REASONABLE PARTIALITY FROM A BIOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT. Speculation about the evolutionary origins of morality has yet to show how a biologically based capacity for morality might be connected to moral reasoning. Applying an evolutionary approach to three kinds of cases where partiality may or may not be morally reasonable, this paper explores a possible connection between a psychological capacity for morality and processes of wide reflective moral equilibrium. The central hypothesis is that while we might expect a capacity for morality to include aspects of partiality, we might also expect these same aspects of the capacity to produce systemic forms of performance-based error. Understanding these errors helps point the way toward a theory of moral competence that includes aspects of both partiality and impartiality.

KEY WORDS: evolutionary ethics, evolutionary psychology, impartiality, moral emotions, moral epistemology, moral psychology, partiality, wide reflective equilibrium

One might not think that evolutionary biology would be very helpful in addressing questions about how to balance partial and impartial moral reasons. From the point of view of evolutionary psychology and sociobiology, partial moral reasons will seem eminently reasonable: kin selection and reciprocal altruism should dispose us to act kindly towards particular others in particular social relationships with us. But on this same view, impartial moral reasons are highly suspect: promulgated by the moral idealists among us, such reasons may ultimately trade on nothing more than a human psychological tendency to be taken in by them. While this does not necessarily mean that partial moral reasons should always trump impartial reasons, it does give impartiality some of the lowest cards in the deck.

The deeper problem with such a view, from the point of view of moral philosophy, is that it does not show us how we might move from moral tendencies, partial or impartial, to moral reasoning. Humans reason about morality in ways that seem at least sometimes completely unrelated to our biological fitness, and so far neither sociobiology nor evolutionary psychology has been able to tell us anything unequivocally interesting or important about the patterns of moral reasoning or argumentation that are most socially important to us in our contemporary world.
In this paper, we explore a new and potentially important way in which a biologically based capacity for morality might be related to moral reasoning and argumentation. In particular, we examine several ways in which such capacity might affect processes of wide reflective equilibrium, as this latter concept is currently understood by moral philosophers. Our deeper aim is to show how our evolutionary approach to ethics can have significant implications for both meta and normative ethics, from the point of view of both evolutionary biology and moral philosophy. For reasons that will become apparent as we proceed, questions about the limits of reasonable partiality give us a particularly rich context in which to pursue the aims of the paper. At the same time, we think our approach, whether it is ultimately successful or not, will help to clarify some of the limits of reasonable partiality.

We begin with some suppositions about a natural capacity for morality, and how such a capacity might express itself in a species capable of language and thought. Our first supposition is that whenever social and intelligent creatures evolve, certain things become good for them, such as sharing, fairness, reconciliation, and sympathy. Unlike roughage or protein, which are nutritional goods, things like fairness are moral goods, natural moral goods that arise through evolutionary processes. We suppose that behaviour in accord with natural moral goods is generally good for survival at either the group or individual level, but we do not suppose that this is what makes things like fairness morally good. Natural moral goods are morally good simply because of the kind of good thing they are: fairness is a moral good, protein a nutritional good.\(^1\)

Social and intelligent creatures able to recognize and to respond to moral goodness might be expected to have an evolutionary advantage, in the right sorts of environments, over similar creatures not as psychologically sophisticated. We call this kind of psychological capacity a creature’s moral competence. Depending on the evolutionary context, moral competence may be more or less well developed from the point of view of morality itself, in the same way that eyes may be more or less well developed from the point of view of vision itself. The best eyes in a particular environment may not be the best eyes in terms of seeing all that might be seen, and something similar may be true for moral competence.

Regardless of how well developed human moral competence might or might not be, with the development of language and thought our moral competence cannot be expected to enable us to recognize right or wrong in any direct sort of way. With language and thought social arrangements become highly complex and variable, and if we recognize them as fair, for

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\(^1\)For more discussion of the view sketched in this paragraph and the next see Stingl (2000).
example, this recognition will typically be mediated by the social meanings of such arrangements. Even so, moral competence may play an important background role in processes of wide reflective equilibrium, which processes will themselves play an important role in the construction of social meanings as they pertain to moral values like fairness. On the surface, processes of wide reflective equilibrium are social and historical. While they centrally involve moral argument and moral reasoning, they are also tangentially related to morality, such as religious belief and rational self-interest. Here we set aside such variables, interesting though they might be, to focus instead on the point that processes of wide reflective equilibrium both provide and rest upon provisionally fixed points of moral agreement, what John Rawls (1971) and Norman Daniels (1996) have called our considered moral judgements. These judgements often depend on moral arguments, but some of these arguments may themselves ultimately depend on an underlying moral competence.

