

# “From Every Tribe and Tongue and People and Nation”: The All-Inclusive Group

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**Abstract:** *This article seeks to take a position different from John Hartung’s position in his article entitled, “Love Thy Neighbor: The Evolution of In-Group Morality.” His article was originally written in two separate issues in Skeptic in 1995 and 1996. Hartung takes the position that in-group morality (a moral code for a specific group) exists so that religious groups can compete against other groups, even overcoming them through violence and subordination. The position of this present article seeks to show that Hartung’s premise falls short through examination of presuppositions, the central motif of redemption, and a high view of Scripture in light of its context. This article will address certain components from Hartung’s article to state a position that remains true to the biblical text. Instead of an in-group morality, this article promotes an all-inclusive group morality that is intended to extend beyond that group to others for the purpose of evangelism, not competition.*

**Keywords:** Presuppositions, Inspiration, Context, Redemption, All-Inclusive

## Introduction

John Hartung’s article, “Love Thy Neighbor: The Evolution of In-Group Morality,” is an interesting read. The title alone is intriguing making one believe at the outset that the quotation from Scripture in the title, “Love Thy Neighbor,” might possess the prospects of a true biblical treatise. Not far into the reading, however, it becomes clear that he is not pro-Bible nor pro-God for that matter (Hartung refers consistently to the God of Judaism and Christianity with the lowercase, “god”). To be fair, “in-group morality” as a premise is not necessarily wrong but appears to be limited in scope where the use of scriptural texts is misunderstood and misinterpreted.

He bases his argument for in-group morality early on in an evolutionary theory which goes against Scripture. This becomes interesting in his article as he uses evolutionary concepts to understand the behavior of his two primary test groups—Jews and Christians—and seeks to tie those concepts into his use of Scripture. There can be no two more conflicting ideas

than modern-day evolutionary theory and Scripture (particularly the understanding of the origin of all things). The two go together like oil and water, they simply do not mix. So, to seek to understand the behavior of God's people through the use of evolutionary concepts is an argument built upon a faulty foundation. A more biblical model is to discuss group morality in the sense of being all-inclusive.

### Presuppositions Matter

Before addressing some of the specific points Hartung makes in his article, this writer believes it is imperative to begin with an understanding of one's presuppositions. The word *presupposition* is defined as "a set of underlying assumptions ... a set of preconceived ideas."<sup>1</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard stated, "The aims and presuppositions of interpreters govern and even determine their interpretations."<sup>2</sup>

While Hartung does not clearly state his presuppositions, they can be derived from his article. First, he is a proponent of evolution based upon the many evolutionary concepts he employs such as "kin selection," "natural selection," "inclusive fitness," and "reciprocal altruism."<sup>3</sup> Second, he does not hold to the divinity of God. As stated in the introduction, he refers to the God of the Bible in lowercase. He further belittles the triune nature of God which is an orthodox belief of Christianity. Hartung stated, "Indeed, for a religion that prides itself on its contradictions and imponderables—like a Holy Ghost who is indefinable by definition and simultaneously one and the same entity as the god of the Israelites and that god's son."<sup>4</sup> Third, Hartung does not hold to Jesus as the true Messiah when he wrote that Jesus "wanted to make Isaiah's dream come true."<sup>5</sup> Fourth, Hartung does not hold to the authoritative nature of Scripture as he equates the Bible with other ancient works:

The Bible is a blueprint of in-group morality, complete with instructions for genocide, enslavement of out-groups, and world domination. But the

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<sup>1</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and William W. Klein. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1993), 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> John Hartung. "Love Thy Neighbor: The Evolution of In-Group Morality," 2, 7, 8. John Hartung's article was originally published in *Skeptic*, vol. 3 no. 4, 1995: 86–89; and *Skeptic*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1996: 24–31. Quotations and information from his article will be cited in this paper from its running in ResearchGate, [researchgate.net/publication/216842386](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/216842386), 1–29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Hartung, "Love Thy Neighbor," 17.

Jesus gives two commands in vs. 44 not only to love one's enemies, but to pray for them. The resulting effect is confirmation that one is truly a son of the Father. This kind of love and prayer exemplifies just how the Father treats all with general goodness through the provision of sunshine and rain. If people only love those who love them or only greet their brother, they are not exemplifying true Fatherly love. One of the main points of the Sermon on the Mount is to make sure that one's righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). In-group morality is not enough, there must be a love that reaches to the end of the earth.

The United States is facing a love crisis in the year 2020 in the aftermath of George Floyd's death at the hand of some Minneapolis police officers. The country needs the kind of love that is not contained in one group but reaches out extensively. Jew cannot just love Jew, Christian cannot just love Christian, white cannot just love white, and black cannot just love black. True love comes from God (1 John 4:7-8), and there is no greater expression of love than when Jesus laid down His life so that mankind might find forgiveness of sin through repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus. Then, and only then, can man truly learn to love his neighbor as himself.

### **Conclusion**

Where one starts in his understanding often determines where one will end. Hartung began with certain presuppositions about God, the origin of things, and Scripture, and thus ended where his assumptions carried him. To be fair to Hartung, however, this writer also began with certain presuppositions, which also impacted his ending point. To truly understand the primary groups that Hartung discusses (Jews and Christians), one must focus upon the main primary source material, which is Scripture itself. While rabbinical writings (which Hartung heavily depends on in his argumentation for in-group morality) or commentaries on Scripture can be informative and helpful, one must allow the fuller context of Scripture to dictate the meaning of any specific verse or passage. In-group morality is a legitimate concept as people within a group, especially those who have covenanted together, should possess a certain moral obligation to one another.

This type of in-group morality exists in the typical family unit, but only if that family unit is not broken. This type of brokenness happened at times with Israel when a split occurred after the reign of Solomon. One must keep in mind, however, that God had a plan for both Israel and the church. God planned to bring about the redemption of mankind by sending the

Messiah (Jesus) into the world. The church now proclaims this message of redemption to the world. God's people need to love one another so they might cooperate together in God's redemptive plan to bring about an all-inclusive group "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

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