

## Re: Darwin's morality

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**From:** Michael Ragland (*ragland37\_at\_webtv.net*)

**Date:** 09/29/04

Date: Wed, 29 Sep 2004 17:04:32 +0000 (UTC)

Michael Ragland wrote:

Michael Ragland wrote:

MR:

Comment: I think only a fool would insist good and evil don't exist in the world. As a "general principle", however, I don't think Darwinian evolution results in caring and compassionate organisms.

PR:

My take on this is that natural selection is "inadvertently" manufacturing morality (via cultural evolution, i.e., the evolution or rationality) at a faster rate than she can eliminate it via her customary genteel technique of dealing with inefficiency, as explained in my response to a poster to another egroup:

MR:

I don't know what to say Phil except that Darwinian evolution results in life (at least on this planet) that is not caring or compassionate and that includes human beings.

PR:

I agree that it SHOULD NOT result in caring organisms (excluding immediate kin of course). But that flies in the face of the simple fact there actually ARE organisms that care about things much greater than their own interests, and that such organisms currently constitute AN EVOLUTIONARY ANOMALY (e.g., concern for the suffering of a bird with a broken wing, the plight of the Palestinians, the whales, etc.).

MR:

If kin selection is operative in human beings that is not what I meant by "caring". I'm using the term "caring" as a synonym for empathy and compassion which can include one's kin (but not necessarily) and to those outside one's kin. Kin selection isn't based on "caring" but altruism in the sense of sacrificing yourself to propagate your own genes. If kin selection operates in humans in some form it is decidedly genetically deterministic and I don't equate "caring" and "empathy" and "compassion" towards one kin and outside of it as genetically

deterministic. I already stated compassion is a rare commodity but it is a byproduct of Darwinian evolution. This doesn't weaken Darwinian evolution but it does show how diverse it is.

MR:

The processes of natural selection work on every organism, not just humans. Yes, we are a different organism and we have cultural evolution and scientific and technological advances but the principles of Darwinian evolution apply nevertheless.

PR:

They are SUPPOSED TO APPLY. But we have it on fairly good authority that homo sapiens are considerably more "good" than can currently be explained employing the mechanics of natural selection:

We are "nicer than is good for our selfish genes," and "we are never allowed to forget the narrow tightrope on which we balance above the Darwinian abyss." (Dawkins, 1996).

MR:

I don't think much of Dawkins. He's an ethologist with a gift for popularizing (and consequently often simplifying and distorting) biological concepts. We can only be more "good" for such a time before we fall off the tightrope into the Darwinian abyss. Much of the world is already a nightmare and it could get and probably will get much more worse. It's just a matter of time.

PR:

I would suggest that the best way to understand the evil in the world is to first try to understand the good, since most of the evil is itself the result of folks getting a little too carried away with imposing their own particular brand of "good" on the world.

MR:

I know what good is Phil. It's not emotionally and/or physically or sexually hurting yourself or others. At least that is my definition. I'm quite well aware there have been people and organizations and even countries—states which have tried to rationalize their evil by projecting and scapegoating and presenting their ideology as what is "good" for the world. I don't confuse my definition of what is "good" with the latter.

MR:

Whether it be territoriality, war, genocide, xenophobia, rape, sexual selection, competitiveness, etc.

PR:

IMHO, you've left out the very core of human motivation:

There is no value—judgment more important to man — no factor more decisive in his psychological development and motivation — than the estimate he passes on himself. This estimate is ordinarily experienced by him, not in the form of a conscious, verbalized judgment, but in the form of a feeling, a feeling that

can be hard to isolate and identify because he experiences it constantly: it is part of every other feeling, it is involved in his every emotional response. ... it is the single most significant key to his behavior. (Nathaniel Branden).

MR:

I don't have any control over the estimate a person places on themselves or the environmental and genetic factors which play a part in that. If a person estimates themselves to feel they are inferior I have no control over that. If a man estimates women are garbage and should be punched around like a bean bag I have no control over that. If a person estimates themselves to have feelings of high worth and self esteem I have no control over that. How a person estimates themselves is extremely complex and involves innumerable interaction of environmental and genetic factors. Arguably, those who are closest to the person e.g. family, neighborhood, school, etc. have more of an influence on the interaction of the individual's environmental and genetic makeup. But there are also larger forces at work such as the media, videogames, internet and society and world at large. Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people.

