

THE SELFLESS GENE: HOW EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY  
FAILED TO OBTAIN ALTRUISM

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A Paper

Presented to

The Annual Meeting of the  
International Society of Christian Apologetics

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Deerfield, IL

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by

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2009

## THE SELFLESS GENE: HOW EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY FAILED TO OBTAIN ALTRUISM

### INTRODUCTION

Even the simple process of defining altruism is not without argument, because the stakes are high in the creation-evolution debate. Creationists have long pointed to it as an Achilles' heel (or one of many) for the evolution theory. As hard as the evolutionists try, they cannot adequately explain the existence among humans of altruistic behavior. So, in the evolutionist devotees' (hereafter evo-devo or ED) sincere attempt to heal this wound, they have begun by redefining the term.

### EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY'S ATTEMPT TO RESCUE ALTRUISM

An objective viewpoint might define the word as "the principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others."<sup>1</sup> However, ED's like Ayn Rand try to steal the concept by redefining it. Rand's objectivism philosophy led her to revise altruism not as a way of life that would characterize someone, but the only way a person could exist she writes, "Altruism declares that any action taken for the benefit of others is good, and any action taken for one's own benefit is evil. Thus the beneficiary of an action is the only criterion of moral value-and so long as that beneficiary is anybody

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1 [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

other than oneself, anything goes.”<sup>2</sup>

Is this fair? I know that my place is not one who is qualified to challenge the work of someone as prolific and proficient as Miss Rand, but how well do these definitions line up? It’s no wonder that Miss Rand opposed altruism as viciously as she did a generation ago, since she demanded that this not be an occasional practice, but a way of life. Would those who occasionally practice altruism be able to function if, as she said,

...[A]ltruism, the ethical theory which regards man as a sacrificial animal, which holds that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that service to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue, and value. The differences occur only over the question of who is to be sacrificed to whom. Altruism holds death as its ultimate goal and standard of value-and it is logical that every other form of suffering, including self-destruction, are the virtues it advocates. And, logically, these are the only things that the practitioners of altruism have achieved and are achieving now.<sup>3</sup>

Rand was at least honest in her assessment, which is more than can be said for ED’s who have followed her. It is counter-intuitive to stake a claim for both altruism and survival of the fittest, which Rand refused to do. Her successors, however, have sacrificed integrity for the hope of creating a smoke-and-mirrors effect on the topic of altruism.

So, it may be possible to find a more reliable sense of “altruism,” from someone with no need to redefine it. The French philosopher Auguste Comte is credited with establishing philosophical positivism, but also for coining the words “altruism,”<sup>4</sup> and

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2 Ayn Rand. *The Virtue of Selfishness*, (New York: Signet Books, 1961), viii.

3 Ibid, 34.

4 Stephen J. Pope says that Comte coined the word in opposition to “egoism.” For further study, please see *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994)

“sociology.”<sup>5</sup> Utilitarian John Stuart Mill wrote about Comte and positivism, and concluded that Comte opposed the notion of individual rights as being ethically inconsistent, and felt it to be a human moral obligation to put the interests of others ahead of one’s self-interests.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Rand has strayed from Comte’s original thought process. Having self-interests (such as eating, breathing, etc...) is not evil. However, suppose someone has the opportunity to do something good for someone else expecting nothing else in return. Let’s imagine that Tim “The Toolman” Taylor goes to New Orleans and rebuilds the homes that were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, and receives no publicity or payment whatsoever for his work. Comte would call that altruism. As we will see below, the New Testament writers called this *avga,ph*<sup>7</sup> and ED’s would insist that either The Toolman was crazy, or that he was helping the species survive. As the paper proceeds, we will see considerable twists in the definition of the term in order for the Achilles’ heel to have minimized exposure.

### EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY’S INVOLVEMENT IN METAETHICS

It will be necessary to do some over-simplistic definition work on EP and then tie it into metaethics. Alvin Plantinga summarizes the concept adroitly,

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<sup>5</sup> J. S. Mill says that Comte claims to have coined this word as well, but in a later publication acknowledged that Aristotle had laid the foundation. Please see *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (London: Routledge, 1882) reprinted in 2007 by Dodo Press.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 80. Mill says, “It is as much a part of M. Comte’s scheme...that the direct cultivation of altruism, and the subordination of egoism to it, far beyond the point of moral duty, should be one of the chief aims of education, both individual and collective.”

<sup>7</sup> Word study assistance is provided by the software program BibleWorks 7.0.

