

DySoC Webinar Series on Human Origins and Cultural Evolution
Questions from *Why we succeed*, with Joseph Henrich
February 2, 2021

1. (a) Generally, cultural evolution has been slow, with subtle changes happening over centuries before any real or substantial structural change in society is observed. With our technological advancements and the rapid shifts in technology, can this speed up cultural evolution? (b) In a similar vein, as a sexologist, I'm wondering how dating apps/larger dating pools and the option to choose to stay single for much longer (or indefinitely), how may that shift our sexual psychology? This question is inspired by the "WEIRD Monogamy" chapter in your newest book.
2. How should we think about language and discourse within a human and cultural evolution framework, particularly with respect to human capacities for cooperation?
3. What is your preferred definition of 'culture'?
4. Should reason and intent be believed applicable to the evolution of complex adaptive systems? As stable complexity reaches inflection point, does not change emerges, verses being produced by reason or purpose? Can we ever know what absurdity might succeed?
5. How have you found the reception of your last book among economic historians? Do you think there we are going to see a stronger synthesis between CE and economic history?
6. Do you think that cultural evolutionary models can have value for predicting complex social processes of the type that macroeconomics would ideally be able to predict?
7. Do you think that cultural evolution can breed a corresponding "engineering" discipline? Does it inform your views on how you would change human social systems?
8. Is the cumulative culture bounded? A lot of cultural traits replace or mix with previous ones instead of actually "accumulating."
9. The secret of our success is the transmission and accumulation of cultural traits. The critical point for this spread of new technologies is copping the best performer. During our evolution, there was nothing able to know us better than ourselves. However, Yuvak Noah Hariri points out that new technologies can know us better than ourselves. How do you think our cultural and genetic evolution will be affected by artificial intelligence? (Or better saying, by big companies that control artificial intelligence.)
10. How has your early fieldwork informed your high-level theories? What are your main tips for young students of anthropology for choosing and approaching fieldwork?
11. When you say it's not intelligence but social learning, the question for me seems to be how a complex neural network (brain and CNS) adapted for the terrestrial environment, and for sensitivity to others, must function (taking that question as an intuition pump).
12. In the context of social norms, do we know how they are culturally transmitted and learned? E.g. through language, or observing actions or their condemnation?
13. Do you think people had the cognitive ability to imagine zooming in on an item (or concept) before invention of microscopes, telescopes, and film cameras?
14. How can we explain the non-adaptive cultural practices? Does cultural selection compete with natural selection?
15. Social learning, as you suggest, is roughly the ability of a human to learn from and enhance upon the knowledge of past generations. However, it seems that when a given human learns and improves upon the knowledge of the past, they do so as a part of a learning community--many minds in

interactions learning from and improving upon past knowledge. How does your notion of social learning deal with this community of minds in interaction? Thanks!

16. What do you think the roles of emotions and their evolution are in cultural evolution?

17. Do you think Neanderthals' 'unsuccessful' story can be explained on the basis of less 'tuned' learning abilities (or even 'hardwired' components of complex cognition - brain connectivity/genetic variants...) or did unfavorable demographic contingencies (small effective population size, less connectivity) play a major role here? Thank you!

18. As social media expands contact of individuals, could we say that cultural elements inside them (for example, internet memes) are subjected to natural selection?

19. Do you think that understanding how human culture has evolved through time help us forge better societies in the future? If you do, how?

20. Does social complexity (i.e. societies that comprise multiple groups with distinct norms and unique social identification processes) affect human brains, specifically people's ability internalize social norms? Would such people be 'better' norm-internalizers?

21. Sorry if I missed this but why would warmer climates have more sonorous languages? How credible is the evidence for this?

22. Naive biologist question here: if mutations are the substrate of biological evolution, how do you explain the kind of experimentation that leads to cultural innovations? E.g. your example of nardoo was really compelling, but do humans just naturally add ash to inedible plants as a matter of course? (Especially without a causal understanding of the process?)

23. Around slide 23 or so you mentioned "innovation without invention" (or, was it vice-versa?), due to 'promiscuous copying' (combining things). But, (my question) is not 'combining (i.e. synthesizing) 2 or more old things' the universal formula for creativity (provided the new synthesis: works, i.e. - is new, useful, surprising)? (Sorry if I misheard, or misunderstood! :)

24. Have longevity and population densities come together to start 'homonisation'?

25. Very similar ideas to those developed in my last book, *Evolution Driven by Organismal Behavior*, indeed, there is an increasing convergence about these topics, from many fields of science.
<https://www.amazon.com/Evolution-Driven-Organismal-Behavior-Mismatches/dp/3319475800>

26. You found that cultural trait advances by comping the best and by social interaction within a group. Social media seems not to enhance the overall connectedness but to create bubbles. Do you think that today's political extremist is a consequence of optimizing beliefs with these bubbles? Do you think there should be a governmental policy regulating the creation of those extremist groups (e.g., 4G WiFi causes COVID-19, or flat earth, or the invasion of Congress)?

27. Could you explore on the relationship between the evolution of cooperation and the evolution of language? The cooperative dilemma, etc.

28. Great talk! Given that there is extensive evidence (like Moore & Perston 2016) that even early Acheulean stone tools might very well lie in our Zone of Latent Solutions (Tennie et al.), do you think the claim that this process hit off 1Ma holds? Does it not seem more likely/possible that cumulative culture emerged ~500ka (only shortly before the craniofacial feminization, possibly an anatomical proof for increasing cooperation)?

29. Is the choice of wealthy people to have fewer children really maladaptive, or given over population is it species adaptive?

30. Applied research that aims to alleviate social or other problems is mainly focused on developing causal understanding and identifying specific factors that have the largest impact. However, the results

of such conscious intervention attempts are often disappointing. Do you think that there could be an alternative approach that would better harness cultural evolutionary processes?

31. How might globalization and social media impact future dynamics of human cultural evolution, with expanding but also more dispersive, fluid social networks?

32. is it possible that globalization negatively affects a population because it brings new products / methods (e.g., intensive agriculture) that has not evolved locally?

33. Is there a non-return point in the process of self-domestication?

34. Is gene-culture coevolution making WEIRD people genetically different from the rest?