

Book Review Article

The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous

Joseph Henrich

New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2020

Europeans Have Always Been WEIRD: Critical Reflections on Joseph Henrich's *The WEIRDest People*.

Ricardo Duchesne*

Retired Professor, University of New Brunswick

* Address for correspondence: ricardo.duchesne77@gmail.com

This essay acknowledges Joseph Henrich's landmark analysis of how medieval Europeans were already psychologically distinct from the kinship-oriented peoples of other civilizations long before the rise of modern science and liberal thought. It then shows that Europeans already exhibited WEIRD psychological traits in ancient Greek times, along with monogamous nuclear families, civic citizenship, and a relatively high level of literacy long before the Protestant emphasis on reading. The early Christians of the Hellenistic period were already advocating a WEIRD sexual morality before the Catholic Church intentionally — not “unintentionally” — abolished the polygamous kinship norms of early medieval Germanic peoples. The creation of nation-states in the modern era was an alternative form of community created by WEIRD Europeans consistent (in principle) with their liberal values. Despite his emphasis on “cultural evolution”, Henrich misses the extent to which Europeans were the most creative cultural species in history.

Key Words: WEIRDness, Great Divergence, Western uniqueness, Catholic Church, Protestant literacy, Kinship institutions, Cultural evolution

Joseph Henrich's thesis must be taken seriously

The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous (2020) by Harvard academic Joseph Henrich will surely stand as one of the most important evidence-based books written about the perennial question why the West became the first modern industrial civilization.¹ This book should be essential reading for those who want to understand why European peoples today are hyper-individualists with weak ethnocentric ties carelessly indifferent about how immigrant multiculturalism is undermining their ethno-cultural heritages. The thesis of this book is that the kinship-based in-group psychology dominating traditional societies was fundamentally altered in Europe into individualistic habits of thinking and behaving as the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages “unintentionally” transformed the psychology of Europeans in a direction that ignited the rise of liberal institutions and norms by prohibiting cousin and polygynous marriages and promoting monogamous nuclear families. This released Europeans from their kin-based obligations and encouraged them to choose their spouses, social friends and associates, which opened the door to the creation of voluntary associations, chartered towns, guilds, universities, monasteries, and representative institutions. This world without kinship ties socialized Europeans to extend their trust to anonymous strangers, to think in a less contextual way, and to judge objects and humans in terms of universal principles and rules applicable on the basis of rationally-based criteria.

This emphasis on the immemorial role of kinship institutions in the shaping of human psychology and how the psychology of Europeans was “rewired” is what differentiates Henrich from the standard approaches that have dominated this debate with their focus on the autonomous role of market relations, modern scientific and enlightenment ideas, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, exploitation of the Americas, or geographical “good luck”.² According to Henrich,

¹ Citations from Henrich's book will be indicated in the text of the article. *The WEIRDest People* may have been the most talked about academic book in 2021. It was extensively reviewed in the mainstream media, with numerous editorial endorsements by highly prominent academics, with over 700 ratings at Amazon.com, notable mentions, and already its own Wikipedia entry. This Wiki entry has yet to mention that Kevin MacDonald (2021) published an extensive review of this book in *Mankind Quarterly*.

² Kevin MacDonald's important book, *Individualism and the Western Liberal Tradition* (2019) should be emphasized here, not just his review essay of Henrich's book cited above. As I discuss at length (Duchesne, 2021-2022), MacDonald traces the divergence of the West to its monogamous families, individualism, and openness to

kinship norms and the “scaling up” of kinship relationships have played a foundational role in shaping the mind and behavior of humans and directing the broad patterns of history. Kinship has determined the survival and social identity of humans, status and obligations, sense of right and wrong, normative relationships between family members, when and who one should marry, where newly weds should find residence, who owns the land, and how property should be inherited. The world humans have inhabited since their early *Homo-sapiens* days has been one of intense kinship relationships characterized by a corresponding psychology that was clannish, conformist, deferential, and highly context-sensitive, without the ability to detach objects and persons from particular settings, and thus without the ability to generate abstract concepts and think analytically.

It is hard for Westerners socialized in WEIRD societies, where families have been nuclearized and a wide network of other institutions has been created independently of kinship ties, to appreciate the cardinal importance of kinship, even as they appreciate how significant the family remains today in the ontogenetic development of humans. Westerners who write about the rise of modern industrial Europe prefer to talk about the role of ideas, Malthusian demographic pressures, modes of production, technological innovations, institutional changes, warfare, and religion.

But Henrich, by combining his ethnographic field studies with cognitive/cultural psychology, and subsequently mastering the scholarship on the economic history of Europe, brings out in full how the weakness of kinship relationships in the West since the Middle Ages fundamentally shaped the psychology of Europeans in a direction that led to the rise of the modern world. The Catholic “demolition” of kinship institutions and the Church’s promotion of monogamy loosened Europeans from their extended families, encouraged them to marry outside their group and to form new “voluntary” associations, which spurred “new forms of urbanization and fueled impersonal commerce, from merchant guilds and charter towns to universities and transregional monastic orders, that were governed by new and increasingly individualistic norms and

forming contractual relationships with non-kin. For MacDonald, however, it was the “harsh evolutionary pressures of the Ice Age” in the northern regions of Europe that selected for these cultural traits, with the Catholic Church acting as a reinforcer of these pre-established evolutionary trends. Moreover, while MacDonald does not offer a detailed discussion of the institutional dynamics of kinship and detailed experimental surveys demonstrating the WEIRD personality traits of Europeans, he does mount a very effective historically-based argument showing how the weak ethnocentrism of Europeans is an underlying reason why mass immigration is not seen as a major threat.

laws" (p. 23). While blood ties continued to exert their natural influence, all in all, a whole new institutional setting gradually emerged in medieval Europe based on rational principles and centered on the intentions of individuals, with objectively defined rights, as members of the institutions. Only Europe, Henrich explains, would see the rise of self-governing cities guided by abstract constitutional principles that welcomed individuals as individuals from many backgrounds regardless of tribal origins. Only Europe would witness the spread of impersonal markets in which one's reputation with strangers as a reliable dealer would come to depend on one's fairness and impartiality rather than on one's personal kinship status. These changes would be accompanied and followed by the rise of rational systems of law, continuous technological innovations, the emergence of Galilean and Newtonian science, and an industrial revolution that would put Europeans on top of the world.

After years of intense ethnographic field studies of non-western peoples, Henrich became sceptical of the prevailing assumption in psychology that the "patterns and dimensions of personality observed" among Americans and Europeans "represent the human pattern". While social scientists generally drew a distinction between traditional and modern norms, the implicit argument was that industrialization automatically strengthened dispositions for time thrift, love of choice, impersonal prosociality, analytical thinking, trust and fairness towards strangers. These were universal traits found everywhere in the world, innate to the psychology of humans as humans. According to Henrich, the reason for this major error in the understanding of human psychology was that "most of what was known experimentally about human psychology and behavior was based on studies with undergraduates from Western societies." Ninety-six percent of "experimental participants were drawn from northern Europe, North America, or Australia." There were studies done with participants from outside the West, but these relied heavily on highly Westernized "relationally mobile university students in urban centers". (p. xii)

The WEIRDest People is packed with experimental surveys, figures, graphs and tables, based on game theory, measuring the psychological differences between populations across the world, to counter the "massively biased samples" from the past that had been derived almost entirely from Western students. The types of experimental games, conducted by Henrich's research team and many other independent researchers, include the Dictator Game, Random Allocation Game, Public Good's Game, Impersonal Honesty Game, Ultimatum Game, and the Sharing Game. Henrich concluded based on this experimental research that there were two fundamental psychological profiles in the world, the WEIRD profile of Westerners and the non-WEIRD profile of kinship-based peoples. Drawing as well on data from the World Values Survey covering 75 contemporary countries,

he observed that the greater the intensity of kinship, as measured particularly by degree of cousin marriage, the less trust individuals will have for “people they have just met, foreigners, and adherents of other religions”.

“The higher the rate of cousin marriage in a country, the more willing managers were to give false testimony in court” to protect their ingroup members. “The executives from countries with stronger kin-based institutions hire more relatives into senior management.” People from countries with intensive kinship rarely ever donate blood to strangers, don’t like to report crimes within their own ingroups, and they much prefer to dodge taxes. Henrich’s book also compiled a substantial amount of evidence showing that Western peoples generally tend to be less in-group oriented, less tightly bound to traditional norms, more individualistic, less distrustful of strangers, highly inclined to believe in impartial notions of fairness, and more honest in their dealings with strangers (pp. 21-30, 237-242).

