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Source: *Behaviour*, Vol. 151, No. 2/3, Special Issue: Evolved Morality The Biology and Philosophy of Human Conscience (2014), pp. 137-141

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24525998>

Accessed: 11-05-2020 17:14 UTC

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Behaviour 151 (2014) 137–141

Behaviour
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Foreword

Evolved morality: The biology and philosophy of human conscience

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The last decade has seen a renewed interest in evolutionary approaches to morality. In the 1970s and 1980s, morality and evolution were considered largely incompatible, even by biologists, but we are now returning to the view that morality requires and probably has an evolutionary explanation. This view is not without its controversies, however, hence the intense debate about moral origins within biology and philosophy. Since psychologists, anthropologists and neuroscientists have joined this debate, and also religious scholars are involved, it has become a truly interdisciplinary effort, which is reflected in the composition of the present volume.

Morality is often defined in opposition to the natural 'instincts', as a tool to keep those instincts in check. This is reflected in Dawkins' (1976) advice to teach our children altruism, since our species is not naturally inclined to such behaviour, and the even more extreme position of Williams (1988), who complained about nature's 'wretchedness'. Williams (1988, p. 180) felt that calling nature 'amoral' or 'morally indifferent', as Thomas Henry Huxley (1894) had wisely done, was not strong enough. He accused nature of 'gross immorality', thus becoming the first and hopefully last biologist to infuse the evolutionary process with moral agency.

By holding up human morality as an exception to the larger scheme of nature, these authors deviated dramatically from Charles Darwin's (1871) proposal in *The descent of man* that human moral behaviour is continuous with the social and affectionate behaviour of other species, and evolved to enhance the cooperativeness of society. Darwin saw morality as part of human nature rather than as its opposite, a view widely supported by new interdisciplinary evidence. Experiments on human infants indicate that moral understanding starts early in life, studies of our primate relatives (Figure 1) show signs of moral building blocks, psychologists suggest 'gut' judgments that arrive more rapidly than reasoning and logic, and anthropologists have documented a sense of fairness all over the world. We are moving towards a

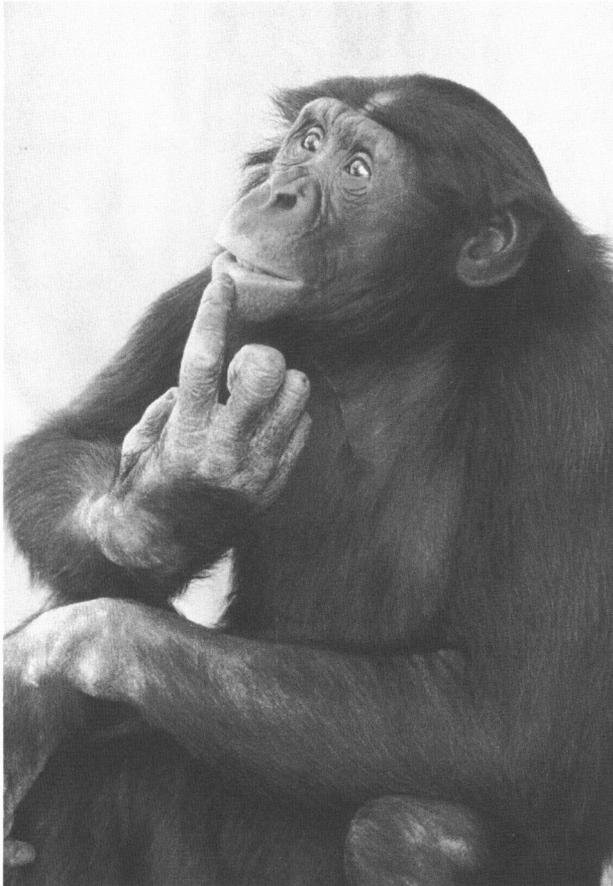


Figure 1. An adolescent male bonobo appears lost in thought. Photograph by Frans de Waal.



Figure 2. Some of the speakers at the conference held in June 2012 at the Ettore Majorana Foundation and Centre for Scientific Culture (EMFCSC) in Erice, Italy. Top, from left to right: Jeffrey Schloss, Richard Joyce, Liane Young, Owen Flanagan, Patricia Churchland, Philip Kitcher, Simon Blackburn, Melanie Killen and Stephen Pope. Bottom: Stefano Parmigiani, Frans de Waal, Telmo Pievani, Darcia Narvaez and Pier Francesco Ferrari. Unknown photographer.

new appreciation of the roots of human morality as well as the brain structures that support it.

For this reason, we brought together a collection of experts from disparate fields with the goal of exploring how and why morality may have evolved, how it develops in the human child, how it is related to religious beliefs, and whether neuroscience and evolutionary theory can shed light on its functioning in our species. This being the topic of several recent books by some of our participants (Harman, 2009; Churchland, 2011; Kitcher, 2011; de Waal, 2013; Norenzayan, 2013), we felt confident that a lively debate would ensue. We did not shy away from the age-old facts-versus-values debate, also known as the ‘naturalistic fallacy,’ as attested by several contributions that explicitly tackle this complex issue. The implications of this debate are enormous, as they may transform cherished views about our status as a moral species, a species able to produce conscious moral judgments.

The workshop idea originated during Frans de Waal’s visit to Parma just after another Erice workshop entitled *The primate mind* (de Waal & Ferrari, 2012). Stefano Parmigiani was quite confident of a positive response to a

workshop proposal on the biological roots of morality and ethics. The workshop was eventually held in the beautiful Sicilian city of Erice, in Italy, from 17 through 22 June, 2012, under the auspices of the Ettore Majorana Foundation and Centre for Scientific Culture (EMFCSC) and the International School of Ethology. The EMFCSC was founded by the Italian physicist Antonino Zichichi, who acts as the Centre's President. Since its founding the Centre, now embracing 123 schools, has represented an important meeting place for scientists all over the world. Our meeting was part of the International School of Ethology directed by Danilo Mainardi and Stefano Parmigiani.

The participants (Figure 2) and many students and scientists in the audience strolled the pre-medieval streets of Erice, which city offers a gorgeous mountaintop view of the Strait of Sicily, and discussed the lectures afterwards in local restaurants. All in all, it was a most stimulating meeting, which we hope is reflected in an equally stimulating volume. All manuscripts were subjected to peer-review. For ease of reference, papers on related themes have been grouped together.

Acknowledgements

We are deeply indebted to Antonio Zichichi (President, Ettore Majorana Foundation and Centre for Scientific Culture-EMFCSC) for including the workshop as part of the 2012 program of activities. The editors are grateful to all hard-working referees, and thank the publisher for making this Special Issue of *Behaviour* possible.

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