

GENETICS, PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY

TIT-FOR-TAT OR ALTRUISM IN SCIENCE

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No, this essay will not deal with altruism in science but with the science of altruism. There are two new papers from the Fehr group (one in Science on Nov, 3 about diminished reciprocal fairness after magnetic stimulation of the right prefrontal cortex and a second in Nature on Aug, 24 about altruism in two indigenous groups in Papua New Guinea). I was, however, much more impressed by their [recent review](#) of human altruism.

Cooperation between genetically unrelated groups is a typical human behaviour (otherwise seen only in ants, bees and the naked mole rat) where there seems a strong reciprocity between selfishness and altruism. Cooperation is rarely stable and may deteriorate under worse conditions. Altruistic rewarding and reputation seeking seem to be the most powerful determinants of future donors' behaviour where effects of punishing behaviour seem to be underestimated: Cooperation in larger group continues only if punishment of defectors and non-punishers is possible.



