# Moral Progress for Better Apes

Commentary on *A Better Ape* by Victor Kumar & Richmond Campbell

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*Abstract*: The evolutionary model of moral progress developed in *A Better Ape* is nuanced and illuminating. Kumar and Campbell use their view of the evolved moral mind to analyze clear cases of increased inclusivity and equality (at least in Western society). Their analyses elucidate the psychological and social mechanisms that can drive moral progress (or regress). In this commentary, I raise three main concerns about their model: that factors other than social integration are more central to progress; that their model isn't inherently progressive; and that inclusivity and equality conflict with other forms of progress.

*Key words*: moral progress, social change, moral reasoning, moral disagreement

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## 1. Introduction

"But he's a sweet little otter," insists Judy Hops, the bright and industrious rabbit of *Zootopia*, Disney's 2016 animated film. The mob boss, Mr. Big, calmly retorts, "My child, we may be evolved, but deep down we're still animals." The film portrays a metropolis in which a diversity of animals, both predators and prey, live together in relative harmony. There is no shortage of conflict and organized crime, but the animals have progressed beyond their natural predator-prey dynamic—or so it seems.

Stereotypes and prejudices permeate Zootopia. Prey are presumed to be weak and unfit for roles that require strength and force, unlike predators who are thought to be naturally powerful but also aggressive and impulsive. Judy is inspired by the society's progressive narrative and leaves her rural community for the great city of Zootopia, to become the first bunny police officer. But her father insists that she carry "fox spray," because foxes are naturally dangerous. "It's in their biology," says her mother. The film's takeaway message is that these prejudices are unfounded, yet it also recognizes that animals have differing natures which constrain their ability to live together peacefully.

Kumar and Campbell's (2022) wonderfully ambitious book, *A Better Ape*, grapples with remarkably similar issues, but as they relate to us homo sapiens. The authors aim to develop a grand unifying view of human morality by taking seriously how our minds have been wrought by genetic and cultural evolution. Humans are, in short, highly social and intelligent apes who can live in large groups thanks to culture and morality. Unlike the animals of Zootopia, we are one species, but we are cultural primates, and our tribes are diverse. Indeed, unlike an animated

cast of fictional characters, we don't just harbor prejudice toward outgroups. Humans kill, oppress, exploit, and disparage one another, other animals, and the environment. How can we live harmoniously when cultures around the world, and within societies, have such different beliefs, norms, practices, and institutions? Kumar and Campbell develop a view of human nature that helps illuminate a path toward progress. One of the book's many merits is its ability to draw on a range of cross-disciplinary evidence to not only improve our understanding of human morality but of how it progresses and regresses in relation to divisive topics like wealth inequality, climate injustice, transphobia, and the mistreatment of animals on factory farms.

In what follows, I aim to clarify and scrutinize their evolutionary model of moral progress, which is rich and insightful, even if imperfect and incomplete. I raise three concerns that cut increasingly deeper into their theory, even if ultimately the cuts are all relatively shallow.

## 2. Mechanisms of Moral Progress

To promote moral progress, commentators are prone to advocate for broad psychological changes, such as more empathy or rationality (Persson and Savulescu 2008; Greene 2013) or general improvements in institutions like markets (Sauer 2019). But such suggestions are typically too broad to be precise, reliable, or informative. Greater intelligence often just allows people to better rationalize their existing moral views (Kahan et al. 2017); empathy frequently directs compassion toward the cutest animals and most affable people while ignoring other victims (Bloom 2016); and so on. Some theorists have drilled down a bit further. Peter Singer (1981/2011) argues that moral progress typically involves "expanding the moral circle" of concern to include non-whites, women, and even non-human animals. But the exact mechanism of progress is opaque.

In contrast, Kumar and Campbell drill down beyond common tropes about what's necessary for moral progress. The authors don't aim to provide a complete analysis of the mechanisms of moral change, just a sketch of the psychological and social contours regarding two common forms: greater *inclusivity* and *equality*. Their focus on only these two forms makes room for a rich analysis of particular (even if Western-centric) cases of moral progress. Let's focus on a concrete example of greater inclusivity—their excellent and illuminating analysis of how anti-gay attitudes rapidly declined over the past two decades in the United States and similar countries (see Chapter 9).