Henrich did not reach this conclusion after reading books on the intellectual history of Europeans. He did so after years of ethnographic field studies and after conducting numerous experimental cross-cultural surveys. This research strongly indicated that Western peoples are uniquely WEIRD: They trust foreigners a lot more than non-Western peoples; they believe that Muslims and nonwhite immigrants generally are no different from them as long as Westerners treat them with impartial fairness. One of the experiments mentioned by Henrich, the Public Goods Game (designed to measure whether individuals are willing to act “in the interests of their broader communities” by giving time, money, and effort to voting, donation of blood, joining the army, reporting crimes, following traffic laws and paying taxes) distinctly showed that WEIRD individuals are far more inclined to act in the interests of the public good, whereas immigrants from kinship intensive cultures identify the public good with their own in-group.

Creating successful societies by learning how to scale up kinship networks

Henrich's central argument that the WEIRD psychology of Europeans is a product of cultural evolution, not genetic evolution, and that the psychology of humans can be altered through cultural changes, will likely be seen by members of the dissident Right as another version of “social constructionism”. The Right prefers to talk about human nature, innate biological drives, and differences in the average intelligence of populations. Gregory Cochran and Henry C. Harpending (2009) attempted a gene-based evolutionary account coupled with the effects of culture on genes as central to history. In his book, *Understanding Human History* (2007), Michael Hart argued that differences in average intelligence between separate groups should be given priority in our efforts to understand the divergent patterns of civilizations. The origination of a modern technological culture required

a population with a high level of intelligence. But while Hart offered a persuasive explanation about how in the course of time various physical differences arose between “human groups widely separated from each other geographically, with relatively little interbreeding between them”, he could not explain why East Asians with their higher average intelligence were unable to create the first modern scientific civilization.

On the other side of the spectrum, the geographical approach of Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997) was very good at explaining why the cultures of Eurasia got a head start in the development of complex civilizations, by showing that this area had most of the wild crops and wild animals that could be domesticated, and by showing that the east-west orientation of this area favored the diffusion of domesticated crops, animals, and knowledge. But, again, Diamond failed to explain why the civilization of Europe within Eurasia moved past the Asian world after 1500.

Henrich can definitely be faulted for focusing almost singularly on “cumulative cultural learning” without allowing much influence to innate genetic factors other than saying that humans were genetically selected to be cultural learners. He defines humans as a cultural species precisely because they “evolved genetically to learn adaptively in ways that calibrate our minds and behavior to the environment we encounter” (pp. 61-68). How different environmental settings may have exerted different selective pressures for different genetic traits upon different populations in the world is not a question he addresses. From the position that humans have a common genetic stock he moves on to explain why the psychology of Westerners has been so different for centuries. His approach is nevertheless different from standard cultural approaches in that it goes deeper into the brains and psychology of Europeans to explain their divergent path. Humans can't be easily re-wired in a WEIRD direction with the mere introduction of new classroom lectures or the placement of children in new institutional settings. Living with or without kinship relations has deep ontogenetic effects in the neurological (though not genetic) wiring of the brain.³

³ He offers revealing data showing that immigrants from intensive kinship backgrounds persist in their ingroup behaviors even when their income and education rise in the West. Immigrants “coming from places with more intensive kinship continue to care more about in-group loyalty and less about non-relational morality” (p. 210). He observes that cousin marriage has actually increased “among immigrants to WEIRD societies such as Britain and Belgium”, including among second generation immigrants, “compared to the home country” (p. 546). Although Henrich does not address this issue, it can safely be said that from his perspective the clannishness of immigrants will start

Henrich's concept of learning has to do primarily with the ways humans have learned to expand their ties of kinship beyond their immediate genetic relatives through the creation of broader kinship networks, the spread of "universalizing religious beliefs", and the creation by Europeans of WEIRD institutional associations with different self-reinforcing culturally-learned and interlocking beliefs, practices, and incentives. The fundamental factor driving history, the "secret" of successful peoples, has consisted in their ability to create widening networks of cooperation and solidarity. But why were societies compelled or incentivized to create wider networks of cooperation beyond the small bands of hunter-gatherers in Paleolithic times?

Here Henrich relies on the concept of "intergroup competition" as a biologically pregiven condition in the struggle for survival of all living beings and all human societies. "Violent conflict...among bands, clans, and tribes" has been "the most striking feature" of kinship-based societies. Assaults, murders, adultery, and interpersonal bickering are a permanent reality in human relationships, both within and between kinship groups. Those communities that failed to create wider networks of cooperation were liquidated or absorbed by those societies that managed to "scale up" their networks of kinship cultural cooperation. In this respect, "intergroup competition" has acted as a motivating factor behind the creation of wider kinship networks (pp. 78-85).

Yet, oddly enough, this concept of "violent intergroup conflict" is left undeveloped. His focus is always on the nature and dynamics of kinship networks and wider forms of cooperation created in the course of history, and how "people's survival depended heavily on the size and solidarity of their social groups". This is not an innocent absence. The social sciences in the West are dedicated to the "solution" of human conflict by finding ways to enhance cooperation. Since World War II, this has meant nurturing cooperation across the world through the invitation of diverse races and cultures to overcome "xenophobic ethnic attachments". However crazy it may seem to those who understand that intergroup competition is likely to intensify, this is the mandated cultural project of the West.

Henrich, as we will see below, is committed to this project. This is an unspoken ideological message in *The WEIRDest People* that reviewers have missed. Western academics love the words "cooperation" and "solidarity", which explains in part the great success of Henrich's prior book, *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smart* (2015). Henrich is indeed convinced that the "underlying

to decline in the third or future generation as WEIRD traits penetrate deeper into their psychology.

processes” driving history forward have been the enhancement of cooperative strategies across groups and societies through the scaling up of kinship networks from the relatively simple bands of hunter-gatherers in Paleolithic times to the vast empires of pre-modern times, to the future creation of a global world of WEIRD multi-racial individuals with great possibilities for “residential mobility” anywhere they choose.

So, what did humans do to create greater unity within their bands and between bands as well as wider networks of solidarity? Henrich’s answer to this question is one of the most original components of this book. Whereas prior explanations on the dynamics of history have centered around the impact of external forces, geographical and demographic pressures, or the role of ideas without any analysis of psychological profiles, Henrich focuses on the way humans have gone about rearranging, extending, and intensifying the most basic institution of all: their family ties (albeit under the pressure of intergroup competition).⁴ It all started with the family, who one could marry, how many wives one could have, where married couples could reside, how descent should be traced. “Pair bonding” was naturally selected as a mating strategy because it permitted “males and females to team up to rear offspring”. From this genetic starting point, marriage became a norm, and these marriage norms were gradually expanded to include rules aimed at constraining women’s sexuality in order to increase the confidence of the husband and his family that her children were really his biological children. These marriage norms increased “paternity certainty,” which firmed up the links between children and their fathers, as well as links with the in-laws. In-laws are not genetically related, but through marriage norms humans have learned to think, for example, of the wife’s brothers as part of the family, and to believe that we share genetic interests. These ties with in-laws were reinforced through social norms “involving gifts, rituals, and mutual

⁴ While Henrich aims for a comprehensive account of the role of kinship across history, in the last few years a number of economic historians have been exploring the role of kinship and monogamous families in the divergent paths of the West and the East. Avner Greif (2006) observed over a decade ago that “little attention has been given to the impact of the family structure and its dynamics on institutions. This limits our ability to understand distinct institutional developments — and hence growth — in the past and present.” Henrich draws on Greif’s work, citing among other papers “Family structure, institutions, and growth: The origins and implications of Western corporations” (2006). In this paper Greif presents “the reasons for the decline of kinship groups in medieval Europe and why the resulting nuclear family structure, along with other factors, led to...intentionally created, voluntary, interest-based, and self-governed permanent associations” such as guilds, fraternities, universities, communes, and city-states.

obligations". Hunting and gathering bands have in fact consisted mostly of in-laws rather than blood relatives.

From the evolved disposition that humans were selected with an aversion to sex with siblings and parents due to the high chances of unhealthy offspring, they came to "figure out" ways to extend this aversion beyond close relatives through incest taboos prohibiting sex with step siblings, and prohibiting marriages with first, second, and even third cousins. This encouraged norms compelling parents to arrange marriages for their children with more distant kinfolk, which extended their social networks and solidarity in times of droughts, floods, and in the face of threatening enemies. Only those norms that enhanced success in competition with other groups would tend to survive and spread. "Psychologically-potent communal rituals" involving synchronic dances and rhythmic music were commonly used to enhance in-group solidarity, alleviate personal divisions, and induce members to collaborate in major public works.

Within and between all societies, including egalitarian Paleolithic societies, there is competition among individuals, families, and clans. With the "emergence of food production" intergroup competition was intensified, which encouraged new forms of cooperation, ritual bonds, and interpersonal relations within groups. As societies grew in size with agriculture, additional non-kin-based institutions were developed; however, these institutions were "built atop a deep foundation of kin-based institutions". Henrich observes, furthermore, that building societies based on cooperative relationships beyond a handful of family clans is very hard once the population exceeds a few hundred people. Large villages of over a few hundred people (though this depends on the environment) tend to fracture into feuding clans. Anthropologists have been very interested in understanding why and how some societies managed to integrate large numbers of clans.

