

A MODEL OF ACTIONS AND NORMS: AN INTEGRATED EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE ON NORMATIVE ETHICS AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

One fundamental question in normative ethics concerns how norms influence human behavior and discussions within normative ethics would be facilitated by a classification that treats human actions/behavior and moral norms within the same functional framework. Based on evolutionary analysis of benefits and costs, we distinguish five categories of human action. Four of these – self-interest, kin selection, group egoism, and cooperation – are basically results of gene selection, benefit the individual's genetic interest and may be described as "broad self-interest." In contrast, the fifth category, unselfishness, is more likely a result of cultural influences. All the five categories of action are influenced by three broad moral spheres, each of which represents many norms that have a common denominator. Thus, a sphere of integrity concerns the individual's right to act in his/her interest and against those of other individuals. A sphere of reciprocal morality deals with rules for various

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forms of cooperation. An altruistic sphere has to do with the obligations to generate advantages for others. Ethics can be viewed as a dynamic conflict among various norms within and between these spheres. The classical conflict is that between the integrity and altruistic spheres. However, we argue that the prime antagonism may be that between the altruistic and reciprocal spheres; the main impact of altruistic ideals may not be the reputed one of counteracting egoism, but subversively thwarting reciprocal morality.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us hold strong moral opinions and make daily judgments of right and wrong. At the same time, academic moral philosophy is often regarded as an abstract topic without practical relevance. Yet, most people do believe that ethical norms have a great influence on the morals we practice. Even if we do not obey all commandments, but reserve individual freedom of judgment, we are directly or indirectly affected by these rules; our exemption does not eliminate all effects of the general principles. The choice of moral principles is therefore most important, something that concerns each and everyone, and not something to be left for ethical committees or philosophers.

This chapter is divided into six parts:

1. The relationship between evolution and ethics is briefly discussed in the introduction.
2. Human actions are analyzed in an evolutionary framework.
3. A broad classification of ethical rules is suggested.
4. Possible causes of human altruism are discussed.
5. Moral conflicts are discussed in terms of competition between spheres.
6. Conclusions are drawn about how different classes of ethical rules may affect human behavior and sociality.

Much of human behavior can be understood and explained from an evolutionary perspective. The fact that the same evolutionary processes have shaped all life forms, and that we share features with other organisms through a common evolutionary history speak for incorporating human behavior in a Darwinian scheme. Still, morality is often regarded as a unique human feature, and this may be one reason for even many biologists being

reluctant to discuss moral philosophy from an evolutionary perspective. Huxley (1894), for instance, regarded ethics, the “moral process,” as antagonistic to evolution, the “cosmic process,” and Williams (1989) follows Huxley’s view that nature is an enemy that has to be combated.

Nevertheless, over the last couple of decades, there has been an increased interest in the interrelationship between evolutionary biology and moral philosophy (Alexander, 1987; Campbell, 1975; de Waal, 1996; Frank, 1988; Masters, 1983; Ridley, 1996; Ruse, 1986; Wilson, 1975, 1979; Wright, 1994). For instance, based on studies on monkeys and apes that show phenomena like the capacity for empathy/sympathy, mutual aid and conflict resolution, de Waal (1996) concludes that “evolution has produced the requisites for morality,” and therefore, that there is no fundamental conflict between evolution and ethics.

Because of the impact of evolution on human behavior, it is a factor that needs to be taken into account in a discussion about ethics. An evolutionary perspective can shed light on and explain a range of human actions. First, our psychological constitution, which is a result of an evolutionary process, has a direct effect on our actions (e.g., Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992; Pinker, 2002). At the same time, our psychological functioning is affected by the exposure to specific norms, which in turn are a product of the human psyche (e.g., Richerson, Boyd, & Henrich, 2003). Thus, because norms are shaped by humans, our evolutionary history is likely to indirectly affect the design of those norms.

Yet, moral philosophy is difficult, for several reasons (e.g., Wilson, 1998), and we agree with the philosopher Elliott Sober in that “It is not implausible to think that many of our current ethical beliefs are confused. I am inclined to think that morality is one of the last frontiers that human knowledge can aspire to cross” (Sober, 1993, p. 208). According to Sober, one reason why the question about how we ought to lead our life is so difficult to come to grips with is because it is clouded by self-deception (also see Trivers, 1985).

Because of the natural relationship between moral norms and human actions (via the human psyche), it would be valuable to be able to discuss these within the same general framework. One framework, commonly used in evolutionary biology, is to consider the general effects of behavior in terms of fitness, or correlates to fitness. Such effects are commonly measured as gains and losses in materialistic, survival, and, ultimately, reproductive, terms. In our view, ethical rules too can be considered within such a framework, that is, who will gain/lose by others following a rule, and who will gain/lose by following a rule. Such a functional perspective on ethics may shed light on potential conflicts as well as agreements among various norms. We believe

that a treatment of actions and norms within this general framework would facilitate analysis within normative ethics, and the purpose with this chapter is to contribute to analytical progress within this field.