How did so many (though not all) Americans rapidly come to accept their fellow citizens who are gay? Part of the explanation is activism, with powerful slogans like "Love is love." But all social movements have their activists. Kumar and Campbell argue that what's special about this case is that sexual orientation is a *relatively hidden trait* that's *randomly distributed* throughout the population. Those seemingly unimportant facts facilitate significant *social integration* among gay and straight people. Straight people unwittingly came to love and respect friends, aunts, uncles, children, and pastors who are gay. Eventually, gay people began to come out to their loved ones and communities, and not just in big cities on the coasts but in the deep south and across socioeconomic classes. Opponents of homosexuality were then faced with an *inconsistency*: acceptance of the gay friends and family they know and love, but condemnation of gay people as a class.

The inconsistency can be resolved in one of three ways. Either reject all gay people (including loved ones), accept all, or identify a morally relevant difference between the two cases. Love is powerful. It creates bonds and loyalty, so rejecting friends and family is difficult

to rationalize. Love also opens our hearts and minds to the suffering of those with whom we deeply empathize; it makes salient that the struggles of one's own child or friend and their same-sex romances are just as real for all gay people. So it's also difficult to rationalize a morally relevant difference.

Ultimately, love and consistency reasoning produce change both in individual attitudes and social structures. Same-sex marriage becomes legal, for example, and churches welcome gay ministers. These changes in society then make even more gay people comfortable coming out, which leads to more social learning and changed minds, which leads to even greater support for modifying social and political institutions. And so on, yielding a "rational loop" in cultural evolution.

In contrast, racial and ethnic identities are more visible, which has led to deeply ingrained segregation throughout society. Even where schools and workplaces are relatively integrated, key social networks remain segregated. In many diverse cities, people from all walks of life work in the same buildings but go home to different neighborhoods with relatively homogenous groups of friends, family, and congregations.

What can we learn about moral progress generally? By examining the gay rights revolution and other cases, Kumar and Campbell argue that greater acceptance of oppressed groups typically proceeds through changes in three mutually reinforcing factors:

(1) Acquisition of relevant *non-moral knowledge* (e.g., awareness of suffering, often gained through relationships with victims of oppression).
(2) Changes in moral *intuitions and reasoning* (e.g., empathy and consistency reasoning).
(3) Corresponding changes in *social structures and arrangements* (e.g., social integration, marriage equality).

Each of these elements fits well with Kumar and Campbell's theory of the evolved moral mind developed in earlier parts of the book. We humans are intelligent and highly social apes (Chapters 1-2) who developed moral norms and reasoning to facilitate cooperation (Chapters 3-5), which stabilizes large societies with well-defined social and political institutions (Chapters 6-7). Greater inclusivity and equality arise from relationships and reasoning with others and codifying new values in the culture's norms and laws.

Key to Kumar and Campbell's theory of moral progress is cultural evolution. Humans come equipped with brains primed to absorb culture and eventually to reflect on and revise existing norms. Compared to genetic evolution's glacial pace, cultural evolution is like a bullet train. Nevertheless, as Kumar and Campbell put it, "just because a trait is cultural does not mean that it is optional" (2). Culture can change, but it's incremental and requires harnessing human nature to propel moral progress forward. For instance, human reasoning evolved to seek converts not the truth, but we can harness this capacity to produce knowledge in diverse groups who engage in productive dialog with one another (Chapter 5). Similarly, although we're inclined to ignore or undermine concerns raised by outgroups, integrating others into the fold can foster greater inclusivity and equality (Chapters 9-10). Kumar and Campbell's vision doesn't seem to be that of a melting pot in which minority groups assimilate to the dominant culture. Rather their vision is Zootopian: multicultural societies in which groups maintain their identities but integrate in social roles and positions of power to produce norms and social institutions that work for everyone.

How far can this model of moral progress take us? Below I aim to articulate three concerns: that factors other than social integration are more central to progress; that the model isn't necessarily progressive; and that inclusivity and equality conflict with other forms of progress.

