

## **Natural Ethics - A Confrontation with Altruism**

This is an interdisciplinary study of values in human relationships, with emphasis on the validity of moral systems and their analogies and origins in biological evolution. Case analyses are given in fields ranging from traditional philosophy and the history of ideas to practical decision-making as in politics and economics. The approach is both descriptive and polemical, in order to stimulate debate on naturalistic ethics and to question the utility of prevailing altruistic approaches in ethics.

The basic aims of the book is to show the weaknesses of ethical norms built on altruism, i.e. individual self-sacrifice, and to replace these with norms built on reciprocity. The starting point of the argumentation is the finding of modern evolutionary biology, that altruism as a strategy is not evolutionary stable since it is easily invaded by cheater, free-rider strategies. Humans are products of evolution by natural selection, and as such, should not be expected to be altruistic, but behave so as to promote our wide self-interest, which include kin selection and reciprocity, as well as group egoism. However, human behavior will also be affected by learning, and normative values and rules are part of that learning.

Why do such normative values and rules so often promote altruism? One reasonable answer to this question is the quest for manipulation, which unfortunately also seems to be a part of our evolutionary heritage. Thus, the ultimate explanation for the existence of altruistic ethics might be the possibility to manipulate other individuals to give up their self-interest. Inherent problems with this situation is the possibility of hypocrisy, i.e. the promotion of ideals that one is not willing to follow in action.

The most serious problem with altruism, however, might not be the fact that too few people live up to its norms, but on the contrary, that the manipulation works in a whole lot of cases. Why should altruism be stable on a short temporal scale when it is not stable on an evolutionary time scale? The argument of the book is that the conclusions concerning the stability of altruism are general because altruistic behavior is exposed to exploitation from other individuals.

Reciprocal behavior, contrary to altruistic, has safe-guards against cheating since it rewards cooperation and punishes cheating. The book argues that reciprocal norms have several advantages. One is that they should as a class be more easy to accept by people in general, not only in word but also in deed. This is because I as an individual can see that they promote my wide self-interest. Thus, there is a much greater element of honesty in such norms. The most important advantage, however, is that, such norms will work to prevent cheating and thus are likely to improve human social conditions.

The conclusion of the book is that modern evolutionary biology, where the individual, not the group or the species, is the main actor, is highly compatible with for instance democratic ideals, which build on individual rights, and with reciprocal rules, that build on individual interests. Thus, who we are, and what we ought to do, may not be so far apart as many philosophers and others have implied.

# CONTENTS

Foreword

- 1. What are good morals?**
- 2. Actions in nature and culture**
  - 2.1 Selfishness
  - 2.2 Kin selection
  - 2.3 Group egoism
  - 2.4 Reciprocity
  - 2.5 Altruism
  - 2.6 Human behavior
  - 2 Summary
- 3. Moral systems - a structure**
  - 3.1 Morality of integrity
  - 3.2 Reciprocal morality
  - 3.3 Altruistic morality
  - 3.4 Conflicts between the spheres
  - 3 Summary
- 4. Morality and reality**
  - 4.1 The anatomy of morality
  - 4.2 Intentions
  - 4.3 Realism
  - 4.4 Romanticism of nature and culture
  - 4.5 Double standards and public relations
  - 4.6 Universality
  - 4.7 Three philosophical schools
  - 4 Summary
- 5. Private morality - ethical rules and effects**
  - 5.1 The happy beneficiary?
  - 5.2 Bringing up children
  - 5.3 Selfishness and materialism
  - 5.4 Egoists and egocentrics
  - 5.5 Subegoism
  - 5.6 The human mind
  - 5.7 Problems of reciprocity
  - 5.8 Effects on conduct
  - 5 Summary
- 6. Morality and social dynamics**
  - 6.1 The effects of generosity
  - 6.2 Long term considerations
  - 6.3 Theories of human nature
  - 6.4 Survival of the fittest
  - 6.5 Power, sexuality, and reproduction

- 6.6 The nuclear family
- 6.7 Progress or mere change?
- 6.8 The Prisoner's Dilemma
- 6 Summary
  
- 7. War and peace - and reciprocity**
- 7.1 Imperialism
- 7.2 Cooperation or isolationism
- 7.3 Separatism and internationalism
- 7 Summary
  
- 8. The morality of leadership**
- 8.1 Leaders and private morals
- 8.2 Morals in public life
- 8.3 Democratic leadership
- 8.4 A cautionary tale
- 8 Summary
  
- 9. Biology and the cultural gap**
- 9.1 Biologists and moral debate
- 9.2 Critiques of sociobiology
- 9.3 Biological rules of conduct
- 9 Summary
  
- 10. Altruism and political sociology**
- 10.1 Social forces against altruism
- 10.2 Social forces for altruism
- 10.3 Democracy's dominance
- 10.4 The totalitarian threat
- 10 Summary
  
- 11 The future of altruism**
- 11.1 A normative analysis
  
- 11.2 What next?
- 11.3 Altruism's shadow
- 11 Summary

## Foreword

We have been interested in sociobiology for many years, and have often discussed the weaknesses of altruistic moral philosophy, but without devoting ourselves to a systematic critique until now. This was initiated by the preparatory work for a lecture at Stockholm University in the spring of 1992, entitled "Cooperation and morality in evolution". During the work we developed a model which has become the foundation for our analysis. We saw that the model raised a number of exciting questions that could later be merged into a new synthesis with radical conclusions. The project of a book was conceived and gradually materialized.

Biology and moral philosophy lie on opposite sites of the cultural gap, and every effort to cross this gap is met by wild attacks. It is fortified with powerful taboos, which have led to a lack of coherent and rational analysis. Many otherwise straightforward ideas and theories have made a sudden swing to avoid this zone of contention, dominated as it has been by ingrained beliefs, kind-hearted platitudes and sophistic speculations.

In moral philosophy, as in all subjects, it is far easier to give a deep criticism of others' systems than a considered defense of one's own. Without a better alternative, however, much criticism turns to ineffective quibbling. The rapid advances of sociobiology in recent decades have provided more profound knowledge of behavior than what was available in the past. We want to present and pursue this natural alternative in order to compare it with those altruistic approaches to socialization. The results call for a basic reevaluation of traditional moral philosophy.

Our gratitude is due to the Swedish Natural Science Research Council for contributing to the publication of the Swedish edition. While writing this book we have also profited from the good advice and viewpoints of several people. We thank Olle Brick, Torbjörn Fagerström, Thomas Falck, Svante Folin, Jan Helleday, Leif-Tage Jansson, Bo Sillén, Sverre Sjölander, Hans Temrin, Kjell Torbjörn, Maud Tullberg, Tycho Tullberg, Nils Uddenberg, Lars Werdelin and Christer Wiklund.

Our personal backgrounds are studies on both sides of that cultural gap. Jan Tullberg is an economist with a degree in social scientific and humanistic subjects such as the history of ideas, philosophy and political science. Birgitta Tullberg is associate professor in the Evolutionary Ecology group at the Department of Zoology, Stockholm University.