Henrich uses the example of a culture in New Guinea, Iahita, to show how a small clan managed to "scale up" successfully by augmenting, improving, and intensifying its kinship forms of cooperation within its own clan and with other clans. It "culturally constructed" new rituals across clans which had the effect of inducing strong emotional ties among participants. Included in these rituals were a sequence of initiation rites at various ages in the maturation of males from different clans, "rites of terror" which had the effect of bonding these males into a "band of brothers". These and other rituals were "infused with a powerful set of supernatural beliefs", powerful gods that were said to govern the entire community and would punish the people, or not bring them harmony and success, unless they performed the proper rituals. Many deaths that had previously been attributed to sorcery were thereafter attributed to the anger of the gods instigated by the failure of the clans to perform the proper rituals (pp. 88-99).

Another means of enlarging cooperation is precisely by outcompeting and taking over other groups. The more successful groups will “drive out, eliminate, or assimilate those with less competitive institutions”. Ties of cooperation were also “scaled up” through the use of social norms regarding residence after marriage, inheritance and ownership, incest taboos, arranged marriages, gods, and rituals. Arranged marriages, for example, involved using daughters for strategic alliances with other clans, which had the effect of extending blood lines between clans. Patrilocal residence had the effect of solidifying ties between the new couple's children and the father's children and other patrilineal relatives. The norm that the perpetrator's entire clan is culpable if someone injures or kills someone in your clan fostered interdependence and loyalty among clan members.

The rise of pre-modern states with “universalizing religions”

By focusing on kinship, Henrich manages to find a very firm ground upon which to explain the entire movement of history from bands to big man societies to chiefdoms and pre-modern states. Many theories have been offered to explain the rise of pre-modern states. Among the most famous explanations are the “hydraulic hypothesis” proposed by Karl Wittfogel (1957) and the class-based explanation proposed by Marxists. Bruce Trigger (1993) believed that religious fear was the main reason an exploited majority was initially prepared to support a state system based on inequality. But perhaps the most respected argument nowadays is the circumscription theory proposed by Robert Carneiro (2012). He argued that environmental constriction in the context of population growth intensified intergroup competition and warfare, and that this set of causal factors eventually led to the formation of centralized authorities to meet competitive pressures for scarce resources.

Henrich's focus is on how pre-modern states “were built on an underlying social and psychological foundation formed by intense kin-based institutions” (p. 112). The consolidation of the ownership of rituals by the most powerful clans “has been one of the main ways in which some clans have set themselves above others”. By excluding weaker clans from control of key rituals, the leaders of powerful chiefly clans could accumulate most of the rituals and in this way spread their legitimacy and sacred authority. They could also attract more marriage offers from patrilineal clans seeking to link themselves directly through their daughters' children with the chiefly clan and thus gain greater prestige for themselves. And because polygyny was a key norm of all pre-modern kinship-based societies, the chiefly clans could easily take multiple wives and thus accumulate links with many other clans and reproduce faster. They could also wrap themselves with the most

powerful gods and give themselves a divine and superior status; and they could take ownership of the land “away from the clans of the commoners”.

As chiefly clans evolved into fully stratified chiefdoms, new bureaucratic institutions gradually emerged in charge of collecting taxes, adjudicating disputes, conducting long-distance trade, gathering armies, and organizing the building of public works. While the relationships between the upper clans and the growing lower strata of the population were not directly based on kinship ties, the upper elite continued to rely directly on family connections to manage and control these bureaucratic institutions, just as the lower clans continued to be thoroughly based on kinship ties within their own localities. The rise of pre-modern states would thus remain rooted in intensive kin-based relations and in norms, obligations, and identities that derived from kinship.

Early state religions, such as the one of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and later the major world religions of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, played a similar historical role in the way they successfully “scaled up” human cooperation among believers over and above (though not against) tribal ties. These religions were not WEIRD in their beliefs, including Christianity, but remained rooted in kinship institutions, though they did expand cooperation beyond tribal lines. To the extent that these religions enhanced cooperation among humans, they played an important role in enhancing collective learning. For all the talk about “learning”, Henrich describes these universalizing religions with a broad brush, without making any distinctions in the nature of their beliefs. All religions are alike in their irrational beliefs about supernatural beings and childish notions about heaven and hell. This is the way most evolutionary theorists approach religion. Religions have relevance in the degree to which they can be shown to have played a role in the enhancement of the survival capacities of societies or as ideological justifications for the power of elites.

In Henrich’s explanation, universalizing religions spread in the degree to which they produced beliefs, rituals and ceremonies with a wide popular appeal, and thus managed to scale up the networks of cooperation among tribal groups, which made possible greater production of goods, larger societies, and civilizations with greater capacities for intergroup competition. While rulers were strongly inclined to employ religious beliefs and practices to benefit their families and legitimize their authorities, intergroup competition was the main factor pushing societies, without any moral intentionality, to adopt these universalizing religions. Those communities that pulled together many clans and tribes under the umbrella of universalizing beliefs were the ones that managed to construct and sustain chiefdoms and states, outcompeting those communities that remained too clannish in their beliefs. The promotion of fellow feelings for strangers was far less powerful in encouraging cooperation than the threat of

punishment against those who violated the commandments of supernatural beings.

The historical relevance of the rituals practiced by these religions is that they worked to induce members of the same community to build emotional attachments with each other. Henrich provides experimental surveys showing that religious people are far more motivated by fear of punishment than empathy for strangers to follow the moral codes of their religions. Humans as cultural learners are inclined to accept and “conform” to those religious beliefs that have great rituals, including food taboos, sexual prohibitions, fasts, martyrs, daily prayers, grace before meals, that enhance the credibility of the religion. Humans also gravitate towards prestigious or successful advocates of beliefs and rituals. Universalizing religions were able to create “super-tribes” of believers with a greater inclination to trust members of other clans with the same religious beliefs. But Henrich carefully notes that the broader cooperation and encompassing identity the universalizing religions encouraged among believers did not dispense with the old kinship ties. These universalizing religions, together with the civilizations they worked to sustain, were in fact built atop the old kinship systems. Only later in the Middle Ages would Christianity set out to demolish kinship ties and thus promote a truly WEIRD pan-tribal world of Christian believers for whom shared beliefs alone functioned as their unifying identity rather than shared tribal lineage.

The immense but “unintentional” revolution of the Catholic Church

The foundational core of Henrich’s argument about how Europe “unintentionally” followed a divergent path that led to the industrial revolution is that “between about 400-1200 CE the intensive kin-based institutions of many European tribal populations were slowly degraded, dismantled, and eventually demolished by the...Roman Catholic Church” (p. 189). Only after this demolition Europeans “began to form new voluntary associations based on shared interests or beliefs rather than on kinship or tribal affiliations.” It was only during the High Middle Ages that Europe began to witness “novel institutions such as charter towns, professional guilds, and universities.” Pre-Catholic Europe was a normal culture without WEIRD institutions where the social identities of individuals were determined by their position and role within their kin-based groups. Disputes were adjudicated on the basis of the customary norms of the kinship group, not impersonal legal principles. There was no concept of intentionality and free will. Wives lived with their husbands’ kinfolk. Kinship groups collectively owned the land, and even in those places where individual ownership existed, the kinfolk had inheritance rights. Marriages were arranged and marriages with relatives

were customary. Polygamy was accepted and polygynous marriages were common for high-status men.

The Church dismantled Europe's clans and kindreds by using its moral authority, threatening excommunication, expanding the incest taboos, and imposing numerous prohibitions during the course of many centuries, until by about 1200 it managed not only to dissolve Europe's extended families but to substitute for them a new pan-tribal Christian identity across much of Europe. It prohibited: all marriages between both blood relatives and affinal or in-law kinfolk, sororate and levirate marriages, polygynous marriage, marriage to non-Christians, arranged marriages while requiring bride and groom to publicly consent to marriage, and it promoted individual ownership of land and inheritance by personal testaments against customary inheritance. All these prohibitions seriously undermined the authority of kinship groups, forcing people to reach out beyond their clans and localities to find marriage partners, releasing individuals from age-old kinship obligations and inherited interdependence into new voluntary associations.

With individual ownership and the promulgation of the idea that wealthy individuals could bequest by testament their wealth to the poor (to be administered by the Church), kinship groups lost much of their land to the Church. The idea that charitable acts could ensure one's entry into heaven, along with the power of priests to administer to the dying in preparation for the afterlife, encouraged many wealthy landowners to give their wealth to the Church as they were freed from the duties of kinship inheritance. "By 900 CE," Henrich observes, "the Church owned about a third of the cultivated land in western Europe." (p. 185).