It is important to note that although behavior can be seen as given in an evolutionary perspective, in normative ethics the impact of norms on behavior is clearly acknowledged and in focus. Accordingly, in normative ethics behavior can be regarded as the dependent variable and ethics as the independent variable, and the fundamental question concerns how ethical norms will influence behavior.

ACTIONS IN AN EVOLUTIONARY FRAMEWORK

On the basis of functional design and effects, in terms of costs and benefits to agents, we identify five broad categories of action. These are self-interest, kin selection, cooperation, group egoism, and unselfishness, and we discuss each of these categories in turn. It is important to note that the categories are primarily descriptive, not normative, and that each category contains both what we would consider normatively good and bad actions. Various classifications of human behavior have been proposed previously (Alexander, 1987; Campbell, 1975; Masters, 1983, 1989; van den Berghe, 1981) and we discuss some of these below.

Actions could potentially be categorized on several grounds: (1) by the actor's intention and (2) by actual effect or consequence. However, we use a third ground for categorization of actions, namely (3) the general effect of actions with a certain design. Here, the action is not regarded as an isolated event but as a part of a pattern or strategy. The result may vary, but it is the statistically expected value that is most interesting when understanding the existence of a behavior. Since "expected" carry a connotation implying intention, we use the term "likely effect." For instance, an investment of money that happens to be unsuccessful is still classified as a self-interested action.

In general, we would expect a high degree of correlation between intention, actual effect, and likely effect of an action. In moral philosophy and law, intentions are judged extremely important (cf. man-slaughter vs. murder). Intention, or purpose, can be estimated from either an agent's own claim or a bystander's observation. The fact that these do not always agree shows that there are severe empirical problems with an intentional approach. Moreover, we could think of certain actions, for example, saving one's child from drowning, being carried out in an almost reflexive or automatic manner, without being preceded by a calculated decision. The

problem with a classification based on intentions would be where to place such actions. In contrast, no conscious premeditation of an action is needed in order to classify it based on likely effects. Neither does inadequate intelligence nor self-deception, influence such a classification. Subjective beliefs or claims of good intentions can be important parts of the behavioral mechanisms, but they are not decisive for our more ultimate classification.

We also leave out emotions from our basic classification and this point needs elaboration. We regard emotions as explanations for behavior on a proximate level, and we also acknowledge that these are the targets of behavioral evolution. There are specific emotions connected to each of our behavioral categories, and also many different emotions behind each category. For instance, a reciprocal behavior may be triggered both through a positive feeling of gratitude or a more negative feeling of guilt or revenge. The ultimate reason for the existence of such feelings may be that they tend to enforce behavior toward a larger long-term benefit (through cooperation) at the expense of a smaller short-term gain (through deceit) (Frank, 1988).

Although the emotional background of behavior is important in its own right, there is a tendency to give emotions an overall importance when classifying actions. For instance, it has been argued that real altruism does not exist because, for example, saving a total stranger in distress either relieves the distress felt by the actor himself or generates a feeling of goodness in the actor. Both kinds of emotional change are for the better to the actor, and should be regarded as basically selfish. Altruism is thus defined away. However, here we define the act as altruistic because of its likely effect in materialistic terms.

In conclusion then, psychological factors related to intention, emotion, and cognition are decisive for the execution of various actions. However, here we regard them as intermediate factors and base our classification of actions on likely effects.

Self-Interest

Selfishness is hard to define in a manner both clear and consistent with ordinary usage. One problem with selfishness – and even more with its synonym egoism – is that, in a moral sense, it gives rise to associations with many things we dislike. Moreover, there are other actions that we gladly perform but do not enjoy calling egoistic, but maybe self-realization. Therefore, we have chosen the term self-interest to encompass actions with an expected benefit for the actor without regard to how others are affected.

It can always be argued that we could direct time and effort to the benefit of others rather than to ourselves so that others suffer an alternative loss when we favor our own interests. A functional definition of self-interest is as follows: “actions that on average produce greater advantages than disadvantages for the actor.” The definition includes all actions bringing an expected net benefit to the actor independent of whether they are considered self-evidently justified or morally condemnable.

On these grounds, self-interest is plainly a label that suits a great deal of what we do, ranging from actions that maintain our physical selves – to the social situations where we behave in our own interest. Most such actions are, in fact, so automatic that we give them no reflection at all. In regard to numerous other actions, we think it so obvious that our personal preferences should lead the way, that we see no moral choice confronting us. Actions for which a self-interested option is questioned are a tiny portion of the total.

Kin Selection

Kin selection is a notably important process in understanding the evolution of behavior in social animals, not least people (Hamilton, 1964). Whichever human society is studied, helping own kin is common. For example, the substantial sacrifices we make for our children are a very large proportion of what we do for others. The function is sometimes said to be mutual: we help our children so as to be helped in the future. Such alliances do exist in various cultures, but are not the decisive ones. A child’s future sacrifices are primarily devoted to its own children, not its parents. We are ready to take a conscious loss in dealing with our children because of genetic, rather than individual, rationality.

