

**DARK NATURE:
A NATURAL HISTORY OF EVIL**
LYALL WATSON, 1995

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The biologist-naturalist Dr. Lyall Watson has presented a jewel of a book for those who are diligent enough to forge through his compact writing style and get to the kernel of the point that he is trying to convey. Each sentence in *Dark Nature* must be read, dissected, and digested before moving on to the next. This work strives to answer the question “what is evil?”, and from there works to unravel the mystery that surrounds the origin of evil in humans. Early in the introduction to chapter one Dr. Watson defines for the reader what good and evil are. Respectively they are that which encourages the integrity of the whole, and that which disturbs or disrupts that completeness, or anything that is bad for the ecology (page 9). While not explicitly part of his definition of good and evil, the reader gains a sense that these definitions are proffered on a genetic basis, as evidenced by his writings throughout the rest of the work.

Throughout the entire work Dr. Watson provides the reader with many colorful and interesting examples of the workings of the natural world from the animal world ranging from gorillas and chimpanzees to killer whales. These examples act to show the reader that the rules and ideas Watson is putting forth about evil do not only apply to *Homo sapiens*, but can also be applied to the animal world. Watson is demonstrating the universality of evil, an important point when trying to discover the origins.

Dr. Watson gives the “Three Principles of Pathics,” which he argues describes how things get bad, a synonym for evil throughout the work. Watson argues that things become bad when one of the Three Principles of Pathics is violated. He argues that order is disturbed by loss of place, which means that “stability suffers when something is removed from, detached from or distanced from, the locus where it works best and set down somewhere else, where it is no longer part of a larger system of mutual advantages and constraints” (page 30). Watson argues that this rule is so obvious that even

the federal governments of many nations have realized it, in limiting the importation of exotic plant and animal life. When order is disrupted by loss of balance, or a population increases to the point where they have exceeded their resource supply, the Second Principle of Pathics is demonstrated (page 33). Watson illustrates this point with an explanation as to why Norwegian lemmings tend to “commit suicide.” The final Principle of Pathics argues that when order is destroyed by loss of diversity good turns to bad, which can be seen in his depiction of elephants and baobab trees from his childhood home in South Africa (page 42).

As mentioned previously, Watson uses the genetic makeup of the world as the driving force behind all actions and therefore behind the ideas of good and evil. He suggests that there are universally applicable genetic rules for survival which should be activated when one of the Three Principles of Pathics is violated. These rules are to be nasty to outsiders, be nice to insiders, and to cheat whenever possible (page 54). Watson suggests that violation of these genetic rules of survival or violation of any of the Principles of Pathics is evil, except for certain circumstances.

Interestingly, Watson argues that something as heinous as murdering your own child could be spared the label of evil, despite the fact that it violates the first rule of genetic survival, and the first principle of Pathics. Watson argues the killing of a child, whether yours or someone else’s, may be considered good, or at least not evil, if there is good for the greater social group to come out of the act. He uses the example of ritual killings among the Asmat people, with whom he has closely interacted (page 153).

Watson suggests that the ritual killing of children can serve to promote ecological equilibrium, population stability and social cohesion, all of which serve the Asmat society well. On the other hand, Watson brings the discussion around to instances in which parents have killed their own children where it was evil, primarily pointing the finger at Susan Smith, who in October of 1995 rolled her car into a lake, while her two young sons were strapped in the backseat. Watson argues that this deed was evil, while the actions of the Asmat parents are not, because not only did Smith’s action destroy diversity, a breach of the third principle of Pathics, but it violated the second genetic instruction for survival (pages 192-3).

While I enjoyed the experience of reading *Dark Nature* by Dr. Lyall Watson, I do not think that there are any real revelations as to the true nature of evil in his wonderfully written work. Perhaps it is an error on my part to have

expected so much, but I was well prepared for a biological, or at least sociological history of evil, a definite answer as to what evil really is, and perhaps several hypotheses about where evil originated. Alas, this was not in the cards for this book, and I wonder had it been, how much more satisfying would the work have been to those of us in the world who are looking for concretes, not just socio-biological hypotheses.

THE EXTENDED PHENOTYPE: THE GENE AS THE UNIT OF SELECTION

RICHARD DAWKINS, 1982

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“The Extended Phenotype” is written as a sequel to “The Selfish Gene.” Dawkins says that it is written for people with a knowledge of evolutionary biology, which is very true. If a person has little knowledge of the terminology, then they will never decipher what he is trying to say. He begins his book by stating that, “The phenomena that I shall consider—co-evolution, arms races, manipulation of hosts by parasites, manipulation of the inanimate world by living things, economic ‘strategies’ for minimizing costs and maximizing costs and maximizing benefits.” (2)

One of the first ideas that he addresses is that scientists often speak of adaptation being “for the benefit of something,” but it usually is best not seen as an individual organism. He says that it is best to think in terms of genes, which he calls the “germ-line replicator.” Although, he says, “it is convenient to think of these phenotypic effects as being packaged together in discrete ‘vehicles’ such as individual organisms, this is not fundamentally necessary.” (4) He says that the replicator should be thought of instead of as of having “*extended phenotypic effects*.” Dawkins says that that effect should be thought of in terms of its effect on its whole environment rather than on itself only.

For this, he uses an analogy of a Necker Cube. He illustrates that when a person draws a Necker Cube on a piece of paper, one can see it from two perspectives. Dawkins says that he sees the replicator in the same way.