## 3. Limitations of Integration

Key to Kumar and Campbell's model of moral progress is integration. They are inspired by Elizabeth Anderson's (2010) theory about how to promote racial equality in *The Imperative of Integration*. Kumar and Campbell expand the idea to greater integration among various ethnic groups, socioeconomic classes, and even countries in the United Nations. To promote inclusivity and equality, black and white people should live in the same neighborhoods, sports fans worried about transgender athletes should get to know some of them, poor women and people of color should occupy more positions of power, and poorer nations should have a more prominent place at the table of international politics. Without greater integration, concerns among the oppressed go unheard or receive little uptake, moral intuitions and reasoning remain unaffected, and existing social institutions ossify. Kumar and Campbell are onto something, but I suspect "integration" and similar terms might not get to the bottom of what's at work here.

### 3a. The Ire of Integration

Of course, as Kumar and Campbell recognize, spatial integration and social proximity are neither necessary nor sufficient for moral progress. Episodes like the #MeToo movement, which unfold primarily on the Internet, show that proximity isn't necessary. The Southern portion of the United States shows that proximity isn't sufficient. Black and white people interact with one another significantly more in Alabama than in California, yet racism and racial tensions are no less frequent in the former. As Tommy Shelby writes in response to Anderson's argument that racial justice requires integration, "two people can live in the same neighborhood—indeed, they can live right next door to each other—without forming social ties" (2014: 275).

Even worse, increased integration might promote more *exclusivist* attitudes. Anti-immigrant and populist sentiments are rising around the world, and many theorists argue that it's partly a response to increased immigration. A number of fascinating studies observe these trends experimentally (e.g., Enos 2014), which fit well with sociological and political analyses suggesting that demographic change often increases intergroup hostility and conflict (see Klein 2020).

A competing theory of moral progress might be better suited to explain the ire of integration. Allen Buchanan and Rachel Powell (2018) argue that inclusive moral progress tends to occur when people perceive relatively little out-group threat in the environment, such as reduced competition for resources and disease transmission. But inclusivity is "adaptively plastic" and can toggle off when people perceive greater outgroup threat, such as economic hardship perceived to be a result of increased immigration. In response, Kumar and Campbell might insist that *proper* integration can avoid intergroup conflict and competition. We just need "role integration" in which members of outgroups gain prominent standing and power.

However, neither of these theories quite gets to the heart of the matter. It doesn't seem to be integration or reduce outgroup threat *per se* that does the progressive work. The conditions of the interactions must allow group members to be *heard, understood, and appreciated*. Often

reduced threat is explained by these conditions (not vice versa), which aren't guaranteed by integration either—spatial or otherwise. Consider the "democratic integration" that Kumar and Campbell suggest will help reduce oppression of marginalized groups, such as poor people, women, and people of color. If members of these groups "enjoy broader representation in institutional decision-making roles" (239), will we really see durable reductions in wealth inequality, mass incarceration, and the gendered wage gap?

It depends. As Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò (2022) has argued, contemporary identity politics can lead select minorities to occupy positions of power without resulting in an improvement in the conditions of the oppressed. Real change more often results from "constructive politics" that builds broad coalitions. Oppressed peoples must work together with members of dominant groups in legislative sessions, workplace conference rooms, school board meetings, and other facets of society. Without productive interactions, integration can easily intensify conflict, polarization, backlash, and gridlock (not to mention burdens of stress, alienation, and assimilation that fall disproportionately on integrated minorities; see Shelby 2014). These considerations suggest that something else, something close to but distinct from integration, is key to moral progress.


3b. Beyond Integration


The case of the gay rights revolution suggests that integration is helpful when parties on all sides feel heard, understood, and appreciated. What promotes such conditions?

Here's a proposal: mutual trust and respect. These are part of the binding and collaborative attitudes that Kumar and Campbell identify early in their book as "emotions" (I'd call them *attitudes*), which form the first core of the moral mind that appears to have evolved genetically some 300,000 years ago. Now, I certainly regard reasoning as central to moral cognition, including moral progress (May 2018). However, Kumar and Campbell are right that our moral reasoning is shaped by our nature as tribal apes who are more liable to appreciate reasons articulated by people we trust and respect (and love, admire, etc.). To my mind, it is these sorts of attitudes, and conditions conducive to them, that enable other factors like moral reasoning to gain traction. Kumar and Campbell recognize this fact in some parts of the book (e.g., 113, 249), but it could play a more prominent role in their overall model of moral progress. Their social view of reasoning (Chapter 5) is well-equipped to explain that our tribal minds are designed to dismiss the testimony and arguments of those we distrust and disrespect. We dig in our heels, automatically discount what opponents say, and look for holes in their ideas and arguments.

