

CULTURE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

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"We don't have culture because we are smart, we are smart because we have culture" J. Henrich

Introduction:

Henrich's publication titled: 'A cultural species: How culture drove human evolution' (2011) shows that 'Human Evolution' and 'Psychology' only make sense in the light of 'Culture' and 'Culture-driven Genetic Evolution'. Up until recently, cultural explanations for behavior were taken from social psychology or anthropology, or through biology and sociobiology. The new approach however says: let's take the logic of natural selection that helped us explain so much of the natural world and apply it to understanding culture and cultural evolution.

While human groups have produced innovative technologies, sophisticated languages/means of communication, and complex institutions that have permitted human to successfully expand into a vast range of diverse environments, still we often struggle to survive on our own in the wild, failing to overcome basic challenges such as finding food, building shelters, or avoiding predators. Drawing insights from lost European explorers, clever chimpanzees, mobile hunter-gatherers, neuro-scientific findings, ancient bones, and the human genome, Henrich demonstrates how our collective brains have propelled our species' genetic evolution and shaped our biology.

Nature & Nurture:

Humans are cultural species. We are addicted to culture, so we need non-genetic downloaded information to survive. This separates our genetic inheritance from our cultural inheritance system – what makes us different from other animals. Our early capacities for learning from others produced many cultural innovations, such as fire, cooking, plant knowledge and projectile weapons, which facilitated the expansion of our brains and altered our physiology, anatomy, and psychology in crucial ways. At later stages, some collective brains generated and recombined powerful concepts, such as wheel, screw, and writing, while also creating the institutions that change our motivations and perceptions. 'Cultural Inheritance' that we get for free helps us solve more problems.

Therefore, the key or 'the secret of our success' is not our intelligence, but our 'cultural abilities' - because *we are such powerful social learners*. We can accumulate ideas, beliefs, values, heuristics, bodies of know-how, language, which over time we call them 'Cultural Adaptations' (packages that help us to solve problems).



So, how sophisticated our technology gets, it depends on '*high fidelity cultural transmission (good copiers)*' and '*Sociality*'. Those two elements give rise to 'Collective Brains' - a brain which is larger, its more interconnected populations generate more complex repertoires, and larger tool-kits.

And of course, from Economics point of view, maintaining such brain is expensive and requires adaptive strategies.

The Learners' Cues:

Contrary to other species, we are social learners, but here the question is: how should natural selection have shaped our minds to make us better learners? Well, what distinguishes us is the 'Capacity of Cultural Learning' i.e. what cues should learners use to assess who is most likely to possess information useful/adaptive to the learner. They often include: Skill/competence, Success, Prestige (cues of attention differences), Age, and Self-similarity: sex, ethnicity, dialect. (Dorbayani, 2019)

Conclusion:

We have the interaction between two kinds of inheritance system, i.e. genetic and cultural inheritance. According to Henrich, "*genetics and biology are inextricably interwoven* with cultural evolution, and how culture-gene interactions launched our species on an extraordinary evolutionary trajectory."

References:

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