**Benevolence in a Justice-Based World:**

**The Power of Sentiments in Predicting Prosocial Behaviors**

Gustavo Carlo

University of Missouri

Scholars have long articulated and debated various conceptions of morality. Among the most challenging questions regarding the nature of morality is the issue of the place of benevolence and caring in the framework of understanding moral development. Often presented as a stark contrast to justice-oriented approaches in moral development, benevolence was frequently overshadowed by justice in the prominent developmental theories of Piaget, and especially, Kohlberg (1969). For decades, cognitive-structural developmental theories that emphasized a justice and rational-based approach dominated the scholarly work in moral development. However, in recent years, theoretical and methodological developments, and a newfound recognition of the role of sentiments has shifted greater attention to the prominent role of benevolence in understanding morality. The first major section of the present essay briefly contrasts justice- and benevolence-focused perspectives. The second major section of the essay proposes a conceptual distinction between principled-based (e.g., moral reasoning) and compassion-based (i.e. sympathy) altruistic behaviors to advance our understanding of the role of benevolence in morality. The third section briefly reviews relevant research on the relative predictive value of thoughts (i.e. moral reasoning) and sentiments (i.e. sympathy) on altruistic and other forms of prosocial behaviors. We present a strong case for the central role of sentiments and benevolent traits in the role of understanding morality. Although thoughts and reasoning play an important role in morality, we propose that benevolent sentiments ultimately determine what is good and just.