Many actions in this category, such as helping children and other relatives, are generally considered good or acceptable. However, as with each of the categories this one contains actions that may be disproved of, and nepotism is a word of normally negative import. Even cultures that are critical of nepotism in principle will exhibit systematic use of it.

Cooperation

Cooperation among unrelated individuals is important in all human societies. David Hume (1739) spoke of “confined generosity” and a synonymous label is “reciprocal altruism”(Trivers, 1971; Humphrey, 1997).

The importance of “contacts,” a dynamic network of services and return services, is emphasized in all areas of social life. If reciprocal behavior is to develop, someone must take the first step by making a sacrifice that benefits others. This does not always succeed, of course; nor does it function perfectly even in a group with few individuals. But there is often a chance to perform a deed, which is a minor sacrifice, but of greater value to the recipient, which, in turn, motivates a return service that benefits the first giver. Such an increase in effect means that reciprocity can survive in spite of the waste that occurs when some services are never returned. A classical example of reciprocal behavior in animals is the study by [Wilkinson \(1984\)](#) on vampire bats. A recent example concerns joint mobbing of predators by flycatchers, where birds help others from which they have previously received help, but refrain from supporting non-helpers or cheaters ([Krams, Krama, & Igaune, 2006](#)).

Central to reciprocity are return services ([Axelrod, 1984](#)), and a capacity to behave reciprocally has been anchored in many emotive responses ([Alexander, 1989](#); [Fessler & Haley, 2003](#)). For instance, sympathy is mutual to a striking extent. The debt of gratitude we feel on neglecting our part of a reciprocal relationship is an emotional reinforcement of behavior, which has demonstrated its strength in the process of evolution. The ability to detect cheaters is also likely to have evolved in a reciprocal context ([Cosmides, 1989](#)).

As in all the categories of action, both a good and a bad side exist here, quite close together. Friendship is regarded as good, while the same action may be called “friendship corruption” or “partial behavior” by someone who has suffered from others’ collaboration.

Group Egoism

Yet another type of behavior can be called “accumulative egoism.” In sociobiology, the phenomenon may be described as “gregariousness” or “selfish herd” ([Hamilton, 1971](#)). Here, the term “group egoism” will be employed. It is essential to recognize individual interest as the central point of departure, the group being primarily an instrument. Thus, group egoism builds upon individual rationality. By joining forces, individuals increase the possibility of improving their conditions.

Human society involves many actions and institutions that can be attributed mainly to group egoism. It comprises much of the activity in human society, from small gangs up to nations, and occurs spontaneously due to palpable advantages. Labor unions and business enterprises are clear instances.

Experiments within the field of social psychology show that there are several powerful psychological mechanisms involved in group-egoistic actions (e.g., Brown, 1986; Cialdini, 1988). Among these are the tendencies to conform to group values, to upgrade members of the own group, and to think in terms of in-group/out-group (Fessler & Haley, 2003; Tullberg & Tullberg, 1997).

It is important to draw a clear line between categories of action. Cooperation and group egoism are particularly easy to confuse. If, for example, an action benefits people with the same school tie or the same profession, this is not cooperation but group egoism. One can expect members who see one obeying the group norm to consider one loyal and offer help; and the group is strengthened if solidarity is not shown toward members who betray the group's fellowship. For instance, union members often think less of strikebreakers than of anybody else, and many religious groups consider heresy a worse sin than paganism. In sum, belonging to a certain group is not enough: avoiding and punishing violation of its norms is crucial (Fehr & Gächter, 2002; Fehr & Henrich, 2003; Bernhard, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2006).

There is an ongoing debate in evolutionary biology about the possibilities of group selection in combination with unselfish or altruistic traits (Sober & Wilson, 1998) (next section). A discussion of levels of selection is outside the scope of this chapter, but it has been argued in detail elsewhere that group selection is much more likely to work in combination with group-egoistic traits since they tend to homogenize groups and link group members closer to each other (Tullberg, 2003).

Unselfishness

Unselfishness alias altruism is defined as acts that are costly for an actor, do not benefit kin and confer little likelihood of reciprocation. Thus, cooperation and kin selection are not included in this category and this distinction is rather easy to make. However, the distinction between unselfishness and group egoism is more difficult. When are soldiers in a war participating in a group-egoistic versus an altruistic venture?

There is a confusion around the term altruism, caused by a use of the term in both a broad (including all our categories but self-interest) and a strict sense, and several workers have pointed out the need to make a clear distinction between these phenomena. Thus, Ruse (1989) uses altruism with and without quotation marks to denote altruism in a broad and strict sense,

respectively. Lopreato (1981) suggests the term “ascetic altruism” and Hardin (1993) “promiscuous altruism” for altruism in the strict sense, and Boyd and Richerson (1991) have used the term “self-sacrificial cooperation” for the same phenomenon. Here we simply use the terms unselfishness or altruistic behavior. This terminology may also be in line with a general use of the term; for instance Swap (1991) concludes that “naive” perceivers define an action as altruistic when it is directed “to a needy recipient unrelated to the actor.”

