

Genetic similarity, human altruism and group selection: A study of the open peer commentaries

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Rushton's (1989a) target article, arguing in favor of a relationship between altruism and genetic similarity, seems to have important heuristic value. To illustrate this, I use the open peer commentary on the target article as a data base for applying Rushton's theory. Genetic similarity is assessed in many animal species through geographic or spatial proximity (e.g., Jaisson

1987). I use the academic affiliation of the commentators on Rushton's target article to assess their geographic distance from the author. Altruism was assessed using Rushton's response to the commentaries (Rushton 1989b), applying the criterion of whether or not Rushton considered that they "gratified" him because they "found that aspects of the theory looked promising and deserved serious attention."

The data are as follows: The overall proportion of commentators who "gratified" Rushton was 48% of a total of 33 commentaries; if calculated for each commentator's country of academic affiliation, 29% ($n = 7$) of Canadians were classified as favorable, 43% ($n = 14$) of those were favorable from the USA (so classified if no indication of any country was evident in their addresses, a clear indication that the commentator is living in the center of

Continuing Commentary

the universe), 55% ($n = 11$) from the British Isles (Great Britain and Ireland), and 100% of the Germans ($n = 1$). No other nationality was available for the study, possibly suggesting that interest in altruism, genetics, and group selection is restricted to these countries. A 2×3 chi square test, pooling commentators from Germany, Ireland, and Great Britain to avoid cells with too small frequencies (Siegel 1956), shows that the frequencies differ significantly among the various nationalities ($\chi^2 = 6.18$, $p < 0.05$).

If a similar analysis is performed assessing genetic similarity through professional similarity, no significant correlation appears. Of the 15 psychologists, 40% were favorable to Rushton, 33% of the 6 biologists, and 50% of the 6 commentators from anthropology, education, and sociology; 6 cases could not be classified for lack of information in the addresses given. A chi square test showed no significant differences among disciplines ($\chi^2 = 2.2$, $p > 0.1$).

As the data clearly show, a gradient in the index of favorableness is inversely proportional to the distance from Rushton's working place, suggesting that genetically similar people are more likely to disagree in scientific matters. This result would on first view seem to contradict Rushton's theory. But if group selection is at work, it is highly probable that humans have evolved cultural or genetic mechanisms maximizing disagreement in rational activities: "The wider the range of differing views, the deeper the insight" (Socrates, unpub). As these mechanisms will work more efficiently among similar individuals, increasing academic conflicts among similar minded people, our results would be consistent with the theory under discussion.

Corollary. Any theory can be stretched *ad libitum* to explain a given set of data. This is in itself not negative for science, as long as we agree that the main value of any scientific theory lies in its heuristic quality. In that sense, Rushton's approach in explaining human behavior is very important. Reality, though, might be different, and approaching it will require the insight of as many different thinking minds as possible. Thus, a wider assortment of criticism is very much needed. I recommend that *BBS* make efforts to extend scientific interchange to countries outside the world of the Anglo-Saxons, the more so if racial and ethnic theories are in discussion.

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

All suggestions as to how *BBS* can increase participation of under-represented parts of the academic world will be gratefully accepted and followed. Currently (1) we explicitly solicit the nominations of non-US and non-Anglo commentators from all authors, referees, and editors in compiling the commentator list, (2) we do computer literature searches to find authors, commentators, and referees all over the world (and add them to the *BBS* Associateship, now more than 6,000) and (3) most promising of all, *BBS* Calls for Commentators are regularly being disseminated on such electronic networks as Bitnet, Earn and Internet. (Please send your email address to: harnad@clarity.princeton.edu or harnad@pucc.bitnet.)