

Ethics from natural evolution?

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Is ethics something that is invented by humans only? Many people will answer that question in the affirmative. I say: "No". Since the advent of the Enlightenment, human reason has been held in high esteem, especially, of course, by man himself, for we are not strangers to a good dose of narcissism. Ethical rules therefore seem to be the result of our own life experiences and intuitions. We think it all up ourselves, so we may as well cheat a little. By the way, a decreasing number of believers still think that ethical rules are chiselled into stone tables by a deity, as is the case with the Ten Commandments in the Bible. But modern biblical research suggests that the biblical writers also drew heavily on older mythical sources and their own intuitions. Where did they get their ethics from?

Everything stems from evolution

There is a difference between "inventing" and "discovering". Columbus discovered old land and gave it the name America. He invented the name himself, but he discovered the land; it had been there for a long time and people even lived there. We think we know that the laws of nature concerning gravity and electromagnetic force came to us from the Big Bang. We were allowed to discover these laws and put them into formulas and words. Thus we may also work with them and 'conquer nature', but only by carefully obeying these laws. This is also the title of a book on the history of technology: "Victory through obedience". Well, if everything, really everything, in nature has become what it is today through long evolution, why shouldn't this also apply to ethical rules of conduct, natural ethics and natural rules of behavior? So my question is: What ethical values or laws, which come to us from nature, may we discover and then put them into words and comment on them? This question is important, for just imagine that there are indeed natural laws (natural rules of behavior) about ethics, with the same origin as the physical laws of nature, namely from the first seconds or centuries of this universe? If these laws of ethics or guidelines came into being from the Big Bang, they would therefore be truly universal, valid for the whole universe. They would then in any case also apply to all life forms here on earth, from bacteria to man, and also to the mutual relationships between all these life forms, both horizontally (from man to man) and vertically (from man to the smallest bacterium and vice versa). But what are these laws or ethical guidelines?

A first protesting thought might be: "Ethics from nature? Come on, you can't do that!" Since the Enlightenment, we have become accustomed to the idea that there is something basically wrong with nature and that we must conquer nature by taming and subduing it. Nowadays, we do this by diligently uprooting, exploiting, burning down, polluting, asphaltting, cutting down and by many other predatory methods. After all, man is the steward of nature, appointed by God himself as master over everything that lives and grows, so the Bible teaches us? According to this teaching, we may exploit everything on this earth and also on nearby heavenly bodies, such as the Moon or Mars. Moreover, Charles Darwin came up with his theory of evolution about the origin of living species, and since then we think we know for sure: nothing ethical comes to us from nature itself. After all, the whole evolution is only a matter of chance and natural selection, survival of the fittest, eat or be eaten, the right of the strongest? A predator bites a deer's throat, birds pull worms out of the ground, a heron outsmarts a frog, a crocodile pulls a wildebeest into the water and devours it alive, etc. In short:

nature is one big bloodbath, right? Many wonderful nature films teach us that: natural selection is literally all there is. And since then the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who was delighted with Darwin's teachings, we also think that God has nothing to do with it. God is dead, says the philosopher with the hammer, and we have killed Him. There you are, from now on the Übermensch is the boss on this planet, and if there are ethical principles to be thought up, we do it ourselves.

Anyone who has an eye on the recent history of science and philosophy will notice that this is, in fact, also the academic and social mood of the last few hundred years. We neglect and exploit nature, unrestrained and without compassion. To us, nature is a 'winged territory'. It should therefore come as no surprise that nature has been treated by mankind over the past century as a stupid thing or an underdeveloped child, from whom you should not expect anything sensible, let alone ethical. As a result, we have also become alienated from the real authentic nature and we now stand by amazed and panicked when we notice that this same nature turns against us in all forms, from natural disasters and temperature increases to nasty viruses. "How tenable is the neo-Darwinian vision?" wonders philosopher Thomas Nagel.¹

Ethical rules of conduct from nature

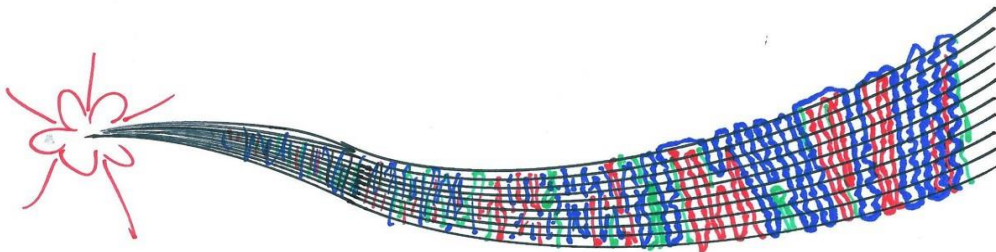
How strange is it, then, reasoned against this hostility to nature, that there are nonetheless 'eternal' ethical rules which come to us from the depths of evolution and which we may articulate in our temporary existence and convert into actual rules of behavior of goodness and charity? At the same time, they also seem to be rules, which reach beyond present humanity into the future, while mankind may have destroyed himself long ago. For that is the price that has to be paid if the ethical laws of nature are not obeyed: self-destruction. Such a price is also paid when physical laws of gravity or electromagnetic force are disobeyed. Then aero planes fall from the sky, glyphosate destroys nature, insect species disappear, CO2 and methane heating makes parts of this earth uninhabitable, etc. Well then, in order to prevent this deliberate self-destruction (also out of pure self-interest), the question remains: are there natural ethical laws or rules of conduct, which come to us deep from evolution and which we must obey anyway in order to survive as humanity? The answer is "Yes!".

In my essay entitled: "What should we do? An essay on the evolution of natural ethics." I describe these laws or guidelines and their evolutionary origins. However, I do not write them down as fixed laws of nature, but as five practical criteria when judging any decision we have to make, whether it is personal, group, provincial, national or even universal. In the drawing below, these long-standing guidelines are represented as the warp threads of the 'ethical fabric', originating from the earliest times of this universe. Our own daily actions are the answer: the weft threads. Thus the ethical fabric is formed: a composition of nature (basic ethical rules, facts of life) and culture ('laws' and customs, opinions).² From the Big Bang, the long warp threads come to us and gradually the weft threads of our everyday behavior are woven into an ethical fabric.

In this essay, we examine what the natural and evolutionary basis of these ethical guidelines could be (in the drawn metaphor of the *ethical fabric* hereafter: The warp threads), using a particular physical theory about the evolution of mind, matter and their mutual intensive cooperation. We see how all living beings and ourselves in everyday life create an ethical fabric through their practical deeds (here called: the warp threads, across the warp).

¹ Thomas Nagel "Mind and cosmos, how tenable is the neo-Darwinian view", AUP. BV, 2014

These long warp threads emerge in the drawing from the deepest depths of evolving nature (from the Big Bang onwards) and reach over mankind into the furthest future of evolution. This suggests an evolving dynamic whole, in which man is allowed to participate for a while. In other words: this natural ethics consists of two parts, the first part is given to us by the evolving nature and the second part we add ourselves, to the best of our knowledge and ability. So the first part is by far the oldest part and the second part is rather recent, at most a few (tens of) thousands of years.



From the Big Bang on the right, drawn like an explosion, the long ethical warp threads come towards us and along the way, the weft threads of our daily behavior are incorporated. This creates the ethical fabric.

French thinking on l'esprit

For the fundamental whole story, we need to go back deep to the beginning of this universe and the natural behavior of the smallest particles, as a precursor to our own behavior. In the essay, I therefore combine elements of two French scientists, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Jean Emile Charon, into a radical new idea of mind and natural ethics. The most obvious basic idea is that our mind, like our body, consists, from the Big Bang onwards, of elementary particles, spirit particles, with basic spiritual properties. Teilhard was still somewhat vague about this, but Charon elaborated this idea with great precision. These ancient spirit particles (Charon calls them "eons") are present everywhere in my body, down to every cell or atom. They constantly communicate with each other in a timeless manner and therefore form a single entity in me, my own spirit, just as all the atoms in my body also form my integral body. We can elaborate on the theory of mind particles in terms of quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity, all very incomprehensible and exciting, but we can also talk about it as an enlightening metaphor. 2 Indeed, these mind particles, with their natural rules of behaviour and long evolutionary history, also lead us in the direction of an evolutionary natural ethics. The eonic view summarised:

- The Big Bang can be seen as a cosmic spiritual event, in which the singular point, a concentration of infinite energy (light), divided itself into myriads of spirit particles, filled with concentrated energy: "drops of pure light".
- Spirit particles manifest themselves in our physical world and in our body as measurable electrons. A spirit particle contains in its "interior" highly concentrated light (photons) with extremely high temperature and density.
- The particles of spirit are in every atom and in every being, organic or inorganic, everywhere in and around us in this universe (panpsychism). My own mind is a part of this great whole.

- Spirit particles are imperishable. From the Big Bang, their experiences and first elementary rules of behaviour (ethics) also begin. The spirit particles entered the universe with the command: "Go and become conscious" (evolution of consciousness).
- Spirit particles possess basic mental properties: (1) an infinite memory, (2) power of thought (contemplation), (3) ability to communicate with other mind particles (referred to by Charon as "love": connecting communication) and (4) the ability (as an electron) to connect atoms to form larger structures: molecules, cells, bodies etc.
- The entire evolution of everything that exists is based on this intense cooperation between electrons and atoms. 2 For more details, see my article in Bres 314: "Electrons and the miracle of consciousness". Or read my book "Do we have a soul? If so, where?", Aspekt 2013.
- Spirit particles (in their capacity as active electrons) steer evolution with their experiences, creativity and sense of beauty, with the use of chance, and with remembering and reusing the good or beautiful results. The sense of beauty is the compass on which evolution sails. • The imperishable spirit particles within us carry the memory of the construction of countless lasting constructions, through countless reincarnations: our subconscious. To "know" nature is therefore to "recognise" nature. We learn what we already know internally.
- From the intensive cooperation between the mind particles and the neurons, consciousness also emerges. How? We do not understand that and it is questionable whether that will ever change. Our consciousness is only a limited entrance to our global eonic inner mind and is not able to fully comprehend itself and its own workings.

Five ethical criteria with an ancient connotation

The essay "The Natural Evolution as a Source of Ethics" culminates in five ethical criteria that we can use in every decision to see whether the decision is in accordance with a deep-seated natural ethic. The five rules are so simple that they even fit on the back of a credit card, because especially in the amoral world of money, a new practical ethic is desperately needed. From the eonic vision of the spirit of man, animal, plant and earth, these five ethical criteria emerge as logical, reasoned points of interest. They can be used directly as ethical guidelines or even as 'ethical laws of nature', which must necessarily be followed in order for humanity to survive. The criteria are hidden behind modern words, but they carry an ancient evolutionary charge:

- Consciousness evolution,
- Cooperation,
- Sustainability,
- Beauty
- Love

In the table below, these names of a natural ethic are included as criteria for actions: questions to be asked when critically examining any decision to be taken at any level, from personal to global. Those who answer all these questions in the negative when assessing decisions, as some fanatical terrorist groups and radical religious groups do, are inevitably steering towards self-destruction. In many areas of our behavior in the world, we can already see this happening before our eyes. All the more reason to look at natural ethics in this radically new way.

| Action criterion: | Expands to: |
|--|---|
| 1 What is the contribution of this action to (general) consciousness development ? | A (world) plan for education, food, clothing, housing, peace, leisure, appreciation and poverty reduction. |
| 2 What is the contribution of this action to broad (global) cooperation ? | Establishment of global and local organisations, democracy and participation. United Nations, EU, etc. |
| 3 What is the contribution of this action to long-term sustainability ? | No depletion of natural resources: recycling and saving. Our children must also be able to live. Does it preserve living species? |
| 4 Is the action in accordance with basic sense of beauty and truth? | Support and appreciation (support base) among broad sections of the population, nationally and internationally. No superficial populism, but connection to deep feelings of beauty and justice. |
| 5 Is this action supported by a broad sense of love and appreciation? | Love as connecting and creative communication, mercy, compassion, on every scale (from neighbours to world population and universe). |