Henrich raises a crucial question at this point: "Why did the Church adopt these incest prohibitions?" More precisely, why did the Church identify polygamy and cousin marriage, including marriage with distant cousins, as immoral acts? Why did it advocate for monogamous marriage as the only morally acceptable relationship in the procreation of families? What reasons did it offer to justify these supposedly never-seen interferences in the sexual behavior and family arrangements of humans in history? His preferred answer is that the Catholic Church "unintentionally" abolished kinship groups and cousin marriage for the wealth it stood to gain and for its own peculiar "obsession" with controlling "people's sex lives". The "Catholic Church stumbled onto a collection of marriage and family policies that demolished Europe's intensive kin-based institutions" in its greedy pursuit of economic power (p. 471). There were no cognitively-based moral reasons for the Church's decision to prohibit pederasty, concubinage, and polygamy. The most crucial transformation in Western history was driven by plain economic interests and peculiar sexual obsessions.

This is very odd in a book that seeks to emphasize cultural learning and the eventual spread of intentionality, individual responsibility, and reason-based actions. Henrich believes that “in nearly all societies, individuals don’t consciously design the most important elements of their institutions and certainly don’t understand how or why they work” (94). He says “nearly” without mentioning a society that has consciously planned its institutions. It is his view, as we will see in a later section, that WEIRD individuals are no more conscious than non-WEIRD people in their creation of societies. How can the Europeans who began to talk about “free will”, invented logic and deductive reasoning, and articulated ideals and pragmatic programs about how to build better states, going back to Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics*, be deprived of any intentionality?

The WEIRD sexual morality of Christianity from its beginnings

The historical record shows, however, that Europeans were already quite WEIRD in their family laws and practices in ancient Greek and Roman times, and that Christians had already articulated a “new sexual morality” favoring monogamous marriage before the Middle Ages. *The Western Case for Monogamy over Polygamy* by John Witte, which Henrich ignores, decisively shows that, from the fourth century BC, Greek philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, and Roman Stoics, eulogized monogamous marriage as the proper way to create a family and raise children. Early Christians saw monogamy as the “most beneficial” form of union between a man and a woman for a society to prosper. For “nearly two millennia,” Witte writes, Europeans treated “polygamy as a *malum in se* offense — something bad in itself — because it “deprecates women”, “fractures fidelity”, “divides loyalty”, “promotes rivalry”, “foments lust”, and “harms children” (2015: 459). Only Europeans among all the peoples of the world would extoll, in the words of Plutarch (46-120 AD), “the union for life between a man and a woman for the delights of love and the getting of children” (p. 107). When Catholics set out to demolish polygamous kinship groups, they did so in awareness of the merits of monogamy for the raising of a family and the harmonious functioning of society. Europeans did not become WEIRD because they accidentally abolished polygamous kinship groups. They abolished polygamy because they were the first to emancipate their moral consciousness from norms dictated by their biological inclinations.

Henrich’s claim that the “package of prohibitions” the Catholic Church implemented had “only tenuous (at best) roots in Christianity’s sacred writings” (p. 161) is untenable. It was not rooted in Judaism; as Henrich observes, “Jewish law...permitted cousin marriage, polygynous marriage, and uncle-niece marriage” (p. 176). Abundant evidence has been compiled and interpreted by Kyle Harper in his book, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality*

in *Late Antiquity*, showing a “transition from a late classical to a Christian sexual morality...a quantum leap to a new foundational logic of sexual ethics” (2013: 8). Christians consciously preached against sexual activity outside marriage, sex with minors, divorce, infanticide and abortion, on the grounds that these practices were harmful to the soul of humans, their families, and the social order.

While the early Roman Republic was a traditionally conservative farmer-warrior society in which monogamy was emphasized and the family was seen to consist of father, mother, and children in a state of “affectionate devotion” (Saller, 2010), it can’t be denied that, as Rome became an empire with millions of slaves supporting the ruling class, the moral character of Romans weakened, divorce became normal, the birth rate declined, and the pornographic exploitation of slaves, especially girls, women, and boys, became rampant in elite circles. As Harper observes, slave minors were “subjected to untrammelled sexual abuse” (2015: 26). It was quite common for wealthy men to own boy slaves for sexual usage right inside their households. It was against this late Roman decadence that Christians objected. They rejected the Roman notion that a man born free could have sex with slaves, prostitutes, and boys. Paul condemned same-sex relations and sexual activity outside of marriage as *porneia* (“fornication”). Harper does not get into polygamy, but it should be noted that late-antiquity Christians, Paul, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian, spoke against polygamy, without getting rich for it (Crossan & Reed, 2004; Witte, 2015)

The WEIRD Hellenistic roots of Christianity

It needs to be emphasized, however, that the Bible was not the original source for monogamous marriage. The Old Testament permitted polygamy and the New Testament did not make any substantial calls for monogamy. The principle of monogamy came to Christianity through the Greek-Roman cultural ecumene where monogamy had long been a culturally mandated institution. Christianity was from its very beginnings a WEIRD Hellenistic religion deeply infused with Greek reason and Roman legalistic modes of thinking: the only religion that originated and developed within a metaphysical framework consistent with a rationalistic understanding of the natural world and in an intellectual setting where freedom was the subject of much discussion.⁵ The way

⁵ The rationalizing impulse that transformed early Christianity into a theology was the subject matter of Edwin Hatch’s *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*. Christianity was “profoundly modified by the habit of mind of those who accepted it. It was impossible for the Greeks, educated as they were with an education which penetrated their whole nature, to receive or retain Christianity in its primitive simplicity.” Christianity became “no less a philosophy than a religion” (1895: 49).

Greek reason entered into Christianity could be seen in the tendency to draw inferences from clearly stated definitions, to construct systems from these inferences, and to ascertain the validity of these inferences in terms of their logical consistency within those systems. The Greek philosophical language came to influence Judaism from the middle of the third century BC, long before the New Testament period.⁶

Christianity too was born inside the womb of Hellenism. The Greek language, rather than Hebrew, was the language through which the Christian faith spread. The first Christians were Hellenized Jews. All the books of the New Testament were written in Greek. The Gospel of St. John reinterpreted Jesus in Platonic terms, and non-Jews who became Christians were typically educated Greeks. The majority of Jews in the first Christian century were not living in Judea but in the *politeuma* of Alexandria, Antioch, and the Hellenistic *oikoumene* at large. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 50 AD) played a significant role in this adaptation of Christianity to Hellenism. Convinced that the Scripture could be elucidated through the use of Greek philosophy and science, Philo started a theological tradition within Christianity by bringing together in a rich mixture the religious beliefs of the Septuagint, the Torah and Mosaic Law, and the Platonic and Stoic idea of a single rational law inherent in nature (Chadwick, 2001). By the early 2nd century, Christ had come to personify the Logos, the “Word” of the opening of St. John’s Gospel. The four fathers of the Latin Church, St. Ambrose (340-397), St. Jerome (340-419), St. Augustine (354-430), and Gregory the Great (540-604), received a thorough classical education that taught them that God is a purposeful designer of the world who can be known through the things He has made. The Latin apologists, Tertullian, Minucius Felix (late 2nd century), and Lactantius (250-326), came to Christianity from a classical professional background. Minucius deliberately borrowed the Greek literary style of the dialogue, together with the Roman use of legal rules of evidence, to persuade pagans that Christianity was consistent with the classical search for wisdom and goodness. Lactantius, known as the “Christian Cicero”, told his readers that the Stoic notion of a cosmic rational

⁶ The foremost scholar on this topic is Martin Hengel, starting with this two-volume work, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (1974). His basic finding was that Judaism was deeply influenced by Greek thought much earlier than commonly believed, at least by the third century BC; Greek words penetrated the Bible itself; the book of Daniel, for example, includes themes mediated by Hellenistic writings. Hengel’s conclusion, however, was not that we should underestimate the religious differences between Judaism, Hellenized Judaism, and Hellenized Christianity.

order was consistent with the Christian idea of a benevolent Creator who rules the world providentially (Colish, 1998: 10-15).

