

Backslide: The Coming Loss of Moral Knowledge

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Moral progress happens when a population acquires new moral knowledge and puts it into practice. Naturalistic moral epistemologists are converging on a set of factors which explain the acquisition of moral knowledge. Casting their eye over world history, many philosophers now believe they can identify the forces and factors which made it *likely* that human groups would acquire moral knowledge. This valuable project ought to bolster our confidence in our moral beliefs. But suppose that some or many of those forces and factors begin to diminish or recede from group life. What should we conclude? This, I argue, would entail a prediction: in such a scenario, we should expect those communities to *lose* moral knowledge. My second claim is that this is no counterfactual: explosive technological and social change is now actually depriving many human communities of the very elements which have explained their historical knowledge-acquisition. We should therefore predict that people in those communities will soon lose moral knowledge (or, perhaps, have already begun to lose it). I conclude by urging naturalistic moral epistemologists to recognize the essentially political implications of their views.