

A Model of Actions and Norms

- an integrated evolutionary perspective on normative ethics and human behaviour.

by

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Abstract

Discussions within normative ethics would be facilitated by a classification that treat actions and moral norms within the same functional framework. Based on evolutionary biology, we distinguish five categories of action. Four of these - selfishness, kin selection, group egoism, and reciprocity - benefit the individual's genetic interest and may be described as "broad self-interest", but not so altruism. Departing from the five categories of action, we have divided moral norms into three broad spheres. A sphere of integrity concerns the individual's right to act in his/her own interest also against those of other individuals. A sphere of reciprocal morality deals with rules for various forms of co-operation. 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.

Most of us hold strong moral opinions and make daily judgements 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 judgement, 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 paper is divided into five parts:

- 1/ The relationship between evolution and ethics is briefly discussed in the introduction.
- 2/ Human actions are analysed in an evolutionary framework.
- 3/ A broad classification of ethical rules is suggested.
- 4/ The problems to understand altruism and the dynamic conflict between ethical rules are penetrated.
- 5/ Conclusions are drawn about how different classes of ethical rules may affect human behaviour and sociality.

Much of human behaviour can be understood and explained from an evolutionary perspective. The fact that the same evolutionary processes have shaped all lifeforms and that we share features with other organisms through a common evolutionary history speak for incorporating human behaviour in a Darwinian scheme. Still, morality is by many 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. T. H. Huxley (1894), for instance, regarded ethics, the "moral process", as antagonistic to evolution, the "cosmic process", and G. C. 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; 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 behaviour 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 evolutionary history has a direct effect on our psychological constitution which in turn has a direct effect on our actions. At the same time, our psychological functioning is effected by the exposure to specific norms, which in turn are a product of the human psyche. Thus, because norms are shaped by humans our evolutionary history is likely to indirectly affect the design of those norms.

Yet, moral philosophy is extremely difficult, for several reasons (e.g. Wilson 1998) and we agree with the philosopher Elliott Sober (1993, p. 208) 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." 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.

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 behaviour 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, i.e. 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 paper is to contribute to analytical progress within this field.

ACTIONS IN AN EVOLUTIONARY FRAMEWORK

On the basis of functional design and effects we identify five broad categories of action. These are selfishness, kin selection, reciprocity, egoism in group, and altruism, and we will 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 behaviour have been proposed previously (Alexander 1987; Campbell 1975; Masters 1983; 1989; van den Berghe 1981) and we will discuss some of these below.

Actions could potentially be categorised on several grounds: 1/ by the actor's intention, 2/ by actual effect or consequence. However, we use a third ground for categorisation of actions, namely 3/ the general effect of actions with this 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 behaviour. Since "expected" carry a connotation implying intention, we will 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 either from an agent's own claim or from 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. No conscious pre-meditation of an action, then, is needed in order to classify it based on likely effects. Neither does inadequate intelligence, or self-deception, influence such a classification. Subjective beliefs or claims of good intentions can be important parts of the behavioural 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 behaviour on a proximate level, and we also acknowledge that these are the targets of behavioural evolution. There are specific emotions connected to each of our behavioural categories, and also many different emotions behind each category. For instance, a reciprocal behaviour may be effected 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 behaviour towards a larger long-term benefit (through reciprocity) at the expense of a smaller short-term gain (through deceit) (Frank 1988).

Although the emotional background of behaviour is important in its own right, there is a tendency to give them 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 effects a feeling of goodness in the actor. Both kinds of emotional change is 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 their likely effects.

Selfishness

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 which we gladly perform but do not enjoy calling egoistic, but maybe self-realisation. The word selfishness needs precision. A functional definition of selfishness is as follows: "actions that on average produce greater advantages than disadvantages for the actor".

On these grounds, egoism is plainly a label that suits a great deal of what we do - ranging from actions which 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 in which an egoistic option is questioned are a tiny portion of the total.

Kin selection

Kin selection (Hamilton 1964) is a notably important process in understanding the behaviour of social animals, not least people. Whichever society is studied, kin aid 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 to nepotism in principle will exhibit systematic use of it.

Reciprocity

In human society, reciprocity plays a large role. David Hume (1739) spoke of "confined generosity" and a synonymous label is "reciprocal altruism" (Trivers 1971). The importance of "contacts", a dynamic network of services and return services, is emphasised in all areas of social life. If reciprocity 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 make 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. (A good illustration is the vampire bat (Wilkinson 1984): For an individual that is already sated, giving away a small amount of food is not so costly; yet a friendly regurgitation may yield a vital return gift when one's own stomach is empty, since a vampire can survive at most three days without food). Such an increase of effect means that reciprocity can survive in spite of the waste that occurs when some services are never returned.

Central to reciprocity are return services (Axelrod 1984), and a capacity to behave reciprocally has been anchored in many emotive responses (Alexander 1989). 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 behaviour, 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 behaviour' by someone who has suffered from others' collaboration.