Formerly called ‘sociobiology,’ evolutionary psychology has been with us for at least twenty-five years, ever since the publication of E.O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology*.<sup>8</sup> The heart and soul of this project is the effort to explain distinctive human traits—our art, humor, play, love, poetry, sense of adventure, love of stories, our music, our morality, and our religion itself—the heart and soul of this project is to explain all of these properties in terms of our evolutionary origin.<sup>9</sup>

Plantinga, after discussing that Wilson and others acknowledge that the ministries of Mother Teresa and Methodist missionaries of the nineteenth century were solely for the benefit of others, and provides a problem for evolutionary naturalism concludes,

[W]hy should altruism be a problem? Because (EP) says we human beings have come to be by way of natural selection operating on some source of genetic variation. But then one would not expect altruistic behavior. What natural selection would select for; one thinks, would be behavior of a kind that promotes survival and reproductive fitness, ... (which is) the probability that one’s genes will be widely disseminated in the next and subsequent generation, thus doing well in the evolutionary derby.<sup>10</sup>

The connection with metaethics is simple. There are three branches of the foundations of morality: the metaphysics of morals, moral epistemology, and moral psychology. The latter of the three seems to have been taken hostage in the past twenty-five years by scholars who want to necessarily connect moral psychology to evolutionary naturalism. EP is the obvious illegitimate child of the result of moral psychology’s naturalistic seduction. As this paper proceeds, EP will be the primary focus, while we

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<sup>8</sup> Having employed Plantinga, I will not actually use Wilson’s ice-breaking work in this forum, but will cite it for further study. E.O. Wilson. *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge: Belknap Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. “Evolution and Design” in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology*, ed. James K. Beilby (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 209.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 210-1.

will occasionally glance at the epistemological impact of EP, as well as the metaphysics of morality.

Altruism and metaphysics are connected as Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann analyze “being and goodness” as helping transfer from metaethics to normative ethics by saying,

By converting humanly specific potentiality into actuality, an agent’s actions in accordance with rationality increase the extent to which the agent has goodness as a human being. Human goodness, like no other goodness appropriate to one species, is acquired in performing instances of the operation specific to that species, which in the case of humanity is the rational employment of the rational powers. The actions that contribute to a human agent’s moral goodness will be acts of will in accordance with rationality.<sup>11</sup>

David Copp presupposes moral realism and uses the expressions of “water” and “H<sub>2</sub>O” and the interrelations of the two to make his case for synthetic moral naturalism and applies the theory to goodness by writing, “Moral theory gives us our best account of the relevant nature that is shared by standard samples of things that qualify as ‘morally good,’ ‘morally wrong,’ and the like.”<sup>12</sup>

Moral realist Russ Shafer-Landau struggles with accepting psychology in general into the ethical arena. He notes, “...[N]either sociology nor psychology, nor any other science that I know of, will do much to fix the content of our fundamental moral principles. That is the job of ethics proper.”<sup>13</sup>

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11 Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. “Being and Goodness,” in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 103.

12 David Copp. *Morality in a Natural World: Selected Essays in Metaethics* in the Cambridge Studies in Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207.

13 Russ Shafer-Landau. “Ethics as Philosophy” in *Metaethics after Moore*, ed. Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 209.

Unlike Shafer-Landau, Thomas Nagel sees ethics as a branch of psychology and altruism as a big part of ethics by observing,

[S]usceptibility to certain motivational influences, including altruism, is a condition of rationality, just as the capacity to accept certain theoretical arguments is thought to be a condition of rationality. The view presented here is opposed not only to ethical relativism but to any demand that the claims of ethics appeal to our interests: either self-interest or the interest we may happen to take in other things and other persons. The altruism which in my view underlies ethics is not to be confused with generalized affection for the human race. It is not a feeling.<sup>14</sup>

Almost forty years ago, Nicholas Rescher prophesied about a paradigm shift in values in America as he wrote,

This contention that certain of the virtues of character will be upgraded in the America of the year 2000 must not be inflated beyond intended limits, however. Some of these traditional values seem very definitely on the decline. A trend toward the welfare state, for example, will very likely add 'charity' to the roster of outmoded values. Again, 'compassion' may well become downgraded in an environment in which violence is an increasingly familiar phenomenon.<sup>15</sup>

### **EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY'S ATTEMPT TO RESCUE ALTRUISM**

Allan Gibbard sees altruism as fitting in properly with an evolutionary perspective by noting, "Benevolence would often be the best reproductive strategy, and so evolution does well to incline us to benevolence under certain conditions. We do well to be benevolent, so long as benevolent will be repaid and so will its lack. Is what pays, then,

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Nagel. *The Possibility of Altruism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Rescher. *Introduction to Value Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 125.

unconditional benevolence or an eye to reciprocity?”<sup>16</sup> Gibbard’s remarks show how he has redefined altruism like other ED’s. His view endorses revenge and ties a short leash of conditional reciprocity onto benevolence. What would a world like Gibbard’s look like if the only benevolent acts had these types of conditions attached?

