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Babbler altruism and kin selection – a reply to Jon

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1. Logic can be stated in English. Hence I do not understand why Wright describes my reasoning as intuitive. Translated into Hebrew it does not sound like a complement. One small mistake in the logic of the verbal assumptions forming the basis of explicit mathematical models will create false results, and most of these models are wrong not because of their mathematical technique but because of the false assumptions stated in English. The best theoreticians now supporting the handicap principle were building mathematical models that rejected it. Why should we believe in their ability to test theory better than done with verbal logic?

2. When collecting information on competition among babblers that display their prestige it is important to know what the relevant parameters are. For instance: Although sportsmen competing in a 100-m run all run 100 m, one of the runners runs quicker than the others, sometimes only by a small fraction of a second and

rarely he does not come first. Still, although in other races his actual speed may vary, the important parameter is that he usually comes first. If one calculates the mean time for each runner's 100-m race, the difference among the best competitors will most probably not be significant. The same is true for the data on mobbing by babblers that Wright quotes. Although all group members on average come as close to the raptor, the dominant male is usually nearer the raptor than any other individual present on the scene.

3. The fact that my theories are not in line with the bulk of evolutionary theory does not necessarily mean that I am wrong. The fact that in many cases helping at the nest is correlated with relatedness is not evidence for the validity of kin selection. The fact that in a good number of cases altruism is not correlated with relatedness begs the question whether an explanation of altruism by kin selection is valid even in the many cases where altruism is correlated with relatedness.