Trust and respect aren't quite like sympathy, which can reflexively arise from witnessing the suffering of others, even strangers. More complex conditions and relationships are required, especially if such binding and collaborative attitudes are to be *mutual*. Consider two related conditions that plausibly foster mutual trust and respect: love and being a member of the same tribe. Each were arguably central to the rapid decline in anti-gay attitudes in America. Because homosexuality is relatively concealable and randomly distributed across demographic lines, nearly every group in the U.S. eventually learned that some of their beloved members are gay. Already being a member of the tribe accorded trust and respect—among other relevant attitudes like loyalty and love. As Kumar and Campbell explain, these marginalized members of the community were then increasingly able to share the knowledge of their plight and of the happiness they experienced from their same-sex relationships, which bolstered consistency

reasoning that justified acceptance. But imagine if gay people were not able to first become trusted, loved, and respected members of so many different communities. Their plight would likely have continued to have been ignored and diminished, or the inconsistencies could have been resolved in the other direction.

What this suggests is that something other than integration should be central to a model of moral progress for tribal apes like ourselves. Across moral tribes we need to counter what Arthur Brooks (2019) calls a "culture of contempt." More than that, in place of contempt we need mutual trust and respect. Spatial and role integration might foster these attitudes under the right conditions, but neither is necessary or sufficient.

Consider a concrete example of how one woman abandoned a homophobic worldview, among other deeply held beliefs, without spatial or role integration. Megan Phelps-Roper is a former member of the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas, infamous for its vitriolic condemnations of homosexuality and protests at the funerals of soldiers who died fighting for what this church regards as a morally bankrupt nation. Phelps-Roper (2019) credits her fundamental change of mind to interacting with people on Twitter who were kind and who respectfully engaged with her inflammatory tweets and provocative arguments. Eventually she befriended some of these people she met on the Internet, so her radical transformation wasn't driven by physical proximity to the outgroup. Nor did she occupy new roles in their community, such as fellow church member, classmate, sibling, or council member. She just developed relationships of mutual trust and respect across ideological lines.

Of course, Phelps-Roper might be the exception. It is difficult to trust and respect people one regards as suspicious outsiders or haughty subordinates. Might greater trust and respect presuppose greater inclusivity or equality? The promise of integration is that it can sidestep this bootstrapping problem by *creating* mutual trust and respect where it is sorely missing. Yet we've seen that integration can be ineffective or even backfire. Fortunately, conditions other than integration can avoid the bootstrapping problem. Here are three examples.

First is *less polarizing media*. Many commentators have recognized that the new digital media landscape has increased political tribalism and hostility (e.g., Klein 2020). Part of the problem is that social media platforms permit misinformation, incentivize incendiary content, and prop up echo chambers. As C. Thi Nguyen (2020) has argued, the essence of echo chambers is that their members actively distrust sources of information from other tribes. People on the far right decry major newspapers as fake news factories, anti-vaxxers dismiss health authorities as corrupted by profit and ideology, and so on. The lack of trust and respect is mutual, as these skeptics are written off as idiotic or ignorant by so-called "elites" in science, journalism, and government. Thus, as Kumar and Campbell point out in their discussion of climate change denial, combating misinformation requires elites to treat skeptics with more respect. The point is well-taken, but it applies well beyond climate injustice and can serve as an alternative to integration in these other contexts. Now, Phelps-Roper's transformation occurred largely on one of these modern media platforms, but she miraculously found herself in an unusual pocket of Twitter filled with kindness and respect.

A second method for generating mutual trust and respect is *civility*. Confucian philosophers have long championed the importance of proper comportment, judicious choice of words, and appropriate tone of voice when interacting with others, precisely because it fosters good will (Olberding 2019). Recall, for example, how Phelps-Roper's interlocutors used the old strategy of killing with kindness. Calls for civility and good manners can seem antiquated, but they are cultural innovations that have persisted for thousands of years in human societies for a

reason. An evolutionary model of moral progress might treat practices of etiquette and civility as more central to inclusivity and equality, as they directly prime binding and collaborative attitudes in humans.

