

# Altruism or Mutualism in the Explanation of Honour with Reference to Reputation and Indirect Reciprocity?

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**Abstract** Notions about honour and honour codes are culturally institutionalised and sacralised as well as important quasi-moral human concerns that relate to reputation monitoring. This article addresses honour concepts from the standpoint of the cognition of reputation management and indirect reciprocity. In view of the massive bulk of research on the evolution of moral dispositions for cooperation, it hypothesised that such proclivities for social life underpin and constrain the cultural formation of honour concepts, particularly through the function of reputation. However, there are two prominent theories that address evolved morality, and both consider reputation. Firstly, altruism and group selection theory holds that key moral dispositions are related to punishment and possibly honour, and it proposes that the altruists outcompete non-altruists in a group. By contrast, mutualist theory holds that it is mutually advantageous to cooperate and that an actor's reputation as a reliable exchange partner is at the core of concerns about honour. In this article it is asked whether altruism and mutualism are both of equal explanatory value in explaining honour and reputation. The overarching argument of this article is that mutualist models, *prima facie*, have explanatory higher ground when a model of the cultural transmission of honour concepts is advanced based on evolved human morality. This objective is highlighted by (a) suggesting a model of how reputation is a conceptual core of honour notions and (b) demonstrating how mutualist rather than altruist approaches offer the most cohesive account of reputation and consequently of honour notions.

**Keywords** Altruism, Mutualism, Honour, Reputation, Culture, Cognition

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## 1. Introduction

Anthropologists have described honour as esteem, respect or prestige or some combination of these traits [1]. Honour has been seen as a sentiment, the manifestation of the sentiment in conduct and the evaluation of this conduct by

others[2], cf. [3]. and a personal claim to worth and a social recognition of the claim of a right to worth[4]. Honour is also about the right to be treated with respect and to enjoy a special socially recognised worth [5]. Reverence and respect are thus constitutive in this notion of honour since they refer to reputation and how others view the respected person. In order to maintain their honour, people comply with behavioural rules and uphold standards known as *codes of honour* [6]. Such codes of honour obviously demonstrate huge cultural and historical variation, implying that they possess a relative or fragmented nature lacking any cross-cultural similarities. However the position held here is that despite these variations, a number of conceptual and functional topics such as reputation, downgrading and social exclusion avoidance constitute a common core of honour. One way to describe the thematic modalities of honour codes has been suggested and various “cultural models of honour” have been characterised by Roy D’Andrade [7], who highlights masculine traits of formidability, bravado and concern with reputation (e.g. criminal gangs, mafia, knights, warlords, aristocrats, soldiers and officers) and also codes of sexual honour seen in honour killings and violence against women in order to ensure sexual purity. The point of construing an analytical or “etic” category of honour models would be to develop a typology and relate and compare various types of honour under one explanatory framework. Cultures of honour have, furthermore, been described as adaptations to ecological stress, when people depend on unproductive herding [8,9]. In many pastoral economies, a “self-help justice” develops where honour deters theft and other offences with threats of violence. Such cultures of honour thrive in patrilineal societies with weak governing laws, institutionalised feuding, strong bonds within fraternal interest groups, bride-wealth exchange and an emphasis on female chastity, virginity, claustration and seclusion e.g., [10,11,12,13,14]. In these circumstances, the protection of female sexual purity is a concern for the whole family's reputation, and is based on controlling a woman's reproductive powers and capacity so as to guarantee patrilineal descent e.g., [15]. It is also concerned with the reproductive assets arising for families that build political

and economic alliances with high-ranking families [16]. Secluding and controlling the family's women thus functions as a public signal [17,18] that preserves the reputational value of the family's honour [19].

