

Re: Sociobiology explains one more aspect of morality

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"sinister" <sinister@nospam.invalid> wrote in message news:<Y8FXc.8423\$2F.5537@trnddc05>...

> *"Socialism is a Mental Disease"* <root@localhost.> wrote in message

> news:rb4ti0pqk4fviolltkomhtvuj3sdcrr2n@4ax.com...

>> *On Thu, 26 Aug 2004 17:41:27 -0700, The Trucker <mikcob@verizon.net>*

>> *wrote:*

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>>> *There may be a connection between animal instinct and "rights". But*

>>> *using the word morality will not get you there.*

>>>

>>

>> *Rights are the foundation on which absolute morality rests. And I'm*

>> *using the word "morality" within the context of moral philosophy, not*

>> *the household definition.*

>

> *Again, what is "absolute" morality?*

>

> *And speaking of moral philosophy, what would moral philosopher's say about*

> *"Rights are the foundation on which absolute morality rests."? (I'm not*

> *sure.)*

>

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>> *"A democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where fifty-one*

>> *percent of the people may take away the rights of the other*

>> *forty-nine." -- Thomas Jefferson*

I approach the issue of morality slightly differently, but get to the same kinds of questions. For instance, the science of complexity is based on the observation that physical systems have certain properties. As the systems become more "complex" new properties emerge that the simpler system did not have. A simple example: subatomic particles behave according to the laws of quantum mechanics.

When they combine into atoms, they exhibit properties that individual particles do not, and they generally become much more stable with

longer half-lives. Also, when atoms combine they form molecules which likewise have properties that individual atoms do not, e.g. they form salts and bases and acids and plastics, etc. And, certain combinations of molecules exhibit the property of self-replication and life.

It would be silly to talk about the morality of a stone because it does not have the complexity necessary to exhibit any properties that one might describe as morality. So the question is, to me, what properties must an organism have in order to have "moral capacity."

Another principle of complexity science states that all systems are composed of and constrained by simpler systems. For instance, the physical laws of electromagnetism apply to humans as much as they do to a single photon of light. No biological process can violate the constraints of the basic laws of electromagnetism. Or, Charles' or Boyle's Laws of gases governing pressure, density and diffusion. So to understand the capabilities of any physical system (and I consider the human animal a physical system so I am not a dualist) one would need to know what simpler systems constrained the human animal.

Here comes another element of complex systems. They evolve. That is, they have a history which means they did not spring forth fully formed from nothing. Therefore, all organisms are constrained by their ancestors, and indeed their more complex properties emerge from the less complex systems from which they derive.

And, as physical systems are composed of components, e.g. the particles that form atoms, which form molecules, which form organisms, organisms can also form systems we call societies. Ant colonies, bees, baboons, elephants, you name it. All social animals form a physical system which is the social group. If the one selective force for evolution is "natural" selection, or simply survival over time in changing conditions external to the system, then there must be some survival greater advantage to social systems over individual survival. These advantages can be found generally in cooperative behaviors. Such cooperative behaviors are the evolutionary precursors of moral behavior.

There are many more emerged properties between a bacteria colony and morality, which I will not bore you with further, but suffice it to say that I believe a careful analysis of the additional emerged properties is necessary to identify what we really mean by moral behavior.

I believe that morality is a property of a physical system, i.e., human society composed of individual humans. (Would there be morality for a single person living on a deserted island?) I believe that there is such a thing as "moral capacity" which requires the maturation of cognitive capacities for choosing one's actions based on a prediction of the desired consequences, self-awareness which allows

the individual to make choices based on consciously trying to achieve one's self-interest, what I have describe in other places as "other-consciousness" which is the ability to see the world through the mental perception of other individuals. The combination of Self-awareness and other-consciousness can produce an identification between the self and others one views with other-consciousness. (It is an emergent property that does not always emerge in all individual humans) This is, IMO, the source of the notion of human equality, that is, the equal value of each human having or achieving what will make him happy. In Jefferson's famous words, all people have an equal "right" to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The conflict between self-conscious self-interest and the identification with others for whom one has other-consciousness, and thus views as an abstraction of the self, which necessitates a set of rules about how to make choices whose consequences give equal value to the self and those for whom one has other-consciousness.

Why do some people who consider themselves highly moral kill other people? Because they do not view them with other-consciousness and therefore as their equal. Don't believe this. Why do some people eat hamburgers? Because they do not see cows as their equal—with other-consciousness. The extreme animal rights advocates do, however. Hence the claims of animal rights. But even the most extreme animal rights advocate does not apply the same logic/empathy to vegetables, which are also living organisms. But they do not have any consciousness, at least not that we are able to see the world through like we do our fello animals. Do you suppose that the animal rights people slap mosquitos that bite them, or step on cockroaches in their kitchen. They probably do, but some Buddhist monks would not.

We can find many examples of what I would call pre-moral behavior in social animals many degrees of relation separate from humans. Any social animal will exhibit behavior that show restraint in the use of the individual animal's physical ability. For most mammals whose males engage in some form of physical combat in competition for a group of females to mate with will not fight to the death, but rather stop short. Is this "moral" behavior? I don't think so, but it certainly is restrained behavior that has the potential for providing a reproductive advantage.

Sorry I got so longwinded. (not proofread)