased attention towards the concept of altruism. The novels that frame Howells's negotiation of the concept and the idea of altruism, and that are, accordingly, the subject of

[106] For a discussion of the label "economic novel," see Taylor. See also Fluck, *Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* (308), Cady (67-91), and Carter (179-85). See Christianson (175) for an elaboration on the importance of the Haymarket affair for Howells's later work.
[107] Other labels Howells's later novels have received are "socialist," especially in literary criticism of the 1940s and 1950s, as Ekstrom points out, and "progressivist" and "liberalist," as Engeman argues.

my analysis in this chapter, are *Annie Kilburn* (1888), which features an altruistic heroine and her (failed) attempts at social reform in a small Massachusetts town, and the trilogy known as the *Altrurian Romances – A Traveller from Altruria* (1892-93), *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* (1893-94), and *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907) – in which the moral tenet of altruism constitutes a utopian social order.

Both *Annie Kilburn* and the *Altrurian Romances* have a somewhat complicated relationship with the aesthetic principles of realism as proclaimed by Howells himself, a complication that is contingent on the novels' negotiation of the concept of altruism. In much of the scholarship, *Annie Kilburn* has been accused of sentimentalist and didactic tendencies. The utopian novel *A Traveller from Altruria* and its sequels, in turn, are usually read as outright deviations from Howells's program of literary realism. Frank Christianson, whose interpretation of Howells's growing interest in social and moral issues can be seen as representative for a larger strand of criticism, summarizes: "The arc of William Dean Howells's career suggests that the limits of altruism as a social ethic also mark the limits of American realism as a mode of literary representation" (171). According to this and other readings, the novel *Annie Kilburn*, and particularly the *Altrurian Romances* have been charged with exhibiting just what Howells accused Bellamy of, namely a triumph over "matter over manner" (Budd "Annie Kilburn" 86), that is, content over form.

While it is difficult to completely disagree with the core of these critical statements – after all, *Annie Kilburn* does indeed exhibit sentimentalist strategies, and it is true that the *Altrurian Romances* cannot strictly be classified as realist novels – I argue that it is necessary to complicate the standard readings of Howells's later novels. In the following chapter, I will do so by analyzing how the novels point out their own awareness of the dilemma the issue of reform poses for the program of literary realism. The use of the concept of altruism in Howells's utopian novels (and also, if slightly less markedly so, in his other reformist novels) inspires and epitomizes Howells's reformist aspirations, while it, at the same time, negotiates the very problem reform poses for the form of the realist novel. The existing reading of Howells's reformist and utopian novels as deviations from his realist project can thus be challenged if one focuses on the centrality placed on the concept of altruism, which allows these novels to be read not primarily against, but in line with his ethics and aesthetics of reformist realism.

Ultimately, Howells's reformist work is also always concerned with the possibilities and limits of realist representation. I argue in this chapter that the prime object of inquiry and discussion in Howells's reformist novels is not only the issue of social and moral reform, but

also literary realism itself. This means that "matter," that is, the issue of social reform, can be understood as a platform from which Howells reflects, often ironically, upon "manner," namely realist representation. Both *Annie Kilburn* and the *Altrurian Romances*, via a negotiation of the concept of altruism, therefore exhibit the interconnectedness of the problematic relationship between social reform and realist representation explored in the preceding chapter of this dissertation: Reformist realism is a form that is positioned – often uncomfortably so – in between two competing popular literary forms at the end of the century: the sentimental novel on the one hand, and the utopian novel on the other. I argue that via various (ironic) strategies of demarcation, Howells's novels *Annie Kilburn* and the *Altrurian Romances* negotiate the formal problem of reformist realism, that is, the precariousness of its in-between position.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first is dedicated to a discussion of Howells's literary criticism of the 1880s and 1890s and introduces the formal problem of reformist realism. Discussions of Howell's critical work will also accompany the following two analytical parts of this chapter. The second part of this chapter consists of an analysis of Howells's reformist novel *Annie Kilburn* (1888), which has received charges of didacticism and sentimentalism in the majority of scholarship available on the text. In close readings of selected scenes, I will show that Howells sometimes uses the issue of social reform to ironically point out his own awareness about the potential formal shortcomings of the text at hand. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of *A Traveller from Altruria* (1892-93), *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* (1893-94), and *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907), three novels that, together, are known as *The Altrurian Romances.* I read all three Altrurian fictions as meta-reflections on a number of literary forms, namely the romance, the sociological study, and the utopian novel. These negotiations with competing literary forms, I argue, point out the possibilities and limits of realist literary form.

2. The Problem of Reformist Realism, or: The Grasshopper Problem Revisited

In terms of literary form, Howells defined the realist novel of reform first and foremost by distinguishing it from the preceding, but still highly popular form of the sentimentalist reform novel. In his strategy of defining realism by negation, however, Howells is often inconsistent in naming his adversaries. Howells's criticism of the kind of literature identified as 'sentimentalism' in the critical essay about to be discussed bears parallels to his rejection of

what he refers to as 'romance' or 'romanticism' in other instances of his critical writing.[108] Howells's often-polemic denunciation is probably not directed at the canonical writers scholars today associate with American Romanticism, but rather at the popular trend of sentimentalist writing. As has been summarized in the preceding chapter, in American sentimentalism of the mid-century, a text's educative purpose, its "cultural work" (Tompkins) was deemed to be generated by the powers of the faculty of sympathy. Thus, many sentimentalist writers employed strategies of sympathetic identification and didacticism in the hope of educating their readers. Howells, in his advancement of the new literary program of realism, was highly critical of the sentimentalists' reformist literary strategies; he considered didacticism unproductive for his project of reformist realism. Rather than participating in didactic moralizing, Howells claimed that the reformist function of their novels should be activated by truthfully representing society.

The dictum of 'truthful representation' lies at the heart of Howells's conception of the form of the realist novel as one of aesthetic reform. It is framed by a discursive distinction that became increasingly prominent for literary criticism in the advance of Anglo-American realism at the end of the nineteenth century, namely that between 'realism' and 'idealism.' In an influential essay from 1887, John Addington Symonds argued that the rising influence of the social sciences and evolutionary philosophy at the end of the century resulted in an increasingly political urgency of the conflict between a positivist notion of the 'real,' defined as "the presentation of natural objects as the artist sees them, as he thinks they are" and as an "attempt to imitate" according to "senses" (123), and an interpretivist notion of the 'ideal,' defined as "the presentation of natural objects as the artist fain would see them, as he thinks they strive to be" and as an "attempt to imitate" according to "interpretation" (123).[109] Symonds, however, states that this distinction is unproductive, even false and "illogical" (125) for literary criticism and consequently argued for an interdependent relationship between realism and idealism.

The realism/idealism debate ascertained by Symonds had significance for Howells's conception of American realism. In one of his columns for *Harper's Monthly*, the "Editor's Study" from December 1887, Howells contributes to Symonds's distinction (*Selected Literary Criticism* 74) with his famous example of the grasshopper. Howells differentiates

[108] see, for example, *Selected Literary Criticism* 19-21 and 124-126. The marker "romance" will be discussed in the context of my reading of Howells's *Altrurian Romances* below. The noticeable ambiguity about naming genres substantiates my argument about a problem of literary form in Howells's later work.

[109] The essay "Realism and Idealism" first appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* and was republished in a separate essay collection in 1890. I quote from this later publication. For further information on the realism/idealism divide and its significance for early definitions of literary realism, see also Watt (10).

an 'ideal' grasshopper, formed after pre-conceived notions of what is beautiful and what is culturally perceived as typical or artful, from a 'real' grasshopper, which is linked to Howells's often repeated evocations of "commonness" and "truthfulness" (74). While the representation of an ideal grasshopper, endowed further with the attributes "heroic," "impassioned," "adventureful," and "good old romantic" (74), relates to an idea of uncritically taking into account premises about what literature is supposed to be, the representation of a "real" grasshopper is described as "simple, honest, and natural" (74), is characterized by "life-likeness" (73), a qualification that gestures toward immediacy and objectivity. Howells thus conceptualizes his literary program of "truthfulness" as contingent upon the distinction between the real and the ideal. This distinction, however, is of course profoundly complicated by the formal problem that concerns this chapter: How can a 'real' grasshopper be enlisted in the service of reform?

In the "Editor's Study" from December 1888, which deals with the notion of "Christmas Literature," Howells addresses the problematic relationship between social reform and realism more explicitly. He begins his column with an attack on the recurring (and hypocritical) urgency in the practice of almsgiving around Christmas time. This gives way to the main target of Howells's criticism, namely that kind of literature which prides itself on "celebrating the bestowal of turkeys upon the turkeyless" (*Selected Literary Criticism* 103). Howells's sarcasm continues in the first part of his column, in which he condemns the sentimental literature of yore (while making perfectly clear that, "chronologically," these kinds of literary practices are "not so very remote") for its failure to address the social and political realities of the time: "A gentle superstition seems to have arisen to console the race for the formidable phase which the dismal science of political economy was then beginning to assume" (103). Howells ironically juxtaposes "superstition" with the "science of political economy," thus pointing towards a larger problem of the relationship between religion and science, which is here linked to a conflict between sentimentalist and realist aesthetics.

After having established his disdain for the popular sentimentalists' politics of appeasement for the "well-to-do people-of-heart," for their failure to debunk almsgiving as "not inconsistent with the hardest selfishness" (104), in short, for their way of dealing with the question of how to do good, Howells proceeds to endorse a "new Christmas literature," one that is spearheaded by Tolstoy and "appeals to no sentimental impulse, but confronts its readers with themselves" (104).[110] He continues:

[110] On Tolstoy's influence on Howells's later work, see Cady (7-10), and Daugherty (22-25).

> Turkey to the turkeyless, with celery and cranberries galore, and nourishing wines for the sick – yes, these are well, and very well; but ineffably better it is to take thought somehow in our social, our political, system to prevent some future year, decade, century, the destitution which we now relieve. This is what the new Christmas Literature says to us. (104)

On the one hand, Howells upholds his belief in the transformative power of "taking thought," an expression he repeats at the end of the column, where he proposes to "take thought for [society's] healing" (106) and connects the truthful representation of reality to the revelation of the social wrongs of "the system" (104). However, Howells's choice to entitle his discussion of ethics in literature "Christmas Literature" introduces an additional issue, one that is not immediately compatible with the realist aim of truthful representation, of a rational way of conceiving of and representing society: Howells claims Christ himself to be "the forgotten factor" (104) in literature's dealing with reform. The teachings of the New Testament and Christ, presented as the epitome of self-sacrifice, are elevated to an exemplary, ideal status in Howells's notion of reformist literature. To rationally engage with socio-economic reality is thus not Howells's only concern. Rather, he advocates a moralization, a Christianization of literature (105). The sacrificial or altruistic figure of Christ is thus conceived as a programmatic standard for art itself.[111]

The problematic relationship of these two maxims – to "take thought" and to take Christ as an example – make up the main formal tension that is at stake in Howells's project of reformist realism. The conflicting aims of the reformist realist novel inspire the necessity to reformulate various seemingly incommensurable paradigms – the real and the ideal, the rational and the religious, the realist agenda of truthful representation and the sentimentalist interest in educating and influencing the reader. I propose that this need for reformulation is captured in competing conceptualizations of altruism.

3. *Annie Kilburn* and the Problem of How to Do Good

William Dean Howells's 1888 novel *Annie Kilburn* tells the story of the eponymous heroine Annie Kilburn and her wish to "do some good" (645). The title of the novel notwithstanding, the novel is not a psychological portrayal of Annie's altruistic character. Rather, it focuses on the problem of social inequality and the devastating effects of modernization and industrialization on a small American town. Due to its episodic illustration of the problem of

[111] Howells negotiates his indebtedness to the Social Gospel. It is possible that Howells's criticism in the Christmas column is also directed at the emerging literary form of the Social Gospel novel.

social injustice, *Annie Kilburn* has, in much of the literature available on the novel, often been read as an allegory on the problem of reform, or at least as a text whose primary interest lies in conveying a moral message rather than in engaging in detached realist representation. Over the last decades, *Annie Kilburn* has therefore often been discussed as a novel whose reformist agenda is in conflict with the main formal characteristics presented in Howells's own conception of realist aesthetics, most importantly with his rejection of didacticism. Edwin H. Cady, in *The Realist at War* (1958), detects a "forceful economy of form" (88) in the novel. In his *The Incorporation of America* (1982), Alan Trachtenberg claims to perceive a forced "symmetry of form" (201) in Howells's reformist writing; he reads his "morally pleasing" endings as an indicator for the author's resort to the form of the romance (192). In 1992, Winfried Fluck reads the novel as exhibiting a somewhat "purposeful" or "controlled" narrative (*Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* 316; my translation) and this, in turn, as a sign for Howells's having partially sacrificed his already-established realist model of communicative interaction for a conception of literature as exemplary, symbolic space of action. Frank Christianson, finally, argues that the text uses its theme of reform as "a mechanism for universalizing middle-class social values" (173) in 2007. The fact that *Annie Kilburn* has been placed within the canon of the Social Gospel novel provides further support for reading the novel not only as an exhibition of the problem of realist reform, but also as a testament to its insolubleness.[112]

This short overview of the last decades on scholarship on *Annie Kilburn* shows that there is a remarkable continuity in the critical language used to describe the novel. The repeated associations with force, control, or the mechanic ascribe to the novel a certain aesthetic of intention that remains artificial or unreal, while they, at the same time, often entail accusations of didacticism and moralization. In the following, I aim to challenge these readings. I argue that via a strategy of ironic distancing, Howells reflects on the possibilities and the limits of realist representation in the context of reformist issues.[113] How can a narration be considered didactic or moralizing if the very problem of the relationship of aesthetics and ethics is discussed on the meta level in the text itself? How should a reader trust in the representation of the narrator's moral authority if their presumed normative

[112] Suderman 50 and Davies 328. See also my discussion of the Social Gospel Novel in Chapter 3. For Howells's relation to the Social Gospel movement, see also Kirk and Kirk's essay "Howells and the Church of the Carpenter."

[113] Sarah B. Daugherty reads the irony in *Annie Kilburn* to an opposite effect, namely as a strategy that undermines both the question of reform and "the central tenets of Howells's realism" (25). Daugherty, however, does not consider Howells's self-reflective discussions of realist narration, which I read as an endeavor to point out and reconcile the formal problem of reformist realism.

stances are repeatedly called into question? As I will show, Howells's ironic distancing from the reformist objectives of his novel makes it difficult to sustain an accusation of moralizing didacticism.

Annie Kilburn, not coincidentally published in the same year as Howells's Christmas column, is an exemplary text that deals with the problem of reformist realism introduced above.[114] The need for a reformulation of sentimental and religious values of doing good is the central theme of Howells's novel. Annie, the protagonist, is already on the first page of the novel described as a character with altruistic inclinations that lack both direction and an object after the death of her care-dependent father. Her "habit of giving herself" (643) motivates Annie, who has spent most of her adult life in Rome, to return to her hometown in Massachusetts with "high intentions" (646) to "do some good" (645). The novel's plot is driven by Annie's various endeavors to translate her altruistic intentions into action. However, most of Annie's charitable actions remain ineffective due to their inapplicability to the seemingly impenetrable complexities of her recently industrialized and modernized New England hometown. This is precisely the problem that is the novel's main thematic concern: the practical, that is, individual, institutional, and organizational application of good intentions in light of the ongoing transformation of American society at the end of the nineteenth century. Annie's conflict negotiates the necessity of adapting sentimentalist and religious conceptions of 'doing good' to a changed social world.

The changes that Annie's Massachusetts hometown has witnessed in her eleven-year-long absence are presented to the reader in the beginning of the novel. The town's development is already manifested in its name, "Hatboro" being a nickname derived from the town's straw-hat-making-industry that replaced the town's agrarian economy, implied by its former name "Dorchester Farms." In panoramic fashion, the results of a "spirit of progress" (650) in the town are presented to the reader when Annie, upon her arrival, is driven around Hatboro by her housekeeper. The change in the town is at first described as an organic one: "The irregularity had hitherto been of an orderly and harmonious kind, such as naturally follows the growth of a country road into a village thoroughfare" (649). The "orderly and harmonious" fashion in which the process of industrialization is claimed to "naturally" go about is further invoked by a comparison of the main town street to a river, which is said to form a "natural boundary of the village" (650). In describing Hatboro's industrialization as a natural and organic process, the narrator nods to an evolutionary idea of organic growth of

[114] *Annie Kilburn* was serialized in *Harper's* from June to November 1888, and published in book form in 1889. See Halfman (1973).

society, emphasized here by the chosen method of the panoramic overview. However, the "natural boundary" the street is said to demarcate is simultaneously that which divides the old and the new part of town. The "hitherto" in the quote above suggests an impending change in this "natural" process; the lining of the new socio-economic division, as a consequence of the industrializing process, accompanied by the intrusion of "new" people – "idlers and invalids" (650) – is described as anything but "natural." Thus, while the narrator at first suggests an organic, homogenous development, the comparison of the street to a river also bears decidedly ironic tendencies, emphasized further by Annie's evident skepticism and dread upon observing the way the street divides the town: "She had come prepared to have misgivings…she thought she could bear the old ugliness, if not the new" (650).

The street-as-river analogy preconfigures another "line" in Howells's writing, namely that which seemingly "naturally" divides the social spectrum of New York City in his next novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). Amy Kaplan provides an insightful reading of the novel's famous apartment-hunting scene, focusing on Basil and Isabel March's acquisition of a "knowledge of the line" (48). Kaplan sees this as the main strategy for writing and constructing an ideal of an "urban community," which she argues to be the main object of the novel. The line, which is in *Hazard* formed by the New York elevated L train boarded by the Marches on their search for an appropriate apartment, is implied to naturally divide the socio-economic strata of the urban wilderness into poor and rich, "good" and "bad" quarters. However, it has larger implications for the form of Howells's novel, according to Kaplan: "The drawing of boundaries offers a narrative solution to the ideological question of how to represent and control social difference and conflict. 'The line' divides the city into two separate but unequal camps and veils the antagonism between them so that the social nature of this division fades from view" (53). While *Hazard*'s train is man-made and technological, thus fittingly lining the sprawl of the urban metropolis, *Annie Kilburn*'s street-as-river analogy seems to be still invested in pointing out the difference between an "Old" rural and a "New" industrialized part in the town. In both cases, however, the "line" is, in my opinion, not meant to "veil antagonism" between separate social groups. Rather, it reveals the obvious limits of conceiving of the transformations of the town as organic or homogenous: The organic metaphors with which Howells describes both Hatboro's street and New York's train are imbued with irony and the suggestion of their inapplicability or malfunction. Howells's indicating the limits of the organic metaphor can thus be read as a self-reflective and

distancing comment on the ideal of a homogenous or natural development of society, thus pointing out the heterogeneity and the complexity of the new industrial context.[115]

Again somewhat ironically, Annie's dreads about the developments in her hometown are partially presented as a consequence of her own odd aesthetic judgments. Her drive through the town comes to a halt before a soldier monument, a statue Annie donated and for whose design she was responsible. A committee decided that Annie would be well equipped for finding an appropriate figure for the Civil War memorial. However, after discussions with members of the committee, Annie "overruled their simple notion of an American volunteer at rest, with his hands folded on the muzzle of his gun, as intolerably hackneyed and commonplace" (651). Instead, she and the sculptor "decided together that it would be best to have something ideal," whereupon the sculptor proceeded in executing a design for a "winged Victory" (651). This reflection about the discrepancy between the real and the ideal puts the preceding insinuation (and dismissal) of an organic, homogenous development of social division into a larger context, namely into the realm of the aesthetic. Annie, in her choice for the statue's design, rejects the "commonplace" in favor of "something ideal" – only to fall into the trap of having chosen a statue that she now, under revision and in passing it in its "natural" environment, finds "youthfully inadequate" and compares to "a young lady in society indecorously exposed for a *tableau vivant*" (652). The references to youth, femininity and not least the *tableau vivant* unmask Annie's idealism as stuck in popular images, as inappropriate, outdated, and as cliché-laden as the repudiated, stereotypical figure of the volunteer. Annie, consequentially, feels shame and embarrassment at the sight of the unfortunate, unseemly inaptness of the statue.