Assuming that evolutionary selection has resulted in particular psychological dispositions, this should also impact upon the cultural distribution of reputation and honour [20]. Aside from the institutional and ecological factors mentioned above, there are also evolved cognitive and moral dispositions that may be decisive for reputation and honour. Evolved cognitive mechanisms reflecting parent-offspring conflicts and parental investment are factors that benefit parents, such as the expected future prospects of a child's reproductive success. These mechanisms should be susceptible to local cultural cues about the offspring's ability to turn parental investments into future reproductive success [21]. Attractive daughters in high status marriages are consequently beneficial parental investments that bring the prospect of reproductive success and fruitful alliances between families. Protectiveness in relation to honour is likely to arise because of signals of the intensity of competition and the way in which a person is valued in the local cultural environment among rivals on the marriage market cf., [22]. Notions about sexual honour are likely to draw upon these mechanisms since the costs of dishonourable offspring (daughters) may lead to unfavourable marriages for afflicted women and damage to the family reputation in coalition management. Further, honour is explicit in contexts in which ideals of masculine identity are highly valued [23,24].

A feature of manliness is formidability and a higher degree of formidability may increase the benefits for male individuals [25]. In exclusively male social environments, maintaining one's reputation requires that the individual is able to demonstrate his formidability, pride, assertiveness and willingness to act in ways that preserve honour cf., [26]. These two outlines of the cognitive underpinnings of honour both entail giving attention to the constitutive function of reputation. As will be discussed below, there are probably no codes, concepts or schemes of honour that do not involve reputation. How well then do human notions of reputation and honour agree with the presupposition that evolutionary selection has equipped human beings with moral dispositions? Humans need to cooperate with others, but cooperation implies risks of cheating and free-riding actors that take benefits without paying the costs. However, cheating endangers a person's reputation and chances of being able to access and gain from future cooperation. Given these conditions, an evolutionary backbone of morality can be seen from the general perspective of human cooperation. Evolutionary theories of morality can be classified as either altruist or mutualist. Pioneering work conducted by Trivers suggests that mutualism plays a significant role for individual selection in the evolution of morality [27]. Even if a biological function of morality is to guarantee a good reputation, this requires a genuine moral disposition and psychological motivation in order to be socially convincing

[28]. However, Trivers' idea has unwanted implications for both individual selection models in mutualism and group selection models of altruism [29], since either morality functions solely to support reputation (a position rejected by altruists) or the motivation to behave morally is genuine and is at odds with concern for reputation (a position rejected by mutualists). This is problematic because both models have explanatory value for explaining how morality, cooperation, culture, reputation and, consequently, honour evolved. The overarching argument of this article is that mutualist models, *prima facie*, hold explanatory higher ground when a model of the cultural transmission of honour concepts is advanced based on evolved human morality. This objective is highlighted by (a) suggesting a model of how reputation is a conceptual core of honour notions and (b) demonstrating how mutualist rather than altruist approaches offer the most cohesive account of reputation and consequently of honour notions. Drawing upon the implications of altruism and mutualism identified in the literature, it will be argued that mutualism fits better with what we know about honour and reputation and therefore, *prima facie*, offers a more persuasive explanation. To sum up the conceptual landscape that has been introduced, honour consists of variously developed social notions and behavioural codes about the right to be respected and have social value in the opinion of others. Reputation is an objective belief and evaluation among others about a person X that may have an impact on the social cooperation and indirect reciprocity affecting X. According to biologist W. D. Hamilton, behaviour that is costly to the actor and beneficial to a recipient is altruistic, while behaviour that benefits both actor and recipient is mutualistic [72]. Before analysing the implications of altruism and mutualism, I shall discuss the relationship between reputation, honour, and indirect reciprocity so as to provide a basis for assessing altruism and mutualism.

## 2. Characterising Reputation and Its Dynamics as a Common Core in Honour Notions

The threat of a ruined reputation is a major concern in relation to honour and this may prompt a person to engage in a struggle to uphold public standing. This condition suggests that reputation is the core concept and function in honour codes and various cultural models of honour. Human beings are the only species that must deal with the problem of reputation and socially dangerous information. Because humans engage in social cooperation and exchange, having access to information and learning about others are crucial for future cooperation. Reputation has been described as a process and transmission effect of evaluative beliefs about a given target [30]. It has also been described as an evaluative judgement expressed as a widely shared generalised consensus [31]. Reputation is not just about having a good opinion of others, or shared opinions, but is a distributed meta-representation of a given person and what other people

