

**IS THERE A SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR MORAL GOVERNMENT?
A WESTERN PERSPECTIVE**

An Essay

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I

One of the great questions found in the literature, economics, politics, and science of civilized communities centers on the basic nature of the human animal. From the classical Greek Sophists to Thomas Hobbes, and from St. Augustine to Herbert Spenser, human beings were often described as self interested, individualistic, prone to violence, and divided into factions all of whom were at war with one another. A competing set of ideas about human nature stressed the natural propensity of human beings to cooperate with each other: Plato and Aristotle wrote that man was a social and political animal; Jean Jacques Rousseau announced that a natural desire and instinct drove human beings into communities with the goal of becoming moral persons; and today, contemporary philosophers and scientists argue for the value of civil society as the last best hope for humanity to survive in a divided world bent on self destruction. These two strains in human thought have coexisted for at least 2500 years and will continue to be a focal point of debate for a long time to come.

The Caux Round Table (CRT), an international body of business leaders, has established a number of principles for a moral capitalism, supported by moral government. The concept of moral capitalism is grounded on the proposition that the value of business to society is not only the wealth and employment it creates, and the marketable products and services it provides, but also that prices must be reasonable, and products and services be of high quality. A business that follows the principles of moral capitalism must be responsible for improving the lives of employees, shareholders, and the citizens of the community in which the business operates. Ethical business behavior, respect for the rules of doing business at home and abroad, respect for the environment, and avoidance of illicit operations are among the business principles advocated by the Caux Round Table.

The concept of moral government, as conceived by the Caux Round Table, is based on the Japanese ideal of *Kyosei*, or civic togetherness, which consists of the community celebrating and practicing mutual dependence and respect for all persons in the nation-state; beyond *Kyosei*, a recognition by all persons and all institutions that each individual is unique and worthy as an autonomous soul; and also, that all persons possess the capacity to move beyond self-interest in order to achieve the public interest. This philosophical point-of-view, if followed by the officers of government, would lead to public office being viewed as a public trust; discourse ethics guiding the application of

public power; the civic order creating responsible citizens; public office holders refraining from abuse of power and corruption; persons being secure in their property, life, and liberty; justice being provided, and the general welfare of all citizens being served; and government accountability, transparency, and global cooperation being assured.

The clarion ring of unsupported idealism can be perceived in reading the words that describe moral capitalism or moral government. But, can a capitalistic system of economics be based upon the moral behavior of self-interested, individualistic, profit seeking entrepreneurs bent on growing their own businesses and driving competitors out of the market? Second, can government, where public office is considered a public trust, survive in a world where each nation state competes for power, resources, and economic hegemony?

But, what if it were possible to scientifically prove through contemporary anthropological research and the science of genetics, that cooperation not competition, communitarian instincts not the impulse to self-interest, and the desire for peace not a natural inclination to violence, were the built in characteristics of human nature. What if human beings are social and political animals, and desire association not isolation, and naturally strive to advance from an animalistic, fearful existence to that of becoming moral beings? What if it is just possible that seeking moral government is a natural part of human nature and not a dream of metaphysically intoxicated philosophers and theologians. What if scientific fact could lead to the values encompassed by moral government, as advocated by the Caux Round Table? Then, the idealism supporting the Caux Round Table's vision of a moral capitalism supported by moral government would be grounded in sound reality indeed.

II

In the 19th Century, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, through their extensive studies of natural history and sociology, created a worldview of human nature based on "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest." The natural condition of mankind was to be self-seeking, individualistic, fearful, and competitive, to the point of being combative. The emerging science of political economy accepted this formulation of human nature and rejected social welfare programs as being a waste of money, and also advocated a form of economics best called unregulated "brute capitalism." Even though the sociological ideas of Herbert Spencer have not carried into the 21st Century (though his calculating, self-seeking individualism survives in both Libertarianism and neo-classical economic fundamentalism), Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection and evolution have won the day, and are considered to be mostly accurate by accepted scholars in the field.

This Darwinian victory has come into the 21st Century with an added scientific companion: the science of genetics. Together, these sciences are suggesting that competition and fearfulness are not the only attributes of human nature; instead, human beings also seem to possess attributes of compassion, social interaction, collaboration, and a sense that other human beings should be regarded as worthy of consideration.

through an extended essay in The Economist (December 24, 2006), Geoffrey Carr lays out a summary of research produced by scholars in the fields of anthropology, genetics, evolutionary psychology, and game theory that seems to demonstrate that human beings are naturally moved in the direction of "... friendship with non-relatives; the ability to conceive of what others are thinking, and to act accordingly; ... {and} the use of language, which allows collaboration on a scale denied to other creatures." These emerging facts seem to establish a scientific foundation for a conclusion that through association, comparison, and choice, human beings can establish a moral community, based on the attributes and characteristics of their own nature, and thus may go about the business of creating a system of moral government.

