

CHAPTER NINE THE PROPER PLACE OF SELFISHNESS

Is morality as well as every other action of our lives driven by selfishness, as is the claim by the Super-Neos of science?

That is, even when we think we are driven by a self-transcendent desire to do good in the world, are we—as they have claimed study after study shows—in fact driven by selfishness?

Do we do good in the world just to win praise or gain something from others?

Are we, as claimed by the book that became a bright building block of PseudoDarwinian Mind, ultimately driven by selfish genes?¹

No matter how much we might wish the case were otherwise, the answer is not a simple matter of yes or no. Yet of the things we prefer to skip if at all complex, the answer here remains one of the most important bearing on the future of our species.

In other words, it will pay to puzzle it through.

Here Darwin roams the territory in search of the proper place for selfishness in our understanding of human evolution. . .²

It has been assumed by philosophers of the derivative school of morals that the foundation of morality lies in a form of selfishness. More recently the

"greatest happiness principle" advocated by Mr. Bentham and the Utilitarians has been brought prominently forward.³

It is, however, more correct to speak of the latter principle as the standard, and not as the motive of conduct. In other words, while the greater happiness for the greatest number among us may be a measure of or desirable goal for morality, it is not the motivator for morality.

If we turn to consider what is this motivator we find that most of the authors I have consulted think there must be a distinct motive for every action, and that this must be associated with some pleasure or displeasure.⁴ Two exceptions are J.S. Mill, who although a Utilitarian and an advocate of the greatest happiness principle, recognizes in his System of Logic in the clearest manner that actions may be performed through habit without the anticipation of pleasure.

In this regard, I think a dim similar feeling that our impulses do not always arise from anticipated pleasure has been a chief cause of the acceptance of the intuitive theory of morality, for which I am providing a naturalistic or evolutionary explanation. I also think this same feeling must lead us to reject the utilitarian or "greatest happiness" theory.⁵

For if we simply observe ourselves it is evident we often act impulsively—that is, from instinct or long habit, without any consciousness of pleasure. Moreover, we do this in the same manner as does probably a bee or ant when it blindly follows its instincts.

Under circumstances of extreme peril, as during a fire, when we endeavor to save a fellow-creature without a moment's hesitation, it certainly cannot be said we feel pleasure. Still less, in such circumstances, do we have the time to reflect

on the dissatisfaction with ourselves we may experience if we do not make the attempt. Should we afterward reflect on our conduct we would feel there lies within us an impulsive power widely different from the search for pleasure or happiness—an impulsive power that the evidence I present indicates is the result of the deeply planted social instinct.⁶

In the case of the lower animals, it seems much more appropriate to speak of their social instincts as having been developed for the general good rather than for the general happiness of the species. **This general good I would define as the rearing of the greatest number of individuals in full vigor and health, with all their faculties perfect.**⁷

In short, basing our standard on this heritage of instinct we share with possibly all other creatures, we may take as the standard of morality the general good or welfare of the community, rather than the general happiness, although this definition may require some limitation on account of political ethics.⁸

When we risk our lives to save those of a fellow-creature, it also seems more correct to say that we act for the general good rather than for the general happiness of humankind. We have further seen that, even at an early period in the history of our species, the expressed wishes of the community must powerfully influence the conduct of each member. As all wish for happiness, the "greatest happiness principle" will become an important secondary guide and object.

But the social instinct, together with sympathy—which leads to our concerns regarding the approval or disapproval of others—remains the

primary impulse and guide.⁹

Thus the reproach is removed of laying the foundation of the noblest part of our nature in the base principle of selfishness—unless indeed the satisfaction which every animal feels when it follows its proper instincts, and the dissatisfaction felt when prevented, be called selfish.¹⁰

“The foundation of the noblest part of our nature” does not lie in “the base principle of selfishness.”

What could be clearer regarding Darwin’s basic conviction as a young man and as an old man, as well as his scientific conclusion based on thousands of observations at both the prehuman and human levels of emergence about the celebration of selfishness? And yet, as we can see, he qualifies this ringing statement with the loop hole that allows the sociobiologists wiggle room to get back in.

Back and forth, back and forth between “caring for others” and “selfishness” he goes. But what in the end is he saying? Let’s take a look at another passage.

The Majesty and Mystery of Sympathy¹¹

The all-important emotion of sympathy is distinct from that of love. A mother may passionately love her sleeping and passive infant, but she can hardly at such times be said to feel sympathy for it. The love of a man for his dog is distinct from sympathy, and so is that of a dog for his master.