As mentioned earlier, a motive of self-interest is sometimes inferred for altruistic acts. The giver might find it more worthwhile to feel good when giving away a coat than to keep the coat on. Thus, in a subjective sense, the giver makes no real sacrifice. Similarly, helping a suffering person in order to relieve one’s own distress evoked by watching him suffer is to be regarded as selfish. Then, there is no altruistic behavior, as was to be proved. Without denying that a feeling of goodness as well as stress relief can motivate, we leave out such subjective arguments and take the likely materialistic effects as decisive for our categorization. If a type of action on average yields a sacrifice greater than the positive effects for the subject himself, then the action is altruistic.

On the private level, some acts are committed that involve vast sacrifices and deliver huge benefits to the recipient. There are people who donate a kidney to another person (the act belongs to a different category if the recipient is a close relative). Trying to rescue a person from drowning at the risk of one’s life is more often used to illustrate altruistic behavior. Whoever is rescued has every reason to feel a debt of gratitude, and the hero can count on public admiration, so he or she reaps a certain reward. If rescuers are able to minimize their own risks, actions may not result in any personal loss. In many situations, however, the expected result is a loss for the actor. Fifty-six persons were rewarded for selfless heroism in USA and Canada in 1977, whereof eight posthumously (Frank, 1988), and this may serve as an example of existing unselfishness. Far more frequent are smaller acts of altruism such as blood donations – yet many such acts can be interpreted otherwise. Tossing a coin into a collection box is altruistic, unless observed by enough people to qualify as a reputation-building signal.

Influence of Time, Culture, and Norms

For our purpose in the present chapter, it is sufficient to conclude that behavior in the five categories mentioned are influenced by a combination of

human nature molded by our evolutionary history and the ethical norms that we are exposed to through culture. The speed of economic and technical progress does not blur fundamental similarities in people and their behavior across borders of space and time. However, the amount of actions in various categories may vary; specifically, a shift from the kin selection category to cooperation has occurred with the rise of modern industrialized society (e.g., Richerson et al., 2003). Kin selection, group egoism, and cooperation together account for a large class of actions between the poles of self-interest and unselfishness. Sometimes the chief frontier is seen as that between egoism and other actions. However, a broad self-interest combines four of the categories but excludes altruistic behavior.

It should again be emphasized that this classification is functional and not normative. The point of departure is that all categories include actions, which can be seen as good or bad according to one's norms and values. We consider this method far more fruitful, even in an analysis that is to yield normative conclusions, than the conventional procedure of pitting egoism against altruism.

Comparisons with Other Models

After taking part of this model, it is reasonable to ask in what respect it differs from other categorizations of behavior.

Compared to the influential sociobiological view as represented by, for example, Edward O. Wilson and Richard Alexander, there is an agreement about egoism, kin selection, and cooperation, but because these three categories together (and extensions such as indirect reciprocity) are seen as including most of human behavior, there is little room for altruism. Thus, perceived deviations are viewed as mistakes or self-deception. In the classical sociobiological scheme, altruism is negligible when it comes to real behavior.

Pierre van den Berghe (1981) also includes these major three categories, but adds a fourth labeled coercion. This is certainly a kind of behavior in human societies but to us it looks more like a proximate variable; coercion is a means to enforce rules of self-interest, kin selection or cooperation.

Roger Masters (1983, 1989) argues for a scheme introduced by Hamilton, where the three main sociobiological categories are joined by altruism and also mutual harm. We have the same kind of criticism of mutual harm as of coercion, and in this case the lack of evolutionary rationality is more

evident. Mutual harm can be the outcome of human interaction, but it is hard to give it an independent *raison d'être*.

Our model has two distinguishing features. First, it seems motivated to break away group-egoistic actions into an own category because they differ in ultimate rationale as well as emotional underpinning. Second, we conclude that altruistic actions belong to a real, rather than hypothetical, category.

MORAL SPHERES: A BROAD CLASSIFICATION OF ETHICAL RULES

Moral systems can be structured in many ways, frequently by setting entire systems against each other, as with Christian and Muslim morality. It may be helpful, instead, to follow a functional division in various dimensions, where classification of moral norms will correspond to the functional classification of actions, that is, depart from the benefits and costs that would result from following the norms. Thinking in this way leads us to a broad classification of moral norms into three spheres:

- A morality of integrity, which regulates individuals' rights to act in their own interest and on their own judgments. Norms in this category lead to benefits for me as an individual.
- A reciprocal morality, which supports mutual benefit and harmonious coexistence. Norms in this category facilitate my possibilities to cooperate with others.
- An altruistic morality, implying obligations for individuals to follow commandments to selflessly serve their fellow men and ideals. Norms in this category lead to losses for myself and benefits for somebody else.

