



University of Zanjan

The Journal of

**Ethical Reflections**

Vol.3, Issue 4, No. 12, Winter 2022-2023, pp. 7-24.

Online ISSN: 2717-1159 / Print ISSN: 2676-4810

<http://jer.znu.ac.ir>



10.30470/er.2022.556621.1142

## **Survival as a Reason to Live Morally:**

### **A Critical Examination of the Evolutionist Perspective**

Fateme Mortazavi,<sup>1</sup> Alireza AleBouyeh <sup>2</sup>

#### **Abstract**

Morality is one of the most important issues for humans and a common concern of human beings. Talking about the importance of morality, prompts people to think about the question of why should we live morally? The answer to this question can be found among the various functions that thinkers have proposed for ethics, because if the agent's knowledge confirms the usefulness of the action, then the agent will be motivated to do it. Therefore, the functions of an action can be an answer to why the action is performed. One of the functions of moral life is to increase the chance of survival, which has been introduced by moral evolutionists. The question of the present article is: how much this function can create motivation for a person to perform a moral act? Can the agent's knowledge that ethical life increases the chances of survival motivate her/him to observe moral values? Considering the challenge of not believing in resurrection and sacrificing life, and many problems in life and the difficulties of ethical life, it is concluded that although increasing the chance of survival can motivate a person to live morally, but just increasing the chances of survival is not worth accepting the costs of being moral and does not provide enough motivation to endure the hardships of moral life. Therefore, evolutionary ethics is facing the challenge of lack of explanatory power for moral motivations and cannot be accepted as a comprehensive theory in the field of moral motivation.

**Keywords:** Moral Motivation, Evolutionary Ethics, Morally Live, Function of Ethics.

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Received: 26 June 2022 | Accepted: 25 Oct. 2022 | Published: 26 Dec. 2022

<sup>1</sup>. M.A. in Islamic philosophy, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism, Bint Al-Huda Higher Education Complex, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, Iran.

Fateme\_Mortazavi@miu.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup>. Assistant Professor of the Institute of Islamic Sciences and Culture, Qom, Iran.

a.alebouyeh@isca.ac.ir.

## Introduction

Regarding moral values, two questions have always been raised among thinkers: What is the criterion of moral values? Why we live morally? This article deals with the second question. The various functions that thinkers have proposed for ethics can be considered as an answer to this question because all human voluntary actions are done to achieve something that is a priority for the agent, who prefers its existence to its absence (Ibn Sina, 1375, p. 94). If the agent's knowledge confirms the usefulness and goodness of the action, (s)he will be motivated to do it. Therefore, the functions of an action are an answer to why that action is performed. The thinkers of evolutionary ethics introduce "increasing the chance of survival" as the function of moral life and consider living morally as a way to increase the chance of survival in the life cycle.

## The Function of Moral Life from the Perspective of Evolutionary Ethics

Evolutionary ethics has been based on the principles of the theory of evolution, one of the basic principles of which is the struggle for existence and natural selection. Struggle for existence means that every organism does its best to eliminate the destructive factors, survive and reproduce successfully (Darwin, 2009, p. 51). Natural selection means that an organism that is more compatible with the environment will have a better chance of survival (Darwin, 2009, p. 63-66). This issue creates competition among organisms for survival and selfishness to preserve their lives. But on the other hand, cooperation and even sacrifice among organisms, cannot be denied. This challenge caused evolutionary thinkers to explain the evolutionary reasons of moral life. These reasons are in three layers of social relations as follows:

1. Family: Since there are similar genes among relatives, an individual's sacrifice is actually helping the survival of genes shared with relatives, thereby increasing the chance of survival of the moral agent (Davies et al, 2009, p. 275; Schloss, 2002, p. 215; Hölldobler & Wilson, 2009, p. 22).

2. Friends and acquaintances: Humans alone cannot meet all their needs, and through altruism in the cycle of mutual needs and abilities, they can meet the needs of themselves and others and increase their chances of survival (Dawkins, 2006, p. 216-217; Wilson, 1978, p. 120).

3. Strangers: Reputation for moral behavior can attract more people's support and thus increase the moral agent's chances of survival (Putnam et-al., 2014, p. 98-99; Nowak & Sigmund, 2005, p. 1295-1296; Ruse, 2009, p 350).

## The Motivational Role of the Survival Function

As it was said, living morally in social relationships can be effective in increasing the chances of human survival. Paying attention to this issue can be motivating for humans in ethical life, because the importance of saving life is clear to everyone. In a situation where people spend a

lot of time and money to save their lives and increase their chances of survival, introducing a way that is often free or does not cost much can be welcomed by many people and living morally is such a way. Therefore, ethics, as one of the ways that affect the preservation of human life and survival, can stimulate human beings to observe moral virtues and motivate them to live morally.

### Review

Evolutionary ethics may have provided information about how good and bad human tendencies are formed, but it is not able to provide a complete and clear explanation as to why we should choose the good and abandon the bad. A person who is not interested in continuing life due to many issues and problems and on the other hand considers death to be equal to destruction, why should he live morally and accept the hardships of sacrifice and the limitations of moral life? Therefore, increasing the chance of survival alone cannot motivate people to follow ethics.

But if increasing the chance of survival is considered as one of the functions of morality, considering the dual aspects of worldly and the hereafter, and it is placed alongside other functions of morality, it can be a more acceptable answer to why we should live morally. Therefore, although the function of survival can be necessary and useful for motivation in living morally, it does not seem to be sufficient.

### Conclusion

Due to the lack of explanatory power in the field of motivation alone, "increasing the chance of survival" cannot be the answer to the reason of doing moral actions by humans. Of course, this does not mean rejecting the answer of evolutionary ethics to "why we live morally", but increasing the chances of survival if it is considered in terms of the dual aspects of worldly and hereafter and placed as an answer alongside other answers can be accepted as one of the available answers to the question of "why should we live morally?"

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