Group egoism

Yet another type of behaviour can be called accumulative egoism. In sociobiology, the phenomenon may be described as 'aggregation' or 'selfish herd' (Hamilton 1971). Here, the term 'group egoism' or 'egoism in group' will be employed. It is essential, however, to recognise individual interest as the central point of departure, the group being primarily an instrument. Thus, group egoism builds upon individual rationality, not group selection.

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. Labour unions and business enterprises are clear instances. By joining forces, individuals increase the possibility of improving their conditions.

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 (Tullberg & Tullberg 1997).

It is important to draw a clear line between categories of action. Reciprocity and group egoism is particularly easy to confuse. If, for example, an action benefits people with the same school tie or the same profession, this is not reciprocity but group egoism. One can expect members who see one obeying the group norm

to consider one loyal and offer one 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 violation of its norms is crucial.

Altruism

We define altruism as an act that is costly for an actor, that does not benefit kin, and where there is little likelihood of reciprocation. Thus, we exclude "reciprocal altruism" and "kin altruism" from altruism.

There is a confusion around the term altruism, caused by a use of the term in both a broad (including reciprocity and kin selection) 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 co-operation' for the same phenomenon. Here we simply use the term altruism. This terminology may also be in line with a general use of the term; for instance Swap (1991) concludes that a 'naive' perceiver's defines 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 his coat than to keep his coat on. Thus, in a subjective sense, he 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. Altruism is absent, 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 categorisation. 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 plane, some acts are committed which 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 altruism. Whoever is rescued has every reason to feel a debt of gratitude, and the hero can count on public admiration, so he reaps a certain reward. If he is able to minimise his own risk, the act 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 altruism. 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 conceit.

Influence of time, culture and norms.

For our purpose in the present paper it is sufficient to conclude that behaviour in the five categories mentioned will be influenced by a combination of human nature moulded by our evolutionary history and the ethical norms that we are exposed to through culture. The speed of economic and technical process does not blur fundamental similarities in people and their behaviour 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 reciprocity has occurred with the rise of modern industrialised society. Kin selection, group egoism, and reciprocity together account for a large class of actions between the poles of egoism and altruism. 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 altruism.

It should again be emphasised 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 of value. We consider this method far more fruitful, even in an analysis, which 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 categorisations of behaviour.

Compared to the influential sociobiological view as represented by e.g. Edward O. Wilson and Richard Alexander, there is an agreement about egoism, kin selection and reciprocity, but because these three categories together (and extensions such as indirect reciprocity) are seen as including most of human behaviour 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 behaviour.

Pierre van den Berghe (1981) also include these major three categories, but adds a fourth, labelled coercion. This is certainly a kind of behaviour 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 reciprocity.

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 to mutual harm as to 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 morals will correspond to the functional classification of actions. Three spheres give such a division of morals:

- * A morality of integrity, which regulates individuals' rights to act in their own interest and on their own judgements.
- * A reciprocal morality, whose rules are to hold for mutual benefit and harmonious coexistence.
- * An altruistic morality, implying obligations for individuals to follow commandments to selflessly serve their fellow men and ideals.

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 categorised 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" emphasises the essential concept here, as well as to lessen the confusion which 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 élite. 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. This view also approves 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 egoistic 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 wonders, 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 democratised, and they have been individualised.

Paradoxically, however, a connection is seldom made with egoism. Rights to act on one's own, for personal aims, are not gladly given this label. Whereas 'self-realisation' is by no means a dirty word, egoism is. What should be equally obvious is that there are moral principles, which support the individual's self-interest and cannot be simply 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 co-operation between individuals within the human evolutionary lineage. A fully voluntary reciprocity suffers limitations; a right to give up co-operation at any moment may only yield a game of wait-and-see. Among the principal functions of society is to lay down rules for co-operation, as well as to exert moral and legal pressure on people who break the rules (Gauthier 1986).

A little thought shows that many social rules are supposed to function by facilitating co-operation 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 favours are constant demands on our behaviour. Many of these rules are so prosaic that we see them not as moral rules, but as normal behaviour. 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 weakly 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 organise groups of people, is based primarily on a morality of integrity. Organisational freedom is closely related to other freedoms of choice, and restricts the state's power to decide what is a good or a bad organisation.

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 co-operation 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 co-operative spirit prevails. 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 agitation also presuppose a reciprocal morality of compromise.

Altruism

The third sphere, altruistic morality, is the officially dominant philosophy in many societies. One of its sources 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 favour of a 'higher' calling.

Communist morality runs in the same ruts. A subject's plain duty is to labour 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 misfortunate 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, 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 wrote in the middle of the last century: "The state is the great illusion in which all believe they can live at the cost of others."

Although most advocates of altruism would emphasise the 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 neighbouring 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 favouring an intentional definition of actions). But there is a connection between norms and behaviour - 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 altruism occurs in human cultures. Groups with an ethics of willing sacrifice maybe 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.

PROBLEMS AND CONFLICTS

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

We believe that pre-requisites for altruism are to be found in each of the other four behavioural categories. For instance, some forms of altruism, such as expressed through nursing behaviour, 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 actual altruism is effected by various interactions between behavioural categories, and mediated through cultural norms. Alexander (1987) regards altruism 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 behaviour (Campbell 1975). Both the promotion and 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 towards altruism. Is a more general inclination to conformism (e.g. Boyd and Richerson 1991) a sufficient explanation?

