

ARISTOTLE AND EVOLUTIONARY ALTRUISM*

The most sustained attempt in recent decades to ground ethics upon the theory of evolution is that of sociobiology. Defined by its founder E. O. Wilson as «the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior», sociobiology aims to lay bare the biological underpinnings of animal behavior, and to apply these to man. Other renowned proponents are Michael Ruse and Richard Dawkins. According to sociobiology, morality is grounded in the epigenetic or hereditary rules received from our ancestors, each generation a transitory and transient relay in the onward perpetuation of the genotype.

According to Wilson, the all-embracing goal of human life is to propagate the species. In this context the inherited trait of altruism provides an answer to the question «Why be moral?» The ideal of cooperation for the sake of the greater goal seems counter to Darwin's «general law leading to the advancement of all organic beings – namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die»¹. Against early Darwinism, which emphasised survival of the fittest in the struggle for survival, sociobiology points to the need for cooperation within the group to guarantee survival of their *shared* genetic material. According to Wilson, Ruse, and Dawkins, this is attained in the concrete through altruistic behaviour which promotes the continuation and expansion of the gene pool. According to Ruse and Wilson «the individual is altruistic but his genes are 'selfish'»². Wilson defines altruism as «self-destructive behavior performed for the benefit of others»³. This occurs principally in two contexts: kin selection and reciprocal altruism. It is supported by the evidence of «social» structures observed in the animal kingdom, and which might be called «biological altruism».

Firstly individuals linked through kinship bestow altruistic favours on

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1. C. DARWIN, *On the Origin of Species*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 244.

2. E. O. WILSON & M. RUSE, The Evolution of Ethics, *New Scientist*, 108, no. 1478, 1985, p. 50.

3. E. O. WILSON, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 578. Ruse and Wilson define it as «self-sacrifice for the benefit of others», *art. cit.*, p. 50.

one another in order to increase the genetic fitness of the group as a whole, even though this may result in the reduced fitness of some individuals⁴. The collective goal is maximisation of shared genes into the next generation; what counts is «inclusive fitness». A perfect example of such altruism is the order of hymenoptera (ants, bees, wasps), studied by William D. Hamilton, who provided sociobiologists with empirical evidence to favour their theory: many females do not reproduce but devote themselves instead entirely to the queen, helping her produce as many offspring as possible. Peculiarly females of this insect group are more closely related to their sisters than to their daughters; it is thus genetically more productive to support fertile sisters than fertile daughters⁵.

Kin selection operates within the restricted blood circle: what of the wider population? Sociobiology appeals to the practice of reciprocal altruism, citing studies of Harvard zoologist Robert L Trivers to conclude that our tendencies toward such behaviour are inherited⁶. While the classic paradigm for *pure* altruism is the Good Samaritan, intuitively it contradicts the model of natural selection and seems overly idealistic. Altruism is more plausible on the wide scale if interpreted not as sheer benevolence, but in the context of generalised reciprocal or mutual benefit. Sociobiology contends that a population marked by an extended spirit of mutual cooperation will be genetically more successful. Wilson concedes: «the theory of group selection has taken most of the good will out of altruism». He acknowledges moreover: «human behavior abounds with reciprocal altruism consistent with genetic theory, but animal behavior seems to be almost devoid of it»⁷. Nonetheless a variety of examples may be cited. Some small fish clean the mouths of larger species, while being simultaneously fed. This cleaning symbiosis is to the advantage of the larger fish, but can function only on the tacit assumption that it will not make a meal of its dental hygienist. Some birds make warning calls to alert against a predator, thereby placing themselves in danger. Wilson refers to the trading of food among chimpanzees, African wild dogs and wolves⁸. How is reciprocity established in evolution? Wilson speculates: «There exists a critical frequency of the altruist gene above which the gene will spread explosively through the population and below which it will slowly recede to the mutational equilibrium. How critical frequencies are attained from scratch remains unknown»⁹.

4. Cf. E. O. WILSON, *Sociobiology*, p. 117.

5. See RUSE, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, p. 225.

6. R. L. TRIVERS, The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism, *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 46, 1971, pp. 35-57.