Daniel Dennett is open with his claim that altruism could have been the result of evolution or selective breeding. He notes,

[S]omehow we have to have evolved into beings that can have a conscience...that kisses us while it hurts us. A vivid way of posing the question is to imagine becoming an artificial selector of altruistic people. Like a breeder of domestic cattle, pigeons, or dogs, you could closely observe your herd, noting in a ledger which were naughty and which nice, and, by meddling in various ways, arranging for the nice ones to have more children. In due course, you ought to be able to evolve a population of nice people-supposing that a tendency of niceness could be represented somehow in the genome. We should not think of this as selection for an ‘ethics module’ that is designated just for giving right answers to ethical questions. Any modules or gadgets might have...the effect...of favoring the altruistic choices at decision time.<sup>17</sup>

Dennett is so set on his evolutionary commitment that he fails to see the pragmatism behind his scenario. In the same sentence he interchanges the notion of animal breeding with that of mankind. With his frequent use of the moniker “Mother Nature”<sup>18</sup> as a substitute for naturalistic evolution, perhaps Dennett feels like she has the capability to selectively breed humans in the same way dogs and horses are bred to produce certain traits. To Dennett, love has little to do with the mating and reproductive process. This process is strictly for selfish reasons.

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16 Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 257-8.

17 Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1995), 477.

18 Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1987), 299.



Tom Bethell provides a superb historical analysis of the evolutionists' fight to explain the puzzle of altruism by stating,

A key contribution to sociobiology was made by an Englishman, William Hamilton... Darwin's theory of evolution had implied that natural selection would generate a selfish world. It was "the fittest" that survived, after all, and that presumably meant looking out for No. 1. Yet, undeniably, there was a lot of altruistic behavior out there. Darwin himself had viewed with alarm the elaborate cooperation of the social insects. Hamilton's explanation, published in 1964, took time to sink in, but once it did, the evolutionists sang his praises and have continued to do so without end. Kin selection-of course!<sup>19</sup>

William Dembski and Jonathan Wells have observed EP in a seemingly paradoxical maneuver. They observe,

According to evolutionary psychology (currently one of the hottest evolutionary sub-disciplines), the story runs as follows: We, and other primates, live in societies structured by moral norms. Those norms facilitate cooperation. They get us to help each other- to behave altruistically. On evolutionary principles, altruism must therefore be a strategy for facilitating survival and reproduction. In particular, altruism does not reflect a designer's intention for us, nor does it reflect any benevolence underlying the universe. According to evolutionary psychology, altruism comes in two versions. In one version, altruism, even though it may require sacrificing oneself, nonetheless may also benefit the survival of kin (blood relatives), thus promoting one's genes, and therefore is likely to be favored by evolution. In the other version, altruism is not really a sacrifice at all but a form of exchange: you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. The first of these is known as kin selection, the second as reciprocal altruism.<sup>20</sup>

EP rationalizes away any attempt at selflessness as having ulterior motives of

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<sup>19</sup> Tom Bethell. "Against Sociobiology" in First Things, January 2001, available at [http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id\\_article=2126](http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=2126), accessed April 20, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells. *The Design of Life: Discovering Signs of Intelligence in Biological Systems* (Dallas: The Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 2007), 19.

some sort. Those of us in ministry might like to think our works are selfless, but EP seeks to remind us of our paychecks.<sup>21</sup> There are millions of unpaid volunteers, who receive no reward other than the notion of helping others out. Perhaps the problem is that the ED's are so into survival themselves that they are not even aware of this bastion of selfless people.<sup>22</sup>

Wilson notes that the founder of "evolution" was aware of insects demonstrating maneuvers of selflessness in order for the species to survive. He writes,

Charles Darwin saw that the paradox (of altruism) was dangerous to his theory of evolution by natural selection. He was particularly concerned by the social behavior of ants. Not only do flagrantly selfless individuals exist, but they form distinct worker castes, which in some species are subdivided further into specialized subcastes...if the combined offspring of the queen ant formed a colony that allowed her to produce more offspring than could an otherwise comparable solitary female, sterile castes would evolve as part of the variation of a single hereditary type. That hereditary type, not the plastic forms it produces, is therefore the unit of selection. The altruistic castes, he said, are like the well-flavored vegetable part in a single crop strain produced by selective breeding.<sup>23</sup>