Consider an example. Jay Drydyk (1997) defends the idea of international human rights against the claim that such rights are ineluctably Eurocentric, and hence, biased by an invidious form of moral partiality. On Drydyk’s view, there are certain bad things that can happen to human beings, things that can be understood to be bad not just by those to whom they happen, but by anyone willing to engage in free and uncoerced dialogue with those to whom they happen or threaten to happen. In such a dialogue free reign can be given to our moral imagination, and ultimately to what we are calling our underlying moral competence. While some cultures may deny that a woman has a right not to be beaten by her husband, security against violence is something people from all cultures recognize and generally see the point of. Threats to security against violence, understood from the inside, are the same sort of negative human experience for everyone, and similarly, protection against such threats is a naturally recognizable moral good.

So what are we to say when such dialogue leads at least some women to claim that protection against wife beating is not a moral good? Diana Meyers (1997) builds on the work of earlier feminists in trying to understand how to make sense of the angry responses of some women toward actions or situations that other women remain acquiescent toward. Meyers notes that moral perception is a complex, many-layered process, prey to many distorting factors, and that anger and bitterness are not always non-distorting elements of moral perception. Meyers suggests that we might ask how a man would feel, were he to be treated in a similar fashion to the angry woman. If he too would feel angry, there is reason to believe that women’s anger at such treatment is a clear moral perception that something is wrong with their social group’s orthodox moral categories. Whether or
not anger is justified in such cases is best ascertained by talking through the experiences of the angry person, sensitive to the fact that accusations of socially inappropriate anger are a significant means for silencing members of subordinate groups. Although anger may distort our perceptions, it may also sharpen them.

Angry, heterodox moral perceptions can thus be an important source of positive moral change and moral knowledge. Such perceptions are heterodox in the sense that they are not a socially accepted form of moral response, the sort of response inculcated by social learning and maintained and reinforced by social sanctions or symbolic practices. So we should not expect, in examples like the one above, that such perceptions will initially be widespread.

But where do heterodox moral perceptions initially come from, why do they persist, and why do they manifest themselves in anger or bitterness? On our view, anger and bitterness may be typical primate responses to situations where the individual involved is not being treated fairly relative to other individuals in the group. In a recent experiment with Capuchin monkeys reported in Brosnan and de Waal (2003), monkeys were trained to do a particular task by being offered the eagerly devoured reward of a cucumber slice. Far nicer, however, to get a grape for performing the same task; and indeed, when some Capuchins got grapes while others continued to get cucumbers, the cucumbers were actively refused or thrown on the ground. Capuchins sometimes seem to be able to perceive when a situation is unfair, and such perceptions seem to be motivationally loaded. Some things are just not fair, and humans, together with other primates, seem to be biologically primed to recognize and care deeply about this kind of fact about their social worlds.

Heterodox moral perceptions are one important way in which a biologically based moral competence may affect processes of wide reflective equilibrium in humans. With regard to the wife beating example, we might suppose that there is an impartial aspect to our underlying moral competence that enables us to correct for the performance-based moral error involved in this particular form of moral partiality. While partiality based on gender may not always be unreasonable, in this instance it seems to be. We call the error performance based because it arises from a process of social evolution that creates the social meanings that make wife beating seem, at the level of actual moral performance or practice, like a reasonable thing to do.

In the remainder of the paper we examine several more systemic forms of performance-based error. Like the example above, these errors involve processes of wide reflective equilibrium and questions of when partiality is reasonable and when it is not. Since partial relationships are a central feature of human life, as well as the lives of other primates, we might suppose that
they will be of central importance for a theory of our moral competence based in evolutionary biology. From this same theoretical point of view, systemic errors are likely to be more interesting and important than specific instances of performance-based error.

