

Does Distance Really Matter in Ethics?

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Distance influences moral judgements and actions in a pervasive way. The *proximity bias* affects cognitive processes on several levels of complexity and on different dimensions (physical-visuo-spatial, intertemporal, cultural, genetic-interspecific, etc.), which I will briefly analyze also leveraging on neuro-cognitive and behavioral evidences showcasing the extent of the phenomenon. I will then discuss the explanation proposed in recent years by anthropologists and evolutionary psychologists of the adaptivity of this bias in light of the modern hypothesis framework on the phylogenesis of morals in *Homo sapiens*. These merely descriptive considerations will frame the normative challenge which I will deal with: is it possible and/or necessary to overcome these limits, which are rooted in our cognitive structures/processes and emotional dispositions, and were selected more than 150,000 years ago in a world which was largely different from the current one? In order to answer this question, I will address some of the main issues in the modern and contemporary ethical debate around impartiality, and I will critically discuss three potential normative proposals: 1) the necessity to abandon our intuitions/affective dispositions as much as possible, including by means of neuroenhancement, as they are considered to be “obsolete” and irrational from a moral point of view; 2) the possibility to take advantage of these biases in order to promote virtuous behaviors and habits that research has shown to be positively correlated with the well-being of persons, society and the planet at large, by leveraging on the driving force of emotions and gut reactions, through effective communication and behavioral interventions in politics and economics (*nudge* and neuromarketing); 3) a synthetic attempt between rationalism and sentimentalism by means of a *neo-smithian* meta-ethical and normative perspective.