

Evolution of Modern Human Morality

Animals often cooperate with others of their own species. But the way humans do so is different. The human form of cooperation—known simply as morality—distinguishes itself in two related ways. One person may help another based on unselfish motives driven by compassion, concern and benevolence. Also, members of a group might seek means for all to benefit through enacting norms to promote fairness, equity and justice. These capacities evolved over hundreds of thousands of years as humans began to work together out of a basic need for survival. The cognitive and social aspects of this process may be understood through the philosophical concept of intentionality: the ways individuals interpret the world and pursue their goals.

Individual Intentionality

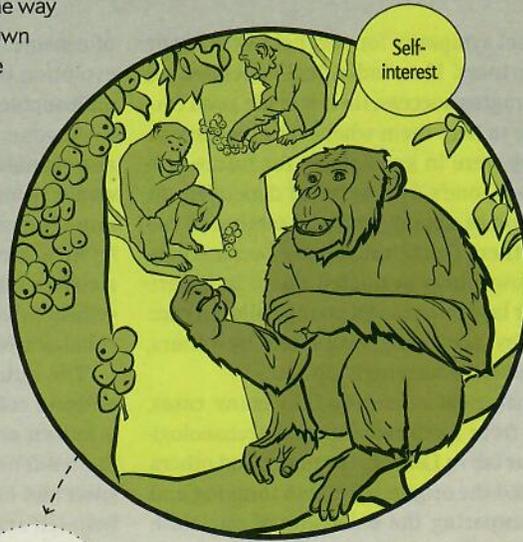
An ability to flexibly change behavior to achieve a particular goal—usually for the purposes of competing with others—characterizes individual intentionality. Chimpanzee behavior is largely spurred by this self-interested perspective, as was that of the common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees—and perhaps it motivated early members of the hominin line as well. An example of this behavior occurs when chimpanzees forage for plants. A small group of animals searches together, but once they find fruit, each gathers its own stash and eats separately without interacting with other group members. A similar set of relatively self-centered behaviors are exhibited when hunting prey.

Joint Intentionality

Some 400,000 years ago a direct human ancestor—*Homo heidelbergensis*—began looking for better food sources. Hunting aurochs or other large game, as opposed to hares, required heightened cooperation, a joint intentionality, focusing on common goals. This type of teamwork contrasted with chimpanzees' every-animal-for-itself scramble during a monkey hunt. If the Paleolithic hunter-gatherers were to survive, their foraging practices became "obligate," not just a matter of discretion. Individuals chosen for the hunt were selected because they understood implicitly the need to cooperate and not hog the resulting spoils. A "second-personal morality" emerged in which it was understood that a "me" had to be subordinated to a "we."

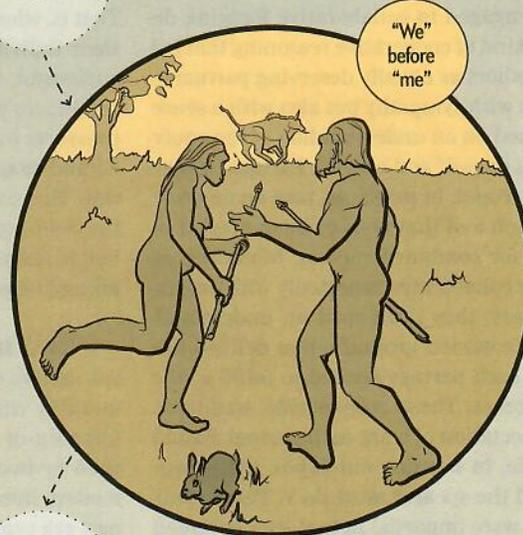
Collective Intentionality

As groups grew in size beginning 150,000 years ago, the smaller bands that made up a tribe developed a set of common practices that represented the formal beginnings of human cultures. A set of norms, conventions and institutions grew up to define the group's goals and establish divisions of labor that set roles for each of its members—a collective intentionality that distinguished a tribe. These goals were internalized by each tribe member as an "objective morality" in which everyone knew immediately the difference between right and wrong as determined by the group's set of cultural practices.



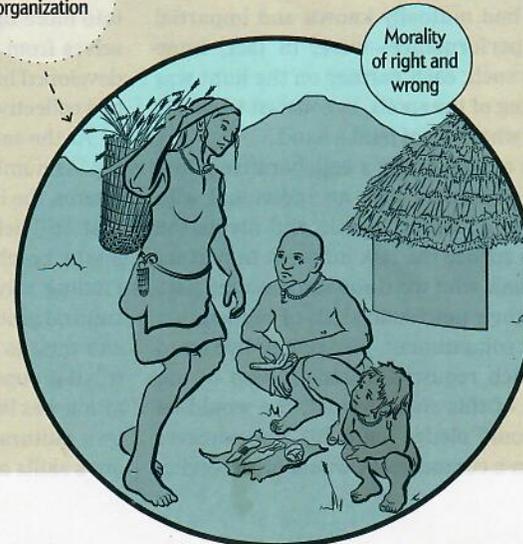
6 million years before present

Collaborative foraging



400,000 years before present

Pressure for cultural organization



100,000 years before present