The scene is the first of many others in the novel in which Annie's wish to do good is discarded as inapplicable, inadequate, and insubstantial, and in which her altruistic intentions quite literally lack an appropriate aesthetics or form. Christianson's reading of the scene, placed centrally in his chapter on the representation of philanthropy in Howells's realist fiction, sums this up as follows: "In the choice between the cliché of the

[115] The Marches' drive through the city is repeated in a later scene of *Hazard*, one that Kaplan does not discuss. Basil March takes the train alone and, in an effort of categorization, observes various groups of immigrants living in the city, described as a "heterogeneous commonwealth" (159). Here, the line is described as follows: "…the vagaries of the lines that narrowed together or stretched apart according to the width of the avenue, but always in wanton disregard of the life that dwelt, and bought and sold, and rejoiced or sorrowed, and clattered or crawled, around, below, above – were features of the frantic panorama that perpetually touched his sense of humor and moved his sympathy" (160-161). Howells's ironic usage of the metaphor of an "organic" line is quite clearly deconstructed. The life on the street is "clatter and crawl", is topsy-turvy, heterogeneous, contingent, chaotic: The suggested division of the line makes absolutely no sense, a "knowledge of the line" is impossible. The scene is all the more interesting, because Basil March, in his reflections on the city, proceeds in comparing it to the chaotic and "lawless" nature of the evolutionary process as such (160).

sentimentalised volunteer and the idealised winged victory, Howells figures a representational crisis" (176). Christianson's application of genre markers (sentimentalized, idealized) in his analysis is telling: Annie's realization of the "irony behind her coercive benevolence" (176) can be seen as one of the many ensuing instances of her failed charitable efforts. The Victorian belief in the civilizing effect of the Fine Arts is debunked as "superficial" (Fluck, *Inszenierte Wirklichkeit* 311) and incongruent, as inapplicable in light of the cultural change that has taken place in Hatboro. This initial panoramic scene, then, already foreshadows the need for a reformulation of old notions of doing reform – a main theme that will enfold over the course of the novel.

What is more important, however, is that the scene directly links the idea of a failed altruistic undertaking to a self-reflective exposure of a representational crisis on what art (the sculpture) or literature (the novel) *can* do in the service of reform. The idealized Victory is clearly discarded as an unsuitable model, enhanced by an ironic rendering of Annie's shame and embarrassment and her housekeeper's telling silence on the matter. The fact that Howells refers to the alternative, the likewise inappropriate figure of the volunteer, as "simple," and as "hackneyed and commonplace," however, also points towards a highly ironic critique of his own realist program – "commonplace" being, after all, one of the most central terms in Howells's literary criticism. Howells thus opens up the question of "failed" endeavors at social reform to a crisis of representation.

Annie Kilburn exhibits the interconnectedness between the problem of reform and the problem of realist representation. Often, the pressing question of "how to do good" – and the correlated question of how to represent reform – is reflected in debates about how to call and to conceptualize good deeds, that is, about appropriate terminology. For example, Annie does not feel comfortable with being called a charitable person (761). Upon her arrival in Hatboro, Annie joins a group of rich charity ladies who are busy with the planning of a play, designed, ostensibly at least, to integrate the town's working class. However, Annie is merely asked to donate and to promote the charity project with her good name. And in fact, the theater event fails spectacularly, mainly because of a joint effort of the town to keep the "well-to-do ladies" apart from the "socially objectionable element – the shoe-shop hands and the straw-shop girls" (671-672). The obvious limitations of the charity ladies' project are not only exposed by an ironic and scoffing narrator, but are also pointed out in an earlier scene of the novel, in which Annie consults Reverend Peck, an altruistic figure with strong opinions on the issue of social justice who can be read as a representative of a more radical bent of the Social Gospel movement, about his opinion on the planned theatrical. The Reverend strongly

disagrees with the ladies' project, claiming it – and the concept of charity as a whole – to be a "palliative [which] can't cure" (684).

The fact that Peck's phrase is a verbatim reference to Howells's 1888 "Editor's Study," discussed above, indicates that this critique is not only directed against the concept of charity. It is also a reflection on reformist writing itself. Howells's evocation of "Christmas Literature" can also be observed in Peck's ensuing critique of the faculty of sympathy, which he claims to be able to "spring only from like experiences, like hopes, like fears. And money cannot buy these" in a societal system that is characterized by a stark division between "rich and poor" (684). Arguably, one can read the novel *Annie Kilburn* as an effort to write Howells's idea of "new Christmas Literature" into practice.

The second reformist concept Annie refuses to adopt is that of "philanthropy," a term so "offensive" that Annie, in a conversation with her friend (and implied love interest) Dr. Morrell, has to stop herself from speaking it out loud (736). Like the inapplicability of the concept of charity, the problematic nature of philanthropy is first established between Annie and the Reverend. Only this time, the critique does not emerge out of a conversation, but out of an interesting comparison: Peck uncomfortably reminds Annie of the character of Hollingsworth of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1852 novel *The Blithedale Romance*. Philanthropists like Hollingsworth and Peck, Annie complains to her friend Dr. Morrell, are "always ready to sacrifice the happiness and comfort of any one to the general good" (686) – a notion Annie rejects as otherworldly and idealistic. In addition to this, Peck's egalitarian beliefs are repeatedly dismissed as being "sentimentalist" (727). Peck, who himself discards the idea of sentimental sympathy, is at the same time repeatedly connected to this notion; the term "sentimentalist" attains further pejorative significance in this instance because it is used to describe not only other-worldliness, but also Peck's socialist politics.

Crucially, however, "sentimentalist" is also a literary term. The dismissal of Peck's sentimentalist politics is therefore, at the same time, a dismissal of sentimentalist writing. In addition to this, the intertextual reference to *The Blithedale Romance* also evokes a different literary genre, namely that of the utopian novel. I suggest that the reference to Hawthorne's utopian novel is not only meant as a gesture towards a certain other-worldliness or fictitiousness of Peck's character, a portrayal that will be reiterated throughout the novel. Nor is the reference to Hawthorne's deluded reformers solely to be understood as a means of foreshadowing the failure of Annie's own utopian inclinations. Instead, the reference to *Blithedale* provides instructions on how to read *Annie Kilburn*, namely as an ironic exposition on the limits of realist representation. Because while it is true that Howells's novel

incorporates many features of the utopian form – Annie, in her function as a visiting outsider, can be read as a quasi-utopian traveller, the social panorama of Hatboro is presented in episodic manner, etc. – the novel also, and deeply ironically so, calls those very formal similarities to utopianism and sentimentalism into question.

Is the novel's ironic play with literary forms, then, to be read merely as a testament to the failure of reform, and, by implication, to the impossibility of reformist realism? The fact that both Peck and the "injuriousness of [his] idealism" (857) are run over by a train at the end of the novel could be read as a bleak statement on the possibility of reform. However, Peck's radical beliefs survive, in a tamed-down version, in Annie's very own "Peck Social Union," a reformist project she establishes after Peck's death and that follows his "social philosophy" (862). The taming down of Peck's radicalism at the end of the novel has been read as an example par excellence for a "morally pleasing" (Trachtenberg 192) ending, as an upholding of moderate middle-class norms, as a forced reconciliation.

However, this reading, too, can be complicated. In the last five paragraphs, the novel exhibits a formal twist. Here the narrative, curiously, switches into the present tense. Annie's new Social Union, far from being a "brilliant success…is still not a failure; and the promise of its future is in the fact that it continues to have a present" (863). The 'real' value of Annie's altruistic intentions, inclinations, and propensities, is manifested not only in the functioning of the Social Union, but it is even more so present in the present-ness of the narration; the promise of a possibility to do good is here clearly stated. It is further emphasized by yet another comment that can be read as responding to the debate of the real and the ideal, as a self-reflective comment on literary form: "She is *really* of use, for its working is by no means *ideal*…[emphasis mine]" (862). To call this suggestion of reconciliation a simple resolution of the problem would miss the mark. If anything, the recourse to the present tense just further emphasizes a perpetual continuation of the problem of reform – and thereby also that of realist representation. The present-ness of the last paragraphs hints at a rather "radical" return to the "real" on the level of form. The conflict between the real and the ideal, the aesthetic and the ethic is in the novel crucially linked to a (literal) opening up of literary form.

In *Annie Kilburn*, the confusion about how to frame and phrase moral principles of doing good is not only a testament to a crisis of social reform in a modern industrialized society, but it is at the same time a self-reflective comment on the problem of realist representation. On the one hand, the continuous investment in meta-commentary on the potentials and limits of realist representation exhibited in the novel certainly challenges standard interpretations of the text. I have argued that charges of didacticism and related re-

classifications of the novel as a sentimentalist, or a quasi-utopian text, are difficult to uphold if those very literary forms are ironically reflected on the meta level. On the other hand, the struggle around how to conceptualize, how to call or name moral reform exhibited in Annie's successive discarding of charity, philanthropy, and sympathy indicates that the novel is, both in terms in form and in content, structured around the idea of a search. I suggest that my proposed concept of *reformulation* is an apt way to describe this expressed need for an update of reform, and the concomitant need for a new literary form. To both needs or problems, to the struggle around meaning surrounding reformist approaches, and to the competition of literary forms, the arrival of the concept of altruism responds and provides tentative answers.

4. Reflections on Literary Form: *The Altrurian Romances*

A Traveller from Altruria was first published in installments for *The Cosmopolitan* from November 1892 through October 1893. The novel's plot takes place in a New England summer hotel that is described as a "microcosm of the republic" (24) by the first-person narrator Mr. Twelvemough. Twelvemough and the other hotel guests, all of whom are representatives of America's upper class, receive a strange guest from the far-away island of Altruria. In the course of the novel, the utopian traveller Aristides Homos proceeds to conduct a number of interviews with the hotel guests. Homos's questions about the socio-political situation in the United States enable the satirical and critical effect of the text: They are rhetorical and highly uncomfortable questions, designed to expose the grievances of American life at the end of the century. *A Traveller from Altruria* was published in book form in 1894, followed by a sequel, *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, which was likewise published serially. It consists of a series of letters, which document the utopian traveller's new life in New York City, where he has moved after his stay at the summer hotel has ended. After a long hiatus, in 1907, finally, Howells issued a third Altrurian novel, *Through the Eye of the Needle,* which continues Homos's *Letters,* and ends with his return to Altruria, narrated from the point of view of Homos's new American wife Eveleth. *Altruria* is, in all three parts, described as a society that has returned to a pre-industrial, agrarian socio-economic order. It is built on an ideal of the family, and its political order is the reverse of what is consistently referred to as America's "plutocracy" in the novels: Altruria is a (Christian) socialist society. The moral principle of altruism constitutes the social order of the utopian space Altruria, and

it defines the imaginary island's law and government, as well as its customs, culture, and social manners.[116]

In the 1910s, Howells planned the publication of a "deluxe" Library edition of the first and third part of the trilogy. For this later, collected edition, which was never published during his lifetime, Howells wrote a "Bibliographical," in which he makes reference to a number of fictional and non-fictional genre markers that are supposed to describe the Altrurian texts at hand. The genre markers listed in Howells's preface are, among others: "romance," "sociological serial," and, finally, "Utopia."[117] This confusion of genre descriptions is no coincidence. Rather, it is indicative of how severely Howells struggled with the question of how to incorporate his growing – and, at the time of the publication of *A Traveller from Altruria*, pressing – reformist interests into his aesthetic program of realism. Howells's search for the right form accompanied his later fictional and critical work, and, as the "Bibliographical" unmistakably indicates, this search found its climax in the Altrurian fictions.

In the following, I will put under scrutiny Howells's genre markers "romance," "utopia," and "sociological serial." Drawing from Howells's own critical writings to theorize the genre markers, I analyze how they are negotiated in the novels themselves. This analysis is directed by three arguments: First, the introduction of the concept of altruism extends the problem of reformist realism discussed above. I argue that altruism's capacity to reformulate complicates a classification of the texts according to genre: it enables the maneuvering and self-reflective play with literary forms exhibited in the Altrurian fictions. Second, reformulation becomes an aesthetic principle in Howells's trilogy. The formal indecision in Howells's "Bibliographical" is not only visible in the difficulty of classification of the three texts at hand. It is also continuously reflected – often in ironic manner – on the level of narrative in the Altrurian text themselves. Third, I argue that in its ironic negotiations of the form of the romance, the sociological serial, and the utopian novel, the texts implicitly make claims on what a realist reformist novel is, in turn, supposed to do. The Altrurian texts, in their formulaic structure, their focus on dialogue, and their adherence to the utopian form cannot be read as strictly realist novels. Instead, they make realistic representation itself its object of inquiry and discussion.

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[116] Pittenger demonstrates that "Howells's eminently respectable form of socialism" exhibited in the Altrurian fictions is influenced by Laurence Gronlund's appeal for the establishment of a "Cooperative Commonwealth" (61). See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Gronlund's conceptualization of altruism.

[117] Howells also mentions the labels "fable," which I read as an extension of "utopia," and "report," which can be contextualized with my analysis of the genre marker "sociological serial" below. A detailed discussion of these two genre markers would go beyond the scope of this chapter.

My reading complicates a large strand of criticism on the Altrurian fictions. While *Annie Kilburn* was interpreted as a novel that departs in some measure from Howells's realist program, mainly because of its alleged didactic and sentimentalist tendencies, the texts *A Traveller from Altruria*, *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, and *Through the Eye of the Needle* are rather consistently read as deviations from Howells's own aesthetic principles of realism and usually read as utopian novels. The majority of scholarship renders Howells's turn towards utopianism, accordingly, in a narrative of deviation or loss, a development that is accompanied, more often than not, by interpretations of Howells's personal biography: His public denouncement of the Haymarket Affair, his succeeding interest in Christian and secular socialism, and the death of his daughter Winifred are often mentioned as important steps in Howells's turn towards utopianism.[118] Finally, criticism on the Altrurian fictions is sparse to begin with. While the first part of the trilogy has received some attention (even though the novel is often used as a stand-in for comparisons, and rarely analyzed in detail), the second and third parts remain understudied until today.

Only a few studies have contested what I have described above as the narrative of deviation. George R. Uba's essay "Howells and the Practicable Utopia: The Allegorical Structure of the Altrurian Romances" (1983) starts out with a premise not unlike mine: He observes a neglect of questions of literary form in the majority of studies on Howells's texts, and consequently sets out to "examine the literary architectonics" (119) of the first and last part of the trilogy. Uba reads them as "carefully designed and fully complementary examples of allegory" (119). While at times convincing, many of Uba's arguments are based on a biographical interpretation of Howells's past in a Shaker community. Furthermore, Uba neglects all aspects of self-reflection, irony, and meta-commentary that are, in turn, the focus of my reading. Glen A. Love's 1994 essay "Slouching Towards Altruria" concedes that, contrary to many standard readings of the texts, Howells's Altrurian fictions exhibit "a great deal of realism" (31) because their main object of study is not the ideal land Altruria, but rather the realities of American society. However, Love's article does not pursue this thought further in terms of an analysis of the formal particularities of the texts. Instead, his approach is primarily dedicated to debunking the evolutionary theory underlying Howells's "Altrurian theorizing" (31) as "bad science" (33).

To be sure: It is indeed difficult to uphold an argument for reading the Altrurian fictions as realist novels. And it is not my goal to do so in the following part of this chapter. But I also do not agree with Amy Kaplan, who, alongside a majority of critics, states that: "*A*

[118] See, for example, Cady, Carter, Ekstrom, and Engeman.

Traveller from Altruria does not wrestle with the conflicted social terrain of *Hazard*; it ingests the background of conflict as subject for conversation rather than as a problem for realistic representation" (64). It is true that conflict is made a subject for conversation, but it is not true that the problem of realistic representation is absent in Howells's Altrurian fictions. To the contrary: The possibilities and the limits of realistic representation are at the center of discussion in the texts. Altruria – and its structural principle altruism – allows Howells to reflect upon a variety of literary forms, all of which define the aesthetic and political principles of reformist realism by negation.

4.1 Romance: A Traveller from Altruria

The genre marker "romance" is the one mentioned most often in Howells's introductory *Bibliographical* – a total of four times – and *The Altrurian Romances* was the title Howells had in mind for his planned de-luxe Library Edition of 1910. When Clara and Rudolf Kirk fulfilled Howells's wish of editing and publishing in one volume the books *A Traveller from Altruria* and *Through the Eye of the Needle* in their authoritative Indiana University edition of 1968, they picked Howells's chosen title, and subsequent scholarship on the texts refers to the Altrurian texts as romances. But the genre ascription "romance" is puzzling, for Howells was famously critical, if not outright scornful of the romance in his criticism. As has been pointed out above, his definition of the realist novel was, more often than not, contingent on an expressed demarcation and often a polemic devaluation of the preceding, but still highly popular literary mode of the romance. The distinction between the romance and realism, which would gain immense significance for succeeding literary criticism, has accompanied most, if not all evaluations of Howells's realism, as Don Pease and others have shown.[119] It is no surprise, then, that Howells's self-proclaimed excursion into romance territory has been interpreted as exactly that: a break, a deviation from realism.

Throughout the trilogy, the land of Altruria is described as a romantic, pastoral idyll, and this conceptualization enables the imagination of the moral principle of altruism. At the end of *A Traveller from Altruria*, the reader learns that the island of Altruria has a history not

[119] See Pease (1991). The differentiation has been formative for the emergence and development of the field of American Studies. Most prominently Richard Chase, but also other early American studies scholars of the 50s and 60s drew on Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous preface to his 1851 novel *The House of the Seven Gables* in order to make their stance about claiming the romance to be *the* American literary form. In this kind of criticism, the "romance thesis" was also substantiated by Howells's critical and fictional work. For an overview of this trajectory, see, for example, Kaplan (2-3), or Fluck *Das kulturelle Imaginäre* (8-9).

unlike the one of the United States: there was a point in time, hundreds of years ago, when the land was industrialized, when *laissez-faire* capitalism reigned, when social and economic demographics were extremely divided. However, the Altrurians, contrary to the Americans, realized the mistake quickly, and destroyed all signs of industrialized life: They burned bridges, dismantled cities, melted down railways. After this clean-slate moment, the Altrurians returned to a pre-industrial lifestyle, culture, and economic system, a process of restoration referred to as "Altrurianization" throughout the trilogy. Altruria is a state uncorrupted by the contingencies of historical progress and the social ills of modern industrialized life.[120] The notion of peaceful cooperation, and the underlying moral basis of benevolence, summed up in the principle of altruism in the utopian space, is conditioned upon a retreat to a pre-industrial, agrarian-Arcadian order.

The juxtaposition of a pastoral land, in which altruism is a real social fact and not merely an imaginary ideal, with the harsh actualities of contemporary industrialized American life can, in a more general sense, be associated with romance's characteristic movement between the real and the imaginary, observed, for example, by Michael Davitt Bell, who claims the genre to be "radically dualistic in its separation of fancy and reason, imagination and actuality" (10) in his *The Development of the American Romance* (1980). Similarly, Winfried Fluck's essay "The American Romance and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary" (1996) approaches the genre of the romance as one that "dramatizes a clash between two aspects of our existence: an 'other' world of desires and imaginary self-empowerment, and the commonplace world of actuality which constantly frustrates but also refuels our longing for transgression and transcendence" (422). In a sense, both Bell and Fluck ascribe a utopian impetus to the genre of the romance, an important thought to which I will return later. In *Altruria*, there is more to the romantic tropes of the nostalgic and the pastoral, however. According to Leo Marx's classical *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), the conceptual metaphor of the pastoral held an especially significant place for the American cultural and national imagination, most prevalently in the literary decade of Romanticism.[121] Howells's use of the literary convention of the pastoral should therefore be read as an ironic comment on the conventions of the romance.

A Traveller from Altruria questions the presumed correspondence of the text at hand to the genre marker "romance." From the beginning of the novel, the first-person narrator

[120] Cooperman compares Howells's agrarian utopian space to Bellamy's vision of an industrial future.
[121] For a revision of Marx's seminal study, see *Rereading the Machine in the Garden: Nature and Technology in American Culture* (2014).

Mr. Twelvemough is granted the privilege to fulfill this task, for Twelvemough is no ordinary witness to the arrival of the utopian traveller: He is himself a writer of romantic fiction. The name Twelvemough is, according to Uba, itself a "comic allusion to the size of the books (the diminutive 12-mo) in which his popular romances presumably appear" (Uba 123). And in fact, Twelvemough personifies the literary mode of romanticism: Throughout the text, he provides not only the story of the Altrurian, but also a lot of information about how to write this very story. On the first page of the novel, the narrator tells his readers about the first encounter with the visitor from Altruria. In describing his "quiet, gentle eyes," Twelvemough cannot help but feeling "obliged to report in rather fantastic terms" about the effect they have on him: "they expressed a vast contemporaneity" (7). Twelvemough thus concedes that he has to take recourse to what is a highly paradoxical form of storytelling – a report that is, at the same time, fantastical – in approaching a first description of the foreign traveller, a concession that is repeatedly made throughout the novel. In addition to ambiguous allegiances to a variety of literary forms on the part of the romance-writing narrator, the only fantastical (or 'unreal') element of the narration, namely the figure of Aristides Homos himself, is immediately called into question by the narrator's reference to the traveller's air of "contemporaneity," which locates the figure of the utopian traveller not primarily in the realm of fantasy or fancy, but also in the here and now. Already on the first page, then, the relationship to the genre of the "romance" is complicated by Twelvemough's ironic narration.