### **EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY'S REJECTION OF ALTRUISM**

Shervert Frazier was a professor at Harvard Medical School for almost twenty years, and is in the EP camp. He surmises,

As many researchers have noted, evolution is more concerned with the survival of the species than with the survival of individuals. Interestingly, and

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<sup>21</sup> Dennett is arguably the best (worst) at this-attacking Mother Teresa's motives most notably.

<sup>22</sup> Last week was National Volunteer Week. Please see the April 30, 2007 edition of *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (E-1) for an article by David Casstevens about 72-year-old Wanda Stovall, "She Lets Her Light Shine at Lighthouse for the Blind."

<sup>23</sup> Edward O. Wilson. "Kin Selection as the Key to Altruism: Its Rise and Fall" (Errors in the Natural Sciences). *Social Research*, 72.1 March 22, 2005.

logically, our altruistic impulses are in the greatest times of disaster, when we collectively sense a threat to our survival. Neighbors who have never spoken to one another are suddenly warm and caring buddies in the wake of an earthquake, fire or flood. People who've bickered with one another for years are suddenly solidly united in the face of an external enemy. People who would ordinarily shrink from a shadow suddenly risk their lives in times of war and natural disaster.<sup>24</sup>

These may be warm, fuzzy thoughts from the doctor, who also did a tour of duty at Baylor early in his career. However, he provides no examples-only a vivid imagination. What he is implying, however, is that everyday altruism doesn't really exist. The only instances where selflessness would be evident are during disasters. He may be correct in observing how disasters can draw people closer, but to restrict it to those dire circumstances is narrow-sighted, but typical of someone desperately clinging to a faulty theory.

Frazier's words ring an all-too familiar tone. In the words of Charles Darwin himself, "Many animals certainly sympathize with each other's distress or danger."<sup>25</sup> In fairness to Darwin, (as opposed to Frazier) he at least gave the example from a fisherman in Utah who observed a fat, old, and blind pelican, which, assumedly, was fed by other birds. However, nothing is mentioned about any of the pelican's other senses, or exactly to what degree the pelican was blind, and how they may have been able to determine that, or even if the aging bird was being fed by his "family." He seems intent at finding alternatives to what has become known as kin selection.

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<sup>24</sup> Frazier, Shervert. *Psychotrends: What Kind of People Are We Becoming?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 130.

<sup>25</sup> Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871) reprinted (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 126.

In a fairly unsuccessful attempt to persuade readers about kin selection by using apes, Franz de Waal admits,

Obviously, the most potent force to bring out a sense of community is enmity toward outsiders. It forces unity among elements that are normally at odds. This may not be visible at the zoo, but it is definitely a factor for chimpanzees in the wild, which show lethal intercommunity violence. In our own species, nothing is more obvious than that we band together against adversaries. In the course of human evolution, out-group hostility enhanced in-group solidarity to the point that morality emerged.<sup>26</sup>

It's unclear at this point exactly what de Waal means by "nothing is more obvious" than this point. Not only is his point not obvious, it's wrong. Humans indeed band together against adversaries at times, but we can certainly think of numerous instances of cowardice where this is simply not true.

Another weak admission of the altruistic puzzle is located in the notion of reciprocal altruism, which was noted above. However, as the term is being used in this paper, the concept of reciprocal altruism is oxymoronic. Altruism says, "I'll scratch your back not expecting you to scratch mine." The tit-for-tat back scratching situation is veiled selfishness at worst, or simple bartering at best. However, reciprocal altruism is the closest thing that may be wedged into the EP system.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> De Waal, Franz. *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>27</sup> Please see Stephen J.C. Gaulin and Donald H. McBurney's *Psychology: An Evolutionary Approach* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001) for a detailed account of how Robert Trivers may have been the first to argue for reciprocal altruism in 1971. They also use a nice example of two cavemen, one of whom is altruistic, but the other is not, and the altruistic caveman starves to death because he gave all his food away to the "cheater." According to Gaulin and McBurney, reciprocal altruism can spread if altruism is withheld from cheaters (75-6).

