

## Misconceptions of Judaism

Although he praises some aspects of my book, *A People That Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994; hereafter *PTSDA*), Timothy Crippen (*ESS Newsletter #45; September 1997*) states that my theoretical treatment is “based on the suspicious logic of group-selectionism” and that I am guilty of “conceptual confusion” “likely to disappoint an informed evolutionist.” My rejoinder argues that Crippen missed my logic entirely, that I am guilty of no conceptual confusions, and that the type of theory Crippen advances is unable to explain the historical phenomena that must be addressed by any adequate theory of Judaism.

Crippen fails to understand the interplay between evolved systems and cultural processes in my theory. In several passages I assert that it is unlikely that altruistic groups could evolve. For example, I state that “The entire edifice of modern evolutionary theory implies that self-sacrificing behavior is highly problematic. Models of group selection face the difficulty that the forces of population regulation inevitably lead to the evolution of selfishness within groups” (*PTSDA*, p. 12). I repeat this point on p. 138 and state that “Nevertheless, . . . humans can develop altruistic groups that rely ultimately on human abilities to monitor and enforce group goals, to prevent defection, and to create ideological structures that rationalize group aims both to group members and to outsiders.” This then sets up natural selection and fitness differences between groups in which typically Jewish groups were more cohesive and more altruistic than their competitors. I also show that there was eugenic selection within Jewish groups for evolved systems related to intelligence, ethnocentrism, and conscientiousness that made Jewish groups more cohesive and more competitive than their neighbors.

There is absolutely no theoretical problem with cultural group selection (see also Boyd & Richerson 1992; Richerson & Boyd 1997; Wilson & Sober 1994) for the simple reason that humans are able to counteract cheating and other individualistic tendencies by expulsion or other penalties. This implies social controls on cheating and other manifestations of individualism that contradict the group strategy, but Crippen fails to acknowledge the central role of social controls in my theory, instead portraying it as resting solely on an ideology of altruism (p. 10). I have no illusions that an ideology of altruism would be sufficient to produce altruistic groups. My view is that the individualistic self-interest of Jewish elites was significantly conditioned by group membership and in particular by social controls acting within the Jewish community. My view contrasts with Crippen’s view that Judaism should be seen as an individualistic strategy of elites originating with the priestly class during the Babylonian exile.

In making this claim, Crippen draws on one strand in my argument (*PTSDA*, pp. 250–57). This strand is an important source for the origins of the Jewish group strategy but is completely

inadequate as an account of historical Judaism. An individualistic perspective simply cannot make sense of the material in Chapters 6 and 7 of *PTSDA*: Failure to provide charity for poor Jews, failure to pay communal taxes, marriage to a gentile, or informing on other Jews resulted in expulsion for self and relatives. Similar consequences were in store for Jewish businessmen who made alliances with gentile businessmen or who interfered with monopolies held by other Jews. And there was intensive socialization for submerging individual interests to the needs of the group. These features of historical Judaism were the result of social controls acting within the community, backed by a powerful ideology, but hardly determined by that ideology.

This does not imply that the Jewish elite was completely self-sacrificing. Jewish society was not at all egalitarian, and it was always better to be at the top. I show that Jewish society was an intensely competitive meritocracy with major payoffs in terms of reproductive success. However, the individualistic behavior of Jewish elites was muted by the forces of community pressure in ways that can only be understood within a cultural group selection model.

Ironically, Crippen is forced to suppose that lower-status Jews were deluded into accepting oppression at the hands of Jewish elites (p. 13)—an explanation that implies that lower-status Jews were engaging in maladaptive altruism on a grand scale. I show that there were conflicts of interest within Jewish society, but Jewish elites also patronized lower-status Jews, employed them in their enterprises, and provided charity to them, including dowries that allowed poor girls to marry, while at the same time they eliminated freeloaders and cheaters from the community. And, because of the high degree of genetic relatedness within Jewish communities, lower-status Jews succeeded to a considerable extent when other Jews succeeded.

In his exclusive emphasis on ideology as the basis for my theory of Judaism, Crippen also fails to adequately acknowledge the critical role of evolved mechanisms in my presentation: The role of biological relatedness in lowering the barriers for altruism within Jewish communities and in conditioning Jewish economic activity, marriage decisions, and charity (p. 150ff); evolutionary mechanisms involved in socialization for group consciousness (p. 213ff); and, most importantly, evolved systems underlying ethnocentrism, group allegiance, and Jewish “hyper-collectivism” (p. 236ff).

Because he ignored much of my treatment and forced my theory of Judaism into a preconceived model of naive group selection, Crippen failed to come to grips with the complexities involved in the interactions among evolved systems and cultural processes central to my theory of Judaism as a group evolutionary strategy.

## References

- Boyd, R., & P. J. Richerson (1992). Punishment allows the evolution of cooperation (or anything else) in sizable groups. *Ethology and Sociobiology* 13:171–195.
- Richerson, P. J., & R. Boyd (1997). The evolution of human ultra-sociality. In *Ideology, Warfare, and Indoctrinability*, ed. I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt & F. Salter. Oxford and Providence: Berghahn Books.
- Wilson, D. S., & E. Sober (1994). Re-introducing group selection to the human behavioral sciences. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 17:585–684.