BEHAVIOR

ALTRUISTICALLY INCLINED?: THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES, EVOLUTIONARY THEORY, AND THE ORIGINS OF RECIPROCITY. *Economics, Cognition, and Society.*

By Alexander J Field. Ann Arbor (Michigan): University of Michigan Press. $54.50. xvi + 373 p; ill.; index. ISBN: 0–472–11224–4. 2001.

In this volume, the author, an economist, sets out to explain why humans are so much nicer than rational choice theory says they should be. For example, why do people cooperate in one-shot Prisoner's Dilemmas when a rational chooser would certainly defect? And how could a tendency to cooperate have established itself in a world of defectors?

The biologist's answer is simple: people are not rational choosers. In evolutionary theory, *natural selection,* not the individual, plays the role of rational chooser. Natural selection "chooses" between alternative designs of organisms; and selection evidently favored a "Tit-for-Tat" design in the context of repeated Prisoner's Dilemmas (see R M Axelrod. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation.* New York: Basic Books). Given that such designs do not always work perfectly in novel contexts, it should come as no surprise that a veteran cooperator such as *Homo sapiens* is insensitive to artificial, laboratory conditions of anonymity and one-shotness, and open with a "nice" move.

A lone cooperator is a vulnerable creature; and so how did this cooperative tendency get off the ground in the first place? The biologist has several nonexclusive answers. Perhaps a mutant cooperator was clustered with its cooperative offspring. Perhaps reciprocity was a cue of (distant) kinship. Perhaps mutualism shaded into reciprocity via small increases in the time-lag between rounds of mutual benefit—from milliseconds, to minutes, to months. Perhaps the attention to reputation and the punishment of infractions that are common in dominance hierarchies were deployed, more benignly, to maintain reciprocal schemes. Any combination of routes provides ample "preadaptations" for full-blown reciprocity. Problems solved.

The economist's answer is less straightforward. Along with other economic migrants to evolutionary theory, Field assumes that the *individual* is the rational chooser, fitness maximizer, or unit of selection. He correctly deduces that this *creates* the "problem of altruism," but he then incorrectly concludes that this problem can be solved only by group selection. Field does not consider any of the

alternative routes to reciprocity. And the author's sole evidence of group selection in our species' past is our current tendency to cooperate in one-shot dilemmas; he does not present any independent evidence that the "right conditions" for group selection were present during human evolution. His defense of group selection therefore carries little weight.

A book on this topic could have provided a much-needed overview of the emerging synthesis of evolutionary psychology and behavioral economics. Unfortunately, this volume is skewed toward promoting group selection, and its structure is dizzyingly repetitive. Interested readers are advised to turn instead to Robert Frank's *Passions within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions* (1988. New York: Norton).

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