Systemic performance-based errors are generally understood to be important for understanding human psychological capacities. Our capacity for probabilistic reasoning, for example, seems to be structured in part by rules of performance that can sometimes lead to error: following these rules sometimes leads us to get things wrong in ways that our underlying competence can correct. A good example is the fundamental attribution error.\(^2\)

People seem to be much more willing than they should be to attribute to a person’s character actions that may have more to do with the situation in which the person finds him or herself. For example, suppose we are told that an essay we are reading in defence of Fidel Castro is the result of a professor’s assigning a student to write it. We should be less prone to believe that the student has a pro Castro attitude than if we had not been told this fact about the situation in which the essay was generated. But experimental results seem clear: while people are somewhat less prone to attribute a pro Castro attitude to the student forced to write the essay by a professor, they are not as prone to do so as they would be under other circumstances, when, for example, their getting the student’s attitude right is crucial to their own success at some assigned task. This suggests the fundamental attribution error is indeed an error, a performance-based error that can be corrected for by underlying competence. The error persists because it is usually benign: people often act from dispositional causes that match their actions, and where they are not so acting, it is a difficult task to figure out what their real dispositions might be. Best to ignore the task unless getting the person’s dispositions right genuinely matters to you.

Systemic performance-based errors may help us understand how our minds have evolved. To see how this might be true for our moral competence, let us turn to the question of how primates less sophisticated than us approach some of their own moral dilemmas involving partiality. One important dilemma for almost all primates is reconciliation with one another after aggressive encounters. As Frans de Waal has frequently pointed out, there will often be clashes between individual and group interests in any species that is both intelligent and social. The interesting question is how the members of the species in question navigate their way through or around such clashes. When and how do the clashes arise, and more importantly, how are they resolved? Does their resolution depend only on the individuals directly involved, or can it involve others, up to and including the entire group?

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\(^2\)Our discussion of the fundamental attribution error is drawn from Andrews (2002).
Among male chimpanzees, there is constant jockeying for power. The alpha male in a group is typically supported by allies, and alliances are always open to shifts in loyalties. Male chimps fight more frequently than female chimps, and consequently, they also reconcile much more frequently than females. There is a corresponding difference in intra sex cooperation: males tend to cooperate much more on a tit-for-tat basis, whereas females base their cooperation on bonds of kinship and close social bonds, bonds expressed in part by affiliative behaviour such as sitting together and grooming one another (pp. 49–50). De Waal puts these differences pointedly as follows:

Male coalitions are instruments to achieve and maintain high status. There is little room for sympathy or antipathy in such opportunistic strategy. In contrast, live in a horizontal world of social connections. Their coalitions are committed to particular individuals, whose security is their goal (p. 51).

Rhesus females, on the other hand, live in a much more vertically oriented world. Rhesus society is made up of strictly ranked matrilineal lines, with all the females in higher lines outranking all the females in lower lines. But again, rhesus males reconcile, on the whole, much more frequently than rhesus females. This difference almost disappears, however, if one controls for kin and class relationships. Within their matrilineal groups and within matrilineal groups close to one another in the overall group hierarchy, rhesus females reconcile with one another almost as often as rhesus males. To again quote de Waal:

In a well-established social network such as a large breeding group, females concentrate on spheres of interest; they make up principally with their relatives and members of their own social class. So both sexes seem to do what serves them best in the natural situation, in which males wander from group to group and females stay in stable societies for their entire life (sic)m (p. 125).

On the other hand, both chimps and rhesus monkeys seem to have some understanding of impartiality. When breaking up disputes over food, alpha chimps will typically prefer the underdog, even when the aggressor is an ally; moreover, alpha males who fail to prefer the underdog risk losing the support of the older females in the group. As well, male coalitions are changeable: your foe today may be your friend tomorrow. So for male chimps, at least, it is better not to be too partial. Though rhesus monkeys are much more rigidly hierarchical than chimps, and seem never to prefer the underdog in their disputes but always their

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3The following discussion of chimpanzee and rhesus monkey behaviour comes from de Waal (1989, pp. 35–87 and 89–141).
own kin or social allies, it seems that they too are capable of impartial behaviour:

Several monkeys were trained to pull chains for food. After they had learned this response, another monkey was placed in an adjacent cage; pulling the chain now also caused the neighbor to receive an electric shock. Rather than pulling and obtaining the food reward, most monkeys stopped doing so in sight of their mate’s suffering. Some of them went so far as to starve themselves for five days. The investigators noted that this sacrifice was more likely in individuals who had themselves once been in the other monkey’s unfortunate position (p. 104).  

4 This behaviour is particularly striking for rhesus monkeys, who fight frequently and fiercely. While chimps’ aggressive encounters are often more bark than bite, the situation is dramatically reversed among rhesus monkeys. Physical violence from dominants toward subordinates is a frequent occurrence in rhesus behaviour, with dominant females doing a good deal of the biting.

Partiality and impartiality both seem important for the development of morality. How might they be related, from a biological point of view? Given the importance in primate evolution of female affiliation, and probably before it maternal sensitivity, these particular forms of partiality might be supposed to be the earliest forms of moral competence in primates.  