The self-referential critique of the romance, geared, in the description of this first encounter, primarily against a mode of fantastical storytelling, is extended during the course of the novel. Shortly after his arrival in the New England summer hotel, Homos wonders in amazement about the fact that its guests are so very homogenous – that is, so wealthy. Homos asks Twelvemough, why there are no miners or farmers, no mechanics or day laborers strolling through the gardens, or relaxing in the lobby. The narrator Twelvemough is, as always, unsure about the nature of Homos' potential provocations, and wonders whether Homos's question is innocent or ironic. Generally, Twelvemough's attitude towards Homos is one of skepticism, not only concerning the candor of his questions, but, in fact, the sincerity of his whole persona and back story.[122] Homos, at any rate, infers from the obvious lack of

[122] The theme of skepticism has been observed by others, who usually use the following quote, in which Twelvemough wonders about the authenticity of Homos, as a reference: "Was he really a man, a human entity, a personality like ourselves, or was he merely a sort of spiritual solvent, sent for the moment to precipitate whatever sincerity there was in us, and shows us what the truth was concerning our relations to each other? It was a fantastic conception, but I thought it was one that I might employ in some sort of purely romantic design, and I was professionally grateful for it" (99). Uba, who conceived of Howell's Altrurian novels as allegories, reads this excerpt as an instance of typologization (122). Love also attends to the "problem" the "outlandish visitor" poses to Twelvemough's narration (32) and by comparing Homos and Altruria itself to Howells's

vacation-taking working people at the hotel that they must "prefer to go to resorts of their own" (29). Twelvemough reflects for quite a while about this question, and decides that it must be a satirical remark. Out of politeness and embarrassment, however, Twelvemough finally decides to ignore his suspicions, and answers as follows:

> "Well," I said, "that opens up rather a large field, which lies somewhat outside of the province of my own activities. You know, I am a writer of romantic fiction, and my time is so fully occupied in manipulating the destinies of the good old-fashioned hero and heroine, and trying always to make them end in a happy marriage, that I don't know what they do with their leisure…In fact, our cultivated people have so little interest in them socially that they don't like to meet them, even in fiction." (30)

These are, quite evidently, satirical remarks about the conventions of romantic writing, grounded on a number of features, all of which are repeatedly invoked in Howells's own critical work: Romantic forms are concerned with the representation of the lives of heroes and heroines, or, in other words, with "good old-fashioned" romantic grasshoppers, the representation of their lives revolves around an ever-present and unavoidable marriage plot, and they have questionable politics of representation: It is the lack of representation of "the lives of agriculturists or artisans", and, more importantly, the lack of interest of the wealthier "cultivated" classes for the "ordinary" working man that is the main vantage point for attack: "They don't like to meet them, even in fiction." The quote is no ordinary satirical comment: In its critique of the romance, the quote implicitly makes claims on the desired principles and obligations of realism: Instead of focusing on heroes and heroines, the realist novel should be dedicated to the representation of ordinary people. Instead of working the plot of a novel towards a happy marriage and a happy ending, the realist novel should endeavor to depict the realities of married life itself. Finally - and here, Howells is possibly already reacting to main points of critique against realism, brought forward by the emerging tradition of naturalism – the realist novel should concern itself not only with the middle class, but also with the lives of working people.[123]

What is more, the scene functions as a mis-en-abyme. All the while Twelvemough states that the lives of the "ordinary" are not representable for him, he is, of course, the narrator of the text at hand. Twelvemough thus makes a contradictory statement here. The life of the "agriculturists and artisans" is, in later chapters, when Homos visits a farmer's

"ideal" grasshoppers, reading them as "creations that *ought* to be nobler and nicer than the real things but often come across as lifeless and contrived" (32). None of them addresses the fact that this quote, too, is a reflection on romantic, fantastical, and, by implication, realist writing.

[123] See, for example, Frank Norris' influential essay "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901), and a discussion of this text in the context of Howells's realism in Bell (109-111).

family in the surrounding hill country, represented in the novel. The lives of the working classes are made a theme in the text that is narrated by Twelvemough himself, even though the representation of its members "lies somewhat outside of the province of [his] own activity". In the critique of the genre of the romance, presented in this self-reflective, highly ironic way via the function of the narrator, Howells gestures to his own formal problem. In letting his "romance" be narrated by a writer of romantic fiction, a genre he rejected, Howells ironically points out his own struggle with the form of the text at hand.

At least two questions remain to be answered. First, how do these musings on romantic form and the fact that Altruria itself is described with romantic imagery relate to the novel's simultaneous dedication to the utopian form? The novel is structured in dialogues between representatives of two different worlds, therefore following the utopian format rather strictly. At the same time, the text is classified with the label "romance." And in fact, one of the messages of *A Traveller from Altruria* is that this does not necessarily have to be a paradox. For while the descriptions of Altruria are riddled with romantic imagery, therefore inviting the reader to reminisce nostalgically about an American pastoral past, Altruria is, at the same time, posited as America's utopian potential: "America prophesies another Altruria" (164), as the novel concludes. Altruria is at once the romantic past and the utopian future.

Second, what kind of realism is established via this self-reflective play with literary forms? The "Editor's Study" from December 1889 provides further answers to this question. In the column, Howells first identifies and condemns the enduring recurrence of the conceptual metaphor of the pastoral. In doing so, he claims that a regression to romantic forms is incongruent not only with the advance of literature, but also, in a more general sense, with the spirit of the time.[124] While "[r]omanticism belonged to a disappointed and bewildered age" (124), realism, in turn, is posited as a form that portrays hope and provides potential: "…this is the time of hopeful striving, when we have really a glimpse of what the earth may be when Christianity becomes a life in the equality and fraternity of the race […] The humanities are working through realism to this end." (124). On the one hand, the idea of

[124] This regression or retreat is repeatedly ridiculed as "childlike" by Howells in this and other columns and critical writings: First, in terms of the genre's position in literary history and secondly, because of the romance's thematic engagement with what he calls the "Weird and Supernatural" (125), with make-believe and fantasy. In his essay "Pernicious Fictions" (1887), Howells makes a similar argument. Here, he discusses the potentially "injurious" (360) effects of literary fiction, particularly the harm that lies in the reading of romantic and sentimentalist novels. Howells places harsh judgment on romantic tales "because they are idle lies about human nature and the social fabric" (360). In turn, he speaks in favor of novels that are "true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women" (363). In this context, Fluck has shown that Howells believed that the realist novel's potential for social and aesthetic reform was based on a "liberation from infantilism," which he, in turn, related to the sentimental and romantic novel (Fluck *Inszenierte Wirklichkeit*, 20-22).

"hopeful striving" connotes a healthy dose of idealism to realism, the "glimpse" into the possible, or the imaginary, is something not only reserved for the forms of the romance or the utopian novel, but seems to be a necessary element of realism – and of the humanities and art in general, as well. On the other hand, Howells's wish for Christianity to become "a life in the equality and fraternity of the race" is summed up in his preoccupation with the concept of altruism. It is therefore a *tension* between realism, the romance, and utopianism that is at stake in the Altrurian fictions – a tension that is always also played out on the level of form, and that is brought to the fore by Howells's use of the concept of altruism.

4.2 Sociological Serial: *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*

From November 1893 until September 1894, the series of *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* appeared in the *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in eleven installments. The last six letters of this series were incorporated into the first part of the novel *Through the Eye of the Needle*. Howells did not plan to include the first five letters into his Library edition, but he transformed some of them into non-fictional, critical essays, named "Glimpses of Central Park" and "New York Streets," both of which were republished, after extensive alterations, in his essay collection *Impressions and Experiences* in 1896.[125] The complicated way in which Howells distributed the raw material of his *Letters* (some of them appeared only in their original form in the *Cosmopolitan*, some of them were transformed into critical essays and dissociated from their original Altrurian narrator, yet others were re-written and incorporated in a novel) allows one to think about these texts as a continuation of the formal problem introduced in the previous sections of this chapter. Only this time, Howells does not only deliberate on novelistic form, but also negotiates the problem in more general terms: Do the *Letters* belong to the realm of fiction or to that of the feuilleton? A question worth asking, not least because Howells begins writing about Altruria after taking up a position at the *Cosmopolitan*, a journal known for its mass-appeal and critical, political outlook and orientation.[126]

[125] Unlike *A Traveller from Altruria*, the *Letters* were not re-published in book form. The last six installments became, after a rather heavy editing process, the first part of the third sequel of the Altrurian Romances, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, which was published in book form in 1907 (see the Introduction to *The Altrurian Romances* by Kirk and Kirk).

[126] Howells's move to the *Cosmopolitan* is explained in more detail by Kirk and Kirk, who suspect a certain amount of editorial pressure to have played a role here. The editor of the *Cosmopolitan* embraced Howells's social stance. But after the publication of the *Letters*, Howells was hailed (and condemned) as a socialist in the review press, which could also be a reason why Harper and Brothers did not publish the *Letters* in book form.

It is somewhat difficult to classify the *Letters* according to a fiction-nonfiction binary. This ambiguity is captured by Howells's designation of the Altrurian texts as "sociological serial" in his "Bibliographical." And the Altrurian fictions were not only classified as sociological studies by Howells himself, but were also received as such by his readers: A review, originally published in *The Dial* and reprinted in 1894 in the journal *The Charities Review*, features a discussion of Howells's Altrurian texts alongside works by established sociologists Franklin H. Giddings and Benjamin Kidd in a section called "Recent Studies in Sociology." The review shows that the Altrurian fictions were read not primarily for their literary value, but also for their "social function" (47). Similarly, a review printed in the *Atlantic Monthly* in the same year declares that "Mr. Howells has turned aside for a moment from fiction" (701) with the publication of the *Letters*.[127] The review of the *Letters* printed in the periodical *The Altruistic Review* in 1893, discussed in the second chapter, also praises Howells not only as a novelist, but also as a "social philosopher" (*The Altruistic Review* 3.4, 188).

What exactly does the signature "sociological serial" connote? The noun "serial" corresponds to the form of the text's initial serial publication: *A Traveller from Altruria, Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* and parts of *Through the Eye of the Needle* were published in installments the *Cosmopolitan* between 1892 and 1894. "Serial" also corresponds to the episodic organization exhibited in the first and last part of the trilogy: Since all texts have in common a central object of inquiry, namely American society itself, they do not focus on plot, but on plans, not on a character's development, but on a fanning out of various aspects of society. In episodic manner, each Altrurian *Letter*, and each chapter in the first and third part of the trilogy, accordingly, is concerned with a particular social question or issue. The serial form is thus a suitable way to present "sociological" material.

The adjective "sociological," in turn, gestures towards the scientific objective of the Altrurian texts: the careful and detached study of (American) society. Howells invokes the marker "sociological" at a time when sociology, like literature, was professionalizing itself as a discipline, as Wolf Lepenies argues in much detail in his 1985 book *Die drei Kulturen*. Lepenies conceives of sociology in the nineteenth century as "third culture," as an emerging discipline situated in-between the natural sciences and the humanities. His study is written under the premise that the emerging social sciences were caught between competing epistemological claims brought forward by the arts and by the natural sciences, respectively.

In the re-publication of the third and the forth letter, Howells notably tuned down the socialist rhetoric (Kirk and Kirk xxvi).

[127] Henderson, C. R. "Recent Studies in Sociology." *The Charities Review* 4.1 (1894): 46-.52 and "America, Altruria, and the Coast of Bohemia." *Atlantic Monthly* 74 (1894): 701-704.

This competition has resulted in a process of differentiation of the discipline of sociology, underlined and enabled by a perceived ideological contrast between "warm sentimental culture" (i.e. the arts) and "cold reason" (i.e. the sciences) (i). Lepenies further states that early sociologists faced a major competitor in the new-formed task of describing, analyzing, and, ultimately, explaining human nature and society, namely the realist novel (iv-ix). The aspirations to truthful and objective representation, put forward in early sociological methodologies, are echoed in Howells's establishment of a theory of realism. The realist novel of the nineteenth century openly borrows from early sociological methods, and vice versa.

While Lepenies's dichotomy between "warm" and "cold" seems at times somewhat reductive, it can nonetheless be read in line with nineteenth-century definitions of altruism, a concept, as has been argued in earlier chapters, that functions as a conjuncture of various disciplines and epistemologies and negotiates, for example, between sentimental and rational notions of human nature and the human good. The signifier "sociological" therefore constitutes the approach towards the concept of altruism so central for the Altrurian fictions: Since altruism was received as a key concept in the formation of the discipline of sociology in the nineteenth century, the sociological is a mode and form suitable for its discussion in Howells's Altrurian texts. More importantly, however, reading altruism as a concept belonging to the "third culture" of sociology also proves helpful for carving out the significance of the concept for literature, particularly for Howells's project of reformist realism. Altruism can be approached as a concept that negotiates between the two orders of knowledge, sociology and literature.

The mutual borrowing of methods (sociology/literature) observed by Lepenies is centrally at work in Howells's *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*. The five letters that make up the text *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* bear formal resemblance both to the socio-critical essay and to the epistolary novel. After the end of his stay at the summer resort, where the plot of *A Traveller from Altruria* takes place, Aristides Homos moves to New York City, where he begins to collect data about the cultural and social environment of the metropolis. The reports Homos sends home to his Altrurian friend, which are the substance of the *Letters*, resemble the research results of a participant observation. Unlike the first part of the trilogy, which is narrated from the point of view of an American, the *Letters* thus have a different dynamic. In their aim at presenting an outsider's perspective on life in the United States in the 1890s, they lack (at first sight, at least) the irony and self-reflection that was observed in Twelvemough's narration. Since the dating of Homos's letters corresponds with the

publication date of the installments in the *Cosmopolitan*, the letters are provided with a contemporaneous urgency and with a journalistic stamp. Homos reports about current events, like the Homestead Strike of 1892 and the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. More often than not, his observations are closer related to the political essay or to the travel report than to the personal letter. These inconsistencies with the form of the epistolary novel also become apparent when Homos recounts lengthy conversations with other Americans in his letters, as, for example, in the second letter, which consists largely of a dialogue between himself and a banker, a figure that is known to readers from the first part of the trilogy. These conversations often span several pages, and are endowed with the *inquit* formula and quotation marks, formal features which mark them as direct speech. The inclusion of these lengthy conversations raises questions about the productiveness of the form of the epistolary novel for the text's purposes. Often, the narration slips back into the dialogical form featured in the first and last part of the trilogy, and characteristic of the utopian form.

The rather inconsistent way Howells's *Letters* are formally constructed somehow contradicts, or at least challenges, the aesthetic viewpoint reiterated and praised throughout the text: the value of symmetry, order, and proportion. As it turns out, Homos has to painfully realize that "the pleasure we get from symmetry at home" (240) in Altruria is hard to come by in the "chaotic" urban metropolis of New York City. Much of Homos's account is a lamentation about the city's eclectic architecture, which he repeatedly credits with "an effect of arrogant untidiness" (237). The notion of "untidiness," moreover, responds to the semantic field of filth, dirt, and disease invoked in Homos's description of the city's poor quarters: adjectives like "shabby," "squalid," (238) and "leprous" (242) abound in his letters. In addition to this, the "arrogant untidiness" that reigns in the chaotic metropolis also delineates, in a more general sense, the notion of heterogeneous disorder that defines the increasingly complex, contemporary U.S. American society. A "knowledge of the line," to establish a common thread between the novels *Annie Kilburn*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, and the *Letters*, is utterly unattainable for Homos. Hence, his disdain for disorder is consistently juxtaposed to the values of order and of symmetry, which, in turn, determine both Altruria's architecture and its moral and social structure.

Two places are exempt from Homos's disapproval: In great detail, he swoons over New York's Central Park and the White City, the centerpiece of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Only in Central Park and in the White City does Homos see the "plutocratic strife" (236) that plagues American society relieved – and this has serious consequences for the architectonic design of these places. Central Park is described, in

pastoral terms, as "an American woodland" (226), as a place that has been rendered back to its natural state and therefore provides refuge from the chaos and noise of urban industrialism. The White City, on the other hand, is praised primarily for its exposition of monumental neoclassicism, an architectural style defined by symmetry and just proportion. Homos deems this to be "the effect of a principle, and not the straggling and shapeless accretion of accident" (202) which, in turn, guides the architectural makeup of the city of New York so despised by the utopian. Accordingly, the reports about Central Park and the White City are posited as educative "lessons" (236), as ideals for the United States to strive for. They are meant to create an image and an idea of America's unfulfilled potential. [128] Central Park and White City are, consequently, called "A Bit of Altruria" (220) in America.

Both the White City and Central Park are interpreted as successful instances of "Altrurianization" by Homos, a process that is achieved not only by aesthetic effects, but, more importantly, by the social and political function these spaces inhabit: Contrary to New York City, whose "deformity" is an expression of its "essential immorality" (236), the Altrurian spaces White City and Central Park are considered exemplary because of their dedication to aesthetic principles of symmetry and proportion. In the "Editor's Study" from December 1890, published two years before the first installment of *A Traveller from Altruria*, Howells was already preoccupied with what he then referred to as the "Synthetized [sic] Sympathies of Altruria", a space that would allow "the apparent reconciliation of all the principles once supposed antagonistic, the substitution of emulation for rivalry, the harmonization of personal ambitions in a sweet accord of achievement for the common good" (152). Disorder is contextualized with inequality, as exemplified in the manifold descriptions of New York's "arrogant untidiness," the values of symmetry, integration, or synthesis are, in turn, always related to social and economic equality, summed up with the concept of altruism. Social equality and aesthetics are thus related and interdependent. And in fact, this interdependency might be, ultimately, what Altruria, and altruism, means to the Altrurian Aristides Homos: A principle of order, the utopian desire for a matching of form and content.

However, this idealized notion of symmetry and simplicity rather severely challenges the label given to the observations at hand: by the end of the nineteenth century, as Howells must have been well aware, "sociology" as a discipline had long recognized the inherent heterogeneity – or disorder – in contemporary American society, and has, in fact, made the

[128] The White City and Central Park, like Altruria itself, are spatial, not temporal utopias. This observation could be extended by probing the accounts of Central Park and the White City in terms of their function as heterotopias (Michel Foucault). Such an analysis would greatly profit from Laura Bieger's study *Aesthetik der Immersion* (2007). Bieger argues that the bourgeois beauty of the White City's design was inextricably connected to its "educative effect" (11); it represented a vision of an urban future (40).

increasing complexity of society its main field of interest, and the justification for the existence of the discipline in the first place. The increasing complexity of modern society is, at the same time, also the prime object of interest for the realist novel. Howells's *Letters* must be read as a critique of the presumed interdependence of sociology and realist literature. That is: If realism is supposed to be like sociology, and if Homos's account is an ironic rendering of a sociological study, then this means that, again, Howells makes claims about the aesthetic principles of realism by negation. The *Letters* pick up, in a more general sense, on the assumed influence of the social sciences on literary production, and play with the fact that a differentiation between the "real" and the "ideal" – understood in John Addington Symond's terms as discussed in the beginning of this chapter – is difficult, if not impossible to uphold.

The *Letters*, like the other parts of Howells's trilogy, are ultimately about the limits and possibilities of realist representation, a conclusion which leads back to the fiction/nonfiction divide considered above: Because yet another feature of the "sociological serial" is that Homos' repeatedly attests a lack of imagination of a just alternative to the "plutocratic strife" on the part of the American people. The inability to imagine it differently is a central theme that connects the five letters (and also the first and third part of the trilogy). It is moreover present in various self-reflective references to the reliability and productivity of Homos's own narration: He deems the realities of American society "impossible," "inconceivable…indescribable" (238), all the while he is doing exactly that which he says he cannot do, namely, conceiving of them and describing them to his Altrurian friend. Finally, Homos repeatedly begs of news from home, of descriptions "fully and vividly" that will make Altruria "living and real" (247) to him. Homos himself is afraid of slowly losing the capacity for imagining the utopia he represents. The *Letters* are, then, ultimately, also a call for the necessity of fiction: It is adamant to imagine utopia, and, related to this, it is the task and the potential of the novel to narrativize altruism.

4.3 Utopia: *Through the Eye of the Needle*

Altruism constitutes the social, moral, political and economic structure of Howells's utopian space Altruria. As the reader learns halfway through the novel *A Traveller from Altruria*, the Altrurians have returned to what is called a "primitive" Christianity: "[A]mong the first Christians, there was an altruism practiced as radical as that which we have organized into a national polity and a working economy in Altruria" (93). The "national polity and working

economy" summed up with the concept of altruism is, therefore, both Gospel and "radical" political principle. It is a decidedly Christian-Socialist conceptualization of altruism that is in focus in all three parts of the trilogy. In addition to this reference to the ongoing project of religious reform at the end of the century, the concept of altruism itself embodies the utopian, as has been pointed out in previous chapters: It allows for an imagination of human nature and the human good that opposes theories of liberal individualism, scientific "truths" of Social Darwinism, and other epistemological perspectives and ideologies employed to legitimize the realities of social and economic inequality in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The literary utopia, accordingly, is a particularly well-suited form and frame for imaginations of altruism.