think that person *is*. So even if others have a good or bad opinion of a person, this is not enough to create the person's reputation. A representation earns its reputational quality when a positive opinion is acknowledged as such and recognised as being widely shared in a social group. Consequently, reputation is not merely an expression of a personal opinion but is a statement that this opinion is shared by others in the social environment. Concern about reputation is also a strategy for upholding a particular social identity or image by persuading others that you have such an identity [32]. One dimension of reputation is its connection to evaluations and social identity as prototypes of moral virtues according to which someone serves as a good or bad example. Further, conformism and control go hand in hand with reputation since people sense that they must conform to moral standards or risk acquiring a bad reputation. Reputation therefore works as a social-cognitive artefact that regulates personal autonomy [33]. This is seen from the fact that a bad reputation is sticky and salient. Negative social information that gives rise to a bad reputation catches people's attention [34] and negative rumours are more prevalent because the information is felt to be more relevant and apt [35]. Research suggests that a person's moral conduct is more sensitive to negative than positive evaluations by others [36]. This perhaps explains why rumour and gossip are likely to be transmitted in particular narrative formats that tend to use stereotyped expressions and metaphors such as "whore" [37] to put a person down.

Managing one's reputation is motivated by the desire to influence how others perceive one. Most people are aware that their behaviour may impact on future social interactions and they may make *strategic* reputation investments when the possibility of pay-off in other situations is high. Consequently, humans must have the ability to foresee others' responses to their actions and inferred intentions. This further suggests that evolutionary selection pressures led to the development of cognitive abilities that operate in the presence of an audience [38]. We may expect human beings to have developed social cognitive competences that are specialised for predicting the reputational consequences of action [39]. Creating a model of these cognitive competences may require dividing them into intuitive mechanisms and reflective, strategic social thinking, and these works toward partly distinct forms of moral reasoning [40]. If this is so then reflective concern about reputation differs from intuitions of reputational risks, and these conditions may be structurally homologous to moral reasoning as a means for justifying moral intuitions. To have honour and a good reputation, it is vital to possess the competence and skills that enable one to predict the consequences of one's own and others' actions upon reputation. A person may even take explicit measures to defend their honour and reputation in a stipulated and ritualised manner.

Further, displaying and indexing honour and reputation in communication may involve signalling in the form of such things as threats and/or violence and ostracism to

demonstrate one's standing in a social environment and commitment to particular norms. There may be high costs for preserving honour, and punishments may be administered to those that inflict disgrace. Various forms of interpersonal or inter-group violence are used to defend honour. Indeed what is constitutive of codes of honour is that if a violation of rules does not imply the penalty of losing honour, then the rules are not a code of honour [41]. There are rules not only for conferring honour but also for what to do when honour has been lost [42]. Strategies to restore honour are therefore part of the code and they are significant in *reflexive honour* [43]. Accordingly, if X challenges Y's honour then, by that very act, Y's honour is ruined unless Y responds to X with a counterattack.

This is indeed a highly communicative and seemingly pricey violence, addressing both an audience and victims as an overt means to restore honour. The notion of costly signalling of this kind may draw upon the evolutionary selection of "honest signalling" that applies to many species, including hominoids. According to biologists such as Zahavi and Zahavi, this is hard to fake; costly signals are direct indices of the fitness traits that they are supposed to broadcast [44]. Further, costly signals can be an evolutionarily stable strategy under specific conditions [45].

### 3. Reputation as an "Ultra Social Gadget" for Indirect Reciprocity

Humans have been described as an "ultrasocial" species [46] among whom social signals are of extreme importance because of the complex ways in which human beings interact, cooperate and rely on reciprocity [47,48]. Humans can be said to live in a "cognitive niche" where they rely for their survival on information in the social and natural environment [49]. Social information is essential for domains such as cooperation, coordination and exchange, and cues about others' behaviour, intentions and dispositions are especially important for identifying collaborators, free riders or defectors. Reputation and correspondingly honour are crucial to maintaining an advantageous position and access to valuable interactions.