Adam Smith formerly argued, as has Mr. Bain recently, that the basis of sympathy lies in our strong retentiveness of former states of pain or pleasure.

Hence, "the sight of another person enduring hunger, cold, fatigue, revives in us some recollection of these states, which are painful even in idea."

We are thus impelled to relieve the sufferings of another in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved. In like manner we are led to participate in the pleasures of others.

This is a point made in the first and striking chapter in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*¹² and also in Mr. Bain's *Mental and Moral Science*. "Sympathy," Mr. Bain states, "is, indirectly, a source of pleasure to the sympathizer." He accounts for this through reciprocity. "The person benefited, or others in his stead, may make up, by sympathy and good offices returned, for all the sacrifice," he says.

But if, as appears to be the case, sympathy is strictly an instinct,¹³ its exercise would give direct pleasure in the same manner as the exercise of almost every other instinct.¹⁴

I cannot see how this well-known view of Smith and Bain explains the fact that, for example, sympathy is excited in an immeasurably stronger degree by a beloved than by an indifferent person. The explanation may lie in the fact that, with all animals, sympathy is directed solely towards the members of the same community, and therefore toward known and more or less beloved members, but not to all individuals of the same species.¹⁵

This fact is not more surprising than that the fears of many animals should be directed against special enemies. Species that are not social, such as lions and tigers, no doubt feel sympathy for the suffering of their own young, but not for that of any other animal.

With our species, selfishness, experience, and imitation probably add,

as Mr. Bain has shown, to the power of sympathy. It seems true, as he and Mr. Smith have argued, that in many instances we are led by the hope of receiving good in return to perform acts of sympathetic kindness to others. Sympathy of this kind would also be much strengthened by habit. But basically my point is that in however complex a manner this feeling may have originated, as it is one of high importance to all those animals that aid and defend one another, it will have been increased through natural selection.

This seems probable because communities that included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members would flourish best, and rear the greatest numbers of offspring.¹⁶

Whatever else is going on here, at least one thing is evident. The much ballyhooed “pioneering” of sociobiologists Robert Trivers, famous for revealing the selfish core for the idea of “reciprocal altruism,” and W.D. Hamilton, famous for doing the same for the idea of “kinship selection,” could hardly be called pioneering. Darwin, it is now obvious, was already there over 100 years earlier— but primed to go further in search of “the truth.”

I will repeat two of several similar passages that come up within a few lines of each other on a single page.

Darwin on Triver’s “Reciprocal Altruism”

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Darwin on Hamilton's "Kinship Selection"

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Even so, because of the success of the half-truth of Trivers' and Hamilton's easy answers, many biologists and psychologists casting about for something to do that might make a name for themselves and sell a book or two went to work. And out of the publishers into the bookstores went sprightly packaged tomes on the scientific celebration of selfishness. And the corporate raiders, investment sharks, and rightwing politicians read them, and told their clients and financiers of this new thing so useful to their purposes. And this particular bog hole of PseudoDarwinian Mind spread and spread and grew and grew.

But then in from the outer darkness into which he had been shoved by Darwin's self-proclaimed most favored heirs emerged a crusader out to give the Super- Neos their comeuppance.

The New Doctrine of the New Wilson

Among the Super-Neos the best known Wilson, as we are to see, was E.O. Wilson, originator of the field of sociobiology. But now, backed by his own study of 30 years and a claim of 400 confirming studies by others, it was the contention of a new Wilson, biologist David Sloan Wilson this time, that goodness was *not* driven by selfishness or selfish genes, but rather by cooperation.¹⁷

Nor was evolution solely a matter of individual organisms contending with one another for who was to triumph in passing on one's own genes according to the dictates of natural selection, as asserted by the Neos and the Super-Neos for over 50 years. Instead, David Sloan Wilson maintained that evolution as well as goodness was even more importantly advanced by an apparently new principle of *group selection*.

That is, ranging from the community of slime molds to tribes and nations at our level, we evolve through a process of the evolutionary selection of *groups* that showed the best capacity for cooperating and working well with others within the group.

Perhaps the single most revealing thing about the intrusion of the new Wilson was how it was greeted by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists—and this, rather than being an aside, is a vital hidden part to this story, for it reveals the ferocity with which the captives of the paradigm that buried Darwin's higher half can act when their version of the old basic doctrine is threatened.