Clement of Alexandria's (150-215) effort to write a regular and orderly treatise of Christian beliefs, a theology, has to be seen in this context as an effort to elevate the unreflecting faith of simple "Jesus believers" to a higher understanding by means of classical learning. The goal was not to elevate philosophy above faith but to employ philosophy as a "preparatory discipline" to the study of Christianity and thus to the establishment of Christian faith as a WEIRD theology. Clement, who was very well read in Platonic philosophy, argued that although faith was sufficient for salvation, it was consistent with Christian faith to educate and discipline one's mind to reach a higher, more coherent understanding of God. Origen, who succeeded Clement as head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria, took further this effort to construct a systematic body of truth on the basis of rigorous argumentation. His *On the First Principles* starts with the elements of faith of apostolic preaching and then goes on to maintain, in the words of F.E. Peters, "that in many cases apostolic tradition did no more than announce that a thing is so, without explaining the how of the why" (Peters, 1970: 625). Origen is said to have provided the "first Summa Theologica" in presenting all Christian beliefs in the manner of a dogma, a canon, a system of beliefs (Jaeger, 1961; Miles, 2005).⁷

Henrich inadvertently slips out that "by roughly 200 BCE universalizing religions included [concepts] of free will...[and] moral universalism" (p. 146). Don't we need humans with WEIRD psychologies to have concepts of free will and moral universalism? He identifies "free will" with the WEIRD "notion that individuals make their own choices and those choices matter", and he lists "moral

⁷ Additional works on how Judaism and Christianity were "Hellenized" include Miles (2005) and Jaeger (1961). There are many additional studies explaining how Christianity was substantially rationalized and transformed into the only "WEIRD" theological religion of the world before the Middle Ages. A drawback of Henrich's "experimental" approach is that it relies on the simple-minded opinions of contemporary individuals to reach judgments about the nature of Christianity, while ignoring the scholarly literature on the intellectual development of Christianity. While I can't claim to have read this work, the notion that Christianity was one of many other religions, rather than a highly theological doctrine, is decisively put to rest by the monumental five volume work of Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition 100–600, Volume 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom 600–1700, Volume 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology 600–1300, Volume 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma 1300–1700, Volume 5: Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture since 1700* (University of Chicago Press, 1973–1990).

universalism” as one of the key WEIRD traits. His point may be that universalizing religions contained some incipient ideas about free will and moral responsibility based on religious texts rather than on customary obligations stemming from kinship ties. But while it can be argued that during the Axial Age (800 to 200 BC) the high cultures of Israel, India, China, and possibly Persia did articulate quasi-universal ideals for “humanity” in opposition to the tribalistic conventions of the day, the subsequent histories of these cultures were characterized by dogmatic fixation, stagnation, and religious traditionalism, whereas only the ancient Greeks would engage in what Merlin Donald calls “second-order theory” or “thinking about thinking,” as is evident in their geometrical proofs, in Plato’s incessant dialogical questioning of taken-for-granted conventions about what is truthful and what is rational, followed by Aristotle’s articulation of a system of logic about how to think properly without contradiction and consistently on the basis of “self-evident” reason-based premises.⁸

We don’t have any textual evidence that any religion other than Christianity articulated ideas about free will and universal ideals on the basis of a systematic assimilation of the Greek philosophical heritage. The first proper articulation of the idea of free will can be found in the writings of the Hellenistic thinker Epicurus, who thought that it was possible for human decision or choice to exist outside a causal chain of determinism, and thus for humans to be responsible for their actions, and for praise and moral blame to be possible (Long & Sedley, 1987). Larry Siedentop, in his fascinating book, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (2015) argues that Christianity (in contrast to every other religion) was responsible for a WEIRD (to use Henrich’s term) moral revolution in the first centuries AD before the Middle Ages. This revolution called for the moral equality of humans regardless of ancestry, and insisted that humans are intentional beings in possession of an inner conscience that should not be obliterated by mandates imposed without reasons. Hellenized Christians were the first to elaborate philosophically the concepts of person, conscience, truth, dignity, and liberty. Kyle Harper (2013: 118) also makes a strong case that it was the early Christians who developed a “thoroughly libertarian view of free will, defined by the capacity to act in a certain way”, in the same vein as they articulated a new family ethic.

In the Roman world, people were in awe of the powers of fate and fascinated by astrology, but Christians came to emphasize the power of human freedom to transcend sexual appetites, the possibility of redemption for all including sinners.

⁸ For an assessment of the Axial Age contributions of ancient civilizations, in comparison to the Greek contributions, see my article “The European Idea of Progress Supersedes the Axial Age” (Duchesne, 2019).

Christianity framed the Greco-Roman views on monogamy within a powerful new sexual morality backed by the sanctified authority of one God in charge of ultimate moral judgement. These early Christian ideas were gradually adopted and transmitted in the second and third centuries to Roman populations. Saint Ambrose (340–397) and Saint Jerome (347–420) insisted on the right of women who chose celibacy not to be forced into unwanted marriages, and on the need to judge women not by sex but by soul (Colish, 1998: 16–24). Christians were thus “unique” in sincerely believing that unrestrained sexuality and suppression of the free will were damaging to human relationships.

Culturally-mandated monogamy of ancient Greece

Kevin MacDonald (2021), in an excellent review-essay of *The WEIRDest People*, counters Henrich’s argument that monogamy was not real in Greece because high status men “could also purchase sex slaves, take foreigners as concubines, and use numerous inexpensive brothels” (p. 273). The essence of MacDonald’s critique is that Solon introduced laws on marriage aimed at curbing “the power of the aristocracy by limiting the benefits to be gained by extra-marital sexual relationships.” Solon’s law made monogamy the only form of union between a man and woman that could engender legitimate children “with the possibility of inheritance”. Solon’s laws provided for “state-subsidized brothels staffed with cheap and therefore readily available female prostitutes” in order to alleviate the polygynous inclination of men. This fact does not negate the monogamous character of ancient Greece since children born outside a monogamous marriage were not recognized as biological members of the household and were excluded from any inheritance. Prostitution and concubinage was “a substitute for polygyny by the wealthy”.

Henrich is also off in his claim that Rome lacked monogamy. While Henrich acknowledges that “Roman law only recognized monogamous marriages” and that “early Roman law...prohibited close cousin marriage”, he thinks the presence of “secondary wives and sex slaves” seriously limited this institution (p. 163). He fails to mention that in Roman law monogamy was the only valid form of marriage that could produce legitimate children with inheritance rights. Henrich references articles by W. Scheidel, including “A peculiar institution? Greco-Roman monogamy in global context” (2009) in support of his claims. Perhaps he thought that Scheidel’s observation that Greco-Roman monogamy “accommodated a variety of men’s polygynous relationships outside the nuclear family” disqualified calling these cultures monogamous. But the conclusion Scheidel actually reaches is that Greeks and Romans regarded polygamy as a “barbarian custom or a mark of tyranny” (Scheidel, 2009). The thesis of another paper by Scheidel (2008, also referenced by Henrich) reads: “Greek and Roman men were not allowed to be

married to more than one wife at a time and not meant to cohabit with concubines during marriage, and not even rulers were exempt from these norms.”

But why would the Greeks and Romans institute monogamy when polygyny is a naturally selected institution consistent with the evolved psychologies of humans? Henrich offers an insightful analysis of the evolutionary selection of polygyny we can rely upon to start answering this question (pp. 255-283). Monogamous pair bonding does not exist among any species living in large groups like *Homo sapiens*. Our closest primate relatives are highly promiscuous and don't form pair bonds. While humans did evolve a psychological disposition for emotional pair bonding and for men to invest in the children of their sexual partner, both males and females were naturally selected to favor polygynous marriage.

This may seem odd because males and females evolved different mating strategies, with females limited in their reproduction to the number of children they could raise due to ovulation, gestation, and lactation. Males, however, can produce sperm over their lifetime and potentially have thousands of offspring. Males are very strongly inclined to favor multiple mates because this means greater reproduction and greater biological “fitness”. Females can only have one pregnancy at a time. Having multiple sexual mates does not augment their reproductive success but harms it by creating confusion and conflict among males over paternity and minimizing their willingness for parental investment. Nevertheless, females do have their own particular type of “polygyny bias”. Females want to form a pair-bond with those males who can best guarantee support for her during pregnancy and during the maturation of the child. They want security and comfort. Therefore, they are psychologically inclined to gravitate toward high-status men with resources. This means that in a world where high-status men are always seeking and acquiring multiple wives, and many low-status men are deprived of sexual mates, young females will have a larger pool of males to choose husbands from than would be available in a society where monogamy was the law. While she would prefer to be the singular wife of a high-status man, rather than marrying a low-status man who can't provide security, a woman would be better off being the wife of a married wealthy man in a polygynous household with lots of resources and much to learn from older co-wives.⁹

All the societies witnessed in history, except the WEIRD societies created by Europeans, practiced polygamy as a naturally selected mating strategy that allowed for the transmission of the genes of the most biologically fit men. Most

⁹ Henrich forgets that a major downside of polygyny for women is the fractious hostility which often occurs between co-wives.

human societies throughout history have accepted polygynous marriage. Almost all hunter-gatherer societies around the world, about 90 percent, “had some degree of polygynous marriage” (p. 260). The hunter and gatherer societies that were “monogamous” were so because resources were too scarce for some men to accumulate extra resources to invest in additional wives, such as the hunter-gather culture of northwestern Europe. In the primitive societies that were polygynous, Henrich informs us, only about 14 percent of men and 22 percent of women were polygynously married because only men with the ability to acquire extra resources had the means to support more than one wife. This does not mean that most men were in monogamous relationships; many simply had a hard time finding partners.