Trust in reputational information and acts of punishment depend upon social signals. The signalling benefits of moralistic punishment may advertise an individual's reputation [50]. People who administer punishment may in so doing communicate that they are good candidates for cooperation because they display adherence to local norms and behaviours [51]. In addition, the administration of moralistic punishment is sensitive to and primed by the social presence of others [52]. Since "costly signalling" and reputation aim to influence others' impressions, an underlying cognitive mechanism that is sensitive to others is likely at work [53]. It is also likely that cognitive subroutines for moral surveillance and punishment may have evolved because of their signalling benefits [54] and, indeed,

research suggests that punishment does provide signalling benefits [55].

The one crucial topic in the above mentioned moral surveillance must, however, itself be based on a human proclivity to embrace third-person morality or evaluative judgement of others' behaviour e.g., [56]. Such third-person morality connects to the way humans interact indirectly, based on reputation. In so-called "indirect reciprocity", individuals occasionally interact directly but respond to and rely on reputational information about others [57]. In a dense social network, punishment operates directly by ruining a person's reputation by means of rumours and gossip, as previously indicated. Further, research suggests that reputation influences the dynamics of cooperation in interactive games based on indirect reciprocity [58]. Maintaining a good reputation is therefore a crucial social asset in indirect reciprocity and high-level cooperation [59]. Studies also suggest that humans who have shown themselves to be cooperative have better chances of receiving help from others in indirect reciprocity e.g., [60]. Importantly, Sommerfeld et al. showed that maintaining a good reputation in cooperative behaviour is rewarded in future interactions in both the individual's own and other groups [61].

#### **4. The Issue of Hypocrisy and Quasi-morality in Reputation**

Before addressing the objective of showing whether altruism or mutualism is the most likely foundation of reputation and the cultural prevalence of honour, the evolutionary issue about alleged hypocrisy and quasi-morality will be discussed. This is an important issue since it deals with the problem of to what extent an evolutionary selection pressure promotes "genuine" moral dispositions and values. Reputation and, by consequence, honour are associated with moral evaluations. However, some evolutionary accounts of morality propose that the human concern for moral behaviour is based on the self-interested desire to boost one's reputation e.g., [62, 63]. Others suggest that we are motivated by both intrinsic moral and reputational concerns. Caring about reputation also gives a supplementary non-moral motivation to behave morally, thus increases the motivation to act according to standards of moral behaviour [64]. This may suggest that the sole reason for people to behave morally is to strategically make an impression on others. Indeed, mutualistic models (see below) suggest such a conclusion and propose that morality functions to provide individuals with a reputation as reliable partners in social cooperation e.g., [65, 66]. On the other hand, it has been argued that evolutionary dynamics have provided both a biological function and a mechanism for moral behaviour [67], where the function is to manage a good reputation and the mechanism or psychological motivation is based on dispositions to act morally. However, even if morality serves to safeguard a good reputation, other

functions are involved because reputation management needs to operate over and adapt to other domains of human evaluations and involvement in which people express judgements about others. This implies that moral evaluations can be understood as evolved adaptations in response to non-reputational factors [68]. It is therefore not the case that moral behaviour merely aims at securing a good reputation in the eyes of others, since earning a good reputation in itself is an adaptation to moral evaluations, and this condition presupposes an evolution of moral evaluation. Consequently, securing a good reputation in a given domain of conduct is fruitless if no one bothers to make moral evaluations in the first place [69]. In this respect, reputation is paradoxical, since the biological function of morality is to manage a reputation that itself relies on an evolved sense of value and morality. This property of reputation would qualify as quasi-morality.

