

ABSTRACT: THE EVOLUTION OF MORAL PROGRESS

In this presentation, I set out and develop further some of the main points advanced in a recent book co-authored with Russell Powell: *The Evolution of Moral Progress: a Biocultural Theory*. I begin by noting that the standard evolutionary account of the origins of human morality create a puzzle: given that origins story, it is hard to understand how any humans could come to have had an inclusive morality, one that recognizes that that all human beings (or all persons) have the same basic equal moral status (the First Great Expansion of the circle of moral regard) and that some nonhuman animals have moral standing (the Second Great Expansion). I then show how a revised understanding of the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptation (EEA) in which human morality first emerged as an adaptation for cooperation makes the emergence of inclusive moralities less puzzling. I argue that whether exclusive (tribalistic) moral responses are dominant depends upon the environment. In environments that approximate the harsh conditions of the EEA or in which people have been led to believe that those harsh conditions exist, exclusivist moral responses tend to be dominant; in environments where human niche-construction has moderated those conditions, inclusive moralities become possible. I also argue that attempts to explain the nature of human morality that assume that it is nothing more than an adaptation for cooperation are inadequate, because they cannot account for what may plausibly be viewed as two of the most important forms of moral progress that have occurred so far, the two Great Expansions of the circle of moral regard.