These spheres, too, are primarily functional, not normative. Here no implicit evaluation is made of a sphere as good or bad. Nor is it assumed that moral rules are inherently good and that bad ones are to be categorized as immoral or amoral. The three spheres naturally include principles, which some people praise, but others reject. The purpose of a functional division is to facilitate analysis and promote a well-founded normative assessment. We shall now examine each sphere, in turn, with most examples taken from Western societies with which we are most familiar.

Integrity

The first questions about the individual's right to act in his or her own interest are: what should it be called and should it really be treated under the heading of ethics? Our term "morality of integrity" emphasizes the essential concept as well as lessens the confusion that has resulted from the long propaganda war on egoism. The most striking thing about morality of integrity is its expansion during the last few centuries. Previously, many states had an aristocracy with rights in relation to the monarchy, while the common citizen retained little integrity in relation to either these or the priestly elite. With the Enlightenment, and the American and French Revolutions, came new ideas. Conventions on human freedom, from Virginia in 1776 to Helsinki in 1975, have underlined the rights of individuals against the state. The main position is that such human rights are an overriding end in themselves. Another view is that they are functionally valuable in promoting a good society: thus one supports individual rights as a means, not as an end. Both of these views approve of individual interests, even when they conflict with official "social utility."

Individual rights presuppose some economic independence, so that people do not live at the mercy of regimes. Economic life must allow real freedom of choice for the individual, both as a producer and as a consumer. At present, there are few that agitate for total state domination of economic life with very narrow leeway for individuality. When connecting morality of integrity with actions, it is certainly self-interested actions that receive support from the norms in this sphere.

Even in decisions that affect oneself very greatly, the individual does not have full freedom of action, and this may seem surprising. According to Catholic belief, suicide is a grave sin, and numerous countries forbid it. The absence of a right to die painlessly can also illustrate the limitations on personal integrity. A right to use drugs is another area where strongly individualistic choices are opposed by different values.

It is reasonable to view kin selection as a group of actions influenced by integrity morality. We have a right to take care of ourselves and our children to the best of our ability, but rights over children are complicated. While a genetic concurrence exists that prevents basic conflicts of interest, dire threats to the rights of children do occur. In particular cases, deep feelings may arise for and against the parents: a timely intervention by the social authorities, one asks, or a witch-hunt? Most people probably agree with the parents as responsible guardians, and with the social authorities only in situations of extreme abuse; yet exactly where the border runs is a sensitive

matter. The growing rights of children can be regarded as an expansion in morality of integrity.

Women's more independent role in the Western society belongs to this development as well. It makes a woman, not chiefly a family member but an individual with goals somewhat different from her husband's. Two parallel changes have taken place in the family: decisions have been democratized and they have been individualized.

Paradoxically, however, a connection is seldom made with self-interest and egoism. Rights to act on one's own, for personal aims, are not gladly given this label. Whereas "self-realization" is by no means a dirty word, egoism is. What should be equally obvious is that there are moral principles that support the individual's self-interest and cannot simply be excluded from a moral debate.

Reciprocity

This heading has the greatest significance if we look at the social rules that directly affect actions. There has clearly been increased emphasis on cooperation between individuals within the human evolutionary lineage. A fully voluntary reciprocity suffers limitations; a right to give up cooperation at any moment may only yield a game of wait-and-see. Among the principal functions of society is to lay down rules for cooperation, as well as to exert moral and legal pressures on people who break the rules (Gauthier, 1986).

The function of many social rules is to facilitate cooperation and coexistence. Traffic laws are a good example. Rules of economic life are mainly intended to create certainty about agreements and obligations; punishment for theft is meant to counteract one-sided transactions that involve no return services.

Besides all the regulations of public economic life, there are the reciprocal rules of private life. Here, a rule-breaker risks social repression, not prison. If one expects to be invited back, one must first invite in turn. Gratitude and return favors are constant demands on our behavior. Many of these rules are so prosaic that we see them not as moral rules, but as normal behavior. Yet the actions we really perform are, to a very large extent, based on reciprocal moral rules.

Often the two parties in a relationship do not have identical status: man and woman, rich and poor, buyer and seller. The purpose of rules is to establish some sort of balance. In various cultures, the parties are – or were – less equal than in the West today, but a reciprocal undercurrent is

still detectable. Its legitimacy may seem dubious, as when a peasant works and his master provides protection. Even so, clarity and acceptance are two conditions for avoiding social conflict. With a weak reciprocal system, economic development is stifled and parasitism becomes rampant. The society turns into a kleptocracy. A functioning reciprocal system is fundamental for every human society.

That reciprocal morality promotes reciprocal actions is self-evident, but the link between reciprocal morality and group-egoistic actions is more intricate. The first step, a right to organize groups of people, is based primarily on a morality of integrity. Organizational freedom is closely related to other freedoms of choice, and restricts the state's power to decide what is a good or a bad organization.

