

## Biology and Morality as Interrelated

In *Braintrust*, neurophilosopher Patricia Churchland emphasizes how the brain chemical oxytocin is one key part of our moral system. This ancient neuromodulator, originally involved in reproduction, is widespread in vertebrates. Only in mammals is oxytocin implicated in infant care, later extended to pro-social emotions. Churchland says that oxytocin activates in the mother's system under any stress brought upon her infant. Importantly, neural changes would have been in many species and would have undergone multiple evolutions before attaining the greater caring and helping tendencies we now see.

In a profound argument against selfishness and for cooperation and empathy, Frans de Waal in *The Age of Empathy* says that parenting extends to about 200mya. The desire for children might stem from innate caring tendencies. In other books, like *Good Natured* and *Primates and Philosophers*, de Waal says that our morals have precedents in the cognition and sentiments of great apes and like them in our interdependent social nature. Moreover, apes, both in captivity and in the wild, do not have to be closely related to work together, as long as assistance can be reciprocated. The ability to guess another's intentions probably arose from cooperation, not from competition, and might be implicated in how we have sclera (the whites of eyes) over apes. Not only do we read faces, but we read eyes to judge aims.

What we call morality has, as David Hume saw, a natural foundation and is not exclusively rational. Reason only modulates emotions. Churchland correctly says that morality may be rooted in biological "attachment" (23). As parents began to accept each other as mates, Churchland goes on, brain chemicals like oxytocin and vasopressin among *Homo erectus* to *Homo heidelbergensis* and especially in *Homo sapiens* solidified pair bonding.

No doubt pair bonding arose so that a male, who would offer protection to a female and some parental care, was granted exclusive mating privileges with her. There are costs to both males, e.g. energy loss in attracting and protecting a mate, and for females, e.g. pregnancy and infant care, so that cooperative behaviors evolved to mitigate high costs. Over time, people began to realize that cooperation is the best strategy in terms of getting and using resources. Basic confidence between parents and the benefits bestowed to offspring eventually spread to other kin, relatives, and group members. Here we see the seeds of cultural behavior.

Although we are biologically evolved to be pro-social and involve ourselves in the care and aid of others, skeptics discount any evolution of morality and adhere, instead, to abstract and metaphysical rules.

### Naysayers Concerning the Evolution of Morality

Here's the question posed by philosopher Hilary Putnam: How can evolutionary biology help us understand ethical judgments? His reply, while acknowledging moral emotions, is "Not very much." This response mistakenly looks for a unified answer. Evolutionary psychologists Kelly Asao and David Buss have answered the question by positing cumulative adaptations that include moral judgment, moral influence, and moral conscience. Moral judgments are not human-created but outcomes in a long chain of primate, cognitive adaptations.

Natural selection and other pressures provide the hardware and behavioral motivations for approval/disapproval emotions which harmonize with artistic culture. Sharon Street raises questions about the compatibility of human values with Darwinian science. While she acknowledges the impact of evolutionary forces on how and what we evaluate, those forces in her view did not affect the content of human values. However we look at it, there are philosophical implications in any discussion about Darwinian evolution. What follows is more analysis than argument. I'll return to Street at the end of this chapter.

Psychologist C. Daniel Batson asks what motivates care and concern expressed not only for family and friends but for others and even animals one has never seen. Do we care for others only out of self-interest? While Batson favors social constructivism he says any social learning does not answer the question of altruism. Acting *instrumentally* for others we nevertheless consider our own welfare. He admits that his view, contrary to current evolutionary thinking, lays emphasis on social learning and not on inherent mental faculties or modules.

Batson sees *principles* that make us interested in the well-being of others, but these principles are not necessarily *moral*, so that altruism is a motivation and not a helping behavior. Along with Sober and Wilson, Batson maintains that there is evolutionary altruism (increases another's fitness) and then there is psychological altruism (ultimately increases another's welfare). There is no need for evolutionary altruism to have psychological altruism. His point is that while one might be altruistically motivated, the end result is egoistic. Batson, on the one hand, offers a skeptical viewpoint of moral behavior, and, on the other hand, offers self-interested biological egoism which is the anxiety of some philosophers like Hilary Putnam and Susan Neiman.