7. E. O. WILSON, *Sociology*, p. 120.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

E. O. Wilson himself acknowledges that altruism is the «central theoretical problem of sociobiology: how can altruism, which by definition reduces personal fitness, possibly evolve by natural selection?»¹⁰ Leaving aside the serious theoretical weaknesses specifically recognised by its champions with regard to its biological mechanism, it seems to me that while altruism plausibly might be an attractive ideal, it is unfeasible as a realistic grounding for an effective and convincing universal ethics. It would presuppose universal good will among every member of the human race; it is a counsel of perfection rather than a practical proposition. Universal altruism makes sense on condition that everyone shares an acceptance of a common independent value recognised by all as deserving love and respect. It assumes universal good will among every member of the human race. Aristotle helpfully distinguishes three kinds of friendship, based respectively on goodness, utility, and pleasure¹¹. This, I suggest, is a valid division to assess the claims of evolutionary ethics. Importantly Aristotle also distinguishes between the rare commitment between virtuous friends and a universal goodwill (εὐνοία), which is devoid of moral purchase.

The primary friendship of the good, Aristotle notes, «only occurs in man, for he alone has conscious purpose; but those of utility and pleasure occur also in the lower animals»¹². If Aristotle is correct, genuine altruism occurs only between humans who are independently good. There are friendships of utility and pleasure among men who are not entirely virtuous, and there is even a kind of «goodwill» among certain animals. In Aristotelian terms we do not observe altruism in animal behaviour; the suggestion of a hereditary altruism on the basis of zoological data, therefore, holds no promise. More importantly the selfless altruism required for the successful propagation of the species is nowhere to be found among humans. The purest altruism we find in humans is that which obtains reciprocally among virtuous individuals, but from an Aristotelian perspective there is no motivation to sacrifice oneself for the propagation of the species.

The term altruism was coined by Auguste Comte (1798-1857). With his proposed new religion dedicated to «the Great Being, Humanity», he defined altruism as «*vivre pour autrui*». Although Charles Kahn has warned that to discuss altruism with reference to Aristotle «introduces the risk of anachronistic assumptions and associations»¹³, this has not prevented schol-

10. E. O. WILSON, *Sociobiology*, p. 3.

11. *NE*, VIII, 3, 1156 a 6 – VIII, 4, 1157 b 5.

12. *EE*, VII 2, 1236 b 5-7, tr. H. Rackham, *Loeb Classical Library*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1956, p. 373.

13. C. H. KAHN, Aristotle and Altruism, *Mind*, 90, 1981, p. 20.

ars from introducing him to the debate. We find little evidence in Aristotle's writings either for or against altruism as understood by sociobiologists. We must distinguish between altruism as an actually observed human tendency and its supposed genetic origins: one might defend altruism as a feature of morality and reject its evolutionary explanation.

Julia Annas believes that «Aristotle's discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is often abused as reducing friendship and all apparent altruism to egoism»¹⁴. As an example of this common view she cites D. J. Allan: «Every point confirms the impression that Aristotle does not think it psychologically possible for a man to choose otherwise than in his own interest, and is seeking, in one way or another, to say what really happens when men appear to subordinate their interest to that of another»¹⁵. Richard Kraut rejects the view that Aristotle is an egoist¹⁶. Arthur Madigan accepts Julia Annas' reading¹⁷. Annas, however, is working with a mild definition of altruism, which makes no mention of self-sacrifice: «now and in what follows, these terms are used without any implication of selfishness versus selflessness; I take egoism to be the doctrine that an agent has no reason for acting unless it can be shown to be in his interests in some way, and altruism to be the doctrine that at least on some occasions the interests of another person can be a reason for his acting, without any reference to his own interests»¹⁸.

Significantly Aristotle speaks of «people mutually well-disposed, whom nevertheless we cannot speak of as friends, because they are not aware of each other's regard»¹⁹. It would appear that altruism is for Aristotle not an operative concept. The most one might do is extrapolate from a passage at the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, where he speaks of a natural and instinctive friendship between birds and most animals of the same species. This is strongest of all, he notes, among humans: «for which reason we praise those who love their fellow men. Even when travelling abroad one can observe that a natural affinity and friendship exist between man and man universally»²⁰. The natural affinity universally observed among mem-

14. J. ANNAS, Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism, *Mind*, 86, 1977, p. 539.

15. D. J. ALLAN, *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 138.

16. R. KRAUT, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 9-11, 78-90.

17. Cf. *Eth. Nic.*, 9. 8: Beyond Egoism and Altruism?, in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV, Aristotle's Ethics*, J. P. ANTON and A. PREUS (eds.), Albany, State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 73-94.

