

Has "right" evolved from "might"?

The hypothesis outlined above can be formulated in a number of ways, but all derive from Darwin's concept of sexual selection. Depression evolved as the behaviour of those who are not selected and its function is to stop them competing; it does this by inducing in them a state of psychological incapacity, which may be seen as a ritual equivalent of the wounds or death they would have experienced if the competition had not been symbolic, conventional or ritual (i.e., ritual agonistic behaviour). Thus, we can say that depression is the yielding component of ritual agonistic behaviour, or that it subserves fall in hierarchical rank, or that it is a mechanism for managing a fall in resource-holding potential (RHP), or that it is a mechanism for switching from the policy espoused by one group member to that espoused by another; these are all different ways of saying that depression mediates failure in social competition.

One of the fascinating things about primate evolution is the gradual change from an RHP-based social system to a social attention-holding potential (SAHP)-based system (see Gilbert, 1989) and even more recently to a system in which competition between ideas has (partly, at least) replaced competition between people. To some extent, in this evolution, policies have replaced personalities. Thus, in the example given above, the competition is not only between the war advocate and the peace advocate, but between the war policy and the peace policy. The winner depends not only upon the RHP/SAHP of the contestants but also upon the manifest virtues of the policies they advocate, and particularly the success and failure of those policies in practice. The "one up position" has been gradually shifting from "might" to "right". In other words, there has been gradual evolutionary change in the condition which determines whether an "insult" elicits anger or depression. In the primitive agonistic mode, an insult from a higher-ranking person elicits depression, whereas an insult from a lower ranking person elicits anger (as Aristotle observed in his Art of Rhetoric). In the hedonic mode, an insult (or criticism) elicits anger when it is unjustified and one is in the right, but depression when it is justified and one is in the wrong.

Theory not precise enough

In our own theory, aggression and depression are both methods of increasing the RHP gap between two individuals: acts of aggression (catathetic signals) are the means of reducing the other person's RHP, whereas depression is the means of reducing one's own RHP. "Stress" occurs when there is symmetry of power, and conflict cannot be resolved by the usual yielding of the subordinate. Stress is resolved by the induction of asymmetry in RHP between the two competing individuals, and whether it is induced in one or the other, by depression or aggression, are secondary issues. The strategies (fight or yield) and the outcome of the fight if one occurs, are the result of complex interaction between the two individuals involving evaluations of relative RHP and pre-set limits to escalation.

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