Monogamy can only be said to exist, I would argue, when it is a consciously culturally mandated norm in opposition to high status men who are biologically inclined for polygamous marriage. Once societies began to practice agriculture and increasing inequalities between classes emerged, with some men appropriating large tracts of land worked by low status peasants, the acquisition of multiple wives by a few men intensified. Only 15 percent of agricultural societies in the *Ethnographic Atlas* are identified as “monogamous”. With the rise of complex chiefdoms and civilizations, it became customary for high-ranking men to have multiple wives, with some kings having a few elite wives and several thousand secondary wives. This is the way nature works.

So, again, we need to ask: Why would the ruling elite in ancient Greece promote monogamy?¹⁰ Here we can continue to draw from Henrich some keen insights on the benefits of monogamy and the dysfunctional aspects of polygamy, so long as we keep in mind that he is talking about *current modern societies*, and that he does not attribute these insights to the Greeks and Romans, or to the Catholic Church. The main problem with polygynous marriages is that they “generate a large pool of low-status unmarried men with few prospects for marriage or even sex” (p. 256). Large percentages of unmarried men are associated with high crime rates and general anti-social behavior. Polygynous men invest less in their offspring because they tend to have more children and because they dedicate more resources pursuing additional wives.

¹⁰ Henrich pays little attention to the scholarly literature portraying ancient Greece as a monogamous culture; see Lacy (1968) and Patterson (2001). Patterson makes a strong case that Greek society since archaic times was already rooted in monogamous households rather than clans, that in law courts the violation of marital relationships was categorized as a public danger and the adulterer as a sexual thief, and that monogamous family households were seen as integral to the sustenance of the city's civic identity and norms.

It has been shown, moreover, that “getting married and becoming a father lowers men’s testosterone”. The level of testosterone (T) influences men’s psychology; men with lower T are less aggressive and more able to self-discipline their emotions and allow the prefrontal cortices of their brains a greater say over decision-making. Monogamy means that a higher proportion of men will have the opportunity of finding a spouse. Marriage suppresses T levels, which lowers the likelihood of property crimes, drug abuse, and violent aggression. Levels of T also “affect a person’s assessment of the trustworthiness of strangers”. Monogamous men are more inclined to trust strangers and to behave according to impartial principles. In polygynous societies, men’s T levels decline slower with age because they remain on the marriage market. Studies have shown that marriage cuts the overall crime rate by about 35 percent.

For all these reasons, Henrich concludes “that monogamous marriage norms...create a range of social and psychological effects that give the societies that possess them a big edge in competition against other groups” (p. 263). But Henrich employs this argument solely to explain why non-western societies eventually came to implement laws favoring monogamy. They did so under the competitive pressure of the incredibly successful Western world in the twentieth century. “Intergroup competition” — the competition of nation states for geopolitical power and survival as independent nations — motivated the non-Western world to copy Western secular institutions, not just monogamy, but rule of law, constitutions, elections, and scientific methodologies.¹¹

While non-Western states did not get rid of all the kinship characteristics that underlay their age-old bureaucratic institutions, they did come to the realization (though Henrich does not quite say this) that favoring monogamy was a great way of limiting the deleterious effects of powerful polygynous clans continually contesting for power and obstructing the creation of a centralized modern nation state. But when it comes to the origins of monogamy in the West, Henrich takes away any intentionality and rational decision making from Europeans.

Interestingly enough, Henrich wrote a 60+ page affidavit for the Supreme Court of British Columbia under the title “Polygyny in Cross Cultural Perspective: Theory and Implications” (2010). He not only made a powerful case against the legalization of polygyny today, but suggested that monogamy was intentionally invented by the ancient Greeks. “Greek city states first legally instituted monogamy as part of many different reforms, including elements of democratic governance, which were meant to build egalitarian social solidarity among their

¹¹ It should be noted that polygyny is still common in sub-Saharan Africa, and that African-American men, more than any other racial group, often sire many children by different women.

citizenries.” He also stated in this affidavit that the Romans consciously mandated monogamy as a way of strengthening social solidarity and functionality. During the reign of the first Roman emperor, Augustus (27 BC – AD 14), a series of reforms were implemented to discourage serial monogamy and concubinage, to make divorce a legal process, and to restrict extra-marital relationships to women who were registered prostitutes.

In making these claims, Henrich relied primarily on two articles by Kevin MacDonald (1990, 1995), referencing him a total of 7 times. Why did Henrich abandon this earlier view to argue that monogamy was created “inadvertently” by a Church obsessed with the natural sexual drives of humans? Perhaps this is a reflection of the existence of more primary documentation showing that the Catholic Church did indeed promote monogamy, and of the fact that there are actual Christians living today for Henrich to conduct experimental surveys to determine their views about family morals – whereas the primary evidence about Greek and Roman family views is scantier and less reliable. There are no Greeks and Romans today with a psychology that resembles the mindset of the ancients to conduct surveys. I would also say that Henrich likely wanted a view in which the Church acted “inadvertently” in order to take away from Europeans (in our age of multicultural equality) any normative responsibility for creating a far superior, trustworthy, honest, and rational culture.

Henrich was correct to rely on MacDonald’s work, though unlike MacDonald’s observation that the presence of monogamy among northern European hunter-gatherers was the original example of monogamous marriage, as a result of the scarcity of the ancestral environment to which they were adapted, I believe the Greeks were the first to consciously mandate monogamy as an institution that enhanced the solidarity of city-state members, not in response to environmental pressures or scarce resources.¹² In all polygynous societies, most men have only one wife. The issue is: Why was Greece the first culture to prohibit polygyny among high-status men economically able to give satisfaction to their evolved disposition for polygamy? The ancient Greeks originated monogamy out of their understanding that the polygamous practices of aristocratic clan leaders were detrimental to internal solidarity within the new WEIRD city-states they had created. They consciously opposed polygamy because it created a situation in which high-status men monopolized the bride market, expanded their clannish networks, deprived many men of marriage, and thus weakened the civic ties within the new city-states. What Henrich and MacDonald do not stress is that the city-state was a totally new institutional arrangement, a new way of grouping humans on the basis of the reason-based

¹² Below I return to MacDonald’s argument.

concept of “citizen” in opposition to the traditional norm that membership depended on lineage and tribal origin.

Before the creation of city-states and the rise of family farms after 700 BC, aristocratic men with their military retinues, clannish relationships, and large landholdings were the main competitors for the allegiance of the local population. It was Solon (640–560 BC) who took the first legalistic steps to create a new civic identity centered around membership in the city state of Athens, rather than the older clannish alliances that we read about in Homer’s *Iliad*. Solon opposed the endless squabbles of aristocrats with their private retinues in the name of a new ideal of good order and harmony between men. He was against the kin-based ingroup norms of the aristocrats. Solon wanted a legal code applied equally to all male citizens. And he recognized the indispensable contribution to the harmony of the city state of non-aristocratic yet independent family farmers who worked incredibly hard to sustain the economic viability of the city-state. These free farmers were included as citizens (Hanson, 1999).

After Solon, Cleisthenes (b. late 570s BC) is said to have “dealt the fatal blow to Athenian tribalism by dissolving the traditional connections of clans entirely and creating in their place a remarkable system of 10 groupings that were artificial tribes” (Rensberger & Farquhar, 1995). These new groupings were called demes, and the members of these demes were identified as citizens regardless of kinship lineage. They were free, native-born males with the right to participate in the general assembly of the Athenian city-state and in local assemblies of each deme. The laws that these assemblies passed were not customary but based on open discussion by Athenians as members of a political order relatively freed from tribal groupings.

By culturally mandating monogamy, and forcing high-status men to focus on their families as members of city-states rather than polygamous kin groups, the ancient Greeks created highly competitive societies.¹³ Henrich’s argument about the indispensable role of the Church’s family program would have carried a lot more weight if he had acknowledged the prior existence of monogamy in the Greco-Roman world while arguing that polygynous marriages were common among the wealthy leaders of the Germanic tribes that took Europe in the early Middle Ages, and that it was these kinship networks that the Church set out to abolish. Of course, this would have required an entirely new research project as to why the ancients were already monogamous.

¹³ I need hardly say that explaining the origins of Greek city-states, and republican institutions in Rome, as conscious efforts to overcome clannish politics, backed by monogamous families and weaker kinship groups, requires far more elaboration than is offered here.

