

We The People

Program 86

Survival of The Nicest



Charles Darwin born 1809 was an English naturalist. Darwin observed species and differences in geographic isolation in the Galapagos Islands and wrote The Origins of Species. Essentially this means a theory of evolution as opposed to creation was conceived. Now as Christian I have some serious questions about evolution and as you might expect as I don't think it's that simple. This is where this narrative takes a curious turn where I want to speak about altruism and for a very specific human reason. Just bear with me for a moment.

Altruism is the act of selflessness and is more common than you may think. To be altruistic is to place the need of others ahead of your own or in some way conduct yourself quietly in the duty of others without any desire for self acclamation. True altruism cannot exist if personal gratification or reward is sort and that's self evident. The Golden rule of "do unto others as you would have others do unto you" seems to rear its head here and must play a role in an altruistic life or act. Now back to Darwin and his theory of survival of the fittest which is central to the theory of evolution.

It's quite common in the animal kingdom to see altruistic acts between animals and sometimes between species. Consider an animal which knowingly sacrifices something if not their life for another. Take the dog which sounds the alarm in a fire while in peril or drags a child from a burning building or places itself in harm's way to alert another of danger. In the case of the Vervet monkeys, a troop containing a high proportion of alarm-calling monkeys will have a survival advantage. So conceivably, the alarm-calling behaviour favours monkeys that do not give alarm calls. When a monkey sounds the alarm it places itself in danger for the immediate altruistic advantage of the others at its own peril. If natural selection applied then only the monkeys which did not sound the alarm would prevail and then the troop would not have the alarm system and perhaps perish. So, no evolution there and it's a paradox largely unexplained today because I believe animals can make real emotional altruistic decisions but like humans not all do and sadly even less in today's society.

Altruism is a noble thing and in humans the best example applies to the altruistic volunteer who without desire for reward or self acclamation freely gives of themselves for others or noble causes. These people are the bed rock, root and branch of society and in my view the very essence of democracy and freedom. There is no desire for personal gain and in some way it actually costs them to be generous and selfless. To volunteer your time or skills, money, goods or beliefs really has no part in Darwin's clinical theories and surely must be the creative mark of a higher authority. Now this is never more evident than this week being National Volunteers Week and all those across the Gold Coast in particular who support society and the natural world. Frankly without them our country would crumble away and no amount of Gonskis or GDP or Politicians could replace them. There is no national budget for volunteers and their value does not appear in the national books of account. It should. The value of the volunteer's time and altruistic provision is almost incalculable and coming so close to ANZAC Day seems most appropriate.

So this week think on the theory of the survival of the fittest which I bring into question because it does not explain altruistic behaviour and I like to think of it as the survival of the nicest or survival of the kindest. Now doesn't that sound better and more logical and it really is better to give than to receive. So to all the volunteers and all the good folk in business and other organisations, well done in working creatively with the Gold Coast's volunteers during this, National Volunteers Week.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley