

In the early nineties Richard Dawkins coined the phrase “the Selfish Gene.” The idea was not new, but he offered the most precise and accessible version of it, which pushed into popular culture as far as a controversial idea about evolutionary philosophy and biology can go in popular culture.

Originally the idea of the selfish gene was propagated by George Williams and William Hamilton in the 1960's. This new idea was that animals, including humans, plants, and other organisms live in accordance to their genes. Our genetic material is in charge of us at all times even if it doesn't seem like it, or we don't know it. The reason we do things—look for mates, care for our young, take care of ourselves long enough to breed—is to make sure our genes get passed down to the next generation of Smiths, Browns, or Johnsons. It is easy for us to look at other animals and tell that this theory makes sense. Animals in general do just what they need to mate, as if it's a process that *has* to be done instead of something that is chosen; how often do we see other animals that choose celibacy?

It starts with recognizing that genes are the genetic material of all living things. Genes are what makes us who we are by coding for everyone of our features in it's seemingly infinite combinations of Guanine, Adenosine, Thymine, and Cytosine—the four compounds that code DNA. The furthering of science through studies on DNA has now given us proof that DNA is indeed the genetic material and makes us who we are in the beginning, I would like to point out that I am not saying, and do not believe, that our character is only the effect of our DNA, and has nothing to do with our environment growing up, or significant experiences in our lives. Another important aspect of DNA is the fact that it self-replicates itself so that each new cell has DNA (granting exceptions for such cells as red blood cells), and that each gamete has half the normal amount of DNA, which makes for the amazing process of evolution to be possible.

The story of the selfish gene starts in the beginning of life on earth, or perhaps before we could even call it “life,” but the idea is the same: that somewhere a long time ago there was the first organic molecule. Sometime after that there was the first molecule that could self-replicate. This self-replicating molecule would have easily become the most abundant organic molecule around. Being as

it would most likely be the only molecule that could copy itself, the replicating molecule would have no conceivable enemies besides the environment itself, but it would have many chances to fight the environment since there were many copies of it, and through each generation it would be adapting to its environment through mutations in its copying process. Mutations make up the roots of evolution by allowing for some new things to adapt its bearer to the environment better, and some only cause its bearer to fail earlier. This example can be seen in abundance in nature; an Antelope that is born with a stubby leg will easily be killed by its predators instead of an antelope that is born with better legs than most, or with a heightened sense of sight, so it can see its predators before its fellow antelope. There are infinite ways to show how mutations in genetics can help or harm its recipient.

So our organic molecule would, naturally, be replicating, mutating, adapting, and becoming more abundant throughout its time on earth. Eventually other molecules would come about that could self-replicate, but they wouldn't come out of chance, like the first one, they would come out of genetic mutations from the original, so we would have many molecules with common ancestors but different groups would be better adapted in one way to its environment, and others would be better adapted in a different way, and still others would just be worse off, and not adapted nearly as well as any others.

The different species of self-replicators would now be competing on many levels between each other for the materials that they needed to make new copies of themselves. This is a very important part of the story because it represents that each self-replicating molecule would do whatever it could to get the supplies it needed for the continuation of itself on an immediate scale. It "felt" that it was most important. The final step of our plan is that after many more generations the molecules would begin to adapt not only to its environment, but to each other, so that some would have ways to protect itself from the others, and some may be able to better destroy the others.

The molecules are now using what Dawkins called "survival machines." Then later in his article he drops the bomb that humans are nothing more than survival machines built over thousands of millions of years by our genes. We are only a survival mechanism for our "selfish genes" that care for nothing

but that we, they're prized inventions, pass them on to the our next generation. In turn that makes us controlled by our genes in a society where everyone else is also controlled by our genes like puppets with a world built around us by something that is inside all of us.

At first this seems like a bleak explanation for life in general, but there is more than that to this picture. What I want to write about is how we go from the selfish genes to having a system of ethics based on our genetic disposition. I do agree that our genes control what we do, but that doesn't mean we all act selfishly, or that ethics do not exist.

[explain where i'm going, and the problems i think there are in ethics]

For me to explain where I think ethics come from I first want to write about what I think is wrong with previously supported ideas in ethics. These basic points are based on my views of the problems with ethics today, and may be wrong, but from my observations these seem to be the biggest problems.

- 1) Ethics being based on the non-physical in any way. This has obvious problems in accordance to anyone who feels that there is only a physical reality.
- 2) Ethics should not require any sort of non logical jump. In many ethical ideas there is a jump much like the 'leap of faith' where one must agree to something that isn't completely based on fact or a logical path. This includes saying that people who are completely in tune with their rationality will all behave ethically.
- 3) Ethics cannot undergo counter arguments based on the way other animals act. Other animals are not humans, and humans are not other animals. Ethics is something created by the self reflecting mind, and other animals do not think about their actions in a way for there to be any ethical code besides survival in its plainest form.
- 4) Generalizations can only be made based on facts. To be applied to all humans and idea must have no exceptions, so that we don't overgeneralize our peers in an attempt to be correct in our ideas.

Therefore I believe that ethics must follow a logical path from our biological faculties to dictating our

physical actions. Ethics must be based on concrete ideas that allow for change over time, and objective rules to the present.

From this I want to show that Ethics are uniquely human, and grow from the roots of evolution and gene survival. They are created by humans, but are objective and subjective. They are objective to all of us, but are subject to the human society as a whole. This allows for them to have base that can flow through time without contradiction.