However, numerous groups are not principally devoted to an internal activity: they assert the members' interests against other groups and interests. When these special interests collide, great problems of conflict resolution arise. The special interests in a society must be able to find solutions so that groups do not end in total confrontation with each other: they should be willing to seek compromises. Without mutual advantages, there is no basis for cooperation or, sometimes, even for coexistence. A factor, which enhances the possibilities of avoiding conflict between groups, then, is a strong reciprocal morality.

In Western states, a cooperative spirit is widespread. The special interests due to group egoism must, through coalitions and compromise, influence other groupings and ultimately find a resolution acceptable to all. Despite their occasionally predominant rattling of weapons, group-egoistic agitations also presuppose a reciprocal morality of compromise.

Altruism

The third sphere, altruistic morality, is the officially dominant philosophy in many societies. One of its products is religion, for which self-sacrifice is always far-reaching. This is most obvious in mortification practices, where one is trained to suppress individual desires and feelings in favor of a "higher" calling. Communist morality runs in the same ruts. A subject's plain duty is to labor in meekness toward the common goals ordained by the leader. Many people listen with a lump in their throats to the old recording of John F. Kennedy's presidential inauguration speech: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

The individual should make a sacrifice for the state, even if the benefit does not match the effort.

While a welfare state has several foundations, one of them is an altruistic claim that we are obliged to help our fellow human beings. The state is then the charitable apparatus, which aids underdeveloped countries and unfortunate citizens: our capacity and generosity provide for their needs and incapacity. The other side of these transfers consists of advantages, which an individual can get from the state: child support, retirement pensions, social payments, resettlement funds and cultural grants. Much in the welfare state could be regarded as a reciprocal system where the costs are covered by the benefits that you receive. A danger in the system, however, is that it is not very transparent, the donor is relatively anonymous and everybody hopes that somebody else is footing the bill. This is, indeed, to be hopeful. Frédéric Bastiat (1848) wrote in the middle of the 19th century: “The state is the great fiction in which all believe they can live at the cost of others.”

Although most advocates of altruism would emphasize its peaceful aspects, we must come back to the significance of ethics for warlike aspects. The state’s survival has owed to its maintaining a military strength, which keeps neighboring states out – and which, if possible, can subdue them. A military system does not rely on voluntary assent to its incitements, but traditionally exerts an element of force. The fiery cross had a noose of rope dangling from one end, as a reminder that whoever failed to defend the community could look forward to being hung from its trees. When persuading people of something as repulsive as the duty to risk their lives, it is seldom a matter of using either “the carrot or the stick,” and nearly always of using both together, and this is where altruism serves a function. The soldier needs a higher aim to motivate his great risk. Raising people’s readiness to risk their lives for the state is a serious moral and social task, with various justifications. An historic mission, God’s will, a thousand-year Reich, the triumph of the proletariat, the victory of democracy, and a war to end all wars are among the commonest candidates. The soldier does not intend to die for the cause – “the earth is strewn ... with the graves of men who were slain even as they were inclined to slay” (Lopreato, 1981, p. 116). Most deaths could be regarded as unintended altruism (or not as altruism at all by people favoring an intentional definition of actions). But there is a connection between norms and behavior – A member of God’s militia trembles at the threat to his physical existence, but fairly succeeds in persuading himself that his sacrifice is a worthy duty. Altruism is a good carrot, which leads the soldier to gaze upon higher values than his own life. Its ability to motivate is perhaps the chief reason why altruistic acts occur in

human cultures (see, e.g., Richerson et al., 2003; Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, & Fehr, 2003). Groups with an ethics of willing sacrifice perhaps possessed, in addition to their apparatus of force, an advantage over groups with that apparatus alone. A capacity for ideological crusades could have been a decisive factor in struggles between competing groups.

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN UNSELFISHNESS

Formal analyses have repeatedly shown that altruistic behavior cannot exist as a stable evolutionary strategy (e.g., Maynard Smith & Price, 1973; Williams, 1966; Axelrod, 1984; Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981), but only as a brief form of transition from reciprocal to selfish behavior; reciprocity, but not altruism, may be stable against invasion by a selfish strategy. In this sense altruism is inherently self-destructive. How is then the existence of human altruism to be explained?

We believe that prerequisites for altruistic behavior are to be found in each of the other four behavioral categories. For instance, some forms of unselfishness, such as expressed through nursing behavior, are mostly to be traced back to mechanisms operating in a kin selection context. Such acts may be due to a signal-receiver system not being very specific, as for instance when a cry, coming from an unknown child, elicits our empathy and help. In other instances, altruistic behavior is an effect of various interactions between behavioral categories and cultural norms. Alexander (1987) regards altruistic behavior as an effect of systems of indirect reciprocity, where, in a society, it is costly for individuals to seem less altruistic than others. Here, the promotion of altruism can be seen as having an egoistic basis; in that it is in one's own interest to surround oneself by altruists. This egoistic basis for promoting altruism is also important for understanding the discrepancy between the amount of preaching of altruism and the amount of actual altruistic behavior (Campbell, 1975). Both the promotion and the expression of altruism can have its root in group-egoistic tendencies of being conformist. In short, from an individual point of view, it is easy to understand why it is interesting to raise the general level of altruism in the population. However, it might be more difficult to understand why people let themselves be manipulated toward altruistic behavior. Is a more general inclination to conformism (Boyd & Richerson, 1991; Richerson et al., 2003) a sufficient explanation?