Impartiality might then be a secondary overlay on these first, more primitive forms of moral competence; more primitive not in the sense that they are somehow less important, but because they are the first and deepest part of our moral competence. But if partiality is the earliest and deepest aspect of our moral competence, we might wonder whether impartiality evolved, at least in part, as a control mechanism to regulate partiality, or whether such regulation is merely something for which impartiality proved to be useful, once it had evolved for other reasons, such as coalition building among males. In either case, the result might appear to be disappointing for defenders of the foundational importance of moral partiality.

4 **De Waal** does not tell us how the monkeys were related to one another, but he does implicitly interpret the results as involving some level of impartiality, contrasting the monkey experiment to Stanley Milgrim’s more famous experiments involving humans and electric shocks. Just as we overestimate the effect of rank on rhesus behaviour, he tells us, we underestimate its effects in humans.

5 For maternal sensitivity in other primates, see Maestripieri (2001). For maternal sensitivity and female affiliation in other primates and humans, see Hrdy (1999, especially pp. 143–174 and 266–287). As Hrdy makes clear, hypotheses involving maternal sensitivity and female affiliation are much more complicated than our simple appeal to them here might suggest. Since the same point is even more accurate for any attempt to link such hypotheses to the development of human morality, our argument here is exploratory. We thank an anonymous referee for helping us to clarify this point as well as a number of others.
Margaret Little (1995) discusses impartial and partial viewpoints as sources of moral knowledge, drawing on some of the same feminist literature as Meyers. Like anger, other emotions (like caring) are often thought to distort our moral thinking; hence, to avoid such distortion, we should strive to take a more detached viewpoint in situations of moral conflict. Little’s response to this line of thinking is that emotional capacities like loving care and affection can sometimes enable us to see things that would not be apparent to a more impartial observer (p. 118). Little gives some nice examples in support of this point, but one might respond to these examples by arguing that all they show is that the moral perceptions of the caring person must sometimes serve as inputs to the process of moral reasoning undertaken by a more impartial observer:

Affect serves as a helpmate to reason as he struggles with his imperfections ... affect is acknowledged as valuable for the aid she gives, but the value is only instrumental. ... From a feminist perspective, of course, such a view has a depressing familiarity: once again it is what is associated with man that defines the ideal (p. 125).

According to this line of thought, affective attention focused on the needs of others is an exact epistemological parallel to the fundamental attribution error: although it is often useful as a heuristic device, it is ultimately a source of moral error, measured against an underlying moral competence that is impartial in its underlying structure.6

While we do not think that affective attention is a moral heuristic device, we do think it is undeniable that impartiality sometimes acts as a regulatory mechanism against partiality. The important questions are whether it should, and if so, under what conditions. The deeper question is over what decides these first two questions: reasons of impartiality, partiality, or both?

One of the main problems with partiality as a moral value is that the collective pursuit of partial moral aims can be self-defeating. To use Derek Parfit’s (1984) phrase, each-we moral dilemmas can arise whenever morality assigns moral agents individually different moral aims. Such dilemmas can only be resolved if those involved reason in an impartial way about the individual, or partial, values at stake. If each of us reasons in a partial way and tries to act directly on our obligations to do what is best for our own children, for example, we may each do worse in fulfilling this obligation than if we had reasoned more impartially. In this way, impartiality can function as an important mechanism for furthering or protecting moral values arising from relationships of partiality.

6Stingl (1996) argued for an impartial theory of our moral competence. Here we recognize that a biologically based theory of moral competence must likely include aspects of both partiality and impartiality.
Consider in this context Brenda Almond’s (2004) point about desiring the last life jacket for our own child. If there is only one life jacket and more than one parent and child, parents may fight over the life jacket and no child may be saved. Or if we have enough life jackets, but I am closer to your child while you are closer to mine, we may save neither child by both trying to get life jackets to our own children. Problems with research ethics boards notwithstanding, it would be interesting to see how parents generally react in such rare emergency situations. One supposes that in such situations most parents would be prone to a particular kind of performance-based error, that of preferring the interests of their own children to the interests of the children of others. Like the fundamental attribution error, this mode of reasoning would be, as a matter of fact, an error; an error, that is, that our competence enables us to identify as such when we think about such situations more reflectively. But the error here is an error for reasons of both impartiality and partiality. Because we deeply care about the partial values at stake in such dilemmas, and because these values themselves are better served in these situations by thinking about them impartially, in these situations we really do err by reasoning and acting in entirely partial sorts of ways.