In science, as in politics and many other areas, there is a "gentleman's code" that generally governs what one says and does to advance one's own cause. But in a frenzy bringing to mind the McCarthy years in the U.S. or the tactics of the Spanish Inquisition, out the window went this code as the Super-Neos out to make a name for themselves and sell books turned to everything they could think of to mount an attack

against this dreadful group selectionist heresy. How could any self-respecting scientist dare raise the prospect that evolution might be advanced by—perish the thought and wash your mouth out with soap—“goodness,” rather than by the entrenched doctrinal requirement of selfishness and brutality.

Careers were checked, academic advancement blocked, publication denied, even the informal equivalent of the infamous loyalty oath imposed. Rather than use up more vital text space on this miserable aspect of the fiasco, in the notes I provide a look behind scenes through the eyes of a warrior in the trenches.¹⁸

With the aid of philosopher Eliot Sober, Wilson finally got the group selectionist theory and story out into the open with the Harvard University Press publication of the book *Unto Others*.¹⁹ Soon it was being hailed as providing the ultimate answer to the rise of goodness and the drive of goodness in evolution. But again the fact of the matter bumped up against the tunnel-vision of post-Darwinian science. For again there were questions and problems.

The first problem was that Darwin had also written all this out during those hard winters over 100 years earlier. The only difference was that Darwin had called it *community* selection rather than group selection.

The Dynamics of Community Selection

With strictly social animals, natural selection sometimes acts indirectly on the individual through the preservation of variations which are beneficial only to the community.²⁰ Although a high standard of morality gives but a slight or no advantage to individuals and their children over others of the same tribe, yet an advancement in the standard of morality and an increase in the number of well-

endowed people will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another. There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members who—from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good—would be victorious over most other tribes, and this would be natural selection.²¹

So we have the pioneering of the new Wilson also preceded by Darwin. Of further interest is the outcome that Darwin thought would prevail.

At all times throughout the world, tribes have supplanted other tribes, and as morality is one element in their success, the standard of morality and the number of well-endowed men will thus everywhere tend to rise and increase.²²

Again, however, there are problems—and they seem pretty big ones. What Darwin called community selection and Wilson calls group selection has undoubtedly worked to the good in many cases in our past.

There can be no doubt that it also works in many places to our advantage today and will continue to do so into the future. This has been amply proven not only by the work of David Sloan Wilson, but also by the 400 other studies in which he says he’s found support for this conclusion. But if we take a good look at the big picture again in terms of the work of GERG member and cultural evolution theorist Riane Eisler, we can see how group selection seems to have also accounted for some of the worst recorded evolutionary regressions in ancient as well as modern times.

The problem, Eisler’s work shows, is the havoc wreaked by “group selection”

when coupled with the “dominator model” for human relations. Hers, and the work of archeologist Marija Gimbutas and many others, shows how such appealing values as patriotism, loyalty to, and most certainly sympathy for, one another, vividly bound together two prototypical examples in the history of our species of dominator model group selection at work.

The pivotal group— which the work of Eisler, Gimbutas, and many others shows radically changed the course of human evolution for the worse— were the Indo-European tribes who starting around 5,000 years ago set out in five directions from the steppes of what is today Russia to bash their neighbors and culturally establish the dominator model which gradually spread worldwide. More recent is the example of Hitler and the Nazis, who most horribly exemplify the devastation of dominator model group selection in modern times.²³ My own development of Evolutionary Action Theory probes the pro and con dynamics involved here in terms of Eisler’s partnership and dominator model differences.²⁴

Notable for both the Indo-Europeans and the Nazis was their fierce and overbearing conviction of their own Nietzschean moral superiority over the “weak” and “immoral” people —that is, for the Nazis, their contempt for Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and everybody foolish enough to believe in democracy. The result was that the early Indo-Europeans have been seen by modern scholars properly indoctrinated in the old Darwinian paradigm —as did also the Nazis see themselves— as the “fittest” displacing the “unfit” and the “misfit” in what was proclaimed an advance for evolution.

One also only has to look around our world today to see the same force or mindset of “subhuman” group selection working not only against moral advancement but indeed also human evolution by any sensible definition in the case of the Islamic

terrorists as well as our own home-grown Mafia— whose faces and tactics I came to know quite well during my earlier years in television news. Through a telephoto lens and the phone logs supplied by an inside contact within the FBI, for months back then I studied what I see now was the group selection process in action.²⁵

Whether the aim is to destroy Israel and America or up crime another notch with a higher professional level for extortion and corruption, the goal is always conquest, which one drives toward with the sympathy, cooperation, and loyalty of one's own savage cohort or "family."