Jeffrey Schloss sees that neither reciprocal altruism nor kin selection is an adequate response, especially for human behavior. He concludes, “Human behavior regularly exhibits noncompensatory sacrifice for nonkin. Explaining such phenomena constitutes one of the most controversial aspects of current evolutionary theory. Formulating an adequate explanation is widely regarded as the last roadblock to the theoretical completeness of evolutionary theory.”<sup>28</sup>

Steven Pinker, an EP advocate who specializes in philosophy of the mind, hastened the revolving of the evolutionary logic by noting the advantages of infanticide under certain circumstances, yet wisely evaded a complete endorsement of the concept.<sup>29</sup> Pinker crafts an open-ended position that allows a relativistic approach to morality by observing,

[E]thical theory requires idealizations like free, sentient, rational, equivalent agents whose behavior is uncaused, and its conclusions can be sound and useful even though the world, as seen by science, does not have uncaused events. As long as there is no outright coercion or gross malfunction of reasoning, the world is close enough to the idealization of free will that moral theory can meaningfully be applied to it...If discrimination is wrong only if group averages are the same, if war and rape and greed are wrong only if people are never inclined toward them, if people are responsible for their actions only if the actions are mysterious, then either scientists must be prepared to fudge their data or all of us must be prepared to give up our values.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Jeffrey P. Schloss, “Evolutionary Accounts of Altruism,” in *Mere Creation: Science, Faith, and Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 243.

29 There is a sickening exchange between Dawkins and Pinker available at <http://www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge53.html> accessed May 4, 2008. Pinker and Andrew Ferguson also debated on the pages of *The Weekly Standard* in 1998. Pinker’s book *How the Mind Works*, almost calls for infanticide, yet the title of one of his entries is called “Arguing against Infanticide.”

30 Steven Pinker. *How the Mind Works* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 55.

If the logic has not already been portrayed as circular, it may become more evident in the fact that there are simultaneous attempts to outright deny the existence of altruism altogether by EP and ED's.

Angus Menuge points out, "Many of those committed to 'evolutionary psychology' such as (Richard) Dawkins and Dennett, admit that a purely biological account of cognition based on our genes is inadequate. However, they propose to supplement the effect of our genes with an account of 'memes,' the ideas and linguistic structures of cultural evolution."<sup>31</sup>

Dawkins is less direct than Dennett on the issue. In fact, Dawkins ducks and denies the issue in *The Selfish Gene*. He notes,

It is possible that yet another unique quality of man is a capacity for genuine, disinterested, true altruism. I hope so, but I am not going to argue the case one way or the other, nor to speculate over its possible memic evolution. The point...is that, even if we look at the dark side and assume that individual man is fundamentally selfish, our conscious foresight-our capacity to simulate the future in imagination-could save us from the worst selfish excesses of the blind replicators. We have at least the mental equipment to foster our long-term selfish interests rather than merely our short-term selfish interests...We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary, the selfish memes of our indoctrination. We can even discuss ways of deliberately cultivating and nurturing pure, disinterested altruism-something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world. We are built as gene machines and cultures as meme machines, but we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators."<sup>32</sup>

Harvard's Marc Hauser mimics biblical ethics in his defense of evolutionary ethics by noting,

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<sup>31</sup> Menuge, Angus J. L. *Agents under Fire: Materialism and the Rationality of Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 16.

<sup>32</sup> Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1999, 200-1.

Unlike the Golden Rule, which transcends the biological relationship between individuals, Hamilton's Rule-named in honor of its creator, the late evolutionary biologist William D. Hamilton-explicitly targets genetic relatives. For Hamilton, the rule reads: Do unto others to the degree to which they share your genes. With this simple formulation in mind, the mystery of altruism vanishes.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, James Rachels rebukes biblical ethics. Like the others listed above, he points to both kin and reciprocal altruism as a way to salvage the notion for EP. He concludes,

If we start with the assumption that humans exhibit a kind of grand, Sermon-on-the-Mount altruism, and we then assume we are trying to explain that, then Darwin's suggestion (reciprocal) might seem too feeble. But we should be careful not to overstate the extent of non-kin (altruism). By far the most powerful kind of altruism, even among humans<sup>34</sup>, is kin altruism. Even when people do show an unselfish willingness to help strangers, their preference for helping their own kin remains very much stronger: our non-kin altruism is so weak that when an affluent American gives a few hundred dollars to support famine-relief efforts, while spending thousands to send his children to an expensive university, he is judged to be exceptionally generous. Truly disinterested, generalized saintliness might exist in a few people, but it is so rare that it may be regarded...as a mere 'variation'-and whether it is something that could spread to the population as a whole might well be doubted.<sup>35</sup>

### THE CREATIONIST'S CLAIM TO ALTRUISM

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<sup>33</sup> Marc Hauser, *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 360.