So unlike the fundamental attribution error, preferring the interests of our own children is not a simple heuristic device, one which enables us to satisfy our impartial aims better than we otherwise might in the context of general kinds of situations we often find ourselves in. The error is a tragic moral error because at bottom, when we commit this kind of performance-based error, we lose the lives of particular individuals whose well being deeply matters to us. To the extent that we accept this kind of tragedy, it can only be because cases of this kind are unexpected and relatively rare. In cases where this kind of error is recurrent and predictable, we should expect our underlying moral competence to block it. This is what makes the error an error, rather than simply a tragic aspect of the moral life. Consider an example of an each-we dilemma from the anthropology literature. The Karimojong are a Nilo-Hamitic tribe living north of Lake Victoria in eastern Africa. In their traditional way of life, the people of this tribe lived in permanent settlements during a lengthy wet season of heavy rain. During the dry season, however, when there was not enough water in settled areas for both people and cattle, the herdsmen of the tribe would have to leave the settled areas with their cattle in search of water. This resulted in the following situation:

. . . herdsmen who meet at one watering place will come from many different settlements, and no one will expect to meet the same people each year. . . . The Karimojong realize this and say, “The sun mixes us up.” They are most mixed up at the height of the drought, when a number of herds and their herdsmen combine to use the same water and grazing
and to keep others out of it. If a conflict of this kind occurs, loyalties are clear. The “insiders” in this temporary group must stand together against the outsiders, whatever ties of kinship or neighborhood may bind them to the outsiders at other times.\(^7\)

In this case, impartiality prevents partial moral reasons from becoming unreasonable.

Such cases are not odd. Consider another case, where the approach to evolutionary ethics we are developing here predicts that although we will eventually do what we ought to, getting to this point will take some time, since it will require us to correct for the powerfully attractive performance-based error behind Almond’s life jacket example. Current medical practice will not accept organ donations when family members, after the death of a loved one, refuse to agree with the documented wish of their loved one to offer his or her organs to others. Here our current considered judgements respect the partiality such family members often appear to be acting on, as they try to do everything they possibly can to protect the bodily integrity of a loved one in a vulnerable position, up to and including brain death. But such partiality cuts both ways, depending on whether a loved one is a potential donor or a potential recipient. The more regularized our current shortages of donor organs become, the more likely it is that our current reflective equilibrium will shift in the direction of the Karimojong.\(^8\)

In an evolutionary context, it is useful to compare these sorts of cases to male chimps and their allies, and to contrast them with the relative inability or unwillingness of female rhesus monkeys to reconcile across established social strata. If each alpha male favours his allies in disputes over food, the alliance does worse, in the long run, than if these allies had not been favoured. Alpha male favouritism leads the older females to step into the fray, threatening the position of the alpha male, and hence his alliance with his current favourites. In certain regularly occurring kinds of situations, partiality fails as a moral good on its own terms, and in these situations, an impartial approach to reasons of partiality is more reasonable than an approach that is entirely partial. The relative inability, or unwillingness, of rhesus females to reconcile outside their social cohort is in all likelihood not self defeating in their normal ecological context, but that context could change in ways that might make their current level of partiality self defeating. Their moral competence might enable them to see...

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\(^7\)Lucy Mair (1977, pp. 25–26.) This example is also discussed in Stingl (1996).

\(^8\)For a recent proposal see Spital (2003). In addition to suggesting we disregard the wishes of family members, Spital also suggests we should disregard the wishes of the potential donor. Given the importance of individual autonomy and the fact that many people seem amenable to the idea of donating their organs after death, this second suggestion seems likely to remain unreasonable. On our view, the first suggestion, unreasonable at present, may come to be reasonable in the future.
and respond to the fact that this is so, or it may not, depending on just how sophisticated rhesus moral competence turns out to be. And depending on the extent of the ecological change, rhesus monkeys as a species might be in more or less trouble.