However, while both *A Traveller from Altruria* and the *Letters* are undeniably committed to the utopian form, most importantly because they are structured in dialogues between representatives of two different worlds, I argue that they have a very unstable relationship with the traditional literary utopia. First of all, the dialogical structure of the text is inverse: the utopian traveller Aristides Homos is not traveling *to,* but *from* Altruria and comes to learns about the contemporary situation in the United States from a representative group of interviewees. The ideal man from utopia does not have all the answers, but poses all the questions, an important difference that subverts the conversational hierarchies that typically define a utopian novel. Second, there is, in fact, not a whole lot to be learned about the utopian land. Instead of focusing on the *ideal* society, the texts invite a reading of a sharp, satirical critique of the *realities* of late nineteenth-century American politics, economics, and morals. A realist function can thus be ascribed to the Altrurian Romances.[129]

Altruria ironically performs its own indecision about the utopian form. This can also be seen in a recurrent theme of the text: As has been mentioned above, the utopian traveller's sincerity is repeatedly called into question by the narrator Twelvemough, whose skepticism develops into serious doubt at the end of the novel. The last chapters of the novel consist of a longer speech delivered by the Altrurian. Here, finally, a few facts about life in Altruria are revealed. But Homos is called out for being a fraud, and his story is compared to the entire canon of fictional utopian spaces, from Thomas More's *Utopia*, to Francis Bacon's *New*

[129] This has already been registered by contemporaries, as an anonymous review, published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November 1894, illustrates: "[T]he counterfeit presentment of America is unmistakable in its clearness, and…it is a just and vigorous representation" (702), commends the reviewer, and later describes the novel as an "able and clear-sighted…report of the trend and status of our social life" (702). The reviewer claims the realists' task to be the study of American society: "Mr. Howells, in becoming a Utopian, has preserved his mental balance and his realism" ("America, Altruria, and the Coast of Bohemia" 704).

Atlantis, up to Edward Bellamy's and William Morris's contemporary Utopian novels.[130] Not only do these intertextual references call the Altrurian's authenticity into question on the level of plot, but they are also a self-reflective critique of utopian writing, and of the very form of the utopian novel allegedly at hand. Like the genre markers "romance" and "sociological serial" discussed above, the unstable relationship with utopianism performed in the Altrurian Romances is an ironic gesture towards the interconnectedness of the problem of reform and the problem of realist literary form. The Altrurian fictions must be read as texts that define and describe the aesthetic principles of realism *ex negativo*.

Of all the parts that make up the collected work of the Altrurian Romances, one text stands out, however: The second half of *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1907). While the first part of the novel is an extension of the *Letters* and continues Homos's personal account of his life in New York City, the second part of the text, likewise rendered in epistolary form, consists of letters by Homos's new American wife. Eveleth accompanies Homos to his homeland and writes to her American friend in New York about her adventures in Altruria. In *Through the Eye of the Needle,* the reader finally gets to travel to the utopian space Altruria.

The title of the novel is telling in many regards. It is a reference to the parable of the eye of the needle, in which Jesus tells his disciples that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (*King James Bible*, Matthew 19:24). On the one hand, the parable corresponds to the Social Gospel's project of reformulation: It challenges the Puritan idea that wealth is proof of God's approval, or that wealth can lead to salvation. It also, by implication, points to the moral tenet of altruism that guides the utopian space, because in Altruria, as the reader will learn throughout the novel, the rich man is despised and the poor man is blessed. On the other hand, the allegory also alludes to the utopian dimension of the novel at hand. The eye of the needle is a gate to heaven, but it is impossible for man to pass it without God's grace, as Jesus tells his disciples. Finally, the novel's title also gives clues on how to conceive of its narrator: The name "Eveleth" does not only evoke the first woman Eve, but more importantly, it bears phonetic and visual resemblance to the word "eyelet" – a common name for the eye of a needle. The eye of the needle is thus Eveleth's narration itself, her story the gate to Altruria, and the reader is granted access to utopia *Through the Eye* of Eveleth. The novel's title therefore also

[130] Arguably, this is true not only for Howells's novels: Manuel and Manuel state that "utopian fantasies are […] dependent upon an eternal dialogue with forerunners" (13).

calls out the necessity of making imaginable the impossible, the utopian, and the principle of altruism.

However, Eveleth's authority to provide a gateway to Altruria can, of course, not be taken for granted. For *Through the Eye of the Needle* comes with a highly ironical, if not straight-out sarcastic introduction, which compares the sociopolitical situation in the United States of 1907 to the time of the publication of the first part of the trilogy in the 1890s. The (unnamed) author of the introduction professes that life has improved in the last 14 years, and that many of the social issues discussed in the previous Altrurian texts, like the untenable situation in New York City's poor quarters and tenement houses, have now become a thing of the past. Because this is obviously not true, the introduction can be read not only as a way to point out the tenacity and longevity of the social issues that Howells began to observe and to work with in the late 1880s and throughout the 1890s, but it can also be understood as a concession of the futility of various reformist projects – including, arguably, Howells's own fictional reformist work – in light of the unchanged social conditions in the United States at the beginning of the new century. It is in this ironic introduction that the fictional editor expresses a warning: the second part of the novel, the actual account of life in Altruria is said to be "not absolutely logical in its events" (273), and the reason provided for this inconsistency is the following:

> Perhaps…we are not to trust to [Eveleth's] hand at all times, since it is a woman's hand, and is not to be credited with the firm, and unerring touch of a man's. The story, as she completes it, is the story of the Altrurian's love for an American woman, and will be primarily interesting for that reason. Like the Altrurian's narrative, it is here compiled from a succession of letters…But it can by no means have the sociological values which the record of [the Altrurian's] observations among ourselves will have for the thoughtful reader. (273)

The ironic critique expressed in this quote is directed at the popular literary convention of sentimentalist woman's writing, including a list of all the necessary clichés attached to such a label: it is less "firm" and "unerring," that is, less objective and neutral, and, arguably, more malleable and sensitive. The alleged lack of realism in Eveleth's account is not only explained by its subject matter (a "fundamentally alien" society), but also by her focus on the romantic relationship to her Altrurian husband. Most importantly, though, Eveleth's account is said to be devoid of "sociological values." This means, as the editor of the ironic introduction states in the continuation of this quote, that her writing cannot provide access to "the reality of the things seen and heard" (273): it is less realist than the writings of a man. The sociological value a realist novel is implicitly said to have is absent, as the editor tells us, not least because Eveleth aims at describing a society "fundamentally alien to her own,"

an endeavor that, it is suggested, cannot really be rendered in realist form. Her part of the text is interpreted as an "interesting psychological result" of this very imagining of a radical other social order, which, however, remains but a "desultory and imperfect glimpse[s]." Finally, Eveleth's letters are said to "continue the tradition of all the observers of ideal conditions from Sir Thomas More down to William Morris" – an intertextual reference that, arguably, denies the second part of the novel any relation to realism.

Contrary to the statements of the ironic introduction, however, the reader learns throughout the novel that Eveleth's report is only marginally concerned with sentimentalist descriptions of her love relationship with Homos, nor is the structure of her text markedly dialogical and thus overtly committed to the utopian form. Instead, Eveleth actually does provide a somewhat realistic account of her time in Altruria, one that navigates between what she calls "international statistics" (390) – detailed descriptions of the customs and rituals, of the dress, of the Altrurian's religious services, of the country's geographical makeup and climate, of its language and architecture, of the mores and manners of the Altrurians, and of her "personal experience" (390) – a chronological account of her adventures in the country. If anything, Eveleth's narration comes across as *less* artificial or intentional than Homos's so-called sociological reports, all belittling assessments of her lack of realism in the ironic introduction aside. By lending Eveleth a voice more realistic than that of her "firm" and "unerring" husband Homos, Howells uses his preface to debunk stereotypes about contemporary female literary production.

Eveleth's narrative begins when the peace and quiet of Altruria is disturbed by "some occurrences" (363), namely by the intrusion of outsiders. The subject of her first letters is a report about a mutiny on a trader ship. The two opposing parties stand trial in Altruria's capital: An American captain, who desires to sail back home to America, and his crew members, who, after having learned about the Altrurian way of life, emancipated themselves from their slave-like servitude and wish to remain on the island. Eveleth's decision to begin her report after these "occurrences" is interesting for two reasons: First of all, it shows that she reflects on her own narration. As Eveleth tell the reader, life in Altruria is so peaceful, so devoid of "news" (363) that she has not felt inspired to document her travels until this moment. Eveleth's repeated emphasis on the significance of the "occurrence" for her own storytelling shows that she is well aware of the fact that an *unerhörte Begebenheit* is required to inspire the onset of a narrative worth telling. Second, the "occurrence" – the mutiny and succeeding trial – gives Eveleth a chance to explain to her friend why Altrurians insist on keeping their island isolated from the rest of the world, and why they have no interest in

international relations or communications with other regions. Altrurians have no room or conceptual space for fighting traders, drunken sailors, and intruding outsiders who do not share their set of moral and social values. Put differently, the stability of Altruria's order is contingent on isolation and exclusivity.

The isolationist politics of Altruria continue to be a theme of Eveleth's narration. Many of her later letters are concerned with the arrival of an "ultra-rich" (409) American family stranded at Altruria's shore. Despite various attempts at bribery, the family Thrall – a billionaire, his obnoxious wife, and an armada of servants and crewmembers – cannot convince the Altrurians to accept their money as payment for the fare back to the United States. Money is an unfamiliar concept in Altruria. Accordingly, the Thralls are first asked and then forced to work for the community in order to repair their ship and sail home to America. The Thralls and their entourage are, accordingly, forced to undergo a process of "Altrurianization," which, at times, is a rather brutal affair. The crew members and servants, who refuse to engage in manual labor for the Altrurians are made to wear a curious piece of clothing both medieval and futuristic, namely a "shirt of mail…electrized [sic] by a metallic ailment connecting with the communal dynamo" (414), which is used as an instrument of control and torture.[131] Punished with "light" electric shocks anytime they refuse to work, the Americans are first made "docile" (414), and are soon thereafter willing to work the required three hours a day. These passages are problematic not only because they endorse forced labor, but also because they indicate that the process of Altrurianization is not necessarily one of peaceful transformation or willing acceptance, but, instead, one of forced assimilation. As capitalists, the Thrall family represent a minority in Altruria. But this minority position is not accepted or tolerated. Instead, the Thralls (and, as Eveleth tells the reader later, the mutinying sailors with which her narration opens) are forced to adopt Altruria's rules, religion, educational standards, and work ethic.

If there is an overarching theme detectable in Eveleth's account, it is the question of how to treat foreigners and outsiders unwilling to assimilate to the Altrurian way, a question that, I argue, answers to wide-ranging anxieties and debates about immigration and the feared influence of ethnic and racial others at the time of the novel's publication in 1907. *Through the Eye of the Needle* opens with a report about misbehaving sailors and their trial, it continues with a story about a group of capitalists, who are treated and understood as racial outsiders, and who are subsequently forced to assimilate to the Altrurian way of life, and the

[131] The electric shirt of mail could be read as a reference to Thomas More, who famously wore a hair shirt while he was incarcerated.

novel ends with Eveleth comparing the Altrurian's fear of "a large number of people from the capitalist world" to American's fear of "the same number of Indians, with all their tribal customs and ideals" (433). What is more, the novel does not only address xenophobic and nativist anxieties about cultural and political influence ("tribal customs and ideals"), but also a deeply eugenicist fear of racial and sexual contamination. The biggest concern of the Altrurians, as Eveleth concludes in her last letter, is that the "charm of strangeness" that surrounds capitalist visitors would work especially with young women: "The hardest thing the Altrurians have to grapple with is feminine curiosity, and the play of this about the strangers is what they seek the most anxiously to control" (433). The secluded paradise of Altruria, to sum up, provides a very suitable platform for creating analogies to these and other contemporary debates about the changing ethnic makeup of the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The themes of immigration, nativism, and eugenics frame *Through the Eye of the Needle.* Interestingly, however, these themes are all but absent in the first two parts of Howells's trilogy. While *A Traveller from Altruria* and *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller* are primarily concerned with discussing class relations, the labor crisis, and economic inequality, the focus shifts significantly with the publication of the third part of the trilogy. Like all utopian novels, the Altrurian fictions are therefore true "diagnostic interventions" (Jameson), documenting contemporary social and political issues and tracing their development over time. Finally, this development can also be grasped with the shifting meanings of the concept of altruism within the novels. In 1892, at the beginning of Howells's trilogy, altruism is a concept that describes a (Christian) socialist order that promises social and economic equality for all. At the end of the trilogy, in turn, this kind of altruism seems to be contingent on a homogenous state, on isolationist politics, and on the exclusion and control of "others." In 1907, altruism is no longer universal: Not everyone gets to go *Through the Eye of the Needle.*

5. Conclusion

In the "Bibliographical" to the projected but never-published Library Edition of the Altrurian Romances, Howells claims the three fictions to be "books of one blood," joined together by a "recurrent continuity of motive" (3). The novels have in common a promotion of a Christian-socialist, utopian order, governed by the principles of cooperation and benevolence, which is posited as an antithesis, or a panacea to Gilded Age capitalism, defined

and sustained by social and economic inequality, political ideologies of liberal individualism, and by the scientific paradigm of social Darwinism. As Alfred Kazin summarizes in 1941: "[The Altrurian Romances] were witnesses to spiritual disorder, observers of social change; their function was to act as a Greek chorus and to furnish the spare but haunting commentary that gave these novels their purpose and texture" (226). The Altrurian fictions formulate a rather dire diagnosis of the contemporary spirit, and they also address the difficulty, arguably even the impossibility of reform in light of the social grievances of the time.

However, something else binds the three *Altrurian Romances* together. As this chapter has shown, the "recurrent continuity of motive" in the trilogy is also a reflection on realist writing itself. The Altrurian fictions address the interconnectedness of the problem of social reform and the problem of realist representation, often in self-reflective, ironic negotiations of other competing literary forms, like the sentimentalist novel, the utopian novel, the sociological serial, and the romance. The problematic relationship of aesthetics and ethics within the form of the realist novel is also already the theme of Howells's earlier reformist novel, *Annie Kilburn*, where altruism is not yet posited as a (utopian) solution, but is the underlying motivation for the protagonist's various endeavors to "do good." I have argued that *Annie Kilburn*, too, continuously links the idea of (failed) reform to an exposure of a representational crisis of realist literary form. All texts under analysis in this chapter figure self-reflective ironic statements not only about the question of reform, but also, and importantly so, about a mode of representation that calls itself 'realist.' The novels, in their negotiation of altruism, should thus not be read as deviations from Howells's realism, but as endeavors of reconciling, or, in the very least, as a way of negotiating the formal problem of reformist realism.

There is another conclusion that can be drawn, however: My readings suggest that the modes of the utopian, the romance, and the sociological are all integral parts of Howells's reformist realism. Support for this claim can be found not only within the novels themselves, but also in Howells's critical writing. Already in the "Editor's Study" of December 1890, Howells mentions the "Synthetized Sympathies of Altruria," as Rudolf and Clara Kirk also point out in the introduction to their edition. Here, Howells claims Altruria to be America's potential not yet achieved. And Howells refers to the imaginary island Altruria again in his last "Editor's Study" for *Harper's Magazine*, published in March 1892. The "farewell essay" (Kirk and Kirk, xiv) marks a turning point in Howell's career. It is the last column Howells published with *Harper's* before he joined the staff of the *Cosmopolitan*. Howells tells his readers that he is leaving his office in the last part of the essay, and he envisions what kind

of renovations his imagined successor would most likely undertake in his study. With regret, Howells believes that his successor will remove all "little side altars with the pictures or the busts of canonized realists above them" (198), and replace them with the "bust of Thackeray" and other popular British authors, like Walter Scott (199). Howells's last "Editor's Study" is therefore not only a farewell to his office, but also a concession to the end of the movement of literary realism.

Interestingly, Howells imagined successor refrains from taking down but one item: It is a "map of Altruria" (199). If we take seriously the symbolism of the interior decoration of Howells's study, this means that like the altars that are designed to worship "canonized realists," the map of Altruria has been an indispensable point of reference for the business Howells took on when he first began to promote his realist program in the "Editor's Study" at *Harper's*. Altruria – and altruism – has, at least since 1890, accompanied and formed whatever it is that Howells calls realism.

5. Alliances.
Altruism and Nineteenth-Century Woman Reform

1. Introduction

Historically, the discourse of altruism was gendered, and it remains so until the present moment. In their original definitions of the concept, both Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer claimed altruistic characteristics to be more prevalent in women than in men.[132] Up until today, this original evaluation has had a strong hold on the public imagination: whether in neurobiological and ethical studies, in politics and economics, or in countless cultural and literary artifacts, altruism has rather consistently been portrayed as a feminine quality.[133] At the moment of the coinage of altruism in the nineteenth century, the neologism was often related to other character traits that were gendered as female, such as compassion and kindness, sympathy and selfless devotion. The exceptional status of women as natural altruists can be read en par with other contemporary generalizations about femininity and womanhood, described by historians of the nineteenth century with by now well-established denominations such as "culture of sentimentality," "cult of domesticity," or "separate spheres." The gendered conceptualization of altruism thus plays into our understanding of a nineteenth century divided along gendered lines, in binarisms between the domestic and the political, the sentimental and the rational, the private and the public.

Nineteenth-century female reformers and literary authors, however, often departed in great measures from Comte and Spencer's original definitions in their conceptualizations of altruism. As I have established in my analysis of the reformist magazine *The Altruist Interchange* in the second chapter of this study, many female reformers used the language of altruism not primarily to argue for greater female political influence on grounds of superior altruistic instincts of motherhood and sacrifice, of nurture and care, but rather employed it in order to inscribe themselves into discourses of science, business, and politics. Not only did the feminist appropriation of the neologism altruism signal a new, professionalized approach

[132] See also Dixon's chapter "Motherhood and the Ascent of Man" (273-320). Ethical naturalists in Victorian Britain, for example Henry Drummond and Patrick Geddes, defined altruism along gendered lines.

[133] Three exemplary studies shall be mentioned here: "Male-female giving differentials: are women more altruistic?," published in the *Journal of Economic Studies* in 2007, "Social Heuristics and Social Roles: Intuition Favors Altruism for Women But not for Men," published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* in 2016, and "Which is the Fair Sex? Gender Differences in Altruism," published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* in 2001.

towards the issue of social reform, but it also enabled a reformulation of woman reform hitherto understood as firmly rooted in discourses of sentimentalism and domesticity. While *The Altruist Interchange* was not especially concerned with the political issue of female emancipation, the texts I analyze in this chapter – Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Woman's Bible* (1895-1898), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898) and *Human Work* (1904), and Margaret Pollock Sherwood's novel *An Experiment in Altruism* (1895) – all formulate feminist interests. Against the backdrop of common (and prevailing) associations of altruism with sentimental culture, Stanton, Gilman, and Sherwood decided against employing it solely to make essentialist claims about woman's greater emotional refinement or to argue for an alleged exceptional status of the feminine for the political cause of gender equality. Instead, altruism figures more frequently in descriptions of progress, evolution, and the social at large.

This chapter analyzes the collaborative potential of the competing meanings of altruism for woman reform and woman's literature at the end of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the analysis of this collaboration makes visible an archive of nineteenth-century feminist writing that has received little scholarly attention until now. On the other hand, this chapter also complicates established narratives of the development of nineteenth-century woman reform, and of nineteenth-century gender relations in general. More precisely, my analysis of the significance of the concept of altruism for woman reform severely destabilizes what Cathy Davidson and others have identified as the "historiographic metaphor" of separate spheres.[134] Already in 1998, Davidson has argued that the ideology of separate spheres is "too crude an instrument – too rigid and totalizing – for understanding the different, complicated ways that nineteenth-century American society or literary production functioned" (445). Despite Davidson's important intervention, the fiction of separate spheres has proven tenacious for the ways historians and literary critics think about and teach nineteenth-century gender relations and literature up until today.[135] As I will show in this chapter, the collaboration altruism-feminism unsettles the fiction of separate spheres, because it signals a transformation of woman reform from a focus on sentiment to one of organization and corporation.

As reflected in the title of this chapter, I conceive of the relationship between late nineteenth-century feminism and altruism as an alliance, that is, an association or a union

[134] See also Lori Ginzberg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence (1990)*, which questions the validity of the paradigm of the sentimental for woman's writing and woman reform during and after the Civil War.
[135] An example is the volume *Our Sisters' Keepers*, edited by Jill Bergman and Debra Bernardi (2005), who conceptualize the genre of "benevolence literature" according to the paradigm of separate spheres.

formed for a mutual benefit and a common purpose.[136] When I use the term "feminism," I refer not only to the goal of achieving, defining, and establishing women's rights and gender equality, but, more specifically, to the historically and locally specific political and social movement dedicated to this larger cause.[137] Similarly, and in line with the findings of the preceding chapters of this study, I understand altruism as a key term for a variety of social reformist and political movements, and I conceive of it primarily as an expression of social visions of equality and justice. Since neither the concept of altruism, nor that of feminism can, strictly speaking, be understood as *actors* capable of forming a bond, I understand the relationship between feminism and altruism as an alliance of *interests*.