One mechanism that may thwart regular group egoism into altruism 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's. 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.

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 altruism that originates in group egoism in prior societies.

Similarly, regular reciprocity 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 altruism is involved, there is one part whose selfish needs are provided for. An altruistic interaction needs both a giver and a receiver.

At this point it might be valuable to summarise the categories of action and the moral spheres in an illustration (Figure 1). How do people divide time and resources among 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 selfish, thus increasing the size of that category. Further, he or she performs a smaller number of actions, which qualify as altruistic. The three other categories then have an intermediate size. The figure also illustrates that the altruistic sphere, by its visual size and position, is considered the higher ethics, dominating the world of norms and moral philosophy.

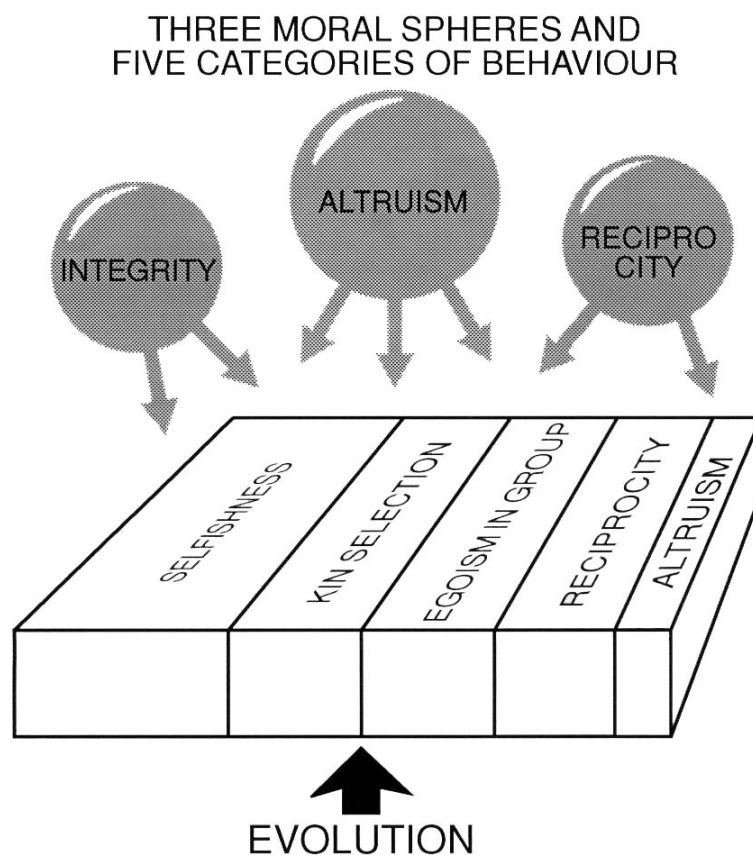


Figure 1. Five categories of action and three moral spheres. Rules in all three spheres will affect all five categories of action. (See text for further explanation).

Moral philosophy can be viewed as a dynamic conflict between the three spheres, as well as between alternative norms within a sphere. Ethics influences action partly within a category, and partly in 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 behaviour by a family, by "everyone else", or by the state. Greater independence would lead to better consequences according to norms within the integrity sphere. Reciprocal morality touches upon problems that could be solved to advantage by co-operation. Altruism sees many tasks that should be dealt with by individuals acting selflessly, in both direct and indirect senses. Thus, the different spheres must not be taken to affect only a specific behavioural category, but as all affecting a broad spectrum of human actions.

On numerous issues, conflict arises between a morality of integrity and a reciprocal morality. How free should an individual be in relation to his agreements: shall he 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, co-operation - as well as written or unwritten rules - is no sacrifice for the individual, but serves his 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 sphere. Because humans are regarded as basically selfish, altruism has to be taught and preached. Campbell (1975) 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. 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 system necessary for a humane society?

There is a third conflict, unnoticed by many, namely that between the reciprocal and altruistic spheres. Whereas an altruistic morality is based upon 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 them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also."

"For if ye love them which love you, what thanks have ye? For sinners also love those that love them.

And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thanks have ye? For sinners also do even 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 spheres and categories combine. For example, a common combination is that between altruistic norms on one hand and egoism of the leaders and group egoism from the ordinary members on the other. The leaders 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 are 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 honour. Conflicts can also occur between groups that have similar values. Two companies or two countries might both honour reciprocal values, but may experience the other part violating these norms. The potential cost to the 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 another paper we have proposed the use of reciprocal norms in conflict resolution between ethnic groups (Tullberg and Tullberg 1997).

CONCLUSIONS

Moral philosophy can be viewed as a dynamic conflict between three spheres - in which morality of integrity argues for maximisation of the individual's freedoms and rights (selfishness), reciprocal morality his effectiveness in co-operation, and altruistic morality his sacrifices for others. What unites the first two spheres is the individual's wider self-interest, since effective co-operation 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 he has a natural interest 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 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 which people can apply and have a serious ambition to apply (Mackie 1977). This should be possible both for a morality of integrity and for reciprocal morality.

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