

## Re: Darwin's morality

**Source:** <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.bio.evolution/2004-10/0080.html>

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**From:** Phil Roberts, Jr. ([philrob\\_at\\_ix.netcom.com](mailto:philrob_at_ix.netcom.com))

**Date:** 10/03/04

Date: Sun, 3 Oct 2004 22:16:02 +0000 (UTC)

Michael Ragland wrote:

- >
- > *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.*
- > *(Nathaniel Branden).*
- >
- > *MR:*
- > *I don't have any control over the estimate a person places on themself*
- > *or the environmental and genetic factors which play a part in that.*

I wasn't talking about others. I was talking about the motivation underlying almost everything human beings do, including WHAT YOU AND I ARE DOING RIGHT HERE AND NOW. This discussion is probably about 2% a quest for truth, and about 98% about intellectual one upmanship, in which each of us is striving to demonstrate to a bunch of lurkers that he is the intellectual king of the hill. Of course, its not easy to admit this. Its a little like being caught in the middle of masterbating. You and I are engaged in striving to maximize our self-worth by finding evidence of that we are charming, witty, brilliant, in touch with a truth that we are striving to bring to the poor unfortunate masses if only they could see the light, 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.*

You don't. But there are probably about twenty million Muslims who, in spite of their abhorrence of violence, probably were thinking that its about time we got a taste of our own medicine (e.g., the millions of displaced refugees resulting from what, from their perspective, constitutes a biased foreign policy favoring the Israeli's).

Where you see evil, a lot of them see justice. Like beauty, good is often in the eye of the beholder. That's why the term 'noble' was placed in quotes. It was supposed to alert you to the fact that noble causes are often in the eye of the beholder. You know, my little quip about the fact that most of the evil in the world is the result of folks simply trying to impose their own particular view of good on the rest of us. You don't really think the 9/11 terrorists saw themselves as perpetrating evil, do you? After all, God himself was on their side just as he was on ours when we decided to arm the Israeli's to the teeth. :)

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> *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 examples 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.*

>

But evil in the guise of "ruthless selfishness" is not biologically enigmatic. What we need to understand is why there is any good at all, e.g., why there is a warm spot in our hearts for "Love your neighbor as you love yourself":

Be warned that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us try to TEACH generosity and altruism, because WE ARE BORN SELFISH. Let us understand what our selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have the chance to UPSET THEIR DESIGNS, SOMETHING THAT NO OTHER SPECIES HAS EVER ASPIRED TO. (Dawkins) [emphasis mine]

The identification of individuals as the unit of selection is a central theme in Darwin's thought. This idea underlies his most radical claim: that evolution is purposeless and without inherent direction. ... Evolution does not recognize the 'good' of the ecosystem' or even the 'good of the species.' Any harmony or stability is only an indirect result of individuals relentlessly pursuing their own self-interest — in modern parlance, getting more of their genes into

future generations by greater reproductive success. Individuals are the unit of selection; the "struggle for existence" is a matter among individuals (Stephen Gould).

\_With very few exceptions\_, the only parts of the theory of natural selection which have been supported by mathematical models admit no possibility of the evolution of any characters which are on average to the disadvantage of the individuals possessing them. If natural selection followed the classical models exclusively, species would not show any behavior more positively social than the coming together of the sexes and parental care....

Clearly from a gene's point of view it is worthwhile to deprive a large number of distant relatives in order to extract a small reproductive advantage. (W. D. Hamilton)

Like Chicago gangsters, our genes have survived, in some cases for millions of years, in a highly competitive world. This entitles us to expect certain qualities in our genes. I shall argue that a predominant quality to be expected in a successful gene is ruthless selfishness. This gene selfishness will usually give rise to selfishness in individual behavior. However, as we shall see, there are special circumstances in which a gene can achieve its own selfish goals best by fostering a limited form of altruism. 'Special' and 'limited' are important words in the last sentence. Much as we might wish to believe otherwise, universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts which simply do not make evolutionary sense (Dawkins).

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).

Humans and baboons 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 that when we go and look at the behaviour of baboons, humans, and all other living creatures, we shall find it to be selfish. If we find that our expectation is wrong, if we observe that human behavior is truly altruistic, then we shall be faced with something puzzling, **SOMETHING THAT NEEDS EXPLAINING**

[my caps] (Richard Dawkins).

Unlike [Lorentz and Montagu], I think 'nature red in tooth and claw' sums up our modern understanding of natural selection admirably. (Dawkins).

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> *MR:*

> *Well the quote by Donald Campbell totally refutes your assertion.*

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> *"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).*

No. You've misunderstood. Campbell is not talking about what "is" but about what theoretically "ought" to be, and the huge discrepancy which currently exists between the two. He's implicitly saying the same thing as Dawkins, that the social cohesion in human culture is currently beyond the naturalistic pale, i.e., that its "something that needs explaining".