One mechanism that may thwart regular group egoism into altruistic behavior is a slow process of increased imbalance between various interests, foremost those of the leader versus other members. When permanent

structures arise within a group, the link between members' interests and the group's policy becomes weaker since leaders and functionaries in the group acquire a self-interest that does not coincide with the ordinary member. The connection between interests and goals is no longer so obvious. A risk always exists that the group will degenerate, making leaders' interest the main theme and turning members into just tools and no longer the beneficiaries. An altruistic goal may be used as an ideological cover for such a transition.

War as a phenomenon can be understood as a male coalitional reproductive strategy, that is, a group-egoistic endeavor with deep roots in phylogeny (van der Dennen, 1995, 2007). Also, men who fight against an invading army of genocidal intent are acting rationally in terms of kin selection, when they risk their lives to save their families. While kin selection has seldom been a cause of war during recent millennia, quite a few wars – both offensive and defensive – can be viewed as acts of group egoism. Wars that include plundering may often be rational according to group egoism: the warriors take clear risks, but these are justified by the opportunity for booty. Group-egoistic offensive war finds an old example in the raiding voyages of the Vikings. In numerous other wars, the soldier has had little to win and his life to lose. It is not a question of defending his family, which has frequently stayed well out of danger, at least in one of the warring states. Nor do the soldier's pay or chances of plunder provide a sufficient gain. Participation in such a war is clearly a form of altruistic behavior that originates in group egoism in prior societies.

Similarly, regular cooperation may be thwarted, so that one actor mainly is the receiver and the other mainly the giver in a relationship. One part may be manipulated or in other ways deceived into believing that the relationship is reciprocal, but that it is good manners to stress the giving. One important point to be made is that in all cases, where unselfishness is involved, there is another part whose selfish needs are provided for; an altruistic interaction needs both a giver and a receiver. With an emphasis on the virtue of sacrifice, there is often a lack of scrutinizing whether the benefits are sufficient to motivate the sacrifices – nor who in fact are the beneficiaries.

MORAL CONFLICTS

How do people divide time and resources among the behavioral categories that we have outlined (Fig. 1), tasks such as reading, dining with a friend, caring for children, community life, and blood donations? A “normal” person does many things, which can be classified as self-interest, thus

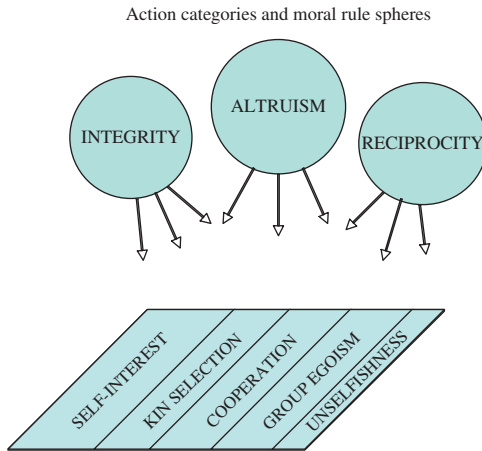


Fig. 1. Five Categories of Action and Three Moral Rule Spheres. Rules in All Three Spheres Will Affect All Five Categories of Action (see text for further explanation).

increasing the size of that category. Further, he or she performs a smaller number of actions, which qualify as unselfish. The amount of time and energy devoted to actions in the three other categories is likely intermediary between that of self-interest and unselfishness.

Moral norms will influence human actions, and moral philosophy can be viewed as a dynamic conflict between norms. Specifically, conflicts may arise between the spheres that we envisage in this chapter (Fig. 1), but also between alternative norms within a particular sphere. Ethics will influence action partly within a behavioral category, and partly considering a choice between categories. In each sphere, there are alternative proposals for norms, but they have a unified tendency. The morality of integrity aims chiefly to strengthen individual action by opposing what it regards as bad actions in the other categories; for example, when an individual is forced into conventional behavior by her family, by “everyone else,” or by the state. Greater independence would lead to better consequences according to norms within the integrity sphere. Reciprocal morality relates to problems that could be solved to improve the advantage of cooperation. Finally, norms within the altruistic sphere stipulate that problems should be solved through individuals acting selflessly. Thus, each moral sphere should be taken to affect a broad spectrum of human actions not only in one specific behavioral category.