#### **5. Evolved Morality in Relation to Reputation**

What should be recognised as a moral domain and what does it mean to allude to a concept "of evolved morality"? Using such an expression is to suggest that over evolutionary history, social and natural selection pressure has caused and promoted such types of moral dispositions as adaptations for social cooperation and coordination. However there seem to be different types of "morality", although arguably altruism and/or mutualism is more basic. This suggests that reputational dispositions may also operate upon a broader moral domain concerning harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity, as suggested by Haidt and Graham [70]. Concern for group loyalty, respect for the elderly, self-restraint and body regulation, including rules about menstruation, sexual behaviour and food consumption, are found in most human groups [71]. Since humans are a social species, cooperation should have significant evolutionary importance for the development of morality based on either altruist and/or mutualist mechanisms. Following Hamilton's typology, behaviour that is costly to the actor and beneficial to a recipient is altruistic, while behaviour that benefits both actor and recipient is mutualistic [72]. Altruism and mutualism are tendencies seen in the broader domain of moral evaluation and are primarily relevant in interactions that deal with in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, fairness/reciprocity and, indirectly, harm/care and purity/sanctity. Although altruistic and mutualist approaches predict different relationships between reputation and morality, the two are not irreconcilable. However, it was previously argued that maintaining a good reputation is a crucial social asset in indirect reciprocity and high-level cooperation and, as will be demonstrated below, mutualism seems to be the most coherent theory with the most coherent account of reputation and indirect reciprocity. In the following sections a more thorough analysis of the claims of

altruism and mutualism will be undertaken in relation to reputation and indirect reciprocity.

## 6. Altruism

As previously noted, the evolutionary logic of altruism is seen in interactions in which an actor's behaviour benefits others at his own cost. Altruism, seen as *strong reciprocity*, has been observed when actors are predisposed to cooperate with other actors and to punish non-cooperating actors even when this cannot be justified on the basis of self-interest, personal cost or reciprocity [73,74]. The aim of punishment here is to deter people from cheating.

Much contemporary work on the evolution of altruistic cooperation suggests that morality is mainly altruistic e.g., [75,76,77]. These models of altruistic cooperation and morality address problems inherent in early mutualistic models of human cooperation such as "reciprocal altruism"[78] or "indirect reciprocity" e.g., [79,80]. The limitations of early mutualistic models are further revealed in behavioural experiments that demonstrate how participants are willing to punish cheaters even when it is costly and there are no obvious benefits for themselves [81,82]. These punitive attitudes and behaviours have been held up as support for altruistic theories of why individuals sacrifice for the group [83,84].

Another idea is that altruistic behaviour supports group selection. Punishment has been seen as a form of altruism that brings benefits to the group at the expense of the individuals. Consequently, groups with strong commitments, reciprocity and readiness to punish defectors have a competitive advantage over groups with weaker commitment and no punishers e.g.,[85,86]. According to the proponents of altruist group selection approaches, moral dispositions and punishment lead to greater reproductive success of altruists in groups. This can give groups with greater numbers of altruists an advantage in group competition and in turn lead to the propagation of altruistic behaviour more broadly. Altruist models further suggest that cooperation evolved through the sacrifice of individuals willing to incur personal costs in order to inflict costs on others (punishment) as a way to discourage cheating. Several experimental studies also show that humans are not completely selfish and are equipped with moral sense, and this has been seen as evidence in support of altruism in group selection models. For instance, moralistic altruistic punishment relates to cooperation in groups and may explain why unrelated individuals can enjoy the benefit of group effort at no cost to themselves.

## 7. Altruism and Reputation

Altruist approaches that propose group selection takes place through genetic and or cultural co-evolution [87,88] suggest that guaranteeing an individual's reputation is

important but not crucial. This is because in group selection altruistic behaviour benefits others rather than oneself. However, if altruism means acting in ways that benefit others at a cost to oneself, it is still unclear how this relates to reputation management. Nevertheless, altruism should be recognised in situations where an actor boosts the reputation of others at his own expense. Bad reputation has been seen as a strong cue for non-cooperation that can result in punishment of "uncooperative" group members [89,90,91]. Altruistic models need to show how a social preoccupation with honour and reputation is a derivative of altruistic dispositions. Perhaps this is possible from scenarios in which punishment is directed towards others (group members) who have a bad reputation.

## 8. The Weakness of Altruism

Cogent criticism has however pointed to problems in the notion that altruism and human cooperation have evolved through group selection (e.g. Pinker 2012). The cause of group success may for example not be the trait of altruism, but rather contempt for weakness, coercion, slavery etc. More generally, issues with group-selection approaches concern the extrapolation of individual selection to group selection such that the latter becomes the unit for genetic selection. This alleged condition would suggest homogeneity within competing groups and genetic isolation between them, which is hard to reconcile with the abundant gene flow that transgresses group-boundaries seen in human social life.