<sup>34</sup> Rachels uses a 1964 study of monkeys to prove reciprocal altruism, but see Dembski and Wells (18) for a summary of a 2005 study that shows that chimpanzees will not aid unknown chimps.

<sup>35</sup> James Rachels. *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 157-8.

As EP attempts to reduce altruism to a simple act of reciprocity, the Christian version allows no such return of service. Emory University's Timothy P. Jackson observes,

In going to the cross, Jesus sets a pattern that is radically self-sacrificial, a stumbling block to common-sense ideas of prudence. Any strict reciprocity, in which one treats others as one has been treated, is left behind, but so is the Golden

Rule that Jesus himself affirms at times. The positive principle of '[i]n everything do to others as you would have them do to you' (Matt. 7:12) is demanding enough, but under the right circumstances Jesus requires more. One does not normally ask or even hope that innocent others be willing to die for one's good, but Jesus insists that the disciples 'take up their cross' and follow him (Matt. 16-24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) and he implies that their willingness to lay down their lives for one another, in imitation of him, makes them his 'friends' (John 15:13-14).<sup>36</sup>

Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary posit a scientific approach to a problem with EP by noting,

The main reason (that evolution has not been true for humans for any time period in which we have specific information) is that passing on genes, which is fundamental to Darwinian evolution, is not a simple, predictable drive in humans, as it is in, say, geese. It is true...that people who have RSMEs (religious, spiritual, and mystical experiences) generally enjoy good physical and mental health, but Darwinian theory, whose driving force is natural selection, depends on producing viable offspring, which is a different matter from experiencing a personal benefit.<sup>37</sup>

In the process of declaring God as the Infinite Good, to which all finite goods have their source, Robert Adams observes, "Altruistic benevolence is an uncontroversially good motive. It can hardly be praised too highly, and surely deserves a

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<sup>36</sup> Timothy P. Jackson. "The Gospels and Christian Ethics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45.

<sup>37</sup> Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 224.



place in the ideal of love. And self-interest is a morally dangerous motive. The domination of our concerns by self is a great source of moral evil. Much that passes for love is selfish or self-centered in such a way as to merit no praise.”<sup>38</sup>

Nancy Pearcey observed that EP’s employed the terroristic disaster of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001 to attempt to further their cause of “kin selection” by observing and countering,

(EP’s) suddenly had a real-world opportunity to apply their theory. Pundits of every stripe rushed to offer some explanation of the terrible tragedy, and even the science desk at the New York Times got into the act. It claimed that the heroism of the rescue workers was a product of evolution-akin to the cooperative instincts of ants and bees... We could... argue that genuine altruism actually provides a powerful apologetic for Christianity. Heroic self-sacrifice of the type we witnessed on September 11 can only be the Christian understanding of human nature as genuinely moral beings, made in the image of God.<sup>39</sup>

When the Christian faith is reduced to its essence, the remaining source is forgiveness. Colin Grant describes *agape* as acute altruism, and also explains how the notion of forgiveness is also something that is contrary to human nature, especially as it might be supposed by EP’s. Grant states, “From the perspective of the gospel, *agape* is a reality before it is an ideal. It reflects the basic reality of God. It is because God is *agape* that we are challenged to pursue that way. The challenge is rooted in and renewed by the assurance of its divine endorsement and encouragement.”<sup>40</sup>

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38 Robert Merrihew Adams. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 136.

39 Nancy R. Pearcey. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 210.

40 Colin Grant. *Altruism and Christian Ethics*, in the series “New Studies in Christian Ethics,” ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 186-7.

Dinesh D'Sousa deontologically predicts that ED's will eventually produce examples of altruistic behavior that are better than kin selection and reciprocal altruism, but prophesies unsuccessful attempts by concluding,

The Darwinian project is necessarily confined to the domain of self-interest. The whole point of morality is that you are doing what you ought to do, not what you are inclined to do or what is in your interest to do. Morality is described in the language of duty, and duty is something that we are obliged to do whether we want to or not, whether it benefits us or not.<sup>41</sup>

Once again, we imagine that Tim "The Toolman" Taylor is on the set of "Home Improvement," and one of Al Borland's electrical wiring efforts sends a massive amount of voltage through Tim. Al risks his own life, but knocks Tim free from the ill-wired appliance. Al and Tim are not blood relatives (kin), and Tim may never have the opportunity to reciprocate, and in fact, the act of heroism itself is an act that would humiliate Al due to the admission of error. So, why does Al save Tim? Dennett et al would seek an ulterior motive somewhere, because, in their vantage point, Al has acted counter to human nature.