What is the common purpose of this particular alliance? All of the primary texts studied in this chapter are expressive of larger debates around suffrage, gender inequality, new scientific (biological and/or evolutionary) findings about the gendered body, religion, and female literary production, and in all of them, altruism is constructed as an ally in the struggle for female emancipation. In Stanton's, Gilman's and Sherwood's texts, the concept of altruism is made productive for diverging ends, however. Put in another way, the alliance altruism-feminism works against different adversaries; it is geared at the destabilization of different institutions or ideologies, which were (and continue to be) held accountable for suppressing women and for legitimizing ideas of female inferiority at the end of the nineteenth century and beyond. These are, among others, the church, evolutionary science, the political state, and the pervasive cultural model of female sentimentality. Altruism, as I will show in this chapter, was instrumentalized to critique and dismantle the influence of these institutions. As the following short overview of this chapter's structure demonstrates, however, the scientific, political, and cultural institutions responsible for the oppression of women did not act separately, but often shared similar and interdependent interests.

In the first part of this chapter, I analyze the work of woman's rights activist and philosopher Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton was concerned primarily with the political cause of suffrage and made use of Comte's notion of altruistic womanhood in order to advocate woman's indispensable role in public discourse, politics, and society. Altruism, understood as a scientific term, was helpful in Stanton's endeavors at destabilizing Biblical

[136] "alliance, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2016. Web. 8 January 2017.
[137] The women I analyze in this chapter did not call themselves feminists, and the application of this term to late nineteenth-century discourses of women's liberation is, to a degree, anachronistic. However, it is interesting to note that the coining of the neologism "feminism" is attributed to Charles Fourier, whose social and political visions bear many similarities to those of Auguste Comte, also in terms of their influence on American socialist utopianism. A comparison of the conceptual histories of feminism and altruism, and of the utopian framework these terms emerge of (and which they, at the same time, also embody) would provide new and interesting perspectives on this chapter's argument.

notions of womanhood and in the larger cause of challenging religious authorizations of female inferiority. In fact, many female reformers employed the scientific language of altruism, because it proved useful to propagate a shift "From Eve to Evolution" (Hamlin), a move away from viewing woman's role within divine, preordained creation to assessing her position within a natural evolutionary progress. This shift is also what guides the scientific studies published by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, which I analyze in the second part of this chapter. Gilman employs altruism within a larger argument about the necessity of women's economic independence, an issue which Gilman prioritized in the overall agenda of female emancipation. I also read Gilman's work as an attempt to debunk theories of female inferiority promoted in contemporary evolutionary science. The third and last part of this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of Margaret Sherwood's novel *An Experiment in Altruism*, which satirizes contemporary efforts at social reform, and, at the same time, critiques formal conventions of reformist literary fiction. Sherwood's critical agenda is summed up and negotiated in the prominent use of altruism in her novel's title.

As this short overview indicates, the corpus of this chapter is interdisciplinary and includes non-literary and literary sources. This points out, once again, the discursive breadth the concept of altruism acquired at the end of the nineteenth century and emphasizes that disciplinary boundaries are difficult to draw between the realms of social reform and literary fiction, between science, philosophy, social activism, and literary production. While the formal categories "woman's writing," "woman reform," and "feminist thought" – all of which can be and have been applied to Stanton's, Gilman's, and Sherwood's texts – are likewise not always easy to disentangle, the last part of my chapter is invested in pointing out the distinctive affordances of literary fiction, particularly of literary form, for the alliance altruism-feminism.[138] Rather than reading Sherwood's novel as a further illustration of this alliance, I argue that the realm of literature provides a different, maybe even more differentiated negotiation of altruism. The interdisciplinary angle of this chapter thus mirrors the approach chosen for this dissertation as a whole: The analyses of Stanton's and Gilman's use and appropriation of the concept of altruism build on the methodology, and also on the conclusions of the first and second chapter of this study, while my analysis of Sherwood's novel corresponds to the findings of the third and fourth chapter.

[138] Many female social reformers understood the novel as a medium for the propagation of their political interests, as an agent of social change, as Wadsworth, Bergman and Bernadi, and others have argued. However, to read nineteenth-century reform fiction mainly as illustrative of larger reformist causes, or as "purposeful" fiction (Wadsworth 3) bears the risk of disregarding the particular affordances of literary form for the issue of social reform, which I have discussed in more details in chapter three and four of this study.

2. Catechisms and Collaborations: Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Revision of the "Feminine Influence"

This section is concerned with carving out an unlikely alliance: that between Auguste Comte, who propagates his vision of an altruistic society within a "Cult of Womanhood," and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the most radical feminist reformers of her time. Both Comte and Stanton put the idea of religion as an ordering principle at the heart of their philosophical and political contemplations; both express criticism of the Bible; both believe in the necessity of a wholesale transformation of society. However, apart from these general ideas, their goals and vision could not be more different. In the following analysis, I introduce Comte and Stanton's diverging standpoints on femininity and female emancipation, which become most visible in their different opinions on the ideology of separate spheres. My analysis also focuses on the forms Comte and Stanton choose for the promotion of their views, the literary and rhetorical strategies they employ: Comte advocates his "Religion of Humanity" in the form of the catechism, while Stanton aims at bolstering female emancipation via a modern form of collaborative authorship. These different forms, as I argue, structure Comte and Stanton's differing conceptualizations of altruism and the knowledge about gender relations they sought to distribute.

2.1 Auguste Comte's Cult of Womanhood

In Auguste Comte's proclamation of the coming of a positivist religion, which was the focus and main goal of his later work, women were granted a privileged role. In describing the organization of his "Religion of Humanity," Comte did not tire to preach the dominance of feeling over reason, the primacy of art over science, and the supremacy of altruism over egoism – an order of priority that could only be achieved, as he claimed, by a strengthening of the "feminine influence." Woman's natural propensity towards piety, sympathy, domesticity, and purity was an indispensable factor in the desired "equilibrium" that was to govern his new social order. "Since the close of the Middle Ages, the influence of woman has been the sole, though unacknowledged, check on the moral evils…in the West" (28), states Comte in the introduction to his *Catéchisme positiviste* (1852) (translated as *Catechism of Positive Philosophy* in 1858), a book which sets out to remedy this lack of recognition of woman's superior role in shaping the civilizational and moral progress of the human race.

The fact that Comte deemed the "feminine influence" responsible for the development of society, or that his overarching system of positivism developed into a veritable cult of womanhood, however, did not move Comte to support or even to accept the idea of female emancipation. Instead, he was firmly convinced that woman was man's biological and intellectual inferior. The following analysis focuses on this seeming inconsistency.

The introduction to Comte's *Catechism,* which WAS designed to present the principles and doctrines of the positivist religion in accessible language and which was also written in order to attract the attention of female readers (Pickering "Comte, Auguste" 520), serves as a great example of how Comte dealt with the "woman question." On the one hand, it introduces some of the main premises of the text, and explains in which ways Comte based his theory of altruism on a particular notion of womanhood. On the other hand, the "Introduction" contains interesting reflections about the *Catechism*'s form, which are equally instructive for an understanding of the position of women in Comte's system.

The *Catechism* is, in line with the main characteristics of the popular religious form, an exposition of a doctrine and a learning manual at the same time.[139] It is rendered in dialogical form that is deemed capable of transporting important messages to its readers. For his Platonic dialogue, Comte assigns two roles, two "types" responsible for presenting and summarizing the main organizational principle of the coming new world order in a question-and-answer format. In the following text, "The Woman" interviews and consults a male positivist "Priest." According to Comte's introduction, "The Woman" is furthermore modeled after his muse, the recently-deceased Clotilde de Vaux, who is elevated to the status of a saint, compared to the Virgin Mother, and concomitantly referred to as "daughter." The role of her conversational partner, the all-knowing father figure of the priest is, naturally, taken on by Comte himself. Referring to both form and content of the *Catechism*, Comte states in the "Introduction":

> Now the present series of conversations always puts forward the heart and the intellect as acting in concert under a religious impulse, in order to bring under the influence of morality the material power to which the world of action is necessarily subjected. In that world the women and the priest are, as a fact, the two indispensable elements of the real moderating power, which must be both domestic and civic…The heart states the questions; the intellect answers them. Thus the very form of this Catechism points at once to the great central idea of Positivism: man thinking under the inspiration of woman, the object being to bring about a concurrence of synthesis with sympathy, in order to regularise the joint action of the two sexes. (26)

Comte's preface impressively highlights what womanhood entails in his theory: he associates women with "heart", the "domestic", "sympathy" and an "influence of morality." Men, in

[139] For more information about the form of the catechism, see Jackson, 89-93.

turn, correlate with "intellect," "material power," the "civic," and "the world of action." Men and women are essentially different, are located in *separate spheres* in Comte's theory, a fact which reinforces the special role he assigns to women in his theory: Woman is staged as a moral agent, indispensable for creating a balance to male "material power." This "equilibrium," in turn, is needed for the establishment of the Religion of Humanity. By way of her "sympathetic" nature, woman is to inspire man, whose "intellect" and access to "material power" enables him, in turn, to "synthesize" thoughts and ideas.

The interplay between feeling and reason is repeatedly evoked in the *Catechism*, but it is also reflected in the text's form. Comte's claim that "[t]he heart stages the questions; the intellect answers them" describes a dynamic that is important for his theory in at least three respects. First, it reinforces the subordinate, yet important role of women in his theory. Women are constrained to the sphere of the domestic, but asked to exert sympathetic and sentimental influence on the male sphere of "action." Second, the dynamic between feeling and reason explains the importance of a certain balance of the sexes on the level of text: "Man thinking under the inspiration of woman" is "the great central idea of Positivism." At the same time, this sentence describes the literary project of Comte's *Catechism* itself – the figure of the "Priest" is inspired to philosophize about life, because he is asked to do so by the questions posed by "The Woman." Finally, the dynamic of the gendered Q&A enables the didacticism of the text, and with it, the transportation of the main messages of Comte's positivist doctrine to his readers. As Comte states elsewhere in his preface, the form of conversation guarantees successful "religious instruction" (17) because it is not merely "didactic," but "logical" (16).

By evoking a dynamic between feeling and reason as constitutive both for the text's form and for the establishment of the "Religion of Humanity," by insisting, that is, on a continuity between form and content, Comte stages his gendered theory of altruism as logical, natural, and given. As becomes evident in the *Catechism* and in Comte's other works, it is not the case that woman's sympathetic capacities, her greater sensibilities for art and literature, and her emotional character are the result of women's cultural, social, or political disposition. Rather, all the attributes and symbols assigned to women are based in her nature, as Martha Nussbaum also notes in an essay on Comte's "Religion of Humanity" (12). Women are *natural* altruists in Comte's theory, and they are staged as an important counterforce to the equally natural proclivity to egoism Comte assigns to men.

And yet, even though the virtue that upholds Comte's system and that guarantees social progress is altruism, which is decidedly gendered as female, his utopian order did not

leave room for feminist progress. Rather, the role of women remains firmly embedded in a Victorian notion of womanhood, defined by sentimentalism, upheld by sacrifice, and rooted in the domestic. Put differently, Comte's text reads as an architectural guide, as it were, for how to maintain and explain separate spheres. All of this is not to say, however, that female reformers did not make use of Comte's assessment of women and used it for their own, reformist purposes; to the contrary: Many feminist activists and philosophers at the end of the century utilized Comte's theories and the powerful language of Positivism to challenge the most dominant force behind the subordination of women, and its single most authoritative text: Christian religion and the Bible.

2.2 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Comtean Feminist.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton is known as a co-author and signer of "The Declaration of Sentiments" presented at the 1848 Seneca Falls women's right convention, as the author of many political essays, among them the influential "Solitude of Self" (1892), as "the [women's] movement's principal philosopher" (Davis 1), and as a central political thinker in the United States in the nineteenth century. Stanton saw the Church as the primary legitimizer of woman's subordination. Accordingly, much of her work was dedicated to destabilizing biblical interpretations of womanhood. Within the American women's right movement, Stanton rose to fame and gained a notorious reputation with the publication of her polemic magnum opus: *The Woman's Bible*, a collaborative writing project published in two parts in 1895 and 1898. The book is a radical re-reading of all the parts of the Bible that formulate claims about the role of women; it was meant to produce "far-ranging explorations of the political, social, historical, and religious dimensions of women's subordinate status" (DuBois and Smith 1). Stanton's *Bible* produced so much controversy among woman reformers and the general public that it led to the dissolution of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), an organization which Stanton herself co-founded and of which she was president until 1893. After the first part of Stanton's project was decried as heretic and blasphemous by the public and the press, the book was disavowed by her colleagues at the NAWSA, who feared that Stanton's anticlericalism would harm, not help, the progress of female emancipation. Only a few members defended the text and moved to amend the resolution of dissociation; among them were Stanton's oldest comrade, Susan B. Anthony,

and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.[140] Despite or because of her controversial status, Stanton's work, and primarily her harsh attacks on the Bible, played a pivotal role in the development feminist reform in the nineteenth century.

Stanton was an avid reader of Auguste Comte. Since the 1860s she had regularly published reviews and commentary of Comte's work in her newspaper *The Revolution* and elsewhere. According to Kathi Kern, the reason for Stanton's fascination with Comte's work stemmed from the fact that she "found within Positivism a powerful language for fusing religion, politics, and woman's rights" (*Mrs. Stanton's Bible* 58). On the one hand, Comte's positivism allowed Stanton to formulate a critique of Christian religion. As Sue Davis notes, Stanton "was particularly attracted to the prospect of a society governed by scientific principles, as opposed to religion or custom" (151), because she, like many others, understood the Church to be among the main offenders when it came to legitimizing women's subordinate status within society. This also means that Comte's work provided Stanton with a humanistic and scientific framework for formulating her feminist politics. The fact that Comte's system was one that predicted progress and betterment in the coming religion (his repeated formula of the "immutable laws" that guide both nature and morals), was additionally attractive for the progressivist cause of feminist reform. Female emancipation, in Stanton's work, is thus part of a Comtean notion of progress.

Of course, Stanton was also aware of the fact that Comte's cult of womanhood was a double-edged sword. Stanton, who was a principal leader in the fight to include women into the Declaration of Independence and held suffrage to be the highest and most pressing goal of the women's movement, did not agree on any level with Comte's idea that women belong to the domestic sphere only.[141] However, political strategist that she was, Stanton was able to utilize Comte's emphasis on the "feminine influence" on society as a case in point for her own agenda: She argued that Comte meant women to be essential for the reorganization of "the state, the church, and the home" (Kern, "Free Woman Is a Divine Being" 100).[142] The

[140] For a history of the NAWSA and its relationship to other major women's rights organizations in the United States, see DuBois (1978). For more information of Stanton's role in the NAWSA, see Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* (125-127), Davis (127-140), Hamlin (54), and Ginzberg's biography of Stanton. The controversy Stanton's book had caused among the members of the NAWSA is re-told and reflected in the second part of *The Woman's Bible*, which was published in 1898.

[141] See Davis's chapter "Seneca Falls and Beyond: Attacking the Cult of Domesticity with Equality and Inalienable Rights" (39-69) in her *The Political Thought of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (2008)*.

[142] In addition to this, Stanton also saw potential in Catholicism, particularly in the Catholic focus on women figures, which might be an additional explanation for her fascination for Comte's work. Kern argues that "[Stanton] departed from the rather prevalent anti-Catholicism that undermined the women's rights movements in this era and heaped praise upon the feminized aspects of the Catholic Church: the convents and Catholic sisterhoods, as well as the Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary – evidence, she thought, of the recognition of a feminine aspect of God" ("Free Woman Is a Divine Being" 95)

focus on a "feminine influence" also explains the biological essentialism in Stanton's idea of female emancipation. Comte's theories allowed her to make a point about the necessity of increasing women's influence in the public sphere, but it also required a recourse to his insistence on a sexual difference between men and women. As Hamlin states, "Stanton realized the futility, at least in that historical context, of arguing for women's rights on the basis of equality with men" (47). Sue Davis concurs by stating that "defenders of women's rights needed to move beyond the liberal framework of natural rights and equality to an approach that relied on sexual difference, rather than similarity" (152). Stanton, like many other female reformers at the time, focused on such issues as maternity, household labor, and birth control, but did not necessarily always argue for the equality of the sexes.

The influence of Comte's work becomes visible also in Stanton's project of writing an alternative approach towards the Bible itself. The impulse behind the project *The Woman's Bible* is in many ways reminiscent of Comte's endeavor to invent, to promote, and to install a new humanistic religion. The fact that Comte's theory was not wholly consistent with Stanton's quest of female emancipation, however, required an adaptation and a dissociation from his system. Stanton's *Woman's Bible* can therefore also be read as an instance of subversion of Comte's theories and framework.

On the level of content, *The Woman's Bible* is designed to challenge and complicate all those instances in the Bible that make a case for female inferiority. In the preface to the first part of the text, Stanton classifies her text as a revision and commentary of Biblical Scripture concerned with or referring to women, and especially to those instances "in which women are made prominent by exclusion" (5). Equipped with philosophical, literary, and scientific knowledge, Stanton and her collaborators focused on "translation issues, biblical history, and textual analysis" (Hamlin 53) in their commentaries of the Bible, all of which were designed to repudiate the grounds on which common notions of female inferiority rested. Boldly, Stanton claims in the preface: "The sentimental feelings we all have for those things we were educated to believe sacred, do not readily yield to pure reason" (11). Insofar as Stanton focuses on the need of freedom from superstition, and calls out the importance of a scientific order of things, the exegesis practiced in *The Woman's Bible* is evidently heavily influenced by Comte's positivism (Kern *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* 54). It is used for a different political issue, however.

On the level of form, too, a dissociation and subversion of Comte's politics can be detected: The *Woman's Bible* was a collaborative project. A revising committee of 26 women is listed on the first page of the book, many of which were not only authorizers, but also

contributors to Stanton's book.[143] The aim of *The Woman's Bible* is not to mechanically recite arguments for female emancipation, but to question tradition by critically engaging with Scripture. The authors of *The Woman's Bible* arrive at their conclusion by re-reading, by historicizing, by re-interpreting, in short, by methods practiced in liberal theology and literary studies. In addition to this, it was in the interest of Stanton, who consistently writes the introduction to the text in the plural, to arrive at varied opinions on what women think about women, to provide "women's commentaries on women's position" (9). Stanton and her collaborators thus challenged traditional and gendered notions of authorship.

Collaborative authorship is, up until today, common in the scientific community, in works that rely on a review-process and on the inclusion of a variety of experts. The same is true for *The Woman's Bible*, a text that, due to its radical political interest of revising traditional, religious notions of womanhood, relies on co-signatures.[144] More importantly, however, this collaborative effort also counters the dogmatic style of Comte's Catechism. In addition to its common occurrence in scientific scholarship, many scholars have also described collaborative authorship as a decidedly feminist writing practice, in that it is non-hierarchical, non-dogmatic, and focused on cooperation instead of relying on an idea of the author as the solitary, individual genius.[145] Formally, then, *The Woman's Bible* could not be more different from Comte's *Catechism*, a text that by virtue of its genre is designed to present, summarize, and establish a doctrine, written by one dogmatic man who refers to himself as "The Priest" throughout his text. Where Comte's Catechism is doctrinal and didactic, Stanton's project emphasizes the importance of varied positions, of negotiation, and of (feminist) collaboration.

So far, I have not addressed the particular ways in which Stanton makes use of Comte's theory of altruism. In taking over Comte's arguments about women's greater sympathetic capacities and their constitutive influence for social and moral progress, Stanton also implicitly argues for an alliance of Comte's idea of altruism and her feminist cause. In

[143] Among the members of Stanford's international revising committee were, for example, Phebe Hanaford, Augusta Chapin, Olympia Brown, and Mrs. Robert G. Ingersoll. Some of these women later denied that they had taken part in the project, which caused the controversy within the NWSA and emphasizes, again, the radical nature of Stanton's work. See Kern (2001) for more information on the revising committee.

[144] The same is true for a more famous historical document attached to Stanton's name, the "Declaration of Sentiments." A comparison of the Woman's Bible and the Declaration would be interesting, because both texts are marked not only by collaborative authorship, but also by the strategy of re-writing a "sacred" text.