The Protestant role, or mass African literacy versus highly literate European men

In Henrich's historical model, Protestantism plays a rather important role in heightening the emerging WEIRD traits of Europeans by encouraging the spread of literacy, which had deep effects on the neurological wiring of the brain.¹⁴ He

¹⁴ Henrich allows for other factors to play a role in the cultivation of WEIRD tendencies. He provides surveys which point to some psychological differences "within China and India" based on differences in the intensity of kinship resulting from ecological differences in types of farming. These variations are "relatively small compared to the impact" of the Church in Europe, which "nearly annihilated Europe's clans, kindreds, cousin marriage, polygamy, and inheritance norms". He wonders whether the "regions of northern Europe" "may have faced somewhat less resistance" against the Church's family program, and indeed whether "the rain-fed, wheat growing regions of northern Europe" engendered weaker kin-based ties. A fruitful line of research may have resulted from an examination of the extent to which the ecology of Greece selected for unique family-owned, privately held, small-to-medium homestead farms freed from wider kinship networks. Homestead family farms were exceptional to ancient Greece. In the ancient civilizations of the Near East, and the later civilizations of India, China and the Americas, the ruler and his court of blood relatives, administrators and provincial elites owned most of the land, huge estates, from which they extracted taxes and rents from slaves, serfs, indentured servants, or faceless peasants with tiny plots owned by clans. Victor Davis Hanson (1999) argues that Greece, roughly between 700 and 300 BC, saw the emergence of "an autonomous group of independent farmers" for the first time in human history. These independent farmers "were most definitely not peasants" since they "had a title to their small farms, enjoyed political rights as full citizens, took on the defense of their communities", and were responsible for the general Greek cultural characteristics of pragmatism, confidence in the middling classes, individualism, and self-reliance" (xiv). While one third to one half of the adult male population in most city states never became independent farmers, V.D. Hanson insists that the independent farmers were the ones who brought (at the beginning of the polis period) "a transformation in the mind, a radical change of attitude, as farmers learned to invest their efforts in the land in an entirely novel way." It was the yeomen farmers who brought an "alteration in the Greek mentality [which] involved a new ideology of work derived from land ownership...an idea that manual labor, time spent on the soil, was both intrinsically ennobling [in contrast] to the well-known aristocratic dislike of manual labor and widespread presence of chattel slavery" (p. 91). Having ownership and control over one's land encouraged individualism and free will in the sense that farmers were responsible for making their own decisions and initiating through trial-and-error new methods of farming. This legacy of free family farms was revived by the Romans, with similar effects on Roman culture, sustaining the rise of a republican form of government and a citizen army. Homestead family farms were also a key component of European medieval agriculture, and of modern Europe and of the

calls Protestantism “the WEIRDest religion” and estimates that it acted “like a booster shot for many of the WEIRD psychological patterns we have been examining throughout this book” (p. 418). He compiles experimental surveys showing that countries today “with Protestant majorities show even higher individualism, greater impersonal trust, and a stronger emphasis on creativity compared to majority Catholic countries” (p. 418). Protestants are likewise “less tied to their families”, less tolerant of those who do not consistently follow the impartial rules, and more inclined to trust and interact with strangers.

Evidence also shows that Protestantism induces people to work longer hours than is the case with Catholicism. Of course, Protestantism did not spring suddenly onto the historical scene but was anticipated by prior heterodox religious currents in the Middle Ages. Luther’s message spread fast because it “resonated deeply with important swaths” of a population that was already proto-WEIRD. The importance of Protestant literacy is high enough in Henrich’s explanation that he dedicates a “Prelude,” before Chapter 1, arguing that the Protestant spread of “high rates of literacy” brought about a fundamental alteration in the brains of Europeans (pp. 3-7). He cites research showing that the neurological wiring of the brain can be altered in a WEIRD analytical direction through the spread of literacy. In the development of reading skills, specialized areas of the brain are re-wired, “thickened”, “altered”, “broadened”, and “improved”. Without altering the “underlying genetic code,” literacy “changes people’s biology and psychology [...] their cognitive abilities in domains related to memory, visual processing, facial recognition, numerical exactness, and problem-solving”. “Literacy thus provides an example of how culture can change people’s biology independent of any genetic differences” (p. 17).

It is interesting that when Henrich writes about literacy it is always about “high literacy rates” or “mass literate societies”. He wants masses of people who can at least “read” a bit in order to talk about alterations in the brain and WEIRD profiles. He is not satisfied with a small elite of highly educated individuals who can also write excellent books. An industrial society requires mass literacy, but Europe did not need mass literacy to bring about the Renaissance in the 15th

settler states of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Only in Western history do we find the famous yeomen farmers who owned their own piece of land and fought in citizen armies. The image of yeomen farmers as honest, hardworking, virtuous and independent played a significant role in Western republican thought. The founding fathers of the United States, Thomas Jefferson and others, were of the view that the “yeoman farmers” were “the most valuable citizens”, the one segment of the population that could be trusted to be committed to republican values, as contrasted to financiers, bankers and industrialists with their “cesspools of corruption” in the cities.

century and modern science in the 16th and 17th centuries. Literacy only began to spread in the 16th century, as Henrich observes. Before this century, “never more than 10 percent of any society’s population could read, and usually the rates were much lower” (p. 7). Throughout the modern era, the most literate societies in the world were Protestant: the Netherlands, Britain, Sweden, and Germany. He supplies numbers showing that “literacy rates grew the fastest in countries where Protestantism was most deeply established” (10).

He zooms in on Prussia to show this was not a mere correlation: “counties with more Protestants had higher rates of literacy and more schools.” This “pattern prevails...when the effects of urbanization and demographics are held constant.” Why did Protestantism promote literacy? Henrich’s answer, again, reveals the belief that Christians (even the ones increasingly becoming WEIRD) could not possibly have acted intentionally and rationally in the promotion of literacy for its beneficial effects on the development of a Christian culture with individuals who legislate for themselves their own religious beliefs. He appears to be acknowledging this when he says that “embedded deep in Protestantism is the notion that individuals should develop a personal relationship with God and Jesus [and to] accomplish this both men and women need to read and interpret the sacred scriptures for themselves, and not rely primarily on the authority of supposed experts, priests, or institutional authorities like the Church” (p. 9).

In the end, however, the impression he wants to convey is that the irrational search for eternal salvation had the unintended consequence of promoting literacy, altering the neurology of the brain in a more analytical direction, raising the intelligence of the general population, and thus fueling the industrial revolution. But if the “European populations at the close of the Middle Ages were so susceptible to the unusually individualistic character of Protestant beliefs” because they had already become “proto-Weird”, why not argue that Protestants emphasized individual conscience as proto-intentional beings? Protestants were consciously for the liberation of the inwardness of individual believers from the unquestioned authority of priests and for the use of one’s own literacy to read the Bible against externally imposed interpretations. This emphasis on the right of private judgement reflected an independent and critical spirit. Henrich views all religious peoples as if they were on the same level of cognition in their common irrational belief in “ghosts”, “demons”, “spirits”, “angels”. This is why he has a hard time acknowledging WEIRD attributes of the very same religion he calls “the WEIRDest”.

There are additional flaws in his assessment of Protestantism. While Henrich is correct that we need “high rates of literacy” to operate an industrial economy, we don’t need it for major intellectual-cultural revolutions. He himself notes in passing that “only about 1 percent of the German-speaking population

was...literate” when Luther began the epoch-making Reformation (p. 9). Henrich’s criterion for what constitutes “literacy” is very low, merely the ability to read. Why would a population of semi-literate Africans be more important than a highly literate elite capable of reading and writing extensively, as was the case in ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy, and Shakespeare’s Britain?

As it is, Henrich is not accurate when he says that before the 16th century the literacy rate was “never more than 10 percent of any society’s population”. One of the most thorough studies of literacy in ancient Greece concludes that “the great majority of Athenian citizens” in the 5th and 4th centuries BC could read and write (Harvey, 1966). These were male citizens, to be sure. Oswyn Murray says that in the period 750-650 BC “writing became widespread in Greece” (Murray, 1980). More conservative estimates tell us that in the ancient Greek-Roman world at large it was “very improbable” that the level of literacy “was above 10%, or 25%, or 50%”. This same source says that in the major cities of the Hellenistic world the literacy rate was around 20 to 30 percent of the population (Harris, 1989). This is relatively high considering that in Protestant England in the period 1580-1700, as noted in this conservative study, “far fewer than 20 percent of adults could read and write”. Why not talk about alterations in the brain in reference to the highly literate male adult population of ancient Greece?¹⁵

Lack of attention to the high intellectual achievements of Europeans is a trademark of Henrich’s book. He never ponders over the question why Aristotle, an ancient thinker from a supposedly kin-based culture, remained the most influential thinker through the entire medieval period, unsurpassed in his logical writings until the nineteenth century. Aristotle argued that truth can only arise if the mind frees itself from particular contexts and learns to provide reasons or philosophical explanations based on abstract-analytical categories (substance, quantity, quality, relationship, place, time, state) for why something is so. Aristotle

¹⁵ Havelock (1963) proposes that the “invention of alphabetic writing” in ancient Greece encouraged a form of consciousness in which pronouns are used, “both personal and reflexive...in new syntactic contexts...as objects of verbs of cognition, or placed in antithesis to the ‘body’...in which the ‘ego’ was thought as residing” (p. 198). With alphabetic writing, the ‘I’ as the authorial agent of his own ideas became the norm, together with prose writing without any metrical (or rhyming) structure, but aiming at analytical precision and open argumentation. Havelock also suggested that, in contrast to oral cultures, which are preoccupied with “formulaic directives” and the transmission of immemorial norms through incantation and repetition, the written word encouraged a reading wherein the text (existing independently of the reader) could be studied, underlined and analyzed, not merely memorized and recited as sacred oral tales, but as accounts which could be subjected to endless questioning. The Greeks, let it be noted, invented prose writing (Goldhill, 2002).

called a “good syllogism” a statement that had nothing to do with a context but depended for its truth only on how the terms were formally related to each other.