### **THE BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF ALTRUISM**

The New Testament is filled with examples of altruism, many of which were summarized by Jackson (above). However, arguably one of the earliest parables taught to Christian children is that of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37.

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the

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<sup>41</sup> Dinesh D'Sousa. *What's So Great about Christianity?* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2007), 235.

Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead." And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side." But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."<sup>42</sup>

**Space does not allow detailed exegetical work of this passage, but there are two minor details that are apparent. First, both of the first two passers-by held fast to the concept of ceremonial cleanliness at the sake of moral responsibility; second, both men had Mosaic legal responsibilities to attend to an abandoned (almost-dead) corpse.**

**It is also implied but not detailed here that these men have been to the temple and performed their duties and were now headed away from Jerusalem. It is also important to note that this story is told on a trip into Jerusalem. The pattern of these first two men is similar. They came, they saw, they avoided. See the difference in the pattern for the hated Samaritan. He came, he saw, he demonstrated altruism.**

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<sup>42</sup> All Scripture references are from the Updated Version of the New American Standard Bible unless appearing in a direct citation from another author.

**The religious Jewish ministers were too busy being holy to be compassionate toward the victim.**

The parable of the “Good Samaritan” is a gold mine for us that a few lines here cannot possibly exhaust. For our purposes here, it must be noticed that this was an extreme act of altruism. A simple word study may also be enlightening. When the Samaritan “felt compassion,” the Greek word for compassion is “*splagchnizomai*” (*splagcni,zomai* –literally, to be moved in the inward parts).<sup>43</sup> What may be concluded from this quick study is that selfless compassion, or altruism, comes from the depths of the human soul and is not simply a result of selective breeding or blind, random mutations.

**The Samaritan, hated by those of the pure Jewish race, took two days’ wages out of his own pocket, and endured considerable hardship traveling down the steep and crooked path, cared for this half-dead victim, and reciprocity is made impossible. This type of behavior was obviously not directed toward a family member, nor was it beneficial for the race, so it could not have been as a result of evolution. This parable is employed more as an instrument for ethical mode; than it is for literal evidence.**

**Joel B. Green comments,**

**What individualizes him is his compassion, leading to action, in the face of their inaction. Having established this point of distinction, his status in comparison with theirs becomes shockingly relevant, for it throws into sharp relief the virtue of his response. For the same reasons, his actions**

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43 BibleWorks 7.0

**condemn their failure to act. Unlike them, he has compassion, and this is the turning point...of this entire narrative unit...The parable of the compassionate Samaritan thus undermines the determination of status in the community of God's people on the basis of ascription, substituting in its place a concern with performance, the granting of status on the basis of one's actions. The care the Samaritan offers is not a model of moral obligation but of exaggerated action grounded in compassion that risks much more than could ever be required or expected.<sup>44</sup>**

George Morelli, a Catholic priest and licensed clinical psychologist parallels this parable with a modern version of a priest who similarly helped a man almost beaten to death by robbers, and then ventured to prison to minister to the men convicted of the incident. Morelli concludes,

This is true spiritual motivation. The Good Samaritan shows us the spiritual way of 'Divine Altruism.' Altruism can only be 'Divine' if it 'fulfills the law of Christ,' enlivened by Divine Love of God and neighbor, with nothing expected in return. There is such a spiritual hunger in the world today. The multiplication of evil is everywhere and even what appears good and altruistic is often bereft of value, because it is self-serving. Only by emptying ourselves and serving in kenotic, self-emptying love, can we satisfy the spiritual hunger and vacuum that exists around us."<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>44</sup> Joel B. Green. *The Gospel of Luke* in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*. ed. Gordon D. Fee. (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 431-2.

<sup>45</sup>George Morelli. "The Spiritual Roots of Altruism: The Good Samaritan," available at <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles7/MorelliAltruism.php> Feb. 4, 2007, accessed April 19, 2008.