Human moral competence is obviously much more sophisticated and much more internally adaptable than rhesus moral competence. Human social networks, unlike those of other primates, appear to be able to expand without limit, and both partiality and impartiality appear to play important roles in such processes. As human societies expand, they become segmented in ways that build upon the simple social hierarchies of other primates, such as the rhesus females who are situated toward one another in both familial and class relationships. Segments of a larger group can themselves be segmented, and individual obligations can travel up and down the segments in such a way that one might be simultaneously obliged to attack or to defend a particular individual or segment depending on the social context in which the two of you must interact. To take another dramatic case from the anthropological literature, in traditional Nuer society an individual might be socially expected to attack someone from another segment of the tribe, perhaps because of an earlier cattle theft. But at the same time, he or she might also be obligated to defend that other individual, were both to be attacked by individuals from outside the larger segment that joins both their more immediate segments.9

This sort of case helps to explain, if not to resolve, an important difference between David Miller (2004) and Veit Bader (2004) regarding the strength of our moral obligations to fellow nationals. Why, unless the situation is dire, might nations justifiably choose to benefit their own citizens, rather than the citizens of other nations who are much worse off? Partial relationships are typically seen by the individuals involved in them as being, at their core, intrinsically valuable, and the uncontracted obligations that are attached to such relationships are typically seen as an important feature of this intrinsic value. According to Miller, this much is certainly true of familial relationships; the worry is whether the same point can be extended to fellow nationals, and hence, whether nationalism is also a form of reasonable partiality. While nations are hardly families, we might point out in defence of Miller that nations are currently the largest social segment linking modern individuals to one another in a generally dependable sort of way. As social segmentation expands, having now grown to a national level, it brings with it significant changes in social identity, trust, and motivation. But just as we can always expect to find tensions among individuals and their groups, we can also expect to find tensions among segments within

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9 This point about the Nuer is also discussed in Stingl (1996). The example comes from Pritchard (1940).
and across levels. Such relationships will always be to some degree conflicted, but what is important is that when the larger segments demand trust and motivation to protect segmental values against internal or external threats, enough trust and motivation exist for the requisite level of segmental solidarity.

Against Miller, Bader claims that such solidarity is precisely what we no longer have at the level of the nation state. Globalization is pulling the nation state apart from the outside while internal economic and ethnic differences are pushing it apart from the inside. But here it is important to consider that as social networks grow in size, we might expect both normal and revolutionary periods in social segmentation. During revolutionary periods, as larger social segments are forming, we might expect, as a particularly important kind of performance-based error among humans, resurgences of internal segmental conflicts, resurgences, that is, of what might be called the worst aspects of tribalism. This will cause the former largest segmental relationship, in this case nationalism, to appear, as it does to Bader, as too weak a moral and social bond to move us forward, either in the direction of acknowledging and shouldering our emerging global moral obligations, or in the direction of resolving and discharging our contested moral obligations to our fellow citizens.

From a biological point of view, earlier segments will typically remain important to individuals, even after these segments have been encompassed by newer and larger segments. Nevertheless, the larger the segment, the more it might be expected to be pivotal in times of revolutionary social growth. So Bader and Miller are both half right, but also both half wrong. In an unstable, globalizing world, the smaller segments that make up nations will reassert their importance, because of their longer-term stability in terms of identity and trust. But on the other hand, national segments will be pivotal in the process of globalization, because they will be what the new, more encompassing segments are most directly built upon. In both cases, however, hanging on too tightly to the hitherto reasonable partiality of more limited segmental relationships can easily become a performance-based error. When segmental growth is successful, an important part of its success must be found in our underlying ability to correct for precisely this sort of error. Correcting for this kind of error does not eradicate earlier segmental obligations, but it does redraw their limits in a way that allows for new levels of social identity, trust and motivation to emerge. While earlier forms of partiality remain reasonable, the limits of reasonable partiality significantly change, contracting at older levels and expanding at new and higher levels of social organization.

What this means for the debate between Miller and Bader is that during a revolutionary period of social growth, there will be no uncontested considered moral judgments to appeal to regarding the reasonable limits of
national partiality. But without an underlying moral competence to push us past such moral conflicts, we would have remained mired in our tribal past. So while the debate between Miller and Bader is not immediately resolvable by appeal to any of the fixed points of our current wide reflective equilibria, East, West, North or South, we might continue to hope, on the basis of our moral competence, and our past episodes of successful social growth, that the limits of our current forms of partiality will be redrawn in a way that allows for more global forms of social segmentation to emerge.

What this means for a theory of our moral competence is that while systemic forms of performance-based error can tell us important things about the biologically based structure of this psychological capacity, the fact that we are ultimately able to correct for such errors can tell us even more. In the case of human moral competence, impartiality would seem to be an important overlay on top of more partial approaches to the needs and interests of others. At least, this seems to be true for each of three examples we have been able to consider in this paper: heterodox moral perceptions regarding wife beating, each-we dilemmas involving family members, and the limits of old categories of reasonable partiality in a globalizing world.

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