18. J. ANNAS, *art. cit.*, p. 535.

19. *NE*, VIII 2, 1156 a 2-3, tr. H. Rackham, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 1956, p. 457.

20. *NE*, VIII 1, 1155 a 20-22: «ὁθεν τοὺς φιλανθρώπους ἐπαινοῦμεν. ἴδοι δ' ἂν τις καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλάναις ὡς οἰκεῖον ἅπας ἄνθρωπος ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ φίλον».

bers of the human race is the closest we find in his writings to altruism as a possible foundation for ethics, but is much too vague²¹. Aristotle speaks enthusiastically of the benevolence that exists between close friends; but what is needed to support sociobiology's case would be impracticable. As Terence Irwin notes, «The friendship of virtuous people requires highly developed altruistic concerns; but the concerns extend to very few people. We may think that the sort of altruism required by justice and the other virtues of character is so different from the sort required by friendship that we need a different account for these other virtues. Aristotle, however, seems to offer no defence of the other-regarding aspects of the virtues beyond the defence of friendship; and so he seems to face a serious difficulty in justifying them»²².

Some elements of Aristotle's friendship are echoed in Wilson's altruism. Charles Kahn states: «if by altruism we mean a concern for the interests of others for their own sake, then for Aristotle true friendship is by definition altruistic»²³. For sociobiology, however, altruism is «self-destructive behavior performed for the benefit of others»²⁴, a concept foreign to Aristotle. Like David Hume, Aristotle recognises that love is firstly centred upon the self, and that men are «endowed only with a confined generosity»²⁵. Aristotle's virtuous man «wishes his own good (ἐαυτῷ τὰγαθὰ) ... desires his own life and security (καὶ ζῆν δὲ βούλεται ἐαυτὸν καὶ σώζεσθαι) ... for existence is good for the virtuous man (ἀγαθὸν γὰρ τῷ σπουδαίῳ τὸ εἶναι);

21. As Anthony Preus points out, the passage «is summarizing common opinions about friendship, and cannot be taken as directly stating Aristotle's opinions». Cf. Aristotle and Respect for Persons, in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV, Aristotle's Ethics*, J. P. ANTON and A. PREUS, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 221.

22. T. H. IRWIN, *Aristotle's First Principles*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 397.

23. C. H. KAHN, Aristotle and Altruism, *Mind*, 90, 1981, p. 21.

24. E. O. WILSON, *Sociobiology*, p. 578.

25. The entire passage is a relevant statement of the fundamental weakness of sociobiological altruism, and why it can never work: «Men being naturally selfish, or endowed only with a confined generosity, they are not easily induced to perform any action for the interest of strangers, except with a view to some reciprocal advantage, which they had no hope of obtaining but by such a performance. Now as it frequently happens, that these mutual performances cannot be finished at the same instant, it is necessary, that one party be contented to remain in uncertainty, and depend upon the gratitude of the other for a return of kindness. But so much corruption is there among men, that, generally speaking, this becomes but a slender security; and as the benefactor is here supposed to bestow his favours with a view to self-interest, this both takes off from the obligation, and sets an example to selfishness, which is the true mother of ingratitude. Were we, therefore, to follow the natural course of our passions and inclinations, we should perform but few actions for the advantage of others, from disinterested views; because we are naturally very limited in our kindness and affection; and we should perform as few of that kind, out of regard to interest; because we cannot depend upon their gratitude». D. HUME, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Section V.

and everyone wishes his own good: no one would choose to possess every good in the world on condition of becoming somebody else»²⁶. The last phrase implies that no one would wish to sacrifice himself for the sake of another self, which is the demand of sociobiology's altruism. The natural love of self precedes and supersedes the love of friendship: «everybody wishes good things for himself most of all»²⁷. While friendship is love of the other as of one's own self, it always remains in some measure a function of self-love.