We have attempted an objective search at the best arguments available in the literature as to how altruism fits into the hot topic of evolutionary psychology. We have given numerous scholars the opportunity to prove their points. It seems clear that most either rename or redefine altruism in order to systematize it. They cannot straightforwardly explain how or why selflessness even exists, because their entire theory is not based on indisputable scientific evidence as is so often claimed, but more on a metaphysical concept aimed at eliminating the God of the Bible from the cognitive realm of the general public. Dennett has complained that there has been a “brain-power arms race”<sup>46</sup> for the last two decades, which, generally corresponds with the time frame in which Phillip Johnson, a law professor at Cal-Berkeley, returned from England and a trip to the Darwin museum with a burden to counter the rampant work of evolutionary naturalism. From there, the Intelligent Design movement was born, and tremendous strides have been made in revealing the weaknesses of the theory. Johnson, commenting on the circularity of Pinker’s argument that both condemns and endorses infanticide based on an EP worldview says,

This point deserves emphasis because it illustrates how Darwinian logic works and why it fools so many people who are all too willing to be fooled... [T]oday evolutionary psychologists may say that killing infants is wrong... Tomorrow they will say that the points you conceded yesterday establish that infanticide is not wrong after all. Whenever the ‘separate realms’<sup>47</sup> logic surfaces, you can be sure that the wording implies that there is a ruling realm (founded on reality) and a subordinate realm (founded on illusions which must be retained for the time being). The formula allows the ruling realm to expand its territory at will.<sup>48</sup>

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46 Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 144.

47 Please see Pinker citation above.

48 Phillip E. Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 114-5.

Since egoism is basically selfishness, and Comte's notion of altruism was a measure to counteract egoism, it can be deduced that altruism is, therefore, selflessness. Since Dawkins insists that there exists a selfish gene that empowers the survival of the fittest, then he cannot claim that evolution would have created a gene that enabled selflessness. Consequently, any attempt for evolutionary psychology to claim altruism is self-referentially incoherent, and the heel remains exposed.

Dembski and Wells observe,

Equally problematic for (EP) is that their evolutionary view of morality cannot be squared with the facts of our moral life. Within traditional morality, the main difficulty is to come to terms with the problem of evil. For evolutionary ethics, by contrast, the main difficulty is to come to terms with the problem of good. Evolutionary theorizing regards reproductive advantage as lying at the root of ethics. Yet it is a fact that people perform acts of kindness that cannot be rationalized on evolutionary principles. Altruism is, as a matter of human practice, not confined simply to one's in-group (those to whom one is related). Nor is altruism outside one's in-group always a quid pro quo. People do, in fact, often transcend their drive for reproductive advantage (of their own genes or of their kins'.<sup>49</sup>

There are visible evidences of selflessness throughout all religions and even among non-religious people. Similarly, ED's would be free to worship any god they chose, unless it is the God of the Bible. From a Christian viewpoint, the primary problem with evolution is not the argument against the existence of God, but more with the argument on the nature of God. Evolution is an attack on the morality and overall accountability that humans would have to one another and to God. EP's claim to altruism is counter to the very purpose of the theory of evolution. So, the notion of altruism is certainly not exclusively Christian. However, nobody should be better at performing it than a Christian, given the perfect model of Jesus Christ. My next-door neighbor is a self-

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49 Dembski and Wells, *The Design of Life*, 19.

proclaimed agnostic, but he frequently will mow the common area behind our houses for no reason other than being a good neighbor and friend. His wife has made cookies for me to enjoy at a break from studying on Sunday evenings. Neither would want to be called “born again.” Both practice altruism.

It is an indictment on the church that we are no longer overflowing in our selfless love for those outside the church. We have allowed the absence of *agape* in the culture to transform our churches into cocoons or Christian social clubs, and cannot relate to those outside the church because we are so easily offended. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons write, “In studying thousands of outsiders’ impressions, it is clear that Christians are primarily perceived for what they stand against. *We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for*”<sup>50</sup> (author’s italics).

Yet, if altruism is not exclusively Christian, it is certainly not evolutionary in any sense. ED’s have, through EP, attempted to claim that altruism is as much the result of random mutations through processes of chance as anything else. In spite of Dawkins’ gene and in spite of recent claims to have found an altruistic gene,<sup>51</sup> selflessness is most frequently the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul said “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”<sup>52</sup> Altruism is an amazing synopsis of all these. It could not have evolved. It had to have been taught or caught. In spite of the best efforts of many

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50 David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons. *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 26.

51 David Brinn. “Israeli Researchers Discover Gene for Altruism,” Jan. 23, 2005, available at <http://www.israel21c.org/bin/en.jsp?enScript>, accessed April 26, 2008 (available in its entirety in the online edition journal *Molecular Psychiatry*).

52 Galatians 5:22-23.



scientific philosophers, altruism cannot be bundled or even biggie-sized into evolution.

It's too good.