



On Peaceful Science

Darrel R. Falk

<https://peacefulscience.org/articles/on-peaceful-science/>



I (Dr. Swamidass) am pleased to introduce Darrel Falk, co-author of *The Fool and the Heretic*, whom I invited to write a series exploring the science of human exceptionality. The two of us recently met in DC to advise The Museum of the Bible on a new exhibit, “Science and the Bible.” Falk is a biologist with a gift for communicating complex science in understandable ways. It is privilege to partner with him in this series. His inaugural post considers *Peaceful Science*.

For those of us who believe the evidence is overwhelming that God created humankind through the evolutionary process, these are exciting days. Our genus, *Homo*, arose on the African savannahs about 2.5 million years ago. The characteristics that shaped our genus and eventually our species were developed while those ancestors were living in little groups of about 15 to 25 individuals.¹ Success under these conditions became closely tied to functioning well in small groups, including for example, having a reputation for being trustworthy.² Over tens of thousands of generations being good at understanding each other in a sympathetic fashion provided a distinct advantage and the genetic makeup of our lineage changed accordingly: Gene-forms that made them better and better cooperators were favored.³ Duke University psychologist, Michael Tomasello proposes that within these little communities a novel human-specific phenomenon which he calls joint intentionality emerged. Here’s how he summarizes it:

A joint agent is created when two individuals each intend that “we” act together jointly toward a single end, and they both know together in common ground (they both know that they both know) that this is what they both intend.⁴

1. Fuentes, Agustin, 2017, *The Creative Spark: How Imagination Made Humans Exceptional*, Dutton, p. 78; Lieberman, Daniel E. 2013, *The Story of the Human Body: Evolution, Health, and Disease*, Pantheon, loc. 1662
2. Wilson, E.O., 2012, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, W.W. Norton, loc. 766
3. Novak, Martin, A., 2011, *Super-Cooperators: Altruism, Evolution, and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed*, Free Press.
4. Tomasello, Michael, 2016, *A Natural History of Human Morality*, Harvard University Press, Loc. 1023

The “we,” as he describes it, functions together as one unit, each individual being subtly aware that cooperativity is essential for accomplishing their common goal. Out of that, Tomasello proposes, came a highly developed sense of fairness and a genetically built-in ability to determine what constitutes “we”-based behavior, as opposed to that which is grounded in the “I.” Despite the simplicity and beauty of his hypothesis, Tomasello recognizes that there is one problem that would have kept cropping up—humankind’s native selfishness. “Morality is difficult,” he writes. “Human beings have natural inclinations of sympathy and fairness towards others but still we are sometimes selfish.” Given the struggle our ancestors would have had to control their own self-centeredness, he writes with amazement that morality actually came about:

It is a miracle⁵ that we are moral, and it did not have to be this way. It just so happens that, on the whole, those of us who made mostly moral decisions most of the time had more babies. And so, again, we should simply marvel and celebrate the fact that, *mirabile dictum* [i.e. wonder of wonders]... morality appears to be somehow good for our species, our cultures, and ourselves—at least so far.⁶

There is much fodder here for theological reflection. Indeed, this is true of so much of the recent genetic, cultural, behavioral, and paleontological data that has been emerging over the past decade in studies of the origin of human exceptionality. But in this, my inaugural blog on the *Peaceful Science* website, I want to focus on something different. I want to focus, not on the “Science,” but on the “Peaceful.” Tomasello is amazed that morality emerged in our species—given that we’re also selfish. The fact is that being good, despite the tendency to be bad, is the secret to our success in the hominin lineage. But the “I” vs “we” dialectic that has long characterized our species still exists. As I read this particular part of Tomasello’s book, I was reminded of Paul’s words in Romans 7:19-21:

5. It is important to note that Tomasello’s choice of the word, “miracle,” was not put into a context which specifically implied he was proposing some type of supernatural intervention.
6. Ibid, loc. 3160

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.

Indeed, going back even further, I think of the words of the Lord to Cain in Genesis 4:7

If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

The answer to the sin problem, Jesus tells us, is to "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."⁷ Therein is the secret to what "Peaceful Science" entails—we are to learn from him. But what does Jesus teach us about how to "find rest for our souls?" Indeed, how are we to live peace-filled lives in the midst of less than peaceful situations?