[145] Due, among other things, to the great influence of (post)structuralist theories on authorship (above all, the authoritative essays by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes), the 1990s witnessed a plethora of scholarly works dedicated to the study of collaborative authorship, and much of it was produced from a feminist critical perspective (York 18). York names, for example, Stillinger, Jack. *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991), Koestenbaum, Wayne. *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (1989), and London, Bette Lynn. *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (1999).

her later life, however, Stanton used altruism more pronouncedly in the context of politics: She employed the concept as a watchword to end social inequality and to enlarge a notion of a Christian brotherhood or sisterhood. As Kern notes, Comte continued to be an influence for Stanton until late in the 1890s, not least because his notion of a "Religion of Humanity" helped her to call attention to a different social issue, she saw related to the problem of female subordination, namely the "inequalities of class" ("Free Woman Is a Divine Being" 59). Stanton had realized that the "status of women was a product of laws serving the privileged to the detriment of the weak," as DuBois and Smith note in the introduction to their anthology of Stanton's work (3). In her later work, Stanton used altruism to propagate ideas of socialism.

This growing awareness of the collaborative potential of socialism and feminism becomes evident in Stanton's address "Worship of God in Man," which was prepared for the World's Parliament of Religions at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. It was published in the Freethought periodical *Open Court* in the same year, which also happened to be the year in which Stanton resigned her position as president of the NAWSA.[146] The address calls out a "Religion of Humanity, in which men and women will worship what they see of the divine in each other" (276). Not only does Stanton in her address promote a humanistic reading of the Bible and a humanistic religion free from superstition and tradition, but she also uses Comtean language to raise awareness of the problems of poverty and social and economic inequality. In this context, altruism is defined as "the law of social morals" (280) that is to reign supreme in the new religion after the "moral revolution" (279) has taken place. "This radical work cannot be done by what is called charity, but by teaching sound principles of political and domestic economy" (280), as Stanton further notes, a quote that illustrates that Stanton considers altruism to be one of the "principles of political and domestic economy" that would enable a system of equal distribution and ensure moral progress.

Altruism is, in this later stage of Stanton's work, no longer attached only to the "feminine influence," but it is understood to be the basis for the imagination of a new, more equal social order, an order she would elsewhere openly define as socialist.[147] Both aspects of Comte's original definition of altruism – the idea of altruism as a (female) sentiment, and the notion of altruism as social theory – are thus present in and productive for Stanton's

146 A year before that, in 1892, Stanton had published her influential speech "Solitude of Self." For more information about the influence of the Freethinkers on Stanton's politics and philosophical approach, see Kern "'Free Woman Is a Divine Being."

147 see Davis (206), and Kern "'Free Woman Is a Divine Being" for Stanton's interest in and promotion of socialism.

project of female emancipation. If one takes into consideration Stanton's other political texts, notably the "Declaration of Sentiments" and her essay "Solitude of Self," it becomes clear that Stanton was invested in arguing against, and in a doing-away of the ideology of separate spheres. The trajectory of Stanton's use of the Comtean language of altruism indicates that this larger agenda is visible here, too.

3. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Social Vision of Altruism

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1934), literary author, feminist activist, lecturer, and social reformer, was hailed as "the brains of the US women's movement," as the blurb of Cynthia J. Davis's authoritative biography puts it. And indeed, Gilman was fascinated by science. Much of her expansive oeuvre aims at promoting a view of society as governed by scientific laws, because she believed that only such a view would capable of challenging traditional, religious notions of womanhood and thereby enable female emancipation. Gilman's work, accordingly, focuses on scientific (biological, evolutionary, sociological) and economic rationales for the subordination of women in society. In the two studies that are at the center of the following analysis of Gilman's use of the concept of altruism, namely *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898) and *Human Work* (1904), Gilman analyzes evolutionary, cultural, and sociological constructions of womanhood and investigates them in terms of their relation to labor and industry. In these and other works, Gilman's main argument is that woman's inferior position in society is mainly due to the fact that women were cordoned from productive labor, and thus dependent on men for their (economic) survival. In her life-long fight for women's economic independence, Gilman also drew on utopian socialist theories and was active in the political Nationalist movement, spurred by the success of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888). Both science and socialism were thus influential for her thought. In more practical reformist terms, Gilman focused most pronouncedly on the issue of motherhood, and actively spoke out against "[w]omen's economic dependence, disastrous child-rearing practices, stultifying domestic conditions" (Davis 260) until the end of her life.

In Gilman's work, the concept of altruism is embedded in a larger narrative of evolutionary progress, which Gilman delineates as a development away from egoistic individualism towards larger collectivity and cooperation. Gilman's study *Women and*

Economics contains a definition of altruism which serves not only as an exposition of her general views on society and evolution, but also, as will be shown below, explains how altruism can be understood as a critical concept for Gilman's feminist politics.

> The main distinction of human virtue is in what we roughly describe as altruism, – 'otherness.' To love and serve one another, to care for one another, to feel for and with one another, – our racial adjective, 'humane,' implies these qualities. The very existence of humanity implies these qualities in some degree, and the development of humanity is commensurate with their development. (323)

This short quote reveals a number of things about the importance of altruism for Gilman's work. First, it is notable that Gilman uses the term at all: Similar to the many sources discussed in the previous chapters, altruism is here conceived of as a technical or specialized term, one that still requires explanation and definition. The use of the scientific term altruism is illustrative of the overall rhetoric Gilman employs in *Women and Economics* and in her other works, namely that of the calm, persuasive, professional evolutionary scientist or sociologist. Hamlin argues that because "science" was "a type of cultural capital" at the end of the century, writing within the register of the scientific lent cultural authority to women eager to challenge traditional, religious notions of female inferiority (16). Gilman's use of the language of altruism, which translates religious epistemologies into scientific contexts, can thus be seen as instrumental for the larger cause of female emancipation.

Gilman defines altruism as a distinctive criterion that allows for a differentiation of the human race from other species, a fact that is emphasized by Gilman's direct comparison of altruism to the "*racial* adjective, 'humane'" [my emphasis] in the quote above. Generally, Gilman's evolutionary philosophy, like Darwin's *The Descent of Man* and other influential theories of evolutionary biology, is based on examinations of the relationship between the human species and the animal world (Hamlin 97 ff.). But Gilman was likewise influenced by contemporary theories of *social* evolution. Extending the idea that altruism defines humaneness, she understands altruism as an indicator for the level of progress achieved by societies. The more humane or altruistic a society, the more developed it is, as Gilman argues further below (235). Francesca Sawaya points out that this idea was related to contemporary theories of race and eugenics: In Spencer's original account, "uncivilized" populations were claimed to be egoistic, while altruism was believed to be more prevalent in higher "Aryan" civilizations (17). As is evident also in her other works, Gilman strongly believed in racial hierarchies, and more often than not, her evolutionary philosophy and her feminist politics were shaped by racist ideas and propagated in racist rhetoric. As the short excerpt above already indicates, the same is true for her conceptualization of altruism.

By concluding that "the development of humanity is commensurate" with the development of altruistic qualities, Gilman commits to a particular theory of evolution. As has been explained in more detail in the first chapter of this study, contemporary evolutionary theorists were in disagreement about the exact relationship of the evolution of nature and the evolution of ethics. One thesis, illustrated most prominently in the work of British biologist and philosopher Thomas Huxley, was that the natural world and morality were two separate spheres, and that it was the task of ethics to keep the animalistic, unethical progress of nature in check. A second school, of which the philosophy of Herbert Spencer was the principal promoter, claimed that the progress of evolution was inherently ethical and propagated the notion of a continuity between the physical world and ethics, an all-encompassing idea of evolution often summed up with the adjective "cosmic".[148] Gilman states openly that her work is associated with the second camp. Instead of subscribing to the belief in a dissociation – or an "irreconcilable contest" (*Women and Economics* 324) – between a natural and an ethical evolutionary progress, she commits to a notion of "cosmic," all-encompassing progress.

Women and Economics (and, as will be shown below, *Human Work*) can therefore be grouped with other popular evolutionary theories that promoted an optimistic view on evolution and positioned altruism as the teleological endpoint to the evolutionary development. Particularly influential for Gilman's understanding of society, evolution, and femininity was the "reform Darwinism" promoted by the sociologist Lester Frank Ward (1841-1913).[149] According to Hamlin, Ward's theories were designed to oppose social-Darwinist idea of a survival of the fittest, and instead argued that "what made humans 'human' was their ability to care for one another, change their environment, and, thus, shape the future" (118). Ward, accordingly, defined altruism as a so-called "socio-genetic force[s]," as a "socializing and civilizing impulse[s] of mankind" (*Pure Sociology* 417). Gilman's work, in line with this notion, sees altruism embedded in a "cosmic" progress.

On the one hand, Gilman's belief in "cosmic" progress allows her to make a prognosis about the likelihood of an increase in altruism, which is here understood as an increase in cooperation. As Pittenger summarizes, this "Christian, teleological, broadly Spencerian view" enabled a view of societies as "essentially organisms that became ever more interdependent" (10). Gilman's conceptualization of altruism is thus contingent on her embrace of the notion of "cosmic" progress. On the other hand, an idea of "cosmic" progress

[148] See also my discussion of Huxley and Fiske in Chapter 1.
[149] See Luczak 102-106 for a more detailed discussion of Ward's influence on Gilman's work.

provides the basis for Gilman's diagnosis of common misunderstandings in the study of human morality and altruism, namely that altruism is a virtue that needs to be trained or learned, or that the practice of altruism "involved a personal effort and sacrifice" (*Women and Economics* 324). Contrary to this view, Gilman argues that altruism is "natural," and that the moral development towards altruism is "orderly" (324). In her theory, altruism is the effect, the necessary and natural by-product of a cosmic evolutionary progress. In *Human Work*, Gilman adds to this a different component, namely that of religion: "Our own principal religion, Christianity, is altruism incarnate – but it is not altruism understood. It preaches altruism as a virtue and a duty, but it does not show altruism to be a natural product…" (141). Here, Gilman clearly distinguishes a "natural" altruism from Christian charity or benevolence. By arguing that altruism is innate, she responds to the prevalent idea, taught by the Church, that humans are by nature selfish, and that good deeds come at the expense of renunciation, which, in turn, is required to remain in God's graces.

This short analysis of Gilman's conceptualization of altruism makes visible the frame in which she develops her arguments about evolution, society, and ethics, namely a familiar, optimistic narrative of progress. Importantly, however, the main political message of *Women and Economics* and of *Human Work*, is that the smooth development of the cosmic progress is sorely afflicted, even hindered by a small, yet important detail: the artificial restrain of half of the human species. *Women and Economics* and *Human Work* are feminist studies, and, as I will show below, the conceptualization of altruism can be related to Gilman's feminist reformist aspirations in a number of ways. Before that, some general information about Gilman's feminism is in order.

The main problem Gilman tackles in her work is women's economic dependence on men: "We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation" (5), states Gilman succinctly in the first chapter of *Women and Economics*. Not only does Gilman repeatedly compare the condition of gender inequality to the animal world (there is no precedent for the subordinate status of human women anywhere else in the natural world), but she also claims that it has much wider consequences for social ethics, for the future of the race, for the progress of humankind, and for evolution as such. Nadkarni sums up the quintessence of Gilman's argument by stating that her "particular innovation was to argue that rather than being naturally ordained, gender inequality was a perversion that stymied the evolution of the species as a whole" (38).

The fact that women are dependent on men for their survival, Gilman further argues, results in an evolutionary development of over-sexualization, which, in turn, slows down the evolutionary progress at large. In Gilman's terminology, women's "race-development" has been "driven back," and instead, their "sex-functions" – those attributes that guarantee women's' sexual attractiveness to men, are over-developed (13). Women, in their endeavors to attract men – endeavors they are forced to undertake, since they are economically dependent on them – have over time adopted and adjusted their sexual features, a warped evolutionary development which manifests itself in three major ways: The first consequence is physical. Women's comparable weakness and smallness is not indicative of a natural progress of evolution, but is instead identified as a result of an imbalanced, unnatural development. Women's necessary focus on finding a mate, which is a prerequisite for their economic survival, also has psychological repercussions. Gilman argues that women exhibit extreme forms of devotion and praise love as the most important virtue, because love and devotion are the only forms of "labor" women are able and granted to undertake. Finally, the social status of women in the late nineteenth century, too, can be explained by overly developed sex-distinction. In an attempt to prove this point, Gilman lists and discusses known proverbs and phrases as proofs for deeply ingrained stereotypes about the social status of women (49-50). For example, Gilman notes that it is no coincidence that women are often spoken of as the "*sex,*" because by their sex alone they are defined. Subsequently, Gilman extends this observation to a call, motivating women and men to recognize "[t]hat women are persons as well as females, – an unheard of proposition!" (62; emphasis in original).

Two major insights can be gained from these theses: First, Gilman's focus on "race-development" and reproduction, and her argument about the possibility of an "unnatural" evolution implies a conviction that evolution can be manipulated and tampered with in the first place. Throughout her life, Gilman was fascinated with eugenics, and racial and racist theories also played a major part in her conception of female emancipation.[150] Nadkani summarizes Gilman's line of argument by stating that "[i]n developing her feminist theory through the idea of eugenic reproduction, Gilman…creates a feminist politics that is always already embedded in discourses of race" (34). On the one hand, Gilman responds to the so-called "race suicide" theory, which, according to Hamlin, described "white Americans' anxieties about falling birthrates and the loss of virile manhood as a result of, among other things, the influx of immigrants to the United States, urbanization, women's increasing

[150] I have already discussed the relationship between woman reform, eugenics, and the concept of altruism in my analysis of the periodical *The Altruist Interchange* in the second chapter of this study.

presence in public and professional life, and the loss of male autonomy in an increasingly corporate world" (114). The race-suicide theory was often instrumentalized by opponents of women's liberation, and Gilman's racially motivated arguments can be seen as endeavors to work against this fear, or maybe even to ease prevailing anxieties of racial deterioration. On the other hand, however, it must be noted here that Gilman was explicitly writing for and about white women and men, and often excluded, sometimes also worked against the interests of women of color and immigrants, as many other biographers and scholars have explained in more detail.[151]

The second conclusion that can be drawn is that Gilman essentially claims that gender inequality is conditioned by culture and society. Not only women's roles and behaviors are defined by historical and cultural circumstances, but also their bodies: according to Gilman's theory, the social environment is an important factor for the development of sexuality. Cultural ideas about what women are, how they behave, what they feel are the result of a stymied evolutionary development – a statement that not only destabilizes the idea of a "feminine influence" – a belief in woman's natural altruistic propensities – but that also vehemently rejects the idea of separate spheres as a given or as natural; to the contrary. Finally, Gilman's underlying assumption that gender is a social and cultural construct is also promoted in the particular rhetorical strategies she pursues. As has been briefly touched upon above, she repeatedly includes proverbs and phrases in order to prove women's inferior status as already manifested on the level of language. What is more, Gilman recognizes and makes use of the political and cultural power of established stereotypes inherent in these phrases and proverbs, thus reinforcing her argument about the social construction of gender also on the level of language and form in her text.

How can these general theses about women's' economic independence be related to Gilman's use of the concept of altruism? How is altruism gendered in her work? In *Human Work*, she claims: "…it is through industrial development that our altruism comes" (141). Like in *Women and Economics*, Gilman puts the issue of labor at the heart of her arguments, because she believed that to work was the only way to contribute to the collective, the social as such. Incidentally, collective work was of course exactly the thing that women were denied. They were not allowed to partake in the "industrial development," but were bound to the domestic sphere, where they could only take care of themselves, their children, and their families. Gilman argued that the constraints of the domestic sphere would further degenerate

[151] Hamlin provides an excellent and detailed literature review of critical perspectives on nineteenth-century feminism's close relation to racism and contemporary racial theory. See 18-21.

women, and, importantly, that it would hinder their moral development. *Human Work*, accordingly, is also a book that entails concrete suggestions for social reform. Generally, Gilman emphasizes the need for an increased centralization of industry and for a greater emphasis on collectivity in all spheres of work. This includes suggestions for a reorganization of domestic labor as collective labor: Gilman promotes the idea of shared communal kitchens, of collective childcare, and of joint education, among many other things, thus inspiring a reconsideration of the productivity of the nuclear family for social organization and for female emancipation.

The core of her argument, then, is this: Because women are denied participation in the (desired) collective nature of work and industry, they are also kept from the "immense increase of altruism" which Gilman has predicted for the world:

> We are so accustomed to think of men as egoists, and women as altruists that it will be a blow to many to advance this position, but seeing that altruism, the social spirit, is but the essential condition and result of our social co-activities; that only men take part in these activities, and that women have been arrested in this natural development and forced to remain as they began, working in solitude and utter disconnection, for their own families solely; it is plain that the world's growth in altruism comes through men as a class, and that women as a class contribute to the social spirit only an exaggerated familism and egoism. (140-141)

Altruism, strikingly, is *not* the feminine in Gilman's theory. Altruism is not, like in the writing of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, used in order to explain alleged female instincts of sacrifice and nurture, or to propagate an idea of a "feminine influence." In Gilman's theory, altruism is "the social spirit"; it is a term that describes the social as such. The concept is the basis for the desired (and predicted) collective organization of modern society. Altruism is no longer gendered, but the signifier of a common humanity in Gilman's theory. It is therefore an important instrument for Gilman's overall cause: to destabilize essentialist distinctions between men and women by revealing them as socially and culturally conditioned, to argue for an innate goodness of humans that can be further promoted in a collective society, and to prioritize women's economic independence in the overall agenda of female emancipation. It is also, finally, a concept with which Gilman exposes the fiction of separate spheres, and ultimately attacks not only the consequences of, but also the premises for women's exclusion in social life.

4. Satire and Reform: Margaret Sherwood's *An Experiment in Altruism*

Not much is known about Margaret Pollock Sherwood (1864-1955), Professor of English at Wellesley College, author of several novels and literary criticism, and frequent contributor to periodicals such as *The North American Review* or *The Congregationalist*. According to Patricia Ann Palmieri, Sherwood was a scholar of the history of the novel and taught widely on nineteenth-century poetry and prose (*In Adamless Eden* 162), academic interests that she also negotiated in her scholarly publications, for example in her study *Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry*, published by Harvard University Press in 1934. Many of Sherwood's fictional texts, such as the novel *Henry Worthington, Idealist* (1899), or the short story "Falling from Grace" (1901), engage with Christian socialism, and many of her non-fictional works reflect on issues of faith and science as well, for example the essay "It does not follow" (1924). Sherwood sometimes published under the pseudonym "Elizabeth Hastings," a name that invokes two historical women whose occupations and personas allow for some speculation about Sherwood's poetics and politics: one is known for her charitable work, and the other as a patron of the art and literature.[152] In fact, Sherwood's work might best be understood as a combination of these two interests, being not only concerned with social problems, but also with the question of how to represent them in literary fiction.

Sherwood's early novel *An Experiment in Altruism* (1895), a highly self-reflective text that resists definitive formal classifications, might best be described as a satirical comedy, concerned with socialist and anarchist politics, with evolutionary science and academics, with female emancipation and social equality, and finally, with self-reflective discussions about what literature and art can and should do in the service of reform. Traditionally, the genre of satire serves an important purpose: exposure. Satire has an analytical quality, or, as Aaron Matz has put it in his recent study on the relationship between realism and satire, "satire isolates conditions or truths in order to chastise the mankind responsible for them" (2).[153]

[152] Elizabeth Stanley, Countess of Huntingdon, also known as "Lady Hastings of Hungerford" (1588-1633), was a writer herself and a patron of the arts. Lady Elizabeth Hastings, also known as "Lady Betty" (1682-1739) was known for giving half of her income to local charities.

[153] According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, satire is a "mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to ridicule and scorn" (299). Aaron Matz's study *Satire in an Age of Realism* (2010) makes an important argument about the relationship between realism and satire, claiming that both exhibit an expository stance. His study is dedicated to the increasing "blurring" of satire and realism at the end of the nineteenth century (2-5). Since Sherwood's novel, as will be shown below, also reflects on realist representation, Matz's definition of satire as a mode that bears similarities to those of realism is instructive here.

Sherwood's satire is geared at two related issues: that of social reform and that of reformist fiction. Among the many reformist movements satirized in the novel, the contemporary trend of "settling" stands out, which is why *An Experiment in Altruism* is classified as settlement fiction in the sparse literature available on the novel.[154] However, the novel is not limited to a critique of the settlement house, but reflects on, and often harshly criticizes the underlying, potentially oppressive modes of social planning of other reformist movements as well. In a sweeping blow, the novel thus questions the premises for, the consequences of, and ultimately, the very possibility of social reform. At the same time, *An Experiment in Altruism* also mocks various contemporary modes of reformist writing, especially the tradition commonly referred to as sentimentalist "woman's fiction." This critique is expressed in various self-referential comments on a variety of literary conventions, but most visibly in experiments with literary form. *An Experiment in Altruism* therefore provides new insights not only on the politics and ethics of modern, "scientific" reformist approaches, but also on the possibilities and limits of nineteenth-century reformist fiction. The prominent use of the concept of altruism in Sherwood's title is thus no coincidence: Both social reform and reformist literature, as the previous chapters of this dissertation have shown, are, at the end of the century, negotiated by the various and competing meanings of the neologism altruism.

4.1 "A Philanthropic Picnic in a Wilderness of Sin" – Social Reform, Satirized.