III

Geoffrey Carr begins his analysis of human evolution by briefly discussing how the science of genetics can tell us where humans came from and how they have evolved into their present form and nature. The DNA of each human being "carries a record of {his} evolutionary past." By analyzing DNA, scientists have been able to determine that our roots are in Africa and that "all lines converge on the ovaries of a single woman who lived some 150,000 years ago." There are two schools of thought about how people left Africa. The Oxford school of thought reports, "that the descendants of a single emigration some 85,000 years ago, across the strait of Bab el Mandeb at the southern end of the Red Sea, are responsible for populating the rest of the world." The Cambridge school subscribes to the same point-of-view, but believes there was more than just one migration.

Human beings evolved over some millions of years even before the "out of Africa migration." *Australopithecines* of various species, *Homo Rudolfensis*, *Homo habilis*, *Homo neanderthalensis*, all preceded current *Homo sapiens*. Through the use of tools, better climate, improving varieties of food, intermingling of different strains of emerging human beings, and the increase in numbers of human beings, mankind begin to create art, invented new tools, started new methods of hunting using group approaches, and invented rudimentary forms of writing and other forms of communication. Brain size, apparently, is fundamental to understanding the development and success of modern *Homo sapiens*. Brain expansion occurred early in human evolution and led to the development of human group life and the future of humanity.

Most anthropologists believe that the need to ingest more protein, because of increased brain size, and the desire for a more varied diet, led *Homo sapiens* to begin to hunt in groups, and to look for and to gather fruit from trees and to dig for eatable roots. Because of the number of fruit trees needed to support a growing group of people, and the large land area necessary to harvest roots, families, clans, and other social configurations began to be established. To succeed, groupings of human beings needed to begin to coordinate their activities in hunting and harvesting in order to husband energy and to maximize productivity of effort. At this point, language begins to enter the picture of human development, and the result is critical to the success of the human animal and the creation of modern society.

Real language requires complex grammar and syntax, all of which are unique to Homo sapiens. According to the Dunbar hypothesis, language became a substitute for grooming in evolving human communities. Grooming establishes and maintains bonds of friendship. Conversation produces the same “bond-forming” role as grooming. Through conversation large groups of people can “gossip” and exchange points-of-view on a variety of matters related to everyday life, and for planning activities in the future. Conversation “stimulates” creation of larger groups of people, and more people in the group stimulates more complex grammar and syntax. Through a “feedback” loop human communities grow and become more complex with relationships becoming more sophisticated and closer together.

The evolution of language promotes human collaboration and leads to cooperation, coordination of activities, specialization of function, and division of labor. Through cooperation and coordination communities “can exploit new and more complex circumstances.” These phenomena point to the development of abstract thought that can be put to the service of even more complex organizations and ever more sophisticated human relationships.

Complex language creates complex human organizations that require complex rules for successful group life. It is through rules that Homo sapiens engender a sense of justice, self-denial, and trust. Evolutionary psychologists and game theorists have been studying how the human animal seems to inherently, on the basis of evolution, exhibit these attributes in both individual and group behavior. These scientists are saying “people will make sacrifices (self-denial) for non-relatives, or friends.” “The assumption is that the favor will be paid back at some time in the future.” Can it be that doing for others will be rewarded when we need something done for us? Is there a natural reciprocity built into human nature?

Dr. Axelrod, a game theorist, has shown mathematically “that as long as you can recognize and remember your fellow creatures, it makes sense to follow the proverb ‘fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me’ and {to} trust them provided they don’t cheat on you.” There seems to be a natural tendency to trust one another until that trust proves to be counterproductive. The more complex the social system the more the factor of trust becomes germane to successful group life.

Game theorists have also demonstrated that human beings are “hard wired” to be acutely sensitive to unfair treatment. To be treated equally and to be regarded as equal with other human beings is a natural part of what it means to be human. In other words, human beings seem to be innately possessed of an inner antenna that focuses on justice (fairness), trust, and the interest of someone else. These inherent characteristics, products of human evolution, constitute the origins of human virtues (compassion, friendship, honesty, self discipline), and it is these virtues that allow human beings to work together and to engage in the exchange of goods and services – the basis for economics.

IV

According to Geoffrey Carr in The Economist magazine, some anthropologists, geneticists, evolutionary psychologists, and game theorists seem to be suggesting, on the basis of science, that there is a tendency built into human nature for modern Homo sapiens to congregate, and to exhibit the characteristics and attributes necessary for productive group life. Human beings are naturally social and political animals, possess a desire and instinct to form communities, and to search for ways to improve conditions of life and to pursue ideas concerning successful communities. Group life assumes the necessity of most within the community moving beyond self-interest and embracing the general interest, and that autonomous persons can agree to a common set of principles and practices important to protection and prosperity for the commonweal.

Public office as a public trust joins with the scientific idea that trust is congenial to human nature, and that through the appropriate use of language the governor must lead the community to protection and prosperity. By adopting policies that create a life of safety and wealth creation for citizens of the state, the governor reinforces the public trust necessary for the continued exercise of power.