## 9. Mutualism

Mutualistic models hold that it is advantageous for individuals to cooperate [92] and that behaviour is mutualistic when it is beneficial to both the actor and the recipient [93]. Mutualist models also imply that it is a person's reputation as a reliable social exchange partner that is at stake in the concern for honour. Mutualist perspectives have "partner choice" versions, where individuals choose good partners for cooperation, such as in market settings, and are less concerned with detecting cheaters e.g.,[94,95]. By contrast, "partner control" may also concern governing cheaters in situations of cooperation and restoring cooperation through punishment e.g.,[96,97,98].

## 10. Mutualism and Reputation

From the mutualist perspective, morality is problematic because there may be no genuinely moral behaviour but only concern for one's reputed moral appearance. Inspired by the programme of evolutionary psychology, mutualist scholars also stress that the psychological motivation for moral behaviour and cooperation consists of self-interest in upholding a good reputation e.g., [99,100,101,102].

Accordingly, moral behaviour has evolved to furnish individuals with a reputation as reliable partners in cooperation [103,104]. Indeed, Kurzban suggests that the seemingly moral behaviour found in altruism is driven rather by non-moral self-interest in good reputation, particularly when agents sense cues of being observed in contexts of dubious behaviour [105]. This kind of concern about reputation was studied by Haley and Fessler, who exposed subjects to signals of being watched and to social sounds [106]. They suggested that these cues were processed as social signals that ultimately safeguard reputation and lead to more generous behaviour among the participants. From this perspective, seemingly moral behaviour has to do with the self's concern for its own reputation. However, there are problems with this Machiavellian or opportunistic view. If an individual was to calculate only for the purpose of reputation and moral appearances, he would most likely be mistrusted by others (and earn a bad reputation) because of his self-serving and calculating attitude. From a mutualist perspective, he would not make a favourable cooperation partner [107]. Nonetheless, reputation is crucial for a person to be regarded by others as a trustworthy cooperation partner. Furthermore, too much interest in manipulating one's reputation and trying to impress others is costly from a cognitive point of view, and reputation without a concern for moral authenticity is difficult to uphold [108], cf., [109].

## 11. Conclusions

This article has dealt with concepts of honour and reputation from the perspective of evolutionary models of morality and cooperation. The overall ambition is (a) to contribute to a naturalistic research program about cultural phenomena and transmission in evolutionary and cognitive anthropology, (b) to develop a model that suggests how reputation, indirect reciprocity and mutualism are crucial factors in the cultural occurrence, maintenance and spreading of honour representations, and (c) to offer a novel and deeper account of the phenomenon of honour. The overall approach is theoretical and methodological, and can generate research hypotheses for future studies about honour and its various institutions based upon reputation and mutualistic notions about exchange, rights and fairness.

The article has argued for the relevance of reputation in the understanding of honour. Further, it has been argued that the mutualist model has some explanatory advantage in the overall understanding of reputation and consequently of honour. The importance of reputation in diverse beliefs about honour has been used as a comparative unit in analysing two evolutionary models. This strategy has been based on the assumption that we can construe an analytical or "etic" category of honour models that can discuss the cultural transmission of various types of honour under one explanatory framework with reference to reputation management and basic evolved morality. Altruism implies that an actor benefits others at his own expense while

mutualism states that behaviour that benefits both the actor and a recipient is mutualistic. In altruist group selection, accounts of the success of groups with strongly committed altruists correlates with the concern for honour and reputation. Altruist models assume that reputation and honour should have an evaluative basis if they are to be of relevance for people. When comparing features of altruist and mutualist models, mutualism is found to better explain what is seen in cases of honour and reputation. This is because reputation management is essential to the pragmatics of honour, also in mutualistic models. Setting aside the issue of whether altruism, mutualism or a combination of the two is preferable, mutualistic approaches do seem to offer a more comprehensive explanation of why reputation is so important for honour. Curiously, this may be due to the paradoxical fact that, although altruist models offer a neat explanation for "collectivist" cultures and inherent honour codes, the mutualistic emphasis on reputation may offer a more grounded account of honour dynamics.

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