Of course, people of opposing moral tribes can display respect toward others without having any. Civility can be a thin veneer while contempt lies underneath. A third proposal that might avoid this problem is the development of epistemic virtues, such as *intellectual humility*. Integration will remain ineffective for people who are dogmatic and overconfident in their worldviews. Intellectual humility can open one's mind to greater inclusivity and equality without presupposing one already has those values. Genuine humility also makes one more liable to admit faults and forgive opponents, which is essential for repairing broken relationships between moral tribes (Sullivan 2017). While civility can effectively maintain goodwill and prevent damaged relationships, it alone cannot fix them. Backward-looking attitudes of forgiveness that let go of grudges are essential for relationship repair. Perhaps repair was less central to the gay rights revolution since relationships of love among family and community members were commonly present (though of course not always). In other cases of moral progress, however, relationships of mutual trust and respect among groups must be built or repaired, not taken for granted.

These are just a few proposals that might avoid the bootstrapping problem by creating mutual trust and respect where it's absent. A virtue of these proposals is that they are compatible with integration but don't rely on this strategy, which is often infeasible. For instance, integration doesn't work well for farmed animals, who can't live among but a fraction of humans, or express knowledge of their suffering, or wield political power to change the industries that torment them. Kumar and Campbell are surely right that our increasing isolation from animals on factory farms is a form of segregation that has led to moral regress on this issue (219-20). However, mechanisms other than integration are crucial for progress. Key behaviors to change are among humans themselves—namely, how they vote with their ballots and with their forks. Even while most people remain isolated from farmed animals, for instance, productive forms of social learning can help vegetarianism, reducetarianism, and other dietary changes to spread across social networks in response to animal suffering (May & Kumar 2023). Here it's crucial to increase (mutual) trust and respect not necessarily for nonhuman animals but for the environmental and animal protectionists who urge us to withdraw support from agricultural systems that cause gratuitous suffering.

So, to my mind, a model of greater inclusivity and equality must emphasize mutual trust and respect as fundamental, along with how these attitudes are enabled by strategies other than integration. Given that trust and respect are central elements of our evolved moral minds primed for socially-embedded reasoning, it's easy to see this as a friendly amendment to Kumar and Campbell's theory of moral progress. Yet the recommendations they make in the final chapters of the book for promoting progress on particular issues might look rather different.

## 4. Does Moral Progress Have a Liberal Bias?

An underlying theme of *A Better Ape* is that morality both shapes and is shaped by our natures. The authors are admirably nuanced on this issue. They don't ride roughshod over the is-ought gap by concluding that it's morally acceptable to follow our natural propensities (compare the early incarnations of evolutionary psychology, or at least its caricatures). For Kumar and Campbell, moral norms that have stood the test of time do have some claim to defensibility, but

it can be overridden. So, unlike so-called "evoconservatives," Kumar and Campbell don't maintain that human nature highly constrains the shape and content of morality. We *can* become significantly more inclusive and fair, in part by reasoning with one another, drawing out principles and inconsistencies. Yet the authors don't embrace the "evoliberal" idea that human nature can or should be thoroughly manipulated or bypassed with modern technology capable of thrusting us into a posthuman utopia where hatred, subordination, and international conflict are coldly recognized as simply irrational.

Instead, Kumar and Campbell maintain that moral norms can change quite dramatically but that progress is typically slow and incremental, influenced in various ways by human nature (Chapters 8-10). Indeed, we can see the book as revealing that the evoliberal and evoconservative positions present a false dichotomy. Liberal moral progress is possible while being constrained by evolved moral minds. So we should distinguish two distinct claims that can come apart. One is an *empirical* claim about how malleable human nature is (highly or hardly malleable). The other is a *normative* claim about which direction that change should take (e.g., liberal or conservative). In the end, Kumar and Campbell are roughly centrist on both fronts: they believe human nature is somewhat malleable (though the change is relatively slow) and that the direction of change should be generally progressive (though don't expect an argument for Marxism).