The other problem is that as Wilson and in part Darwin defined community/group selection, while excellent for promoting *in-group* cooperation, it can be hell on wheels for *out-group* relations.

If we take a close look at what Wilson has given 30 years of work to prove, what is actually going on? Again and again the picture is of the members of the in-group involved in a great love fest of cooperation in order to better prevail in bashing in the heads and grabbing off the territory of the out- groups!

In other words, in another example of the devastation of the half-truth that as we're repeatedly seeing riddles post-Darwinian theory—albeit with a considerable touch of light through the clouds this time— we have gone from a scientific hang up on individual selfishness to a new hang up on *group* selfishness.

Darwin Himself on Selfishness vs. Altruism

So what is the truth here? Having broken out of the grave in Westminster Abbey to which it was thought he had conveniently been socked away for good, the time has come for the lost Darwin to step forth, clear his throat, and after the lapse of

over a century, wrap up all that is still puzzling about what he and others have had to say about selfishness.

Let us go back not only to those winters of 1868-69 and 1869-70 and Darwin writing there in his study while the wind blows and his children drift in and out. Let us return to the young Darwin back from the voyage of the Beagle at work and at play.

Something you will not find in any biography I know of is the argument he was having with the redoubtable Harriet Martineau those nights out on the town with Harriet and his older brother Ras.²⁶ Atop her pioneering work in sociology and political economy, Martineau was also busy setting herself up as an expert on moral development.²⁷ Fervently she maintained what became today's Super-Neo view that selfishness is the basic motivator for morality and goodness. But young Darwin refused to go along with her. Equally fervently he held firm to the idea that the moral sense rises from a motivational system other than "the base principle of selfishness."

At some point during 1837 in his notebook he writes of the difference between moral sensitivity and morality:

"we admire what is right by one and are ordered to do it by the other."²⁸

On October 2, 1838:

"Society could not go on except for the moral sense, any more than a hive of Bees without their instincts."²⁹

On May 5, 1839:

“in man we should expect that acts of benevolence toward fellow creatures, or of kindness to wife and children would give him pleasure, without any regard to his own interest.”³⁰

In other words, over a 30 year span of time and beyond that to the end of his life, while puzzling over the details, here is what Darwin believed was the basic truth in this case. Yes, we are in part and in many situations selfishly motivated to do good in the world.

But we are fundamentally mistaken if, as did the Super-Neos, Harriet Martineau, and countless others, we get hung up on this as the sole answer— for yes, we are *also* motivated to do good in the world simply through love and caring for others.

Moreover—for again and again this is the obvious fact about our motivations that is so difficult for those driven to see everything in terms of it must be either this or that—we are also motivated to do good through a mix at work within ourselves of both selfishness and caring for others.

It varies according to differences of person and circumstance, *but at the core are two systems at work in ourselves and in evolution: in effect the Love System that Darwin sought to define in Descent and the Domination System he described in Origin.*³¹

In our last chapters I will return to this fundamental point truly revolutionary in its implications for both the theory and the story not only of human evolution, but of evolution from the time of the hypothetical Big Bang that splayed our galaxy across the vast blackboard of space, up to now, and beyond as far as we can see.

That’s the deeper part of it. More immediately, in terms of what we have been looking at, the most important thing about the selfishness vs. altruism debate, the

celebration of selfishness, and the bog hole of PseudoDarwinian Mind ever gaping before us and ready to suck us into it, is this:

Both individually and as a species we are driven to move from selfishness toward caring for others as a matter of evolution itself—that is, of development, or simply growing up either individually or as a species.

We'll come back to more of this in Darwin.

And there is this of importance: *This is also the message of the great spiritual and religious visionaries.*

Contrary to being the Antichrist or Great Satan of the Creationists, this is what Darwin also tells us both as a young man, as we saw in chapter one, and as an old man in passages in this chapter as well as those still lying ahead.

This is also the message of every major work I know of in the field of developmental psychology and psychiatry—all of which were so persistently and thoroughly ignored by mainstream evolution theorists throughout the 20th century.

That is, this is the message of the work of Eric Ericson, Jane Loevinger, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, and Daniel Stern, as well as Abraham Maslow, Roberto Assagioli, and Kazimierz Dabrowski, whose place in the lost story of the substantiation of the lost theory we will come to here in chapter seventeen.