The novel *An Experiment in Altruism* is set in an unknown larger city. It is rendered in first person narration and recounts the experiences of a 39-year old, single, unnamed woman, who is driven by an undefined "Cause." In time, the reader learns that the narrator's "Cause" has to do with surveying the urban space, a task the narrator performs by keeping record of her encounters with other reformers. Terms like "classification" and "analysis" appear often in the narrator's vague description of her cause: "I had fallen into the habit of classifying everybody" (25), as she reflects early on. In the course of the novel, the narrator, accordingly, converses with a variety of characters, among them "the Altruist," a religious proponent of

[154] Settlement Fiction can loosely be defined as literary fiction that incorporates and reflects on the space of the settlement house and the figure of the settlement worker, both of which were featured frequently and regularly in American novels, plays, and poetry around the turn of the twentieth century. Next to two dissertations, both of which have only been published by ProQuest, there is no study of Sherwood's text available. Pound's and Lock's dissertation provide only superficial analyses of the novel and focus on providing an overview of its plot. In addition to this, the novel is mentioned in a few anthologies and alternatively classified as a social gospel novel (Wright) or as a utopian novel (Lewes).

the Social Gospel, and with two political activists labeled "the Socialist" and "the Anarchist"; she interviews "the Butterfly Hunter," an evolutionary scientist, and talks to literary authors, poets, muckrakers, and Settlement House residents, to college women, feminists, and philanthropists. All of these (mostly) nameless figures have different political and philosophical points of view, and all of them are representatives of diverging approaches towards the larger issue of social reform: "All that was most advanced was represented here: new faiths, new co-operative experiments in trade, new revelations of the occult" (6), as the narrator reports in a first description of her new social environment early on in the novel. Her narration, which consists mainly of conversations with her neighbors, and which is claimed to be the result of the social work done for her unnamed "Cause," thus reads like a survey of a highly fragmented and diversified field, namely America's reformist landscape at the turn of the century.

An Experiment in Altruism explores the politics of charity and the limits of reform, and the prominent use of the concept of altruism in the novel's title accentuates the taxonomic character of Sherwood's text. As has been established in earlier chapters of this study, the concept of altruism was not only a productive header for a heterogeneous array of reformist organizations, but was also often used an umbrella term to highlight the increasing diversification, the very complexity of social reform at the turn of the twentieth century. The use of the concept of altruism in Sherwood's title seems to be working towards a similar end, summarizing, as it does, the novel's exploratory interest in providing a comprehensive overview of the larger issue of social reform. The novel's "experiment in altruism" is thus reflected in the narrator's undefined "Cause" of providing a survey of her social environment, the result of which is the narration at hand.

In this way, the form of the novel mirrors the activities and practices of social workers and the aspiration of modern social reformers. This becomes particularly evident in the novel's negotiation of the settlement movement, a reformist trend featured prominently in *An Experiment in Altruism*. Settlement projects were a prime locus for new and updated approaches towards social reform and the problem of social injustice, and they were part and parcel of what was then referred to as "scientific charity."[155] Moving away from standard approaches of individual forms of philanthropic and charitable giving, these newer approaches emphasized notions of centralization and organization, and were informed by a focus on politics, business, and social science, thus responding to the demands of a shifting

[155] For a definition and an extensive discussion of "scientific charity" in the British context, see Himmelfarb (185-206). See also my discussion of "scientific charity" in the context of my analysis of the woman reform magazine *The Altruist Interchange* in Chapter 2.

context of urban industrialism. Next to administering housing, education, social welfare and social service to the urban poor, settlement houses provided a space for the organization of labor unions and other political movements. Importantly, they were also centers of sociological investigation and statistical research.

The various facets of settlement work are ironically portrayed in the novel when the narrator interviews a college resident, who, when asked what exactly settlement work entails, answers as follows:

> "The Settlement…is a station for philanthropic work, and also a centre for social investigation."
>
> "What is social investigation?" I asked bluntly.
>
> "Why, you see," said the Resident, his eyes twinkling, "Social investigation means drains and foods and that kind of thing."
>
> "Yes?" I said inquiringly.
>
> "And immorality and crime and amusements. Also wages and causes of popular discontent. In fact, it embraces almost everything." 39-40

This short excerpt can be seen as exemplary for the satirical treatment of the narrator's encounters with eager reformers, especially with young, male university students who decide to spend their time at a settlement. Evidently, the answers of the Resident represent a highly unsatisfying introduction to the concept of "settling." The seemingly random and incongruous aspects of settlement reform, listed excitedly by the Resident, endow his replies with a marked sense of irony and even ridicule. The narrator's skepticism about the exact nature of settlement reform becomes most evident when she mockingly refers to it as a "philanthropic picnic in a wilderness of sin" (38), and her ostensible irritation about the politics of settlement reform continues to be a theme in the novel.

The novel does not only reflect on, criticize, and satirize settlement reform on the level of content, however, but it also engages with the reformist modes of settling on the level of form: The narrator's "Cause," which drives the novel's plot and structure, is, like the work of the settlement reformers themselves, defined by an investment in sociological research, by an interest in organization and classification, and by the desire to manage the fragmented and diversified field of the city. The taxonomic investment of contemporary settlement reform is mirrored in the form of the novel, and emphasized by the umbrella term altruism evoked in its title.[156]

[156] Margaret Sherwood herself, alongside many of her colleagues from Wellesley College, engaged actively in Settlement reform prior to publishing her novel in 1895 (Palmieri 184). It would be worthwhile to compare Sherwood's novel to that of her colleague at the English department, the writer and socialist activist Vida Scudder (1861-1954), who also published a semi-autobiographical novel about her experience at a settlement

The novel's formal and thematic negotiation of settlement reform, understood as the desired creation of an overview of the social environment, has also already been observed by Sherwood's contemporary readers. In a review from 1895, Katherine Pearson Woods, author of the Christian socialist novel *Metzerott, Shoemaker* (1889), reads *An Experiment in Altruism* as a prime example of "the literature of the New Philanthropy" (342). Woods describes the novel as "a series of sketches and character studies which at first glance appear disconnected; but upon further research a thread of purpose and meaning running through the whole, becomes distinctly visible" (341). This "thread of purpose and meaning" is later in the review identified as the larger political interest of the novel, namely to point out, first, the hypocrisy and the "terrible unreality" of modern life and, second, the fruitlessness of "unscientific" approaches towards philanthropy and the unproductivity of many contemporary efforts at social reform. According to Woods, this unproductivity is made manifest in the serial introduction of various reformist approaches, represented by the characters the narrator meets, which Woods reads as "types rather than personalities" (341).

More than 90 years later, Glenn R. Wright provides a similar assessment of Sherwood's novel in his study *The Social Christian Novel:*

> An unnamed young lady comes to the big city determined to help humanity. Very soon she meets a series of stereotypical individuals who are seeking the same objective – the Transcendental Altruist; a Woman Doctor; the Lad, A Greek hero and mechanical genius; a Precocious Teenager; the Anarchist; and Janet, unhappy girl cynic. The novel is highly satirical and episodic, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual's attempt to better humanity's lot. The tone is brittle, self-mocking, yet searching. The effect is rather uncomfortably modern in some ways. (141)

Wright's short summary is slightly inattentive of the novel's complexities. First of all, the "unnamed young lady" is, at 39 years of age, not necessarily considered young at all, especially in the context of the 1890s. The adjective "young" with which Wright describes the narrator, in addition to her alleged determination to "help humanity," alludes to a certain naiveté and inexperience, an evaluation that does not do justice to the profound irony and skepticism the narrator exhibits throughout her account. Second, the cast of characters does not really share "the same objective": The Altruist, the Anarchist, and the Doctor, for example, have highly diverging politics and different points of views on the issue of social reform, and if anything, the narrator inhibits the function of a mediator of, and sometimes also between these positions. Third, Wright is right about the novel's satirical and comical

house. The title of the novel, *A Listener in Babel* (1903) itself indicates that Scudder, too, deals with the increasing complexity of the landscape of social reform at the turn of the century.

effect, and, arguably, also about its "modern" style, but whether the qualifier "uncomfortable" is appropriate in this regard remains questionable.

What both reviews have in common, despite having been published almost a century apart, is the observation that Sherwood makes use of a typology of characters in her novel, a literary strategy neither Woods nor Wright seem to hold in high esteem. What both reviewers miss, however, is that the novel makes a point about the fact that this typology is inherently flawed. For if there is a common thread in the narrator's efforts at typologization and classification, it is a pronounced and often ironically performed lack of orientation. This becomes apparent already in the very beginning of the novel, which opens, *in medias res*, with a dialogue between the narrator and the characters "Janet" and "the Doctor." The conversation revolves around Janet's cousin Paul, otherwise dubbed "the Altruist," whose optimistic and religious outlook on the merits of social reform in general, and on the settlement in particular, is debunked as hypocritical and naïve. This shows, on the one hand, that the novel is engaged in a critique of the settlement's politics, and framed by awareness about the potential ideological shortcomings of the reformist movement from the very beginning. What is more important than this initial instance of critique, however, is that only at the end of the first chapter is it revealed to the reader that "the Doctor" is, in fact, a woman. In this and many other instances, the narrator plays with pre-conceived notions about gendered professions and, at the same time, with the conventions of literary representation of character.

Next to the performed confusion of gender roles, there are many other examples of the narrator's deliberate failure at categorizing her social environment: One character, which the narrator consistently refers to as "the Lad," because he looks so very young, is later in the novel revealed to be a grown man of 27. Similarly, a rich philanthropist called "The Man of the World" is falsely claimed to be merely 14 years old. While men are frequently and comically presented as little boys, there are also instances of misclassification that concern the female characters. In fact, if there is a recurrent theme in the novel, it is this consistent confusion, and thereby also destabilization of social, class, and gender roles, and even of such markers of identity that are generally considered to be more easily discernable, like other character's ages.[157] The narrator is here and elsewhere playing with the assumptions and

[157] One such contemporary mode of classification was the science of physiognomy. Lucy Hartley's *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (2001) argues that the practice of physiognomy had a social function: "[T]he crux of physiognomic practice is a classificatory act which functions in a profoundly normative manner in so far as it takes a particular expression as the exemplification of a general kind and then uses this to describe the character of an individual" (2). The narrator's deliberate misclassification described above thus questions the main tenets of physiognomy, namely that knowledge about character can be

stereotypes of her readers, thus implying that the task of categorization and order is, ultimately, futile. Clearly, the narrator's strategy of misclassification stands in stark and ironic contrast to her "Cause" of analyzing her environment, or of providing a panoramic overview of the social sphere.

Evidently, then, the "types" do not fulfill their function: they rarely correspond to their assigned roles. This indicates that the novel's main argument is that the creation of a reliable taxonomy of the social sphere is impossible. The novel also highlights that all existing systems of classification held up in systematic, "scientific" approaches towards social reform are equally unproductive, regardless of whether they are sociological, biological, anthropological, botanic, or religious in nature. Rather than buying into contemporary notions of reform as a tool in the "search for order,"[158] the novel asserts that the social sphere is a field that resists organization, classification, and settlement. Finally, this also means that the novel's evocation of the umbrella term altruism, with its promise of ordering an increasingly confusing reformist landscape, of encompassing a heterogeneous variety of reformist movements, is likewise critical – one could even argue that the "experiment in altruism" is bound to fail before the novel begins.

4.2 "False Sentimentality" and the Staging of Separate Spheres

The second part of this section analyzes the ways in which Sherwood's mode of satire is geared at the conventions of sentimentalist writing, which was coded as "woman's writing" at the end of the nineteenth-century and beyond. This part links Sherwood's novel to the arguments presented in the previous parts of this chapter, because the pervasive cultural model of sentimentalism also represented a main vantage point for Stanton, and even more so for Gilman's work. Gilman, who was a literary author herself, reflects on the role of women in fiction in *Women and Economics.* As has been established in earlier parts of this chapter, Gilman's study makes a larger claim about the historical progress of emancipation and the growing influence of women in the public sphere. This progress is enabled, among other things, by a doing away with "false sentimentality" (148), as Gilman states. Importantly, "sentimentality," like perhaps no other term, brings to mind a whole tradition

gained by observing his or her physical appearance and/or facial expression. See also Mizruchi (10-12) for a detailed discussion of the importance of social (and, importantly, literary) types for the discipline of sociology (10).

[158] Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980.

of nineteenth-century reformist writing by women. The emergence of the "new woman," who is no longer defined by her propensity for piety and sympathy, also results in a new kind of fiction, which Gilman claims to be both illustrative and constitutive for the larger project of female emancipation: "In the fiction of to-day women are continually taking larger place in the action of the story. They are given personal characteristics beyond those of physical beauty. And they are no longer content simply to *be*: they *do*" (150; emphasis in original).[159] Does Sherwood's focus on types not work against Gilman's call to give female figures "personal characteristics", however?

If one looks at the issue of typologization from a literary point of view, Sherwood's strategy of misclassification receives yet another significance. Woods and Wright's discomfort with the absence of character development in Sherwood's text is, of course, not really surprising: The novel's use of types stands in contrast to the aesthetic standards of the time, which James B. Salazar, in his study on the rhetoric of character in Gilded Age America, summarizes as "the realist imperative of novelistic representation to construe the privacy and particularity of individualized characters" (28). In his overview of the main trajectory of theories of the novel and their evaluation of the category of character, Salazar identifies a consensus in the evaluation of types, which is valid both for literary authors and critics at the turn of the twentieth century, and for the majority of scholarship on nineteenth-century novelistic expression published in succeeding decades. With widespread agreement, it is argued that the modern form of the novel develops out of a gradual turn towards character depiction and a doing-away with the use of stock characters and types, which are usually ascribed to earlier, or to "lower" forms of fiction, such as sentimentalist and romantic writing, and which are usually related to the poetic strategies of those forms, namely sympathetic identification and didacticism.[160] Taking these considerations as a point of departure, Salazar consequently argues that late nineteenth-century fiction functioned "not simply as the cultural site for the mimetic reproduction of a national…character but as the place where one learned the signs of character's social legibility, where one learned which kinds of signs, which kinds of behaviors and social expressions counted as the reliable indicators of character itself" (32).

In light of these larger theoretical arguments about characters and types in the nineteenth-century novel, the insistence on the impossibility of typologization performed in

[159] In her own literary work, Gilman took the renunciation of the sentimental seriously A discussion of the novel *Herland* (1915) would greatly contribute to the argument of this chapter, because it contextualizes Gilman's sociological and evolutionary studies with her fiction and aesthetics.

[160] In Chapter 3 ("Forms"), I have elaborated more on the significance of sympathetic identification for sentimentalist poetics and politics.

An Experiment in Altruism is interesting for at least two reasons: First of all, it questions the "social legibility" (Salazar) of character per se, a larger point that underscores the novel's statement about the impossibility of an organization of the social sphere and its satirical treatment of the problematic nature of social reform. Secondly, the novel's ironic treatment of types can also be read as a self-reflective comment on contemporary trends of reformist writing. It is a critique of literary forms that claim authority over the task of providing an overview of the social. One could thus read Sherwood's ironic use of types as a critique of the realist novel, but even more prominently, it mocks the conventions of the sentimentalist novel, a form known for its didactic use of types.[161]

Before I turn to my reading of the novel as a critical negotiation of contemporary conventions of sentimentalist writing, a brief excursion into the cultural paradigm of sentimentalism and, particularly, its significance for scholarship on late nineteenth-century female literary production is in order. Lora Romero sums up the trajectory of American criticism on the nineteenth-century sentimentalist novel as follows: "Traditionally, [cultural authorities] have used domesticity and its cultural offspring (denominated variously as 'sentimentalism,' 'women's fiction,' or 'the domestic novel') in order to demarcate a stable divide between a 'subversive' high cultural tradition and a 'conservative' popular cultural tradition" (1). This by now familiar devaluation of nineteenth-century woman's writing and of the conventions of sentimental literature is often summed up in the criticism by a by now almost mandatory reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's infamous complaint of the corruption of "public taste" by a "damned mob of scribbling women."[162]

The reading of the domestic novel as a low form was then severely challenged in the 1970s and 80s, when a number of literary critics began to resurrect from obscurity, to analyze, and, finally, to canonize American nineteenth-century woman's fiction. In this scholarly endeavor of recuperation, both the concepts of "sentimentality" and "domesticity" were made productive for discussing the reformist agenda of nineteenth-century woman writing. Nina Baym, in her influential book *Woman's Fiction* (1978), defined "sentimentality" as a gendered value that was claimed to be working for the preservation of social peace and civic stability in the antebellum period. Put differently, sentimentality was understood as that which women could offer the public sphere, and that which, ultimately, could bring women into public life, and thus into a reformist context in the first place. Jane Tompkins mobilized

[161] Since Sherwood's novel has been placed in the context of the Social Gospel novel, the critique could also be extended to the particular use of types in this genre. For a discussion of the Social Gospel novel, see Chapter 3.

[162] For a more detailed contextualization and discussion of Hawthorne's contested quote, see, for example, *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (22-24).

a similar distinction between the public and the domestic – or the political and the personal – for her influential conceptualization of the novel as "cultural work." According to her *Sensational Designs* (1985), women writers in the middle of the nineteenth century wrote from within and against the labels of domesticity and sentimentality in order to build a power structure of their own; they had "designs" on their readers and used sentimentalist and sensationalist literary strategies, like didacticism and sympathetic identification, in order to provoke social change.

To a certain degree, one can infer from this brief overview that the larger strand of New Historicist criticism, to which both Baym's and Tompkins's studies can be counted, analyzes nineteenth-century female literary expression primarily according to its negotiation of a "feminine influence." This is also observed and criticized by Romero, who states that Tompkins's and other feminist revisionary critics' interventions did not manage to "fundamentally disrupt the logic of domesticity either; they just restore[d] domestic women to the station of moral and political transcendence they allotted to themselves" (19).[163] In the introduction to this chapter, I have already pointed out the importance of Cathy Davidson's manifesto "No More Separate Spheres!" (1998), which reminds us that the idea of separates spheres is a "retrospective construction that has had the effect of recreating a binaric gender division among contemporary critics" (443). Without a doubt, the "historiogaphic metaphor" of separate spheres and its shifting influence on literary critics and historians has yielded important scholarly work and has made available a great number of archives in the last decades, as Davidson also concedes (444). In the following, I will nonetheless try to follow Davidson's call and analyze, in particular, the ways in which Sherwood's novel formulates a critique of the very metaphoric character, and of the arbitrariness of a distinction of separate spheres.

Sherwood's novel negotiates pervasive ideas of alleged female sentimentality and of the idea of a "feminine influence" and it satirizes, in particular, the bifurcation of separate spheres. On the one hand, this critical agenda is visible in the significance laid on the "Cause" of the narrator, both for the novel's plot and for its formal structure: Rather than performing reform within the paradigm of the sentimental, for example by placing emphasis on ideas of sympathy and pity, the narrator goes about her task with "professional interest" (63). She is learned in the fields of sociology and evolution and interested in reflecting on the science of

[163] As Romero summarizes, the feminist canon revisions of the 1980s and 1990s did not remain unchallenged and was followed by a new kinds of feminist criticism, which accused the earlier cohort of scholars of having neglected in their analyses important critical categories such as race, class, ethnicity, intersectional discrimination, and imperialism (3). For an overview of this criticism, see also Davidson (449-450).

charity, the politics of reform, and the larger philosophical debates about the possibilities of social amelioration. This shift away from sentimentalist modes of reform, as has been pointed out above, is mirrored in the novel's form, and it is, in addition to this, also prefigured in the novel's title: The emphasis on the concept of altruism, as well as the evocation of the experimental, indicates that the narrator's interests are placed in the public realms of science and politics, and not in sentimental modes of literary reform and writing.

The focus on professional reform is further underscored by the novel's thematic preoccupation with the settlement movement. Settling was especially interesting for women at the end of the century, because it allowed women to practice reform outside of their assigned domestic space. As Shannon Jackson has noted, the settlement house itself unsettles the binarism of separate spheres, because it is, by definition, simultaneously a public and a private space. Jackson analyzes Jane Addams's Hull-House, America's most famous settlement project, in her study *Lines of Activity* (2000). She focuses on the artistic and aesthetic practices performed at Hull-House, notably on the significance of theater for (and at) the settlement. Jackson carves out the importance of a particularly kind of "domestic economy" taught and practiced at the settlement in a theatrical mode she calls "civic play-housekeeping," defined as an activity "where women found agency in generating a theatrical sphere of intersubjective engagement" (209). In addition to these and other important observations of the various ways in which the settlement thus problematized the distinction between male and female spheres via aesthetic practices, Jackson's focus on theater also allows her to make another, related claim. The settlement's agenda of promoting theatrical performance was meant to emphasize the performative nature of social interaction as such: "Jane Addams and her colleagues' routine in vocation of the artistic process in application to reform testifies to their sense of the constructed nature of the social world" (12), as Jackson summarizes.