Nevertheless, the model of moral progress in *A Better Ape* is openly liberal. Kumar and Campbell contend that "reality has an inherent progressive bias" (195)—playing on one of Stephen Colbert's lines at the 2006 White House Correspondence dinner. Now, "progressive" is operationalized here as "greater inclusivity and equality," but these seem to be characteristically liberal values. Readers are left with the impression that the model promotes liberal, not conservative, progress. At any rate, we can ask whether it does, and there are reasons to be doubtful.

Greater inclusivity and equality do seem characteristically progressive. Liberals fight for greater acceptance and better treatment of marginalized groups, including gay people, ethnic minorities, atheists, people with disabilities, and non-human animals. On other issues, however, conservatives can be seen as seeking expansion of the moral circle. Some issues in bioethics are key examples. Conservatives believe that we should accord greater moral status to human embryos growing in petri dishes and in the wombs of women who intend to abort them. As I write this, Republican-controlled legislatures in the United States are beginning to not only ban abortion but to treat the fetus as a full person in the eyes of the law. In the state of Georgia, fetuses growing in utero now have the right to child support, are factored into population counts, and qualify parents for relevant tax credits. Conservative expansions of the moral circle can also be seen in arguments over euthanasia. Patients in a persistent vegetative state can have massive brain damage that affords only reflexive responses to stimuli, yet many conservatives reject arguments that these patients have essentially died and are no longer full persons.

Conservative inclusivity and equality are also visible in more recent movements. Some poor and working-class whites in America, and in other countries around the world, have raised concerns about reverse racism and discrimination against men. Some of these calls for greater inclusivity or equality for whites and men might be disingenuous attempts to ruffle liberal feathers, but many seem to be sincere, even if misguided. Populist politicians, rather than being the catalyst of such discontent, seem to be capitalizing on it. Calls for viewpoint diversity also seem to evoke the ethics of inclusivity and equality. Opponents of "cancel culture" decry its most punitive forms as oppressive. Proponents of free speech insist on allowing more, rather than

fewer, voices to be heard on college campuses. Jonathan Haidt and his collaborators urge greater political diversity in social science and academia generally (Duarte et al. 2015). Since higher education is predominantly liberal, they contend that greater *integration* would allow more conservative researchers to bring their *particular knowledge* to the table. The proposal fits Kumar and Campbell's model quite well.

These examples aren't necessarily meant to raise an objection to *A Better Ape*. Ideological homogeneity can be unhealthy, cancel culture can get out of hand, and there are real biases against conservatism among academics and other "elites." Teaching in Alabama has made me more aware of the implicit biases and outright bigotry that some Northerners direct toward Southerners, including the knee-jerk assumption that a Southern drawl betrays a lack of education. Some of the vitriol boils over into calls for blanket boycotts of all Southern states (including the marginalized people who live there). In response to restrictions on abortion, one meme circulating on social media lists particular states in the South and implores: "Do not go to their colleges. Do not visit their tourist attractions. Do not buy their products. Do not attend their athletic events" (Georgi Gardiner drew my attention to this one). Talk about exclusion.

So the point is not that Kumar and Campbell's evolutionary model of moral progress must be incorrect because it leads to defending men's rights and white plight. Rather, the point is that it's not so clear that inclusivity has a progressive bias. Far left readers might see these conservative applications of the model as a cutting critique, a *reductio ad absurdum*. I'm more inclined to see it as a way for the model to be moderate and flexible. So perhaps this too is merely a friendly amendment that renders the model unbiased toward a certain political ideology. However, these considerations raise another concern about the limited work that notions like inclusivity and equality can do for moral progress theory.

## 5. Limitations of Inclusivity and Equality

Greater inclusivity and equality are prominent forms of moral progress, from many political perspectives, but they might not explain as much we'd like. Haidt (2012) implores us to emphasize that there's more to morality than harm and fairness. We should likewise keep in mind that there is more to moral progress than inclusivity and equality.

Some other forms of moral progress are well known, such as proper *demoralization* of practices like premarital sex and charging interest on loans (Buchanan & Powell 2018). Of course, Kumar and Campbell "do not intend to issue a definitive theory of the evolution of moral progress" (202). Yet they do hold a special place for inclusivity and equality, when they write that moral progress and regress "unfold largely depending on how well or how poorly humans cope with problems of exclusion and inequality" (254). On some topics, however, other forms of progress might be more fundamental or even in tension with inclusivity and equality.

