

Researchers Prove Altruism Begins In Infancy- is this an anticipation?

Post by "Lee" of February 10, 2020 at 4:44 PM

Does this new scientific research support the Epicurean doctrine of anticipations? The study concluded that human beings are born with the ability to sometimes exhibit a selfless inclination for the well being of others. This seems to be an innate propensity to treat others as having equal value and shares some resemblance to justice. Does anyone agree or disagree?

Below are two links. One is to a short summary of the research and the other links to the scientific publication.

Born Kind? Researchers Prove Altruism Begins In Infancy

<https://www.studyfinds.org/benevolent-bab...rs-study-finds/>

Altruistic food sharing behavior by human infants after a hunger manipulation

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-58645-9>

Post by "Cassius" of February 10, 2020 at 5:41 PM

This question is right exactly in the expertise of [Elayne](#) but I know she has been very busy lately - no doubt she will weigh in when able.

My own sense of caution as to the first article would be on this premise:

"Human nature is complicated, no doubt, but most of us would at least like to think that people are [fundamentally good](#). If you're a big believer in humanity's best qualities, a new study is backing up your beliefs in a major way. It appears that babies may be instinctively altruistic."

I think it's perilous to think in terms of "good" and "evil" and as to whether we approve or disapprove of the inclination being discussed, but at the basic level of there being any kind of inclination at all, as opposed to there being only a total blank slate, I bet the findings of the article do support a reasonable theory of "anticipations."

However - is this next quote true? Because I would expect a form of anticipations would probably exist in all higher animals, and perhaps in all life forms.

"Kindness towards others at one's own expense is a **uniquely human trait**. While some primates have displayed a tendency to help each other out and share resources in certain situations, it is virtually unheard of across the animal kingdom for an animal to give up food he or she needs just because another is in need."

Post by "Hiram" of February 10, 2020 at 7:38 PM

I'm planning on discussing this actually in my Twentieth message. Lucretius wrote on the origins of compassion for the weak and for neighbors in the fifth book of *De Rerum Natura*, which is the most complete and fascinating discussion of Epicurean anthropology (it's generally assumed that he based his poem on Epicurus' books *On Nature*)

*And when they saw an offspring born
From out themselves, then first the human race
Began to soften. For 'twas now that fire
Rendered their shivering frames less staunch to bear,
Under the canopy of the sky, the cold;
And **Love reduced their shaggy hardness;**
And children, with the prattle and the kiss,
Soon broke the parents' haughty temper down.
Then, too, did **neighbours 'gin to league as friends,***

Eager to wrong no more or suffer wrong,
And urged for children and the womankind
Mercy, of fathers, whilst with cries and gestures
They stammered hints how meet it was that all
Should have compassion on the weak. And still,
Though concord not in every wise could then
Begotten be, a good, a goodly part
Kept faith inviolate- or else mankind
Long since had been unutterably cut off,
And propagation never could have brought
The species down the ages.

Lucretius, in De Rerum Natura 5:1015-27

(also, the book *The Bonobo and the Atheist* is an anthropological account of the origins of morality, for which I wrote a review

<http://societyofepicurus.com/the-bonobo-and...st-book-review/>)

Post by “Lee” of February 12, 2020 at 10:42 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Good points Cassius. I had also seen the grey parrot study and forgot about it. I agree that this behavior is likely not limited to humans although it may be most developed in homo sapiens .

When I consider altruism in the context of the anticipations of friendship and justice along with the evolutionary-like mechanisms of Epicurean physics, it seems like the behavior is fundamental to our social nature because it works better than being selfish.

I may be hopelessly biased by a Christian and virtue ethics-based upbringing and therefore looking for a justification to see life as more than a brutish survival of the fittest. However, it does seem objectively true that we all live better when we have the circumspection to see the well-being of others is sometimes more important than our own.

Post by "Lee" of February 12, 2020 at 10:52 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

I'm planning on discussing this actually in my Twentieth message.

I look forward to seeing the message Hiram as I am signed up to your email list.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

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Thanks for pointing out the quote from Lucretius. It seems to be an excellent example of the evolutionary-type materialist explanation of how and why we develop social bonds and eventually civilization.

Thanks also for the link to your review of “*The Bonobo and the Atheist*.” I look forward to reading it.

Lee

Post by “Lee” of February 13, 2020 at 1:14 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

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Hiram, I read your review and thought it was very good. In particular the point at the end about “is” vs “ought.”

I completely agree with you that “ought” statements are true and it is misguided to look for a rational first principle for their validity beyond human feelings. We can reason about what we ought to do but will never find a reason for the original moral principles. Those who intellectualize morality as only about “is” statements run the risk of becoming amoral which is unnatural.

Post by “Hiram” of February 14, 2020 at 8:24 AM

Is /ought is a fetish among logicians. And it mostly ends in pointless and self-defeating opinions. Because in the end we all MUST act on our moral intuitions. Not acting on them is a moral choice too.

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2020 at 9:19 AM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

Is /ought is a fetish among logicians

I completely agree. It is such a fetish that we probably need to develop a clear statement explaining the issue and pointing the way to an Epicurean position, just as on this "problem of universals."

Post by “Elayne” of February 14, 2020 at 1:36 PM

Sorry, have been busy lately, but Lee-- I do not see it as sometimes putting the "wellbeing" of others ahead of my own, even if it might look like that to an outsider. It's still always my own pleasure I'm choosing for. Even if I do something that looks superficially like self-sacrifice, it's because my happiness is fully entangled in the happiness of those I love. Not separate, not competing. So to withhold help to a beloved friend when it's within my capabilities to help would cause me immediate and ongoing pain.

I think this is critical to be clear on. Otherwise you risk having competing morality rules that will leave you confused. Trying to balance self and other. It makes a mess, and it understates the depth of human friendship.

Post by “Elayne” of February 14, 2020 at 1:38 PM

on the issue of developmental sharing behavior, yes, a well documented phenomenon. It is "programmed", a prolepsis, not taught.

Post by "Lee" of February 18, 2020 at 10:12 AM

Thanks for clarifying this point Elayne. I see the distinction and the need to resolve our behavior back to the experience of pleasure as the primary principal.

I believe I read somewhere (maybe De Witt's book) how Epicurus taught that giving up one's life for a friend could be justified/rationalized because living with the pain of choosing one's life over that of a friend was more painful than death.