

ASEM 2410
THE CULTURED APE
Spring 2016

Where to from Here: Morality and Evolutionary Pragmatics

I. Evolved Psychology and Morality.

A. Charles Darwin on morality as rooted in the social instincts of animals (*The Descent of Man*, 1871).

B. Michael Tomasello (in the assigned Emily Smith article) on “shared intentionality” as what distinguishes human morality.

C. Ara Norenzayan on “Moralizing High Gods” who also foster cooperation...but also fuel competition (e.g., Robert Sapolsky, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/why-you-just-helped-that-stranger-1461769802>)

D. Jerome Barkow on why “moral stances” are not enough for solving today’s problems (they’re necessary, but not sufficient).

II. Building an Evolutionary Pragmatics (or, “Praxis”).

A. Evolutionary Pragmatics = evolutionarily-informed practice

B. Goals of an Evolutionary Pragmatics

1. Survivability
2. Sustainability

C. Assumptions of an Evolutionary Pragmatics:

1. Humans evolved in small groups in novel, dynamic ancient environments (the EEA), producing powerful, long-lasting effects on the human brain...and human psychology.
2. These ancestral environments no longer exist, creating a potential for *mismatches* between evolved psychology and modern environments.

D. Contemporary Issues that Invite Evolutionary Insights

1. child rearing and education.
2. diet and “Darwinian Medicine (e.g., references in Barkow).
3. mental health (anxiety, depression); e.g., Sebastian Junger, <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/05/ptsd-war-home-sebastian-junger>
4. sex, sexuality, marriage, family (e.g., Muscarella, Fisher).
5. women in combat.
6. technology (e.g., social media, artificial intelligence??); e.g., Frank Bruni, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/opinion/sunday/how-facebook-warps-our-worlds.html?ref=opinion&_r=0
7. urban planning and architecture.

8. social policy and human “addictions”: where to legalize and where to regulate? (e.g., guns, drugs, prostitution, pornography, etc.); see Peter Whybrow, “Dangerously Addictive” <http://www.nlsd.k12.oh.us/userfiles/63/Classes/4521/dangerously%20addictive.pdf>

9. domestic identity politics (race, sex, class, etc.) and international relations (challenges to coalition building and expansion of the “moral circle”).

III. Elements of an Enlightened Practice for Improving the World?

A. *Knowledge* (Barkow, page 182); “Triangulate” between:

1. Morality.
2. History.
3. Evolved Psychology.

B. *Humility*

1. Rethink “Central Dogmas” of the Social Sciences and the Humanities.
2. Consider that the human mind evolved for *Survival*, not for discovering *Truth*.