Consider greater *liberty* or autonomy of individuals who are already within the moral circle. Think about progress on the right to die (e.g., physician-assisted death), decriminalizing marijuana or psilocybin, and abortion rights. Inequality might be part of the story in these cases. Some patients have the right to life-sustaining treatments while others lack the right to life-ending treatments; drugs laws unfairly target marginalized communities; and abortion restrictions do subordinate women, especially poor women. However, in these debates liberal progress requires greater liberty for all, including white men and rich women who also deserve access to abortion and healing plants. So we can't fully account for progress in terms of dehumanization and subordination. Sometimes liberty even cuts against inclusivity and equality.

As we saw with abortion, for example, increased liberty for women might require excluding fetuses from the moral circle.

Another form of moral progress not captured by inclusivity and equality is what we might call *communitarian*. As Kumar and Campbell recognize in their discussion of religious institutions, cultural identities provide "a deep sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose" (143). Indeed, for sapiens, a good life arises from a variety of identities that facilitate local connections to family, friends, and community, which provide both meaning and social support (Christakis 2019). Inclusivity and equality call on us to include more people and creatures in our sphere of moral concern and to treat them as equals, yet many communitarian values involve exclusivity in the form of partiality (see the "localist objection" to Buchanan and Powell in Brownstein & Kelly 2019). Part of what it is to be a good friend, mother, or Muslim, for instance, is to invest more time, money, and resources into the people who form those particular relationships and communities. Indeed, as we've seen, greater inclusivity and equality are best promoted and sustained by building relationships of love and mutual respect with people who are not currently part of one's inner circle. Yet we are finite creatures who cannot necessarily extend the requisite time, empathy, and mental energy to everyone without costs to other relationships.

These conflicts are not superficial. Some improvements in inclusivity and equality might involve merely "negative duties," which demand only that one refrain from treating others poorly. Advancements in civil and gay rights have required that people of color be allowed to vote and that same-sex couples be allowed to marry. But greater inclusivity and equality also demand "positive duties" to provide certain goods or services to others, which can conflict with communitarian values. Paying higher taxes to reduce income inequality might mean fewer vacations with your family; moving to more integrated neighborhoods could mean that your child attends an underfunded school; protesting against abortion restrictions can preclude participation in your child's Parent-Teacher Organization; eating vegan can weaken a valued religious or cultural identity; international aid and trade may increase standards of living elsewhere while driving unemployment in one's own community. Morality requires sacrifice, of course, and I agree with Kumar and Campbell that it's fruitless to seek a complete ideal theory. But moral progress theory should be sensitive to the trade-offs among different values, particularly a theory that is avowedly pluralistic (Chapter 4).

## 6. Conclusion

We are a kind of ape. Although capable of sympathy, loyalty, trust, and respect, these attitudes can be restricted to certain individuals and groups in ways that produce prejudice, tribalism, discrimination, subjugation, inequality, and violence. How can we, like the animals of Zootopia, live together peacefully and justly? *A Better Ape* provides us with a rough playbook of answers rooted in the long history of human evolution—a truly impressive feat.

The book's admirably balanced analysis leaves us with a cautious optimism about the ability of humans to tackle the great social problems of the 21st century and beyond. The brain is a surprisingly flexible organ. Neuroplasticity enables adult stroke patients to regain movement and patients with amputated arms to learn how to play the guitar with their feet. Even if our evolved moral minds are plastic, Kumar and Campbell seem to recognize that there is a point at which bending them will break, especially in the short or medium term. Our minds are less like plastic under a blowtorch, more like marble that can be shaped with skill and patience. We must work with the materials we have.

To promote further theorizing, I've emphasized the limitations of integration and of inclusivity and equality. As a deeply social and cultural species, human flourishing requires friendship, partiality, tight-knit communities, the autonomy to pursue different cultural conceptions of the good life, and forms of exclusivity and hierarchy. Such values grounded in liberty and community will eventually run up against greater inclusivity and equality. Exactly when and how is unclear. But moral progress theory would do well to develop some answers. Even if Kumar and Campbell's playbook requires much revision and expansion, there is reason for hope that we are capable of being ever better apes who share this beautiful planet without destroying it.

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