

Dawkins and Evolutionary Biology

Factfile



Name: Richard Dawkins

Dates: 1941 –

Job: Oxford Professor of Biology and Author

Key Ideas: Evolution, genes, Atheism

Key Idea:

There was no original perfect state. We have evolved. The ideas of fall and original sin are absurd.

Dawkins' ideas

Richard Dawkins (1941-) is one of the leading scientists of the last 30 years. His first book, 'The Selfish Gene' published in 1976 develops the view that we are purely a product of our genes. Our bodies enable our genes to survive and ultimately our genes are hopefully passed on via reproduction. All that our genes are concerned with is survival and replication. In this sense we are no different from any other plant or animal on earth.

In his famous book, 'the Selfish Gene', Dawkins argues that we are human animals, the sum total of our DNA. Life is the individual bytes of digital information in our DNA. There is a constant battle for survival. All that our genes are ultimately concerned about is their own survival and replication. It is no different for us than for any other species. There is nothing special about human beings.

In more recent writings Dawkins has been increasingly interested, perhaps a better word is concerned, with the phenomena of religion. The titles of his books, 'The Blind Watchmaker,' 'A River out of Eden' and 'Unweaving the Rainbow' give a clear flavour of his view that nature, although having an appearance of design, is the product of random favourable variations that were necessary in order to get to where we are now.

Richard Dawkins rejects the idea of Fall and Original Sin. It is unscientific and against everything we have discovered in Biology. It is also damaging to our idea of ourselves.

Dawkins says

- It is absurd that the responsibility for all the evils in the world rests on 2 people.
- Evolution shows that humans (homo sapiens) emerged from less developed creatures who would not have had our level of consciousness.
- Some Christians have answered Dawkins by saying that the idea of the Fall and the Garden of Eden are symbolic. Dawkins doesn't accept this and says that even so Augustine's views have an unhealthy obsession with sin, guilt, violence and sex.

Sartre and Human Nature

Factfile

Name: Jean-Paul Sartre

Dates 1905-1980

Habitat: Cafes

Consumed: Coffee & Cigarettes

Key Ideas: Existentialism, Freedom, Atheism,



Key Idea

We are free. We are not determined/fixed like objects. We always have the possibility of changing situations. There is no such thing as human nature as such.

Humans, Objects and Experience

1. There are two very different types of existence. Sartre calls these 'Being in itself' and '**Being for itself.**' 'Being in itself' is used of objects, they have a fixed form and cannot change themselves. '**Being for itself**' is far different and is used to refer to conscious human beings. Sartre then sets out to define the difference.
2. **Existentialism:** Sartre is an existentialist. This means that as far as he is concerned existence comes before essence (what something is) for human beings. Sartre illustrates this with the example of a knife. A knife is designed for cutting things. It is given this purpose or essence by a designer before it is made. Its essence comes before its existence. For human beings it is different: 'Existence precedes essence.' This means that we first exist and then have to work out what our purpose is.
3. Unlike previous philosophers, Sartre rejects the idea of human nature. Other philosophers had referred to human nature as the way that human beings have to be. Sartre does not believe that there is any such thing as human nature. None of our natures are fixed. Our essence is something we create for ourselves in the things we do.
4. Linked to his existentialism is his **atheism**. Human beings could only have an essence or purpose if made by a creator God. Yet Sartre does not believe there is such a God. Therefore, there is no human essence.

Freedom and Bad Faith

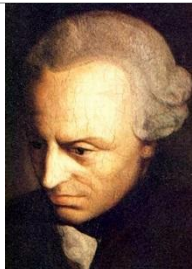
1. **Freedom:** Admittedly we may not be able to choose our birth, our parents, hair colour or the laws of nature. (we cannot fly!) Sartre calls these facts 'Facticity' Apart from this we are free and can make any choice that we wish.
2. **Bad Faith:** However we sometimes deceive ourselves in living according to what Sartre calls 'bad faith.' This is where we deny our own freedom and lie to ourselves. 'I have no other choice' we effectively say. Sartre gives the example of a café waiter. We observe his exaggerated gestures, how he bends forward towards the customer, bows, carries the tray with a flourish etc. He is playing at being a waiter. He is acting as if he is a fixed object and

can do no other. Perhaps he even says to himself '*I am a waiter, I have no choice but to get up at 5am in order to get to work.*' But this is bad faith, he could stay in bed or change his career.