MR:

And underlying all of these is the highly complex trait of aggression.

PR:

Aggression in humans is in an entirely different category, arising from the fact that nature has co-opted (exapted) a number of biological impulses to assist in the shepherding of self-worth (fear of asking for a date, giving a speech, anger over an insult, sex as a basis for endearment, etc.).

MR:

Human aggression is much more than that. Get real. There is real predatory human aggression which has nothing to do with shepherding of self worth (fear of asking for a date, giving a speech, anger over an insult, sex as a basis for endearment. I'm not necessarily suggesting aggression be removed through genetic engineering in the future or if that is even possible. I am, however, saying I hope certain forms of our aggression (such as predatory aggression which is exhibited in crime and wars) can hopefully be modified through genetic engineering in the future. This may also not be possible and we may reach a dead end or destroy ourselves. It may not be necessary to eliminate aggression but it has to be ameliorated if we are to survive as a species. Pick up the newspaper and read about North Korea, Iran, Chechnya, Al Quada, Hamas, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc. and how the Al Quada terrorists are trying their damnest to infiltrate into the U.S. not to mention the sleeper cells they already have here. Or how Russian plutonium was found in the back of a car in Prague and on an airplane.

MR:

You cannot have a species which is caring and compassionate under such

conditions.

PR:

You are looking at man from the perspective of your fellow human being glasses. Once you put on your natural scientist glasses what you will find amazing is not the amount of evil in the world, which is perfectly compatible with what we have a right to expect, but that there is so much self-sacrifice in the pursuit of "noble" causes (e.g., 9/11 terrorists and rescue workers, self-endangering Greenpeace, etc.)

MR:

Yup, the 9/11 terrorists sure did self sacrifice for the pursuit of a "noble" cause. I don't consider that good Phil. Crashing three gas filled jumbo jets into two skyscrapers filled with thousands of people and into the Pentagon which killed several people or the fourth jet which was foiled by passengers and crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. Do you consider that good? As far as the rescue workers they were doing what they were trained to do and many of them died because of lack of communications. I respect Greenpeace. They have stood up for their principles attempting to protect the environment. Their ship the Rainbow was blown out of the water. There are many good organizations in the world fighting good causes but they don't make an appreciable difference or dent in the long run. Any temporary victories they achieve can be undone. Evil predominates in the world. There are different degrees and kinds of it but it predominates. This is our Darwinian nature. Most evolutionists would probably not say Darwinian evolution is evil. The term evil has theological connotations. Indeed, many evolutionists and even ordinary folk emulate the principles of Darwinian evolution. People are classified into weaker and stronger and survival of the fittest.

MR:

Of course, that doesn't mean there aren't individuals out there who are caring and compassionate but they are truly a minority. The reality of their existence doesn't weaken Darwinian evolution but it does show how diverse it is.

PR:

It shows that our current understanding of natural selection is in need of an addendum, precisely as Dawkins as maintained, to explain why there is so much self-sacrifice in nature's most rational species:

MR:

I don't know what you're talking about. Dawkins is most famous for his "Selfish Gene" book which postulates the only purpose of a human being is to propagate and perpetuate his or her genes. Dawkins was the one who stated "nature was red in tooth and claw". If you are trying to extrapolate Dawkins statement, "We are "nicer than is good for our selfish genes," and "we are never allowed to forget the narrow tightrope on which we balance above the Darwinian abyss" as a basis for self sacrifice in nature's most so-called "rational" species then I think you are seriously deluded.

PR:

Human and baboon have evolved by natural selection. If you look at the way natural selection works, it seems to follow that anything that has evolved by natural selection should be selfish. Therefore we must expect when we go and look at the behavior of baboons, humans, and all other living creatures, we will find it to be selfish. If we find that our expectation is wrong, if we observe that human behavior is truly altruistic, then we will be faced with something puzzling, SOMETHING THAT NEEDS EXPLAINING. [my emphasis].

