

## CHAPTER TEN                    THE CELEBRATION OF SELFISHNESS, OR SELFISHNESS *UBER ALLES*

As we are beginning to see, science is one thing, and what society makes of it can be another.

Given their leadership and enormous financial contribution to rebuilding Europe and Japan after World War II and similar moves internationally, worldwide Americans have enjoyed a reputation as a generous people. However, three periods of American history have been notable for a radical escalation in—or what could even be called an epidemic of—selfishness. Is the fact these periods happen to coincide with pivotal escalations for NeoDarwinian science merely a coincidence?

The best known of these marker periods was the late 19<sup>th</sup> century “grab it all up for me and to hell with the rest” era of the incredibly wealthy predators known as the Robber Barons. This was preceded by the shakedown cruise for this merry foray known as the Gilded Age. Not coincidentally, many historians have felt, was the hand-in-glove rise of the notoriously predatory doctrine of Social Darwinism, which used the idea of “survival of the fittest” to bless the tactics that still prevail today of the buying up of politicians and elections by financiers and corporations to allow the unchecked exploitation of the many by the few.<sup>1</sup>

The second time was the so-called Roaring Twenties—a time “when acquisition

of wealth again became a national obsession and was again bestowed with theological fervor,” notes the wellknown newsman and television commentator Haynes Johnson in his wonderful account of the Reagan years, *Sleepwalking Through History*.<sup>2</sup> This was also the time period during which much argument over what should and shouldn’t be called Darwin’s theory of evolution was moving toward its major restatement.

This, more formally, is to say that under consolidation by biologists Julian Huxley, Theodosius Dobzhansky and others, what became known as the synthesis or synthetic Darwinian theory was moving toward the decisive statement during the 1930s for the doctrine of neoDarwinism. Curiously in tune with the hell-for-broke investment dynamics that brought on the crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, the classic Darwinian interaction of natural selection and variation— popularly known as “survival of the fittest” —was being scientifically refined by an increasing emphasis on the rock ‘em, sock ‘em play of chance and the random shuffle of genes as the prime shaper of our lives as well as our species’ destiny.

As for the third period, beyond its beginning during the Reagan years and what became known as the Decade of Greed, its end has yet to be established in the history books because, as this book is being written and published, we are still in this era— and this time with forces at play that make the earlier eras look like Sunday school picnics.

How else may one characterize a time when the multi-million-dollar salaries and corruption of CEOs and their henchmen have soared into the stratosphere?

Or presidential and congressional raids on the public treasury for “corporate welfare” are so huge and blatant they were even denounced by the 1996 *Republican* candidate for president Robert Dole?

And extolled as the cure for all that ails us by the first U.S. president for the 21<sup>st</sup> century —as well as driven by the need to pay back those who put up the multi-million-

dollar war chest that under highly questionable circumstances elected him—in three installments of what most economists both publicly and privately hailed as mounting insanity, tax cuts of \$1.7 trillion were passed with the lion's share going to the wealthiest 2 percent of the American population. <sup>3</sup>

Again the interaction between first half Darwinian science, right wing politics and economics, and the celebration of selfishness can be found at work. As first discerned by liberal Darwinists Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Lewontin, Ashley Montagu and others, out of the scientific core to the Super-Neo doctrine rose the selfishness *uber alles* Darwinism of first sociobiology and then the evolutionary psychology both encouraging and resonating to the politics and economics of increasing social disaster.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Selfishness Fiasco*

How PseudoDarwinian Mind operates can be tracked and perhaps best understood if we look at it in terms of the transformation of the bog hole of selfishness into the format for a hypothetical television game show that helped shape the mind of America from the 1970s on into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There were three sides or groups of players in the case of what — exemplified by wildly popular actual television programs such as Survivor, Survivor II, The Weakest Link, You Can Be a Millionaire, and even Greed—we'll call The Selfishness Game Show . The chief scientific players in this Game behind the games were the sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists, of whom we have so far briefly identified Trivers, Hamilton, Dawkins, and E.O. Wilson. The other main group of players came from the religious community. Here the most influential were the

Creationists— who in trying to drive the teaching of evolution out of our schools have actually succeeded to a far greater extent than is generally realized.

As noted in the Prologue, they have done this partly by managing to gain a significant portion of all the newspaper coverage available during the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the subject of evolution. In other words, the space the story of the Creationists versus the Darwinists sopped up might otherwise have gone to the scientific updating of Americans on this vital subject. But more devastating was the degree to which, egged on by the Creationists, rightist threats so intimidated teachers and administrators and school boards that nationwide evolution became the hot potato that school systems and teachers scooted through with the least substance possible. This has left most Americans so monumentally ignorant about the subject of evolution that the masquerade of PseudoDarwinian Mind as science automatically bypasses their intelligence to go straight into their minds into the only slot that is there.<sup>5</sup>

To complete the surrealism of The Selfishness Game Show, the other players from the religious community were of an amorphous group espousing ancient Eastern religious philosophy, New Age quasi-psychology, and rigorously non-reductionist spirituality.

