

Re: Darwinian evolution=Armageddon?

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Michael Ragland <ragland37@webtv.net> wrote:

> *Ragland:*

> *Okay. But at one time aggression, xenophobia, etc. were apart of
> selection. If they are pleiotropically linked to genes under selection
> why wouldn't they theoretically still be under selection? For example,
> assuming Darwinian evolution was given enough time wouldn't it be
> possible aggression would be under selection and gradually it would be
> "removed" since it was no longer adaptive?*

>

> *Wilkins:*

> *In environments where aggression is selectively disadvantaged. But the
> majority of humans today, whether they live in small tribal arrangements
> or large cosmopolitan environments, live in situations where aggression
> is not so disadvantaged.
> This sets up a situation where group selection may be invoked – those
> groups that are less aggressive may in fact be overrun by aggressive
> groups. It's happened before.*

>

> *Ragland:*

> *Well I disagree with you Mr. Wilkins. I think we currently do live in a
> cultural environment (scientific and technological civilization) where
> aggression is selectively disadvantaged. What do you base your
> statement, "But the majority of humans today, whether they live in small
> tribal arrangements or large cosmopolitan environments, live in
> situations where aggression is not so disadvantaged"? I'm glad you spoke
> your mind here because I think it is the majority opinion and that a
> certain number of people on sci.bio.evolution think I'm a "fritcake".
> Do you think as a "species" aggression is not selectively disadvantaged?*

Michael, I have no opinion on your dried fruit content. But I look about and see that we are relatively as violent as chimps; perhaps a bit less. In societies that live in tribal groups, most aggression within the group is rigidly controlled, while outgroup aggression is generally (but not always) ritual. Even so, tribal murder rates are greater than urban aggression rates. That said, most people lived in a village rather than a city until relatively recently. So I think there has been no selection yet against aggression.

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A large part of the problem is that we who grew up after WWII, and before the current troubles, seem to think that the world is generally a nice place except in those horrid places; in fact the world is as violent now as it has ever been (one reason why reported violence is on the increase is, IMO, because the criteria for reportage is more sensitive. In my dad's day, if someone insulted you, nobody blinked if you decked him. It certainly never got to the police), and the 50s and 60s were the exception – in a very few places (ask a Congolese about that time).

>

> *Technically, you are correct since Darwinian evolution hasn't moved in the evolutionary direction where it is selectively disadvantaged. But I don't think you meant it in a purely technical sense and your additional statement confirms that.*

>

> *You further state due to aggression not being selectively disadvantaged (I'm stating in the purely technical sense) "This sets up a situation where group selection may be invoked – those groups that are less aggressive may in fact be overrun by aggressive groups. It's happened before." Yes, it happened in Nazi Germany among innumerable other examples. Is group selection selectively disadvantaged? Are the majority of humans today, whether they live in small tribal arrangements or large cosmopolitan environments, live in situations where group selection is not so disadvantaged?*

Group selection is weak except in some cases where the individual selection is weak relative to the selected characters and the groups are highly cohesive. As it happens, small tribal groups are indeed genetically highly cohesive and the individual survival rates depend a lot on how one fits into one's tribe. Nazi Germany was **not** a case of group selection, although genetic frequencies were massively affected by it. It was not group selection because there was no iteration of groups outsurviving other groups (Germany was not a genetic group as such).

>

> *Not only has it happened before but it is still occurring more or less today Mr. Wilkins. That is group selection. If you are talking about more extreme examples such as African American slavery or Nazi Germany yes something along those lines could happen again. (read my sig sometime) It would take different forms but it could happen again. Do you consider the possibilities of such group selection to be selectively advantageous in Darwinian terms?*

In the sense that what survives survives, and what reproduces reproduces, then yes, group selection is "selectively advantageous" by definition. It is not morally preferential, but it is selectively advantaged.

>

> *Or is it possible what has been selectively advantageous in Darwinian evolution is not selectively advantageous in terms of cultural evolution and the scientific and technological advances which are the 21st century?*

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Almost certainly true. Cultural evolution is constrained by, but not tightly determined by, the genetic and biological selection going on underneath it. I like to think of cultural evolution being a laminar flow on the surface, and biological evolution being a deep current – sometimes they interact, but mostly they are decoupled.

>

> *Ragland:*

> *I agree with you. But if the industry remains unregulated many unethical and potentially dangerous applications are bound to occur.*

They are bound to occur anyway. The question is what way to bet will minimise it. And we won't know if we bet correctly until the cards are turned over, so to speak.

>

> *Wilkins:*

> *I have a political objection to formal regulation – it leads to a situation where those regulating have vested interests in the continuation of regulation, and this skews the objectivity of their judgement. This is not fatal, but it means you must counterbalance this tendency, and you cannot always do that safely.*

>

> *Ragland:*

> *Even without formal regulation there are already strongly vested interests which skew "objectivity" of researcher's judgment. Pharmaceutical companies, government, military. The situation has been likened to the military industrial complex but a series of relations between academia, government, pharmaceuticals, military, etc. And it does effect objectivity. There is no such thing as pure objectivity of many researchers. If a company or the government is paying so much money to research this or that then that is what will be researched. There is an agenda. I grant you there would be and is more independence than if there was formal regulation but at some point (I'm not saying necessarily now) there will need to be formal regulation.*

>

> *John Wilkins:*

> *That said, I'll snip the remainder.*

>

> *A professor asked a student, "If you had a choice between the oppressed and the oppressor which would you choose." The student replied, "Neither". The Professor shook his head and stated, "You don't have a choice." The student paused and said, "The oppressed".*

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"Men mark it when they hit, but do not mark it when they miss"

- Francis Bacon