This concurs with Alasdair MacIntyre's reference in *Dependent Rational Animals* to «influential accounts of altruism according to which it is either a disguised form of egoism or, in some more sophisticated versions, a transformation of egoism in the interests of satisfying egoism's goals»²⁸. The problem arises, however, only if one seeks to ground ethics upon altruistic sentiments. The distinction between egoism and altruism is a false starting point. As MacIntyre points out in *After Virtue*, altruism was proposed in modern philosophy as a solution to the problem of morality when men came to be viewed as by nature dangerously egoistic. Altruism becomes the only solution, but it is «apparently impossible and, if and when it occurs, inexplicable». MacIntyre points out:

on the traditional Aristotelian view such problems do not arise. For what education in the virtues teaches me is that my good as man is one and the same as the good of those others with whom I am bound up in human community. There is no way of my pursuing my good which is necessarily antagonistic to your pursuing yours because *the* good is neither mine peculiarly nor yours peculiarly – goods are not private property. Hence Aristotle's definition of friendship, the fundamental form of human relationship, is in terms of shared goods. The egoist is thus, in the ancient and medieval world, always someone who has made a fundamental mistake about where his own good lies and someone who has thus and to that extent excluded himself from human relationships²⁹.

I would add, however, that for Aristotle it is not out of generosity that we share goods. Acknowledging that there is a certain universal friendship among men³⁰, Aristotle recognises with good common sense that all men are

26. *NE*, IX 4, 1166 a 14-21, trans. Rackham, pp. 533-535.

27. *NE*, VIII 7, 1159 a 12, tr. Rackham, p. 481. Cf. *NE*, VIII 2, 1155 b 23-24: «It appears that each person loves what is good for himself». Trans. p. 455.

28. A. MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals*, Chicago, Open Court, 2008, p. 160. Cf. MacIntyre's entry «Egoism and Altruism» in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, New York, Macmillan, 1967, pp. 462-466.

29. A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, London, Duckworth, 1981, pp. 212-213.

30. *NE*, VIII 1, 1155 a 20-22.

selfish (φίλαντοι) to a greater or lesser degree³¹. In *Politics* I he notes that some people are consumed by zeal not for the good life, but for the material means needed simply to live; they have a limitless desire (εἰς ἄπειρον) for such goods³². Experience has shown him that «in public, men chiefly praise what is just and beautiful, and in secret rather wish for what is expedient»³³. Individuals are more interested in private possessions than in what is owned in common³⁴. Through practice and moral education we acquire the virtues to counter selfish tendencies. While Aristotle defines friendship in terms of shared goods, friendship is not itself the foundation for justice – even though friendship is preferred by legislators to justice. This is not a contradiction: friendship surpasses justice, but as the ground for universal political concord is an unattainable ideal. Justice is grounded rather on the recognition of common, independent and universal values shared by mankind. Diogenes Laertius reports that when his friends expressed surprise when he gave an alms to an unworthy beggar, Aristotle replied that he was not giving to the man but to the humanity in him.

There are two particular reasons why on Aristotle's view altruistic friendship could never be the ultimate foundation for morality. Firstly, true friendship only exists among virtuous persons³⁵; friendship already presupposes virtue. Since altruism depends upon virtue, it cannot be itself the motivating origin of virtue. Secondly friendship of the kind that involves genuine altruism is only possible within a very small circle of friends. In *Nicomachean Ethics* IX Aristotle states: «it is true that one may be friendly with many fellow-citizens ... but it is not possible to have many friends whom we love for their virtue and for themselves. We may be glad to find even a few friends of this sort»³⁶. Aristotle remarks: «such friendships are rare, because such men are few»³⁷.

Roger Trigg believes that reciprocal altruism, «unlike kin selection, involves an appeal to pure self-interest and is very Hobbesian»³⁸. Comment-

31. ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, I, 11, 1371 b 18 - 23.

32. IDEM, *Politics*, I, 3, 1257 b 40 – 1258 a 1: «αὐξίνει τὴν τοῦ νομίσματος οὐσίαν εἰς ἄπειρον. αἴτιον δὲ ταύτης τῆς διαθέσεως τὸ σπουδάζειν περὶ τὸ ζῆν, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸ εὖ ζῆν εἰς ἄπειρον οὖν ἐκείνης τῆς ἐπιθυμίας οὐσης».

33. IDEM, *Rhetoric*, II, 1399 a 28-31, trans. J. H. Freese, London, Heinemann (Loeb Classical Library), 1926, p. 313.

34. IDEM, *Politics*, II, 3, 1261 b 34-5.

35. IDEM, *NE*, VIII, 3, 1156 b 7-11.

36. IDEM, *NE*, IX, 10, 1171 a 17-20: «πολιτικῶς μὲν οὖν ἔστι πολλοῖς εἶναι φίλον καὶ μὴ ἄρεσκον ὄντα, ἀλλ' ὥς ἀληθῶς ἐπιεικῆ: δι' ἀρετὴν δὲ καὶ δι' αὐτοὺς οὐκ ἔστι πρὸς πολλούς, ἀγαπητὸν δὲ καὶ ὀλίγους εὐρεῖν τοιούτους» (trans. Rackham, p. 569).