While Jackson's approach of reading settlement reform through the lens of performance theory differs considerably from my own, her observations are helpful for a reading of Sherwood's novel for two reasons. First, *An Experiment in Altruism*'s focus on settlement reform makes visible its general aim to dismantle the fiction of separate spheres on the level of content. Secondly, and related to this, Jackson's arguments help to read the novel's expressed formal concern with the theatrical. Described by contemporary reviewers as a comedy, as a series of sketches, and as a satire, the form of the novel itself is reminiscent of drama; the successive introduction of types that provides structure to the novel reads as though the characters are coming up a stage. In addition to the significance of types, the novel

exhibits other theatrical features: it consists largely of dialogue, most of which is rendered in direct speech. However, the theatrical is also repeatedly reflected on the level of text. Early on in the novel, the narrator describes the settlement as follows:

> Perhaps it was the many theories that lent a kind of unreality to the life in the streets. I used almost to wonder if it were a pantomime, arranged to illustrate our ideas. Something certainly made the thoroughfares and the houses in the city look like scenery in a play, and I was always half-expecting them to fold up and move off the stage. (7)

Next to many other references to various dramatic forms – the tragedy (188), the comedy (48), the medieval play (8) – this is a telling instance for how Sherwood mobilizes metaphors of the stage in order to put the presumably earnest, and "real" reformist work of settlement residents into perspective. Even though markers and phrases such as "perhaps," "I used almost to wonder," and "I was always half-expecting" point towards a certain degree of hesitation, the narrator's bafflement about the strange artificiality of the city streets is at the forefront of this quote. It is not only the "unreal" scenery of the city that leads the narrator to comparisons to the stage. She also states here that the various reformist aspirations of the time – "our ideas" and "the many theories" – require comedic staging, theatrical illustration. The quote therefore points out and legitimizes the novel's own satirical and comical presentation of social reform.

This theme of criticizing the conventions of literary representation can also be found elsewhere in the quote. The narrator compares the "[l]ife in the street," that which is the object of scientific study and statistical research conducted by contemporary settlement reformers, and that which other contemporary literary authors were eager to capture not in dramatic, but in decidedly realist terms, to the pantomime, a type of musical comedy, popular in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Pantomimes were entertaining, sensationalist rewrites of familiar folk tales, geared primarily at children and families, and usually performed during the holiday season. Next to dance, song, slapstick, and other features of extravaganza, pantomimes prominently featured gender cross-dressing and drag.[164] Especially the pantomime's focus on cross dressing play into the narrator's strategy of misclassification of social and gender roles. But even in more general terms, the comparison to the pantomime continues – and dramatizes – the novel's interest in pointing out the instability, and, ultimately, the performative nature of social identity, of social interaction, and of social setting – and, importantly, also the arbitrariness of the fiction of separate spheres.

[164] For further information of the pantomime in England, see, for example, Mayer (1969) and Richards (2015).

The novel's self-referential play with types, extended in references to the theater, provides its main instrument of satirical critique. It is geared, at once, at (potentially problematic) reformist modes of planning, at the contemporary conventions of reformist writing, and at the pervasive fiction of separate spheres, which, as Comte's *Catechism* and his mobilization of the figures of the "Priest" and the "Woman" most effectively demonstrates, was in many ways dependent on typology as well. Paradoxically, however, *An Experiment in Altruism* has to employ typology in order to dismantle it – it is a satirical text, after all, tied to a genre that by definition relies heavily on the use of types. This means that while the novel can offer criticism, it cannot provide an alternative social vision, or any solution to the problem of reform and its literary representation. The novel quite consistently destabilizes all efforts and systems of classification, among them, of course, the social vision of altruism, presented as one among many social theories present at the settlement, and, at the same time, as the promise of an ordering principle that holds both reform, and the novel, together.

In many ways, *An Experiment in Altruism* paints a bleak picture about the possibilities of reform. At the end of the novel, the narrator continues to be haunted by the city's "unreality" and by the futility of her task: "We were in a broad thoroughfare, where night after night is played the tragedy of a great city's sin" (188). In this quote, however, the stage metaphors no longer describe the urban scene in a comic mode of criticism. Rather, they signal an instance of surrender and a sad concession to the impossibility of change.

And yet, the final pages of the novel do express some hope, which, however, has its basis in belief and religion. At the end, a different narrative thread of the novel comes together, likewise expressed with the concept of altruism, namely an ongoing negotiation of various opposing epistemological perspectives on reform: science versus religion, dogma versus doubt, and faith versus cynicism. There is a larger philosophical question guiding *An Experiment in Altruism*, namely, whether the transformation of the world is imaginable without a religious framework of belief. This question is, for example, negotiated when the narrator interviews an outspoken atheist, who preaches the primacy of science over dogma. In this conversation, the narrator expresses skepticism about the definite merits of science, and adds for consideration that "[t]o an outsider…science seems at times dogmatic. Are not its skeptical conclusions out of proportion to its actual achievement? (...) You have 'no right to say that God does not exist until you have seen him not-existing" (58). In these and other scenes, questions of belief are weighed and negotiated.

Via a method of trial and error, the narrator experiments with a variety of philosophical perspectives, which gain urgency and a practical direction in the context of

social reform at the settlement project. The narrator's method, namely that of the experiment, is therefore clearly scientific in nature, something that grants the novel its critical (and, arguably, feminist) potential. The final message of the novel, however, is a religious one: In the last sentences of the novel, the narrator posits neighborly love as that which all humans, regardless of religious orientation, have in common:

> Yet I have moments when I know that the strife is not in vain. In these I wonder why we are so troubled about our duty to our fellow-man, and about our knowledge of God. The one command in regard to our neighbour is not obscure. And our foreboding lest our faith in God shall escape us seems futile, inasmuch as we cannot escape from our faith. (214-215)

Despite its satirical outlook, *An Experiment in Altruism* still pledges allegiance to a – surprisingly non-paradoxical – "scientific belief" in altruism at the end of the novel.

5. Conclusion

Female reformers and literary authors became increasingly doubtful and critical of the "powerful cultural belief" (Ginzberg 1) in sentimentality at the end of the nineteenth century for three main reasons: first of all, it was prone to reinforce traditional (religious, biological) stereotypes of femininity; secondly, it was no longer deemed productive for the issue of social reform in an increasingly complex and heterogeneous society; and thirdly, because new scientific theories showed that the belief in women's alleged greater sympathies was, in the end, nothing but a cultural and social construction – albeit a highly persistent one. I have argued in this chapter that feminist reformers employed the language of altruism not only because it was deemed suitable to critique a number of institutions responsible for the suppression of women – the church, the state, and evolutionary science, for example –, but mostly, because the concept was particularly apt to challenge the most vague, and therefore also the most pervasive ideology that legitimized female inferiority and difference at the turn of the century: the cultural model of sentimentality.

The three different feminist appropriations of the concept of altruism under analysis in this chapter – Elizabeth Cady Stanton's reformulation and critical subversion of Auguste Comte's original, gendered definition of the term, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's positioning of altruism as the endpoint of a teleological narrative of evolutionary progress that can only run its course if gender equality becomes a reality, and Margaret Sherwood's satirical critique not only of social reform and its literary representation, but also of the promise of reconciliation the concept of altruism entails – have illustrated, once again, the diversity of

meaning the concept acquired at the turn of the century. The alliance of altruism and woman reform has also shed light on an increasing significance of the discourses of science and politics for female reformers. Above all, however, this chapter has traced a historical development away from a women's rights discourse rooted in sentimentalism. In so doing, my analysis of the collaborative potential of altruism for feminist reform sought to complicate familiar, and possibly incomplete critical categories – primarily the metaphor of separate spheres – with which historians and literary scholars have tried to make sense of nineteenth-century literature and reform, and especially of nineteenth-century gender relations for the last decades.

To conclude this chapter, I want to reflect on the alliance altruism-feminism in the larger context of this study's main argument, namely that the concept of altruism is one capable of reformulation. To recall the methodological and theoretical basis for this argument, altruism's capacity for reformulation is contingent on its status as a neologism at the turn of the twentieth century. According to the findings of *Begriffsgeschichte*, neologisms have a projective-imaginative quality and express utopian social visions, while they express past experiences and pre-existing concepts at the same time. Put differently, in the vocabulary of the discipline of *Begriffsgeschichte*, the concept of altruism is charged both with past *experiences*, and with *expectations* of the future. Reformulation means the endeavor of adjusting these two perspectives.

In the context of nineteenth-century feminist and woman reform, altruism is often posited as a utopian vision of a common humanness; it is presented as a guiding principle for a new social order of gender equality in all three works under analysis in this chapter. While Stanton, Gilman, and Sherwood thus all use the concept of altruism to formulate different expectations about a utopian transformation of the social order, their accounts also, at the same time, express imaginations of human nature and womanhood that have a basis in past experiences and pre-existing concepts: Stanton, for example, at times falls back on (older) essentialist ideas about altruistic womanhood in order to promote her larger goal of female emancipation. Gilman, while more successful in identifying the social and cultural construction of femininity, fails to extend her social vision of altruism to racial and ethnic others. Finally, Sherwood's novel is outright critical of the political potential of the concept of altruism for the cause of feminism, and for social reform in general. This indicates that while all three reformers see merit in altruism's projective quality, they also illustrate that the concept can never be disentangled from its historical baggage.

Conclusion

Altruism may indeed be, as John Fiske complained, an ugly-sounding word, but it is yet again en vogue, as a surge of recent publications suggests. In 2015, David Sloan Wilson published the study *Does Altruism Exist? Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of Others*, which, according to the short description on the website of Wilson's publisher, aims at providing "new answers to this age-old question, based on the latest developments in evolutionary science." Another example comes from the field of neurobiology: Donald Pfaff's *The Altruistic Brain: How We Are Naturally Good*, published in December 2014. Pfaff's study sets out to prove that "the source of good human behavior – of the benevolence that we associate with the highest religious teachings – emanates from our physical make-up. Our brains, hormones, and genes literally embody our social compasses." The recent popularity of the concept of altruism is further illustrated by two books that have been given remarkable attention in the international press, namely Peter Singer's *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas About Living Ethically* (2015) and William MacAskill's *Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Make A Difference* (2015).[165] MacAskill and Singer are two representatives of a philosophy and an international social movement that calls itself "Effective Altruism." According to MacAskill's website, effective altruism "applies data and scientific reasoning to the normally sentimental world of doing good." Singer's and MacAskill's projects are positioned as revisions of traditional forms of beneficence within the academic field of moral philosophy. They also encourage their readers to invest in so-called "high-impact charity." The imperative to social action is already implicit in the titles of their books, both of which address their readers directly. This is also true for the publication *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World*, published in 2016 by Matthieu Ricard, a biologist, humanitarian, and Buddhist monk. His book, according to reviews, provides not only philosophical contemplations and scientific insights about altruism and compassion, but also "proposes solutions and lists scores of areas of progress, cooperation and environmental success stories."

[165] MacAskill provides a list of media reactions on his website: http://www.effectivealtruism.com/media/. Concerned only with MacAskill's project, this list does not reflect on the publicity Singer's book has received, but the large number of reviews listed here is nonetheless indicative of the movement's impact. In addition to this, the movement's outreach extends beyond the print market: In August 2016, the Effective Altruism Global Conference took place in Berkeley, CA, and had more than 1,000 visitors (or "concerned altruists," as an article on the website of *The Future of Life Institute* has it). This is only one of many other examples that highlight the significance of the concept of altruism in present-day public discourse.

None of the publications listed above reflect upon the flexibility of meaning, the politics, or the history of the term they use so prominently in their titles.[166] However, they show that there is some continuity in the way the concept of altruism was defined in the late nineteenth century, and in the way it is used now. First, all of the books listed above can broadly be understood as efforts to conceive of ethics and morality in a scientific manner: Wilson and Pfaff posit altruism as the object of scientific research, and Singer and MacAskill use the marker altruism to promote a new kind of philanthropy within the register of the scientific. It seems, therefore, that Comte's and Spencer's original manifestation of altruism as a scientific concept still has traction in our day. In addition to this, Singer, MacAskill, and Ricard, albeit on different levels, endow the concept of altruism with the capability of inciting social change, which proves that the concept is still related, in the broadest sense, to the issues of social reform and social activism. Finally, the overview demonstrates that altruism is still an appropriate header for a variety of academic, philosophical, and political perspectives. It still encompasses a wide array of different discourses and disciplines, and can thus still be understood as a concept capable of what I framed as *reformulation*.

Next to illustrating that some of the major insights established in this study still hold true for the usage of the term in our day, the list of publications above also raises larger questions about why the present moment witnesses a renewed interest in (and provides a market for) the language of altruism. Since this study has argued that the emergence of the language of altruism in the late nineteenth century was indicative of and instrumental for heated debates not only about the sources of human goodness, but also about diverging opinions on a just composition of society, its recurrence in social discourse points to larger social misgivings. The renewed interest in altruism can be related to important observations made recently by Thomas Piketty and other economists who compare our present-day level of social and economic inequality with the situation in the late nineteenth century and describe our time as a "second Gilded Age."[167] Altruism is gaining momentum, and, as the "Effective Altruism" movement especially demonstrates, the term is yet again mobilized to respond to the problem of social injustice and inequality and claimed to provide answers to a crisis of social reform.

[166] Wilson at times refers to Dixon's *The Invention of Altruism* in explaining Comte's original coinage of the term (161). Ricard credits Comte with coining the term (15). Pfaff, Singer, and MacAskill do not mention the concept's origins. On his website, MacAskill published a report in the form of an email exchange, which explains the process by which the name "Effective Altruism" came into being and shows that it has been chosen almost at random: "We need a name for 'someone who pursues a high impact lifestyle'. This has been such an obstacle in the utilitarianesque community – 'do-gooder' is the current term, and it sucks."

[167] See Piketty and Paul Krugmann's article "Why We're in a Second Gilded Age" (2014).

This is especially interesting because for the largest part of the twentieth century, the concept of altruism has not really been awarded with positive value or claimed to possess a reformist function. The language of altruism disappeared from public discourse soon after its peak around 1900. Both Dixon's *The Invention of Altruism* and Collin's chapter "The Culture of Altruism" end with a review of the harsh criticism it received already by the end of the nineteenth century, most authoritatively, by Friedrich Nietzsche. Sociologists Lauren Wispé and Heinz Harbach, in their respective studies on altruism, also emphasize that there was a noticeable decline in literature on altruism after 1930. The term gained in currency again in the 1960s and 1970s and has, since then, played a formative role in the formation of a variety of newer scientific disciplines, like that of sociobiology and behavioral psychology, or in neuroscientific approaches. [168] Rather than claiming altruism to be "effective" for social change, however, most of these newer accounts of altruism have conceived of it as a problem, an irritant, or an anomaly. Often, this attitude is very much visible in the scholarly language used to address the phenomenon: Across the broad of publications, it is described as "problematic," "puzzling," or even "pathological," but rarely lauded for its reformist potential.[169]

In many ways, this study has also emphasized the limits of the concept for nineteenth-century reformers. Many of my chapters have concluded that the "fad" of altruism – proclaimed as such, for example, by Hazlitt Alva Cuppy in his magazine *The Altruistic Review* in 1893 – was short-lived. Comte's "Religion of Humanity," in which the concept was coined, was rejected by his followers and practically ended his scientific career. While Spencer's influence was much greater than Comte's in the American context, many of his theories, among them also those on altruism, were dismissed as scientifically unsound as well. The problem with altruism becomes most evident in the attempts at a practical application of the term: My chapter on Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman has highlighted, for example, that with regard to feminist struggle, the concept might have promised more than it could deliver. The same is true for most of the other reformist projects

[168] Both Wispé and Harbach speculate about the recurrence of research on altruism and name, among other things, "the tumult of the 1960s" (Wispé xiv), and the publicity around the murder of Kitty Genovese (Harbach 77) as turning points for the renewal of scholarly interest in altruism in the field of sociology.

[169] There are countless examples of this, some of which I have listed in the introduction to this study already. In studies of evolutionary biology that address Darwin's famous theoretical problem about the altruistic behavior of the honeybees, this trend is visible already in the titles of scholarly publications: Robert J. Richard's essay "Why Darwin Delayed" (1983), which qualifies Darwin's as one of the "interesting problems and models in the history of science," and Frederick R. Prete's essay "The Conundrum of the Honey Bees"(1990), which claims that the bees represented to Darwin an "impediment" and "a serious conceptual stumbling block" (271) can be named as examples. The volume *Pathological Altruism* (2012), edited by an interdisciplinary group of scholars around Barbara Oakley and David Sloan Wilson, is a particularly telling example of this tendency.

presented in this study: Whether one looks at the problems faced at "Altruria" in California, at Alcander Longley's lifelong struggle with convincing members to join his Altruist Community, or at the attempts of socialist groups to appropriate the concept in general, the language of altruism, ultimately, lacked a definite political function.

The chapters concerned with altruism's significance for literary form have emphasized that the language of altruism posited a problem for modern conceptualizations of reformist fiction, too. Both modes in which altruism was made productive – sentimentalism and utopianism – were rejected on aesthetic grounds by advocates of the literary movement of realism. This is especially true for the later novels of William Dean Howells, which, on the one hand, expressed an interest in altruism, but also self-reflectively pointed out the formal difficulties it produced for his program of literary realism. The productivity of altruism and its literary representation was also effectively questioned in Margaret Sherwood's *An Experiment in Altruism*, which satirically exposed the various promises of reconciliation the concept of altruism entailed as false and limited.

All of this points to the conclusion that altruism's reformist potential remained just that: a potential. While my study has shown that the term was attractive for a vast variety of reformist and political positions, it has also demonstrated that there was something of a *passe-partout* quality about the word; that its semantic flexibility rendered it prone to appropriation and corruption, that it often remained a mere synonym for older terms, or that it was, for many, nothing more than the "Jargon of 'Ethical' Dilettanti." This corroborates a suspicion raised not only by contemporaries, but also by later critics, namely, that altruism is an overdetermined concept, a floating, maybe even an empty signifier. In his essay from 1956, Louis Budd arrives at exactly this conclusion: While altruism was productive for reformist causes because of its "inconclusiveness," it "dissipated" after its heyday for a very similar reason, namely because it was "too malleable" (51).

Despite these necessary concessions to the limited reformist or political potential of the language of altruism, I want to insist on a larger argument that has likewise been made repeatedly in this study, both in the chapters dedicated to the conceptual history of the term and in the chapters dedicated to its significance for literary form. The very *existence* of the discourse in the late nineteenth-century emphasizes that many people – scientists, religious reformers, literary authors – stressed the importance of collaboration, cooperation, and regard for others as formative for the human experience and for the composition of a just and equal society, and this at a moment when most writers on human nature were stressing the opposite: self-interest, competition, and (rugged) individualism.

As is well known, the vision of human nature as self-interested proved to be much more successful. In her book *Absence of Mind* (2010), Marilynne Robinson traces the scientific formulation (and the solidification) of viewing human nature as naturally self-interested, egoistic, and individualistic back to the nineteenth century, and argues that since then, a "deep and persisting acceptance of this vision as indisputable truth has had an epochal significance for the way we think" (38). The rise of positivism, to which Comte's persona is inextricably connected, therefore, did not only produce an idea of altruism, but it also delivered the basis for subsequent scientific arguments that conceive of altruism as a problem. Robinson uses the history of altruism as a case study for her general project, namely to put the triumph of science over metaphysics, which defines the Comtean moment, into perspective: Throughout her book, she questions not only the legitimacy, but also the inner logics of the works of "self-declared rationalists" (x) like Comte, whose theories she debunks as "parascientific," that is, as quasi-religious, in their usage of science to proceed "from a genesis of human nature in primordial life to a set of conclusions about what our nature is and must be, together with the ethical, political, economic, and/or philosophic implications to be drawn from these conclusions" (32-33). Robinson also argues that because the concept of altruism has consistently posed a problem for scientists, it has consistently been argued away, by way of a "hermeneutics of condescension" (14).

There is a hint of incredulity and skepticism that usually accompanies the question 'Do you believe in altruism?', which I myself have been asked more than once in the years working on this dissertation. This question is usually followed by a denouncement of a belief in altruism as 'naïve' and/or 'religious,' and by efforts at debunking altruist behavior as 'in fact selfish' or 'against human nature.' All of this testifies to the dominance of what Robinson identifies as the "hermeneutics of condescension" in public discourse. This study did not aspire to formulate a counter position to this attitude. But it has demonstrated that the gut response to deride altruism as 'impossible,' 'unreal,' or 'false' was not as prominent in the late nineteenth century as it is now, that in the historical moment around 1900, altruism *was* indeed understood as a social fact and a scientific truth. With the rise of a scientific view of human nature as inherently selfish, there was also a viable discourse that tried to prove, often with the same means, that it was not. That the existence of the language of altruism itself can be seen as a powerful intervention into the ways we think about the human good, and about the good society, becomes evident, not least, in the fact that it keeps on coming back to us. It remains to be seen if it can provide better answers today than it did in the nineteenth century.

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