It seems logical that if language is a key to successful group life, then discourse ethics should guide the application of political power. Discourse assumes rules for processing ideas coming from a variety of people with many perspectives on issues and problems that might face the community. Rules assume that discourse will come to an end at some point and that a decision will be made engaging the interest and agreement of most of the people in the community. The scientists of the day are suggesting that the decision a community takes will be measured against some fundamental values that are inherent in modern Homo sapiens as they have evolved over millions of years. Those fundamental values center on justice (fairness), self-denial (opting for the general interest), and trust (a sense that, initially, one can rely on the character, ability, and truthfulness of someone else), and that these values are instinctive to human nature.

Group life assumes a civic order. A civic order requires rules of conduct and the institutions and processes necessary to create rules of conduct. When the rules of conduct are congenial to human nature the size and scope of government becomes limited. A community that imposes naturally grounded discipline on itself is a community that is free of overweening government power and allows maximum personal freedom and discretion. A civic order that encourages personal freedom is establishing an environment for responsible citizenship. Individual accountability assumes that trust among citizens can spawn equality of regard and concern for all citizens of the community, and a sense that the general welfare is the standard for individual prosperity and safety.

Public officials who abuse power and engage in corrupt practices are looking for personal gain and are not acting in the public interest. Corruption destroys public trust with the community no longer relying on the character and truthfulness of the public servant. By definition, corruption violates the community sense that public officials are acting with equal regard and concern for all citizens within their jurisdiction. In looking at human

history, even during the so-called dark ages, and searching the histories of other non-western civilizations, one is struck by the general public revulsion and eventual rejection of unaccountable, non-transparent, and corrupt government practices. The denouement of such government activities is popular revolution and efforts to reverse the course of government action. It almost seems that human nature demands that justice be achieved, that equal regard for all citizens be realized, and that a public interest be effectuated.

The Caux Round Table has conceived of three ideals as a bulwark for the value of justice. Through *Kyosei*, a sense of community; individualism, a respect for all persons as autonomous beings; and, the public interest as a goal for community effort, justice is not only defined but also becomes achievable. The concepts of moral capitalism and moral government are grounded on the value of justice.

V

Contemporary anthropologists, geneticists, evolutionary psychologists, and game theorists have been investigating human nature and have come to some rather interesting conclusions. One is that human beings can establish friendly, trustful relationships with each other, and that through association and choice they can create just (moral) communities. Another conclusion seems to be that self-interest can be superseded by concern for the public interest. A final conclusion reached by today's scientists is that modern *Homo sapiens* are fixated on being treated fairly and that nothing can disconcert them more than the sense that somehow they are being treated unfairly. This inborn sense of equality drives human actions in many areas of activity. If these human characteristics are natural, that is through evolution and natural selection are the facts of human nature, then why can't these facts lead to more faith in the values of moral government and in the possibility of a moral capitalism?

The answer is clear regarding the possibility of moral capitalism. In the contemporary world, researchers from a variety of academic disciplines, using empirical scientific methods, generally agree that to achieve material progress a nation state must follow a number of economic policies. Some of these policies are: a strong private sector, low rates of inflation, balanced budgets and price stability, low tariffs, allowing foreign investment, getting rid of monopolies, deregulating capital markets, making currency convertible, and hiring and firing on the basis of merit. Honesty, transparency, rule of law, the sanctity of contracts, and various other rather idealistic human and business characteristics, drive a successful capitalistic economic system. There is a real possibility that a moral capitalism can be achieved in this contemporary world. Idealism is reality based and empirically demonstrable.

With respect to moral government, however, a program for remedial action to improve levels of civic virtue and public trust is less in evidence among scholars and commentators. This reticence may arise from the fact that most social scientists are hesitant to discuss a basis for any kind of morality, to say nothing about moral government. Scientific description of governmental form, process, and activity, and the lack of scientific study of the morality of governmental form, process, and activity is a

result of the dilemma created by David Hume, the 18th Century philosopher and political economist, who drew a distinction between fact and value. Fact can be empirically proven, whereas value is an abstraction that cannot be empirically proven. A fact cannot be derived from a value, and a value cannot be derived from a fact. Social scientists can factually describe the world of government, but cannot use the empirical data to reach a moral concept or value about government. The outcome of this Humean Dilemma is that empirical science cannot be used to give meaning to the ideals of moral government.

The questions posed in this essay are: Can there be a way to break through the Humean Dilemma? Using empirical methods, can there be a scientific basis for moral government? Can the concepts and values of moral government be attached to scientific fact? Can value and fact be brought together under the conceptual umbrella of moral government?

If fact is grounded on a science of human nature, and the fact directs human beings toward social arrangements, and those social arrangements naturally lead to cooperation among human beings along with an attendant concern for others, then why not the fact of human nature leading to a value of the moral community and moral government. Maybe there is a way to break through the Humean Dilemma through reference to contemporary understandings of Darwinian evolution. A sense for morality and a basis for idealism are implicit in human nature. This moral sense is a fact, not an abstraction, as Adam Smith himself argued; such idealism is a presence – an Aristotelian efficient cause - not a piety, in human affairs.