MR:

I've already stated human beings are not compassionate creatures because of Darwinian evolution. I've already stated I don't consider altruism in the context of possible human kin selection to qualify for compassion, empathy and caring. Altruism in the context of possible human kin selection is genetically determinist and based on sacrificing one's self in order to propagate and perpetuate kin's genes. It has nothing to do with compassion or empathy and doesn't (or rarely does) extend beyond one's kin. There are isolated example of strangers saving a drowning woman, coming to the defense of somebody being violently raped or nearly beaten to death but these are not examples of kin selection.

MR:

You write, "My take on this is that natural selection is "inadvertently" manufacturing morality (via cultural evolution, i.e., the evolution or rationality) at a faster rate than she can eliminate it via her customary genteel technique of dealing with inefficiency." I think you are confused but I'll ask you this how does the manufacturing of the "evolution of rationality" produce inefficiency for natural selection?

PR:

Because nature is selecting for "ruthless selfishness" and has, via the "moralization mechanism" (below) has actually ended up with a species that cares more for non-related others and cares less for themselves (volatility in self-worth) than has been predicted by our formal models:

MR:

Well the quote by Donald Campbell totally refutes your assertion. How have we've ended up with a species that cares more for non-related others and cares less for themselves? Especially in light of the following,

"Even with qualifications regarding the possibility of group selection, the portrait of the biologically based social personality that emerges is one of predominantly self-serving opportunism EVEN FOR THE MOST SOCIAL SPECIES, for all species in which there is genetic competition among the social co-operators, that is, where all members have the chance of parenthood (Donald Campbell).

PR:

We have a valuative profile that appears to be "red-shifted" toward valuative objectivity relative to the "ruthless selfishness" predicted

by our formal models as the most efficient means of caring out nature's unconscious agenda of perpetuating DNA.

MR:

Enlighten me. What is the valuative profile. What does "red-shifted" mean. What is valuative objectivity? I would argue as long as the agenda of perpetuating DNA is "unconscious" e.g. unknown and undirected Darwinian evolution will continue. As a result you can throw your valuative objectivity (whatever that means) out the window.

PR:

The "inadvertent" arises from the mechanism I mentioned in the post you are responding to:

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Let me suggest a hypothetical mechanism, actually first identified by Hume (1739), that I believe might challenge the genetic determinism advocated by the likes of Wilson, de Waal, Arnhart and yourself, and argued against by Dawkins, Gould, and implicitly a number of others (e.g., Hamilton). It forms the centerpiece of the paper I have URL'd at the bottom of the page. Assume for the sake of argument that:

MR:

Just out of curiosity could you lead me to an article which Dawkins states clearly he is not a genetic determinist. I'm also not sure de Waal is a genetic determinist. Could you provide an article to that effect? Also, could you provide an article stating Hamilton is not a genetic determinist e.g. I believe he came up with kin selection. I know Gould isn't a genetic determinist. I think everybody knows that. And it is simplistic to label Wilson a genetic determinist because he does acknowledge the role of the environment. In fact, I think all these gentlemen realize genes interact with the environment but they have been stereotyped.

PR:

Moralization mechanism:

'An increase in cognitive objectivity (knowledge, cognitive competence, wisdom, intelligence, etc.) "facilitates" an increase in valuative objectivity (valuative impartiality) IRRESPECTIVE OF ITS ADAPTIVENESS.

MR:

Well if its not adaptive what good is it? There is more to a human being that cognitive objectivity, knowledge, cognitive competence, wisdom, intelligence, valuative objectivity and valuative impartiality. One could argue science embodies many of these traits and yet it has yet to make the human species more adaptive to its present environment. I'm willing to acknowledge the possibility that these traits may ultimately assist in making us a more adaptive species but that hasn't happened yet.

PR:

This is analogous to the thesis developed in Kohlberg, 1981, only postulated to transpire in cultures in much the manner Kohlberg has postulated moral maturity as a function of cognitive development in the individual.

MR:

Well obviously if you have extremely malnourished Africans drinking urine from animals and washing in urine their cognitive development may be compromised. In fact, cognitive development can be compromised anywhere. If a child is constantly neglected (not touched) severely and frequently beaten or have learning disabilities, etc. their cognitive development can be compromised. But I don't think cognitive development by itself is a necessary indicator of moral maturity. There are many individuals who have high cognitive development and are morally immature. I see them on television everynight and the past has many examples of them. Moral maturity not only possibly requires cognitive development but emotional development. Somebody can be cognitively developed but emotionally undeveloped and such a person can't be morally mature. I'm not even morally mature to the point where I want to be. I think it is a lifelong process like learning.