The translations of Aristotle’s *Categories* and *On Interpretation* had already been accomplished by Boethius in 510–12 before the alleged creation of WEIRD Europeans by the Catholic Church. Boethius transmitted to Europe, before the full recovery of Aristotle’s work in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the analytical art of “classifying the objects external to the mind” (Southern, 1953: 175-180). He taught how to think analytically with “the terms genus and species, differentia, property and accident, and to apply these conceptions in argument and discussion”. Amazingly, Henrich mentions Aristotle only in passing to say that “the impact of a WEIRD psychology” in science in the sixteenth century was evident in the realization that “the great ancient sages, like Aristotle, could be wrong”.

This is very misleading. While Aristotle’s ideas about motion were superseded, the geometry of Euclid, which systematically organized together everything that was known in the ancient Greek world, famously known for its axioms, definitions and theorems, exercised an indispensable influence on the rationalistic methods of modern science. The geometry of Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* was Euclidean. Newton called his famous laws of motion ‘axioms’ and deduced his law of gravitation in the form of two mathematical theorems. Nor can we ignore the WEIRD contributions of the scientists of the Hellenistic era, not just Euclid’s geometry (300 BC), but scientists such as Eratosthenes (276-195 BC), who measured the distance between the Sun and the Earth, and the size of the Earth quite accurately; and Archimedes (287-212 BC), who laid the foundations of hydrostatics and statics, and explained the principle of the lever; and Ptolemy, who introduced the WEIRD principles of Euclid to mapmaking, depicting with geometric consistency a curved surface (of the globe) on a flat surface (a map) using a gridwork of latitudes and longitudes, and thus laying the foundations for the science of cartography (Russo, 2004).¹⁶

¹⁶ Henrich’s observation that universities trained lawyers to think in a WEIRD manner “in the wake of the rediscovery of the Justinian Code of Roman civil law in the 11th century” can’t explain why a Justinian Code written in sixth century Byzantium became so useful for the WEIRD development of voluntary associations in Europe. Since the Justinian Code was based on Roman law, the question is: How did Romans (with their supposedly non-WEIRD psychology) develop a legal system characterized by a high degree of logical consistency in the classification of different types of law, the definition of terms, the formulation of specific rules, and in the way questions and answers from jurists were systematically collected?

Henrich's new insights on the industrial divergence of Europe

Nevertheless, we can't overestimate the power of Henrich's focus on kinship institutions and norms and his emphasis on the emergence of a new persona in the rise of the West. The concept of WEIRD individuals driving Europe's economic changes from the Middle Ages right into the industrial revolution is very enlightening. He seriously challenges the currently popular multiculturalist argument that as late as 1750 China/Asia was more advanced economically than Europe with its highly productive agriculture and its extensive international networks of trade and larger urban centers. What matters is not the size of urban centers and international trade networks per se, but whether these markets were based on principles of fairness and trust, impersonal forms of credit, insurance, and long-term agreements, rather than on "interpersonal relationships and kin-based institutions". Market networks in Asia and the Islamic world remained rooted in a "different cultural psychology and family organization". The Asian markets were ultimately controlled by large extended families, clan ties, and interpersonal agreements.

With the imposition of the Church's family program, Europeans were increasingly able to break away from kin-based relations and norms, choose their own business partners, move freely into newly created chartered towns with their professional guilds, and expand market networks with anonymous strangers across the world. Much has been made of Marco Polo's excitement over the larger urban centers in China, but Henrich effectively shows that the rate of urbanization in Europe was accelerating from 1000 to 1800 where the number of people living in cities of over 10,000 increased 20 times, whereas China's urbanization rate "remained relatively constant" (p. 309). The freeing of individuals from kinship ties resulted in a sustained rise in residential and relational mobility across Europe. While the cities of Asia remained structured by kin-based relationships, the chartered towns of Europe were a new phenomenon in history, based on representative institutions and open to people from all walks of life.

Henrich provides data showing that those urban centers that were exposed to the Church's family program (due to the presence of nearby bishoprics) grew and developed representative forms of government faster. The inhabitants of these chartered towns, the merchants, artisans, and shopkeepers, were not "enmeshed in patrilineal, polygynous clans". Therefore, their success did not depend on kin-based connections, but on "their reputation for impartial honesty and fairness, and on their industriousness, patience, precision, and punctuality" (p. 317). In kin-based cultures, the occupational choices of individuals are strongly set by families, clans, or ethnic groups. In the emerging WEIRD cultures of medieval Europe, where one finds an increasing number of individuals seeking

to join voluntary associations, guilds, cities, apprenticeships, business partnerships, individuals had to “sell themselves” by emphasizing their personal abilities and attributes. Personal family connections, as they do today, remained important, but personal success was heavily dependent on one’s reputation in a world of strangers. Having a reputation as a hard and reliable worker with the proper specialized talents, personality, and aptitudes to do the job became crucial.

The field of economic history has produced many excellent scholarly contributions on the factors that led Europe to become the first industrial civilization. But these studies have faced numerous quandaries and impasses on a wide variety of pertinent subjects. For example, why did Europeans become obsessed with punctuality in the Middle Ages, inventing mechanical clocks long before industrial capitalist businesses would impose their disciplinary pace of work and assembly line? (Cipolla, 1967; Landes, 1983). Why were so many Cistercian monasteries founded before 1300, long before the rise of the Protestant work ethic, emphasizing hard work and self-discipline?¹⁷ Why did Western Europe see a steady decline in interest rates, below 5 percent in England and Holland before the Industrial Revolution, compared to the otherwise advanced economies of Asia where rates tended to average between 25 and 50 percent?

The flaw in all prior answers, Henrich explains, lay in the assumption among economic historians that the psychology of economic actors throughout the world was fixed and generic. Rather than focusing on how low interest rates reflect a people’s willingness to delay gratification, economic historians looked to a whole range of factors affecting the risk of lending, or at the ways new credit banks eased the lending of money. Similarly, when trying to explain the rapid spread of mechanical clocks they looked at the demands of capitalism for punctuality, rather than at the underlying psychological importance WEIRD people attach to spending time productively and cultivating a reputation for punctuality and reliability. It was the emerging WEIRD psychology of Europeans that prompted them to create a new type of capitalism based on this new psychology. China had developed mechanical water clocks, but these remained mere “showpieces and curiosities” even though this civilization had widespread markets. When true mechanical clocks from Europe arrived in the Islamic world, there was little interest in this culture where occupations were set by family ties, reputations were dependent on one’s adherence to kinship norms, and prayer times were based on the sun’s position.

¹⁷ On the Cistercian “entrepreneurial organization of capital”, “rational cost accounting”, and “inner-worldly asceticism” during the Middle Ages, see Randall Collins (1990).

One of the other consequences of the spread of WEIRD traits is that Europeans began to work longer and harder. Contrary to popular notions and images, Third World peoples have always worked far less than WEIRD Westerners. For some time now, a number of studies have shown that there was an “industrious revolution” (before the industrial revolution), led by a middling class with the workweek lengthened by 40 percent in London from the 1650s to the 1750s (De Vries, 1994). After 1800, people were working about 1,000 hours more per year, or about an extra 19 hours per week. The common explanation is that demographic pressures were forcing people to work longer. Population was increasing steadily through the eighteenth century, but studies now show that when one compares diverse societies, the men who are involved in the commercial sector tended to increase their weekly work time on average by about 5 hours. Henrich thus recognizes the role that the spread of markets had on psychology; however, what was going on in Europe was deeper than having the opportunity to buy newly available commercial goods: tea, sugar, coffee, pepper, nutmeg, and rum. