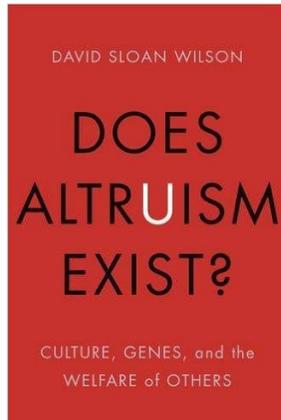


Second Tier Micro-Communities: Altruism in Action!

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It is a pleasure to amplify the concise evidence for evolutionary group altruism provided by David Sloan Wilson in his book [Does Altruism Exist?](#) Wilson's research on the effect of group altruism on neighboring cultures is persuasive, if not downright conclusive. As one who has founded a sustainable spiritual micro-community – the [Valley of Light](#) – I feel both elated and validated that our goal of co-creating an intentional community based on the principles of *Truth, Love, and Light* is both a beneficial incubator experiment, in-and-of itself, while also a mechanism for driving cross-pollination of these universal moral values within our greater Virginia community and, hopefully, around the world.



But I get ahead of myself by jumping to Wilson's climactic conclusion, though it is worth repeating again and again: *Selfishness beats altruism within groups* (which contain a higher admix of selfish over altruistic individuals). *However, Altruistic groups beat selfish groups* (even when between-group selection takes place). So let's back-up for a moment to look at the evolutionary evidence for Wilson's stunning social theory.

As most of us now know, Charles Darwin did *not* prophesize the "survival of the fittest." Rather, Darwin predicted a more utopian future based on his limited knowledge of how the forces of human competition and cooperation interrelate:

*[A]though a high standard of morality gives but a slight advantage or no advantage to each individual man ... over other men of the same tribe, yet an increase ... in the standard of morality will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another. A tribe ... always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes, and this would be natural selection. [A]s morality is one important element in their success, **the standard of morality and the number of well-endowed men will thus everywhere tend to rise and increase.** [Emphasis added]*

In his book, Wilson builds upon Darwin's premise that altruism is an attractive trait for natural selection by summarizing subsequent research which now proves that altruism trumps selfishness. In fact, researchers have identified the core social principles which support altruistic tendencies of individual group members. Those group principles include: (i) strong identity and commonality of purpose; (ii) shared decision-making; (iii) a system for monitoring progress or regression of the group; (iv) rewards for positive contributions; (v) graduated sanctions for negative behavior; (vi) a fair conflict resolution mechanism; (vii) freedom to self-organize with little interference from outside groups; and (viii) functional coordination with outside groups.

Wilson summarizes these findings by concluding that altruistic groups (and enduring religions) are designed to motivate altruism at the level of *action*, by promoting behaviors that benefit the group and suppressing behaviors that are disruptive or self-serving. Moreover, Wilson

buttresses his findings with current real-world examples of how altruistic groups not only prosper when left to their own devices, but also may cross-pollinate with outside groups to produce an even greater sphere of social benevolence. It is important to note, however, that the research also indicates that the proportion of altruistic members within each group will determine whether altruism flourishes or declines during cross-cultural interaction.

We see this cultural tug-of-war playing out globally, as pockets of altruism either spread or get crushed during the process of social exchange (e.g.: the chaos that has resulted from American hubris in attempting to “spread democracy” in the Middle East). Spiral Dynamics and Integral Theory fans already understand that the [First Tier](#) memes are fractious and will doggedly fight with each other – whether with weapons or words – for cultural supremacy.

Now to the really good news, as this research absolutely validates the importance of the Intentional Community Movement. Wilson writes:

*All societies that function well require mechanisms that coordinate **action** and prevent exploitation from within. Whether these mechanisms count as altruistic or selfish, defined in terms of thought and feelings, is irrelevant, as long as they do the job in terms of **action**. [In small groups] these mechanisms operate so spontaneously that we tend to forget that they exist. Small groups thus have an invisible-hand-like quality **Future social arrangements need to be based more on intentional planning than ever before.** [Emphasis added]*

Around the world there are approximately 2,500 intentional communities, almost all of which are based on an ethical code of conduct. (See the expansive directory at the [Fellowship of Intentional Community](#)). These micro-communities are brimming with pioneers – many of whom are [Second Tier](#). These brave souls understand the grave nature of this critical juncture of human history and are already building a New World based on altruism (a/k/a the “Religion of Love”).

Most notably, The [Federation of Damanhur](#) in Italy was voted the “most utopian community” by *EnlightenNext Magazine* in 2007. Today, Damanhur remains our best example of a Second Tier society that is spreading altruism around the world. Started in 1975 and operating under a Constitution that incorporates the eight group principles cited above, Damanhur has coined the word “action” to describe its primary purpose – the same word that Wilson employs to define altruism, since positive change is the only yardstick we have to track pro-social evolution.

At [The Oracle Institute](#) we study religious, geo-political, and social trends. Consequently, I feel comfortable opining that no unifying theosophy is on the horizon, while at the same time predicting that a paradigm shift of unprecedented proportions is. Therefore, to proactively assist the altruistic trajectory of our planet, Oracle recently launched the [Valley of Light](#) community, which we have based on the Damanhur template and the wise words of Wilson:

***The solution to this problem is to experiment with new social arrangements ... and cautiously adopt what works. In other words, we need to become wise managers of variation and selection processes. ... From an evolutionary perspective, we can say that large-scale human society needs to be multi-cellular. The more we participate in small groups that are appropriately structured, the happier we will be, the more our efforts will succeed, and the more we will contribute to the welfare of society at larger scales.** [Emphasis added]*

May the best micro-communities of today bring us the highest order of evolution tomorrow!