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> *MR:*

> *Just out of curiosity could you lead me to an article which Dawkins*

> *states clearly he is not a genetic determinist.*

As an enthusiastic Darwinian, I have been dissatisfied with explanations which my fellow-enthusiasts have offered for human behaviour. They have tried to look for 'biological advantages' in various attributes of human civilization. For instance, tribla religion has been seen as a mechanisms for solidifying group identity, valuable for a pack-hunting species whose individuals rely on cooperation to catch large and fast prey. Frequetnly the evolutionary preconception in terms of which such theories are framed is implicitly group-selectionist, but it is possible to rephrase the theories in terms of orthodox gene selection. Man may well have spent large portions of the last sseveral million years living in small kin groups. Kin selectio and selection in favour of reciprocal altruism may have acted on human genes to produce many of our basic psychological attributes and tendencies. These ideas are plausible as far as they go, but I find they do not begin to square up to the formidable challenge of explaining culture, cultural evolution, and the immense differences between human cultures around the world, from the utter selfishness of the Ik of Uganda, as described by Colin Turnbull, to the gental altruism of Margaret Mead's Arapesh. I think we have got to start again and go right

back to first principles. The argument I shall advance, surprising as it may seem coming from the author of the earlier chapters, is that, for an understanding of the evolution of modern man, we must begin by throwing out the gene as the sole basis of our ideas on evolution. I am an enthusiastic Darwinian, but I think Darwinism is too big a theory to be confined to the narrow context of the gene. The gene will enter my thesis as an analogy, nothing more. (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 205).

- > *I'm also not sure de*
- > *Waal is a genetic determinist. Could you provide an article to that*
- > *effect?*

He is arguing (e.g., 'Good Natured') via evidence of a certain amount of benevolence observable in species phylogenetically proximal to man, that goodness is adaptive, and as such is the direct product of natural selection as opposed to Dawkins, and implicitly most of the founding fathers of sociobiology, that you simply can not use the logic of natural selection to explain human nature via any known direct route. Dawkins is maintaining that natural selection is going to need an addendum, tentatively referred to as "memetics", as a place holder for whatever it is that is going to fill the explanatory void. It is my contention that psychodynamics is going to fill this void and, as such, I see myself, via Hume (see my URL below) as putting some flesh on the bones of Dawkins' proposal.

- > *Also, could you provide an article stating Hamilton is not a*
- > *genetic determinist e.g. I believe he came up with kin selection.*

You have to understand something here. Wilson got sociobiology off to a very bad start with his last chapter in 'Sociobiology' in which he implied, if not directly stated, that the new discoveries by the likes of Fisher, Haldane, Price, Hamilton, hold the promise of a complete reduction of morality to biology. He still maintains this, whereas guys like me think that parts of biology are actually going to reduce to psychodynamics, e.g., the moralization mechanism that, indeed, much of physics (e.g., the paradoxes and anomalies) might actually reduce to psychology (e.g., our imposition of concepts such as existence, occurrence, property, cause and effect, etc. in order to understand nature). My theory is GROUNDED in natural selection, but explains the how and why of how the introduction of rational agency into the process has resulted in a whole new ball game.

- > *I know*
- > *Gould isn't a genetic determinist.*

Both Dawkins and Gould are indeterminists when it comes to human nature. The difference is that Gould thinks the problem is with our understanding of natural selection whereas Dawkins thinks the problem is with our understanding of human nature. I'm in the Dawkins camp in that I think the reason that our formal models of natural selection are out of sync with it arise from the fact that all our formal models assume natural selection is a blind mechanical process, but with the advent of man and his phylogentic neighbors natural selection has acquired "eyes".

- > *I think everybody knows that. And it*
- > *is simplistic to label Wilson a genetic determinist because he does*
- > *acknowledge the role of the environment.*

Perhaps, but a determinist nonetheless, in that Wilson thinks everything is going to reduce to physics, whereas guys like myself and Dawkins think its might just be possible that rational creatures can actually transcend the rules of nature once they have been identified.

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- > *MR:*
- > *Well if its not adaptive what good is it?*

Its not any good from nature's perspective to have creatures that care about non-related others. Its a price that has to be paid if you want to have rational creatures do the heavy lifting, in that they eventually acquire global understandings and values that go far beyond what is necessary to perpetuate their DNA, including coming to question their own "will to survive" in the guise of 'feelings of worthlessness'.

- >
- > *MR:*
- > *What? What the hell do you think the stock market is? The oil in Iraq,*
- > *Saudi Arabia, Russia, Venuzuela? 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*
- > *Chechnans 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 believe, that among other things, the need for self worth includes needs for love, attention, religion, moral integrity, power, wealth, purpose, meaning, autonomy, justice, etc. Assuming just about everything you have mentioned above would come under one of these headings, then you can assume that I am maintaining that most if not all of your examples are actually being driven by ego–related emotional needs far more than is commonly appreciated rather than material needs, as we would expect to find in a species of naturally selected organism. Take away ego–related need, and I believe we would have the same motivations that govern behavior in a pride of lions, another social species at the top of the food chain. Once they have filled their bellies and screwed their mates, they have nothing to do but lay around snapping at an occasional fly or two. We can't do that, because we have an appetite they don't have, our insatiable lust for self–significating experience.

- > *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.*

I think you are confusing an increased ABILITY to reek havoc on the world via advances in technology with an increase in evil intent. Compared to other species, most of us are considerably more caring than is currently biologically explainable:

By human standards, life in a fish school or a baboon troop is tense and brutal. The sick and injured are ordinarily left where they fall, without so much as a pause in the routine business of feeding, resting and mating. The death of a dominant male is usually followed by nothing more than a shift in the dominance hierarchy, perhaps accompanied, as in the case of langurs and lions, by the murder of the leader's youngest offspring (E. O. Wilson).

Ethologists consider other animals relatively peaceful if they see but one or two aggressive encounters while observing an organism for, say tens of hours. But think of how many millions

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of hours we can log for most people on most days without noting anything more threatening than a raised third finger once a week or so. (Stephan Gould).

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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>