MR:

In many ways we have not culturally evolved and exhibit some of the same behaviors we did thousands of years ago.

PR:

They might look the same to an outside observer, but I would say that most behavior in our pre-reflective ancestors was in the pursuit of PHYSICAL interests. In modern man most behavior is in pursuit of EMOTIONAL interests (self-worth).

MR:

What? What the hell do you think the stock market is? The oil in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Venezuela? What about Monsanto and its drive for marketing worldwide crops? What about protecting our borders? What about gem interests? Tanzanite? What about the real estate and construction and contractor industries? Do you think terrorism is in pursuit of emotional interests of self worth? What about crime? Do you think North Korea and possibly Iran have nuclear weapons because of emotional interests of self worth? Do you think Afghanistan is selling heroin in pursuit of emotional interests of self worth? Do you think those Chechynans blew up that school of children in pursuit of emotional interests of self worth? Do you think American soldiers are over in Iraq in pursuit of emotional interests of self worth? Do you think the conflict between the Arabs and Israelis is in pursuit of emotional interests of self worth? Do you think the worldwide movement of neo-Nazism is in pursuit of emotional interests of self worth? Do you think the pollution of the oceans and the biosphere are emotional interests of self-worth? Do you think the mass extinction of species is in pursuit of emotional interests of self worth? Do you think human

overpopulation is in pursuit of emotional interests of self-worth? I could go on much longer Phil. I could probably fill many pages. If you answered yes to any of these questions than obviously I have a different concept of self worth than you do. But I will concede that it is relative when it comes to the pursuit of emotional interests of self worth. I personally couple self worth with goodness and as explained before that means not emotionally, physically and/or sexually hurting yourself or others. To me that is true self worth not only towards oneself but others.

MR:

Where "we" have evolved is scientifically and technologically but biologically we lag far behind in the scientific and technological complexity we have created.

PR:

I agree. But I would also point out that we are far AHEAD of other species in our concern for non-related others and our capacity to experience GUILT when we fall short of our idealized expectations in the "goodness" category.

MR:

You got to be kidding. Stalin committed genocide in the Ukrain through starvation and approximately 1,000,000 died and he shook hands with Roosevelt at Potsdam. After the Holocaust the Germans had no regrets. During it the Vatican knew what was happening but kept his mouth shut for fear it would make it "harder" on the Jews. The U.S. State Department knew and many other governments but nobody bothered to delay the death by trying to blow up the railroad tracks. IBM, Ford and other corporations operated through their German subsidiaries and knew what was happening. Carnegie and the Harriman Railroad Fortune contributed to Nazi Germany's eugenics research. The U.S. bombed Cambodia exacerbating the situation there. The Khmer Rogue came to power and Pol Pot and his henchmen decimated most of their own population. He was never brought to justice and died an old man. The French, UN, and the U.S. saw an impending massive genocide in Rwanda but did nothing. We are not far ahead of other species in our concern for non-related others and our capacity to experience GUILT when we fall short of our idealized expectations in the "goodness" category. That is totally false.

MR:

Panadaptationism is a strawman.

PR:

I wish it were so. When is the last time you attended an evolutionary psychology conference? I recently attended one in which I was the only person amongst some forty professors who seriously considered the possibility that morality might actually be maladaptive.

sci.bio.evolution: Re: Darwin's morality

MR:

Well that was your problem. You attended an evolutionary psychology course. Evolutionary psychology is just a politically correct term for sociobiology. Since sociobiology is highly genetically deterministic morality may be seen as maladaptive e.g. going against nature.

PR:

You couldn't be more wrong about the widespread pandemic of panadaptationism in the halls of higher learning, IMHO.

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Phil

Roberts, Jr.

Why We Turned Out Like Captain Kirk Instead of Mr. Spock:

The Psychodynamics of Genetic Indeterminism

<http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/dada/90/Kirk.htm>

"It's uncertain whether intelligence has any long term survival value. Bacteria do quite well without it."

Stephen Hawking