On one side, then, were the new “hard” scientists of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology out to remake “soft” social science with a hard-core biology rooted in the claim of an exclusive and invariant primacy for selfishness as the drive of drives for our species.

On the other side was this amorphous New Age religious group claiming exclusive and invariant primacy for love, all else being illusion and delusion, who were then joined by the Creationists in denouncing all of science as merely reductionist materialism one might better live without.

There was also a third position earlier prefigured by Darwin now being validated and expanded by modern advanced science, as we've seen. But either blanked out in the case of Darwin or locked up in abstruse symposia, isolated small journals, and academic books with little readership, this voice was no match for what became the dynamics of the Big Game Show for PseudoDarwinian Mind. All of which added up to the fact Americans were so dismally under-educated in the "soft" science that affected the quality of their lives— in contrast to the "hard" science behind the rampage of technology— there was little chance they could begin to comprehend what this third voice was saying.

So this was the line-up for The Selfishness Game Show that with the arrival of the 21<sup>st</sup> century ostensibly set the stage for the new millennium. This was the triumph of science as entertainment rather than enlightenment. This was the glittering purveyor of the buck up and knuckle under mixed message of selfishness as the be-all and end-all for evolution on one side, and of love or altruism as the be-all and end-all on the other side— while somewhere in the shadows at the back of the auditorium lurked the third voice unable to be heard.

As by now celebrated in hundreds of books and thousands of papers by the Super-Neos, the initial contribution of the new science to the development of The Game came in 1964. It was then that in intimately probing the life of bees the biologist W.D.Hamilton came on something he felt sure could be put to use to shake up both the world of science and of human society. For some time it had been assumed by the unscientific that the pastoral world of the bee revealed a classic case of altruism in action. For wasn't it obvious the bees were doing good for others by storing up honey for all? Wasn't it further evident they were doing unselfish good in the world by cross-pollinating poor ground-bound plants unable to reproduce otherwise?

But now Hamilton discovered that down beneath this cheery surface, at the driving core, lay the tactics of a gut-cutting selfishness driven by one strain of bees to preserve their own gene pool or bloodline. As Hamilton did this not with test tubes or other suspect contrivances, but with the seeming purity of mathematics which few could understand, his findings were swiftly and widely accepted as unquestionable. Thus the Hamilton articulation of what he called “kinship selection” became a scientific pillar for the Super-Neos.

But no sooner was this pillar in place than critics pointed to the obvious fact that Hamilton’s “kinship selection” cannot possibly account for all the cases where good is done with no possible advance for one’s own kin folk, i.e., one’s own gene pool or bloodline. Now to the rescue came the Rutgers biologist whose work we earlier glimpsed, Robert Trivers, with an ingenious rationale. Beyond the gene pool, he noted, all goodness is driven simply by the feeling that if we do good for others they will be motivated to be good to us in return. Thus was locked in place the second pillar for the Super-Neos and the celebration of selfishness that Trivers called “reciprocal altruism.”

Now the heavy weights for the movement stepped up to blink at the lights and wave at everybody on the stage for the Big Game Show. First came Harvard entomologist E.O. Wilson in 1975 with his extremely well-written and impressive *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Given the lavish visual packaging of a “coffee table book” by Harvard University Press, this became both bible and battleship for the Super-Neo foray.

In this important book Wilson for the first time with any impact in the 20<sup>th</sup> century made a historic contribution typically seldom noted by either the Super-Neos, their critics, or by anybody else. For it was Wilson who first most forcefully injected into mainstream evolution theory the moral discourse lost ever since Darwin’s time.<sup>6</sup>

The understanding Wilson displayed of classical moral philosophy in this book was, within late 20<sup>th</sup> century neoDarwinism, both unparalleled and nowhere to be repeated. Most importantly, however, and rarer still for biologically-deterministic science, displaying the moral fervor of a biblical prophet in decrying the moral dissolution of his—and our—times, Wilson called upon his peers to bring moral evolution back into the scientific discourse. But then after soaring to the heights in the end he came down with a dull thud four square on the selfishness end of the debate.

“True selfishness,” E.O.Wilson wrote after hailing Hamilton and Trivers for their pioneering, “is the key to a more nearly perfect social contract.”<sup>7</sup>

British biologist Richard Dawkins then locked the mindset in place with his engaging book *The Selfish Gene*. Here he tells the avid readership for this best-seller, on page 2, that in a world generated by successful genes driven by a “ruthless selfishness,” “much as we might wish otherwise, universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts that simply do not make evolutionary sense.”<sup>8</sup>

For everybody ready for it—and by this time in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century years of the Nixon, Reagan, and almost back to back Bush U.S. presidencies increasing millions were — this sequence locked in a seemingly impregnable scientific rationale for Selfishness Uber Alles. Quickly responding to the old cry hearkening back to the Gilded Age of really big money to be made, publishers scrambled for manuscripts by junior grade scientists out to make a name for themselves, slick science writers dutifully went to work to sell the sanctified new message, and thereafter ensued the flood of books that built the doctrine of the Super-Neos into the swiftest rising mind seizure for science in modern times.