37. IDEM, *NE*, VIII, 3, 1156 b 24-25.

38. R. TRIGG, *Ideas of Human Nature. An Historical Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988, p. 99.

ing on the inclination of some neo-Darwinians to explain morality wholly in evolutionary terms, Trigg comments: «such an enterprise is misconceived. Human reason, as a capacity, may be the product of evolution, but it is sufficiently flexible and free-ranging to detach itself from the direction of our natural inclinations. It can even sit in judgment on them. Certainly evolutionary theory is more adept at dealing with the origin of our natural sympathies and aversions, our likes and dislikes, than in explaining the operation of human reason. Since it is itself the product of the latter, it is wise not to overreach itself»³⁹.

Evolutionary ethicists postulate a motivational connection between altruism and genetic promulgation. That this is not necessarily the case is obvious from the fact that many sublimely altruistic lifestyles – e.g. poverty or celibacy in the service of one's fellows – exactly preclude the propagation of one's gene material. E. O. Wilson's interpretation of Mother Teresa's care of Calcutta's destitute as self-serving and «cheerfully subordinate» to her «biological imperatives» is an extreme case of biological reductionism⁴⁰. Even if we were to dismiss her motives as selfish in pursuit of otherworldly rewards, and that such inspiration is illusory, she can only have been motivated by spiritual imperatives⁴¹.

St. Paul speaks of the love that «does not seek its own interest» (1 Cor. 13,5). Human nature being what it is, it is difficult to imagine a genuine altruism or charity that is not motivated by some noble and lofty ideal, involving commitment to a greater value, whether it be the beauty of the natural universe, the earthly paradise of Marxist socialism, or the love of a transcendent deity. Whatever the cause, it involves a universal good perceived as somehow greater than the individual and worthy of service. It must be certainly more than biological in nature and inspiration.

In the ultimate analysis, altruism proves to be a weak foundation for ethical obligation. Roger Trigg presents the following summary judgment:

the self-centered position of sociobiology would refuse to accept that one can love a mere neighbour merely for his sake. From the moral point of view, however, I should accept that my neighbour's interests are as important as mine and that he matters as much as I do.... Our instinctive likes and dislikes are a totally different matter

39. R. TRIGG, *ibid.*

40. E. O. WILSON, *On Human Nature*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 166.

41. S. J. POPE, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 225: «The entire sociobiological project of attempting to 'explain' human behavior in strictly behavioral terms, then, cripples its analysis of genuine human altruism».

from the question of a morality with a rational basis. In attacking the possibility of the latter, sociobiology is ruling out any genuine concern for those who are not related to us, or who give us no expectation of future benefits if we benefit them. Talk of extrapolation of our sympathies merely begs the question how this is possible. Sociobiology will certainly not allow appeals to the survival of the species to bridge the gap⁴².

The argument that altruism is rooted in the universal drive to perpetuate one's genes involves many strange suppositions. Logically it must imply that anyone who has no interest whatsoever in the duplication of his or her genes is not bound by any moral imperative. If I have no interest in propagating the genetic material of the group to which I belong, am I bereft of all sense of duty and goodness? Am I supposed to have inherited it as an intrinsically biological element of my constitution, simply because at some distant time in the remote past, my ancestors felt the compulsion to secure their family stock. Is it the gene that is selfishly driven to perpetuate itself? The gene is not conscious, deliberative or free. While I am the bearer of my genes, they are, however, distinct from me. Apart from the very general control dependent upon my decision whether or not to mate with a member of the opposite sex, I have no control over my genes. Although, as parasites, they depend upon me to carry them into the future, their identity is distinct from mine.

There is no logical connection between altruistic behaviour towards another, and the increase of my descendants; on the contrary it will cause an increase in the beneficiary's offspring. Sociobiologists argue that morality obliges me to further the genetic pool rather than promote my own good. The obvious question is: why? What motivation is there to do so? By the same token, the logic of maximum genetic benefit requires that instead of coming to the aid of «losers», I should concentrate on my group, or devote myself to those whose current success augurs well for their descendants. How should I adjudicate between kin and reciprocal altruism? On the wider scale, moreover, it is naïve to expect that all humans should accept the universal duty of reciprocal altruism. There are also countless incapacitated persons who can never repay any acts of beneficence, but towards whom we have moral obligations. What possible reason could I have to sacrifice myself for the sake of someone who is the carrier of defective genes? If the entire purpose of ethics is to spread the genetic material for the optimal benefit of the human race, this goes counter to its aim. It would not seem possible to establish ethics upon the principles of evolution, since the struggle for exis-

42. R. TRIGG, *The Shaping of Man. Philosophical Aspects of Sociobiology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982.

tence and survival of the fittest inevitably excludes much of what is central to any acceptable ethical system, namely concern for the weaker members of the human species. Peter Singer remarks: «Kin altruism plus reciprocal altruism with perhaps a little group altruism too, seems a slender basis on which to explain human ethics»⁴³.

Sociobiologists maintain that people generally act altruistically because of the tendencies that we have inherited through natural selection. Peter Woolcock remarks that while evolutionary theory may explain how we came to have altruistic feelings, this does not explain how we came to have moral beliefs in the first place⁴⁴. Altruistic feelings are one thing; moral beliefs another. What guarantees their objectivity? Michael Ruse, for example, accepts that genetically humans tend to regard morality as objective – which explains why they are not entirely egoistic – but maintains nonetheless that this apparent objectivity is an illusion. Will people not abandon morality when they realise this?

Experience shows on the contrary, however, that we are prone to deviate from, and even abandon, deeply instilled habits; there is nothing rigorous or coercive about moral injunctions⁴⁵. Moreover, it is not the disposition to «see morality as objective», *i.e.* the theoretical recognition of it as such, that guarantees the good life which encourages the transmission of genetic material, but rather moral practice. What guarantee is there for the transition from theory to action?

Altruism, which it claims is genetically motivated, is the figleaf providing sociobiology with the appearance of an ethics hitherto difficult to justify within the context of Darwinism. The scandal for traditional ethics has been the problem of evil; the challenge for evolutionary ethics is the fact of goodness, which makes little sense within the struggle for survival. Intuitively and implicitly we associate morality with service and benevolence instead of strife and struggle for survival. Altruism fulfills a double function for sociobiology. As well as providing a ground for ethics, it is also important that naturalistic evolutionists can assign an evolutionary role to altruistic behaviour, explaining how it serves the biological imperative of genetic transmission. Otherwise it might potentially embarrass the theory by unmasking itself as a cipher for some transcendent value or origin of non-biological inspiration.

FR. O ROURKE
(Dublin)

43. P. SINGER, Ethics and Sociobiology, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 11, 1982, p. 48.

44. P. G. WOOLCOCK, The Case against Evolutionary Ethics Today, *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 279.

45. See WOOLCOCK, *loc. cit.*, p. 288.

Ο ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΗΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΕΞΕΛΙΚΤΙΚΗ ΘΕΩΡΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΛΤΡΟΥΙΣΜΟΥ

Π ε ρ ί λ η ψ η

Από την επιστήμη της κοινωνιο-βιολογίας (E. O. Wilson, Michael Ruse, Richard Dawkins) μαθαίνουμε πώς ο αλτρουισμός συνδέεται προς το ερώτημα: «γιατί να είναι κάποιος ήθικος». Ο άπώτατος, ίσως και ασυνείδητος, στόχος του αλτρουισμού είναι η γονιδιακή διατήρηση και επέκταση. Πιστεύω πώς, ενώ ο αλτρουισμός είναι μία ιδέα έλκυστική, δεν μπορεί να ικανοποιήσει τις ανάγκες μιᾶς ήθικης καθολικής ισχύος. Ο Άριστοτέλης έπεσήμανε μία σειρά αλτρουιστικών χαρακτηριστικών στη συμπεριφορά των ζώων, αλλά αναγνώρισε τη φιλαυτία ως χαρακτηριστικό του ανθρώπινου είδους. Η φιλία υφίσταται μόνον μεταξύ ενάρετων ανθρώπων καί, καθ' όσον ο αλτρουισμός εξαρτάται από την αρετή, δεν μπορεί να συνιστά την πηγή των κινήτρων της ενάρετης συμπεριφοράς. Επιπλέον η φιλία μπορεί να ενεργοποιείται μόνον εντός του στενού κύκλου των φίλων.

Fran O'ROURKE
(μτφρ. Απόστολος ΣΤΑΒΕΛΑΣ)