On numerous issues, conflict arises between a morality of integrity and a reciprocal morality. How free should individuals be in relation to their agreements: should one be able, for instance, to easily dissolve a contract of employment, marriage, or partnership? Where is the line distinguishing liberty from responsibility? Yet the two kinds of morality are connected by a common basis, self-interest in the broad sense. Generally, cooperation – as well as written or unwritten rules – is no sacrifice for the individual, but serves his or her own interests. The conflicts between these two spheres are more a question of border skirmishing than of total opposition.

The classical conflict in moral philosophy is that between the integrity and the altruistic spheres. Because humans are regarded as basically selfish, altruism has to be taught and preached. Campbell illustrates the conflict between society and individual interests that has been resolved by societal preaching 100% altruism, but in reality manages to reach it to a much lower extent (Campbell, 1975). By necessity, such a moral system is hypocritical because people live up to the norms to such a low degree (Mackie, 1977). Is such a moral system necessary for a humane society?

There is a third conflict, unnoticed by many, namely that between the reciprocal and the altruistic spheres. Whereas an altruistic morality is based on a one-sided giving (and one-sided receiving), a reciprocal morality is based on mutual gain, and this makes quite a lot of difference when it comes to ethical rules. Some citations from the Sermon on the Mount may serve as an illustration of an altruistic morality that directly confronts a reciprocal morality:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
and from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your coat as well.
Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your
goods, do not ask them again.”
“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners
love those that love them.
And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?
For even sinners do the same.”

Many social functions can proceed upon either a reciprocal or an altruistic foundation, but we believe that a fundamental hypothesis should be tested: Would we have a better society if an altruistic morality were replaced by a reciprocal one? Would it not be beneficial with fewer willing givers of blood on the battlefield, even if so also in the hospital? The implications are many and complex, but few if any issues have such importance for moral philosophy.

As mentioned, there is no strict correspondence between the norm spheres and the categories of action. It is therefore important to clarify and exemplify how moral spheres and action categories combine. For example, a common combination is that between altruistic norms on one hand, and leadership egoism together with group egoism from the ordinary members on the other. The leadership might step by step change the policy so that there is no longer a group-egoistic rationale for the members, but their actions in effect become altruistic. The members may, however, believe that they are still the beneficiaries of the group project and that the altruistic norms only have a decorative function. Even the leader might be unaware of his egoistic advantages and firmly believe in himself sacrificing for a great altruistic purpose. Self-deception can be most helpful when trying to deceive others (Trivers, 1985).

The relationship between leader and regular group members may in other instances be influenced by reciprocal norms under which the mutual benefits as well as responsibilities and costs are under steady scrutiny. When influenced by such norms, it should be more difficult for leaders to cheat and easier to keep them loyal to group-egoistic goals.

A difference in interests is a source of conflict between different groups, but norms also influence such conflicts. A strong sense of integrity of one group confronts another group's insistence of general obedience to a norm they honor. Conflicts can also occur between groups that have similar values. Two companies or two countries might both honor reciprocal values, but may experience the other part violating these norms. The potential cost one's own group is always a factor to consider when judging the rationale of escalating the conflict. The problem with altruism is that this rationale is attributed less importance since self-sacrifice is held in such high regard. The confrontation between two groups, both considering themselves standing for high altruistic ethics, is likely to be especially antagonistic. In contrast, reciprocal ethics has a higher potential for solving conflicts between ethnic groups (Tullberg & Tullberg, 1997).

CONCLUSIONS

Moral philosophy can be viewed as a dynamic conflict between norms and we envisage three moral spheres: (1) morality of integrity that argues for maximization of the individual's freedoms and rights (self-interest), (2) reciprocal morality that promotes effectiveness in cooperation, and (3) altruistic morality that promotes sacrifices for others. What unites the

first two spheres is the individual's wider self-interest since effective cooperation is of benefit to both parties. Thus, an overemphasis on morality of integrity at the expense of reciprocal morality can be disadvantageous to the individual in a long run or broader perspective since there should be an interest for the individual in achieving a balance between these spheres.

Yet the altruistic sphere, advocated by traditional moral philosophy and religion, is diametrically opposed to the other spheres because of its focus on selflessness. Traditionally, altruism's main impact is seen as that of counteracting egoism. However, there is opposition between the altruistic sphere, with its rules promoting a one-way giving, often departing from the needs of one party, and the reciprocal sphere, with its emphasis on mutual benefit. Reciprocal morality not only argues against parasitism and free riding for the self but also for others. Help is conditioned upon a reasonable prognosis of reciprocation by the receiving agent. Altruistic morality, on the other hand, is unconditioned, and there is no check against one party being used. This may be clouded by statements that generosity pays even in situations when this is not so. More attention ought to be paid to altruism's potential subversive effect on reciprocal morality.

Hypocrisy is generally and forcefully condemned, but what rightly can be called double standards is in effect presupposed by the agitation for an altruistic ethic of unrealistic ambitions. We maintain that morality should be required to be honest, containing rules that people can apply and have a serious ambition to apply (Mackie, 1977). This should be possible both for a morality of integrity and reciprocal morality.

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