Well for one thing, we can look closely at the Gospel of John. This book is widely regarded as the story of the new creation made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It starts off with the original creation ("In the beginning was the Word...") and then moves on from there specifically doing so in the context of the sin problem. In scene after scene John alludes to a forthcoming new creation. New wine is created in old ceremonial jars (John 2). Jesus exclaims that the old temple will be destroyed and then rebuilt in three days (John 2). Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again, a birth that will be mysteriously, but powerfully, mediated through the action of the Spirit of God (John 3). The centerpiece in the whole book of John is the abundant life made possible through Christ. As the Gospel draws to a close, we read that the resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples saying, "Peace be with you" as he blows his breath on them and tells them to "Receive the Holy Spirit." With this first-creation-echo of the breath of God giving life to Adam, Jesus tells us that through his death and resurrection, a new creation becomes possible. With further echoes, this time of the original creation week, John twice tells us in the 20th chapter that Resurrection Sunday was the first day of a new week.⁸ We are new creations. No longer are we to live as sinful human beings. Instead we are called to be holy as He is holy.⁹ As N.T. Wright declares: "As a parent will not rest until the last traces of illness have been removed from the child, so God will not tolerate the disease of sin within his new creation."¹⁰

Matthew's Gospel complements John's beautifully. In Matthew, Jesus teaches us how we are to live in this new creation. He tells us we are to turn the other cheek, to walk the second mile, and to give not just our coat but our cloak as well. We're told not to judge,¹¹ especially given that the other might only have a speck in his eye

while the chances are good that we have a log in our own. Matthew ends with the picture of the sheep and the goats being separated on the basis of how they cared for others. Indeed, through loving and looking out for others, we're told we are caring for Christ himself. Given Paul's later writings about the church being the Body of Christ—this might be understood at multiple levels. One is that as we care for each other, we are literally caring for Christ's Body, the Church.¹²

In the center of Matthew's gospel is a passage that is deeply troubling. On the one hand we've been told not to judge, but now in Matthew 18, we're told how to handle sin in our midst. There are four stages. First, we are to privately speak to the person who has sinned. If this doesn't seem to have any effect, second, we are told to bring in one or two others. If this still has no effect, third, we are told to bring the matter to the wider body, the Church. What does Jesus tell us to do if this third step has no effect? He says we are to treat the other person as a pagan or a tax collector. Initially, this seems to be in complete contradiction to what Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount—walking the second mile, turning the other cheek, etc. It seems to conflict with all that Jesus has been telling us about how we should live. But wait! How *does* Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors? Well, for one thing he spent time talking with them and he loved them deeply. But the even deeper answer is found on Calvary—Jesus sacrificed his very life for tax collectors and pagans, and he is telling us to do the same. Lest there be any doubt about what Jesus meant by how to treat "tax collectors and sinners," we are next told that Peter asked how many times the disciples should forgive someone in the church who sins. "Seven?" he suggests.

"No," Jesus says, "Forgive seventy times seven!" Then just to make sure we all understand how to treat those who need forgiveness, he tells us the parable of the man who has been forgiven of much but refuses to forgive in turn. The consequences of not-forgiving, Jesus tells us, are dire indeed. And nowhere does Jesus say that the individual has to admit his sin or make restitution before he is forgiven. Indeed, he must be *heartily* forgiven, we are told.¹³

Why in the world would I write about this in a science-based column? I do so because it's not about science as much as it is about *peaceful* science. Jesus came to bring peace in the midst of the conflicts that arise because of sin. It is one thing for nasty conflicts to exist outside the church, but they must not exist inside the church. We are new creations and the foundation for that new creation is love. Jesus gave us explicit instructions about how to handle conflict that arises in the church. After letting others with whom we disagree know that we think they are wrong, even sinful, Jesus tells us to treat them like he treats pagans and tax collectors—he died for them.

Over 15 years ago now, I wrote a book called "[Coming to Peace with Science](#)." Sometimes, I think there is a need for another book called "Coming to Peace with Fellow Christians who Disagree about Science." But then I realize the book has already been written. The key parts are found in Matthew 5, Matthew 25, and when understood through the servanthood illustrated by the life and ministry of Jesus—Matthew 18.

7. Matthew 11:29

8. For a marvelous discussion of all of this see N.T. Wright, 2014, *Surprised by Scripture*, Harper Collins, pages 208-211; Also, Brown, Jeanine, K., 2010, *Creation's Renewal in the Gospel of John*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 72:275-290.

9. See I Peter 1:15,16

10. Ibid, p. 212

11. From the context of the New Testament as a whole, including the words of Jesus, we can tell that this refers to accusingly judging the motives of others—this is God's realm not ours.

12. See Horvath, Andy, 2015, *What You Probably Don't Know about the Least of These*, Christianity Today, March 5, 2015. See [here](#).

13. Matthew 18:35

Joshua has asked me to write on the science of human exceptionalism for *Peaceful Science*, which I am excited to do—the first creation story is beautiful beyond imagination. However, even more beautiful is the concept of peace-filled science enthusiasts who are frank with each other when they think they are wrong—but then, having told them, move on to do what they think is right—“hardly noticing when the others are

still doing it wrong.”¹⁴ That, Paul tells us is what love is. And that, Jesus *shows* us, is how there can be peace on earth.\

14. See I Corinthians 13:5 (TLB)

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