3. Sartre even rejects racial or sexual determinism. To say that I cannot do something because I am black or female or Jewish is an act of bad faith. Likewise, our genes may make us more likely to do certain things but for Sartre genetic traits show many of us fail to embrace our freedom

Kant and the Enlightenment

Factfile

	<p>Name: Immanuel Kant Dates: 1724-1804 Famous for: Philosophical genius whose writings on God, ethics, metaphysics and epistemology transformed Philosophy Strange but true: Thinks that you should tell the truth to a mad axe man enquiring about where your friend is Random Fact: Went for the same walk at the same time every day.</p>
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Key Idea

Humans do not need 'saving.' They are enlightened and rational creatures. They are to improve themselves through reasoning.

The enlightenment

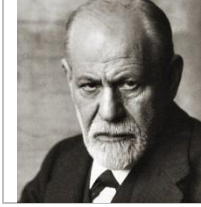
The century before Kant saw rapid progress in science and in technology. Amongst intellectuals there was the idea that human beings could solve their own problems and begin to think for themselves. The motto of this movement which was called the enlightenment was 'Sapere Aude' Dare to know! Kant is an enlightenment thinker who believes in human progress

Kant's ideas

1. Although Kant recognises that humans can be selfish and vicious, he does see the human condition as an impossible one. He believes that humans are different and can rise above their animal instincts to do good deeds.
2. Kant does not believe in original sin. Human nature is not broken but is free to make good (or bad) decisions, it is rational and is able to think through problems, and it does not have to be affected by its environment
3. Kant believes that humans possess a 'good will.' This is the ability to desire to do the right thing for the right reason. As Kant puts it 'doing our duty for duties sake.' We are able to rationally put aside selfishness and our 'wants' and make the right decision. (we may not always do so but it is possible!)
4. HARDER: Kant believes that these logical and rational moral decisions are based on choosing the categorical imperative (doing the right thing just because it is the right thing) rather than the hypothetical imperative (doing the right thing to gain something). We can rationally work out what the right thing is using universal law and asking whether we are treating others with dignity and respect
5. When reason is able to rule over our instincts and emotions we do become better people and we can make the world a better place. (Again we may not always do so but it is possible)

Freud, sex and your parents

Factfile



Name: Sigmund Freud

Dates: 1856-1939

Famous for: Psychology, pioneer of the idea of psychoanalysis

Popular Culture: Any TV/film where a man in a white coat with a European accent gets patients to lie on a couch and talk about their childhood is a nod to Freud.

Key Idea

Although disagreeing with Augustine's view of original sin passed through sex, Freud also to some extent sees humans as damaged. Sex is a good thing but sexual problems cause psychological issues.

Freud unpacked

1. One of the problems of Augustine's view on sex is that it seems to suggest that sex is only useful for reproduction. Freud disagrees. Sexual drives are basic to human nature and the development of these drives in a healthy way is a key part of becoming a well-rounded individual.

Freud believed that each individual is composed of three parts. They are:

Superego: this is the subconscious set of moral controls, given to us by outside influences such as the rules of society and the influence of parents.

Ego: the ego is the conscious self. This is the personality that is most obvious to the outside world.

Id: the Id is the unconscious self, containing all kinds of basic drives, and repressed memories.

To be balanced is to resolve the conflict between the Super Ego and the Id

2. Unfortunately, when healthy development does not occur, almost all dysfunction in human beings such as personality issues and phobias can be traced back to sexual problems

Freud's method of psychoanalysis is based upon the idea that most of our mental life is unconscious: this occasionally slips out in dreams and 'Freudian slips'. Sexual impulses are the cause of mental illnesses. We repress these sexual impulses because they disgust us, sending them to our unconscious.

This is linked to his ideas on the Oedipus Complex. (research this. . .)

3. Hence our 'brokenness' as humans is not about original sin but is instead to do with our environment and upbringing.