One aspect of the rapid rise of the Super-Neos is not only mind-boggling in itself, but further highlights the astonishment of what much of this book is about.

It may at first seem rather trivial to anyone who hasn't undergone the process. But to the scientist who has had to survive the gauntlet many of us must run through to gain our doctorates this particularly sticks in the craw.

Hamilton, Trivers, Wilson, and Dawkins— as well as typically almost all of the Super-Neos who wrote the hot, new, Super-Neo books— were or still are teachers mainly of undergraduate and graduate college students. As such, they will typically sternly admonish their own students that before they attempt anything they might consider original work on their own they must first always be sure to “review the literature.”

The sacred rationale for science is that it represents a magnificent structure erected by putting new bricks in place atop the time-tested structure of what is already known. Before setting out on one's own, it's repeatedly stressed, the aspiring neophyte with a “hot idea” for something new *must thoroughly review the basic studies bearing on the area in question* — otherwise there would be neither advance in that area for science, nor in the long run, science itself. Science would become merely a shoddy structure where instead of advance one only had a succession of the same findings given new names.

Yet here they were, very, very likely all of them, belaboring their students to do what they themselves had so obviously and monumentally failed to do in the case of Darwin —the central scientific pioneer to whom all their own work was supposedly keyed.

As can be seen in this chapter and straight on through to the last chapter, repeatedly I must uncover how not only the Super-Neos but a majority of the rest of the scientists and scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century routinely bypassed the sacred “review of the literature” in failing to even decently scan this major book by the man whose theory

they were supposedly explaining, extending, correcting, and defending. *This book that sat there on their own bookshelves virtually staring them in the face year after year unread.*

For not only were the overwhelming majority ignorant of the fact Darwin had ever said anything previously about the subject of morality. They also displayed no knowledge of the pivotal fact we will get to later: that Darwin actually supported the Neos and the Super-Neos on the half-truth upon which they fixated, but on point after point of the whole truth he wholly disagreed with them.<sup>9</sup>

In short, this was the most striking case of the PseudoDarwinian blinding of 20<sup>th</sup> century science.

But not only did it speed up the wholesale tumble of science and society into the bog holes of PseudoDarwinian Mind. More profoundly—moving beyond science into the territory of religion with the chutzpah that for many was the great attraction of the Super-Neos—this dogma accelerated the replacement of the ancient Golden Rule with the scientifically thrice-blessed Brass Rule of the celebration of selfishness.

***To Summarize: From Bog Holes to Roadblocks***

The PseudoDarwinian belief in the primacy of selfishness, or selfishness *uber alles*,

***derives from***

the belief that the overwhelming weight of science backed by the sacred name of Darwin legitimizes—that is, offers the excuse for—selfishness as the new Golden Rule for corporations, governments, and all who aspire to the all-highest positions of power and wealth,

***which in turn derives from***

what hundreds of books by Neos and Super-Neos, reinforced by thousands of textbooks, have trumpeted as experimental, mathematical, and multi-methodological proofs

***which in turn,***

except among hundreds of dissident but largely ignored other scientists, were accepted without question by the compliant ruling majority.<sup>10</sup>

Thus the PseudoDarwinian belief in the primacy of selfishness, or selfishness *uber alles* becomes the motivation and the mindset for the construction of the roadblocks of . . .

*Environmental devastation*—From motorists who litter the highways with empty coke bottles and cigarette butts to the multinational corporations that clear cut forests and dump every conceivable form of poison into the air we breath and

the water we drink, via the greed that blinds us to the needs and rights of others the message becomes clearer with every year.

Carbon emissions from fossil fuels have increased from near-zero a century ago to more than a ton per person today. In the tropical forests, ten trees are cut for every one planted. In the last 20 years over 1.6 billion people were added to the global population, while the world lost to environmental damage 480 billion tons of top-soil, essential for maintaining the food supply.<sup>11</sup>

*Widening of the gap between rich and poor*— In 1960, the global ratio between the earnings of the top 20 percent and the bottom 20 percent was 30:1. By 1990 this had doubled to 61:1; by 1997 to 74:1.

As our species entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in 2000, rather than some suspect “bleeding heart,” or “academic pointy-head,” or “biased liberal think-tanker,” it was *World Bank president* James Wolfensohn who warned “the difference between rich countries and poor countries is getting bigger and within countries the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.”

*Three billion* of the six billion people on earth—in other words, half of the so-called “human family”— live on less than \$2 per day and 1.2 billion of them live on under \$1 a day, Wolfensohn reported.<sup>12</sup>

And in the face of this global need, as the new century began, in the United States a president and congress joined in passing tax cuts of *\$1.7 trillion* mainly benefitting the richest 2 percent of the American population.