

Re: Group selected altruism – (was: Hamilton's rule)

Source: <http://sci.tech–archive.net/Archive/sci.bio.evolution/2005–12/msg00015.html>

- *From:* "Jim McGinn" <jimmcginn@xxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Thu, 1 Dec 2005 13:16:39 –0500 (EST)
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Guy Hoelzer wrote:

> in article dmi627\$b5o\$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, Jim McGinn at
> jimmcginn@xxxxxxxxxx wrote on 11/29/05 10:18 AM:
>
>> "Guy Hoelzer" <hoelzer@xxxxxxx> wrote
>>
>>> . . . your position assumes
>>> that genetics is the sole conduit of heredity in biological systems. I
>>> don't think it is controversial at all to claim that there are other modes
>>> of biological inheritance (e.g., epigenetics, cultural inheritance).
>> Even
>>> if genetic elements flow in and out of a group without restriction, it
>>> remains possible that exchange among groups is restricted with regard to
>>> other modes of inheritance. This setting permits a group–level
>>> manifestation of natural selection even without a restriction to gene
>> flow.
>>
>> It took me a while to figure out where you were going with this and why. I
>> think I know what you are saying now. I think what you are saying is that
>> some groups have the ability to maintain their relative separateness through
>> cultural practices. So the fact that there is no external isolating factor
>> that serves to preserve the structural integrity of the group (and that thus
>> insures that group behavior benefits the members of the group and not
>> non–members) does not mean that there won't be cultural practices that
>> achieve the same end. Assuming this is what you are saying I agree.
>
> Thanks for reflecting, Jim. You got the idea right, although I didn't mean
> to restrict our thinking to just 2 modes of inheritance: genetic and
> cultural.

I don't know what you mean by this and I also don't know

I would recommend approaching putative levels of organization at
> which natural selection might operate with an open mind as to modes of
> inheritance that might apply. We have been studying natural selection at
> the level both empirically and in theory for a long time now, and we have
> characterized the genetic mode of inheritance well, though not completely

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> (e.g., the influence of genomic imprinting). The issue of cultural
> inheritance is at least familiar to most of us. However, the structures of
> dynamical systems at other scales of organization are different than the
> one(s) with which we are familiar, and I think one of the first questions we
> should ask when venturing into a novel system is "what are the operational
> modes of inheritance in the system?"

I don't see why it's necessary or useful to refer to them as
"operational modes." And it's not clear to me what "other scales of
organization," you are referring too. We're in danger of talking past
each other.

I think a lot of the potential for confusion lies in the fact that few
evolutionists bother to distinguish between units of selection and
levels of biological phenomena. It's a recipe for confusion. (And,
IMO, this is the reason that group selection is mistakenly dismissed by
many adherents of the current paradigm.) And the reason it's so
important to distinguish is because one of these is relative and the
other is absolute, and one of these is real and the other is unreal.
Do you know which is which and why? If you and I could achieve some
kind of consensus on this it would go a long way toward also achieving
some kind of consensus on group selection.

Beyond this I'm still a little perplexed as to why you want to discuss
inheritance. I'm not sure if you're overanalogizing, mixing metaphors,
or if I'm missing your point.

Jim

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◆ *Re: Group selected altruism – (was: Hamilton's rule)*

◇ *From:* Guy Hoelzer

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