

Is Evolutionary Ethics Compatible with Christian Ethics?

Many evolutionists from Darwin to the present have argued that normative ethics have a biological basis and originated through the evolutionary process. In this view ethics is merely a tool—some evolutionists even say an illusion—that helps humans survive and reproduce. It is neither objective nor universal nor immutable. I will discuss various historical and contemporary examples, including sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, and then I will then offer a critique of evolutionary ethics.

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- I. Importance of Topic
 - A. Evolutionary ethics is permeating our culture, our media, etc.
 - B. It is common response to Christians arguing for objective morality
- II. In some forms evolutionary ethics violates NOMA principle
- III. Darwin's view of morality
 - A. Based on social instincts
 - B. Since these instincts evolve, it is not unchanging
 - C. It is not universal nor objective
- IV. Haeckel's view of morality
- V. Eugenics movement and evolutionary ethics
 - A. Rejected human equality
 - B. Some promoted euthanasia to advance human evolution

- VI. Hitler as exemplar of evolutionary ethics

- VII. Julian Huxley's 1943 lecture on evolutionary ethics
 - A. Rejected Nazi vision of evolutionary ethics
 - 1. Evolution, he claimed, leads to cosmopolitanism
 - 2. He provided no evidence for this claim
 - B. Argued ethics are not fixed, but changing
 - C. Criticized the Golden Rule as impractical

- VIII. E. O. Wilson, Michael Ruse, and sociobiology
 - A. Wilson claimed morality was based on hereditary traits
 - B. Believed altruism arose through kin selection and reciprocity
 - C. Denied fixity of morality
 - D. Wilson and Ruse stated: "Ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to co-operate."

- IX. Critique
 - A. Evolutionary ethics assumes that basis of morality is biological instincts
 - 1. But ignores historical changes of moral behavior
 - 2. Robert Wright and adultery
 - 3. Rape, war, etc.
 - B. Story-telling about reproductive value of moral behaviors
 - 1. Story-telling is speculative, not based on scientific evidence
 - 2. Promoting reproduction doesn't tell us anything about origin
 - C. Evolutionary ethics is also used to justify immoral behaviors

1. Infanticide

2. Homosexuality

D. Undermines Judeo-Christian sanctity-of-life ethic, e.g. , Rachels and Singer

X. Evolutionary Ethics is powerful intellectual current opposing Christian worldview

Suggested Readings:

Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics and Racism in Germany*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Richard Weikart, "A History of the Impact of Darwinism on Bioethics," in *150 Years of Evolution: Darwin's Impact on the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Mark Wheeler. San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 2011. Pp. 91-109; available on-line at: <http://archive.csustan.edu/history/faculty/weikart/darwinism-bioethics.pdf>

James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism*. Oxford University Press, 1990. This is from a secularist's perspective.

Dennett, Daniel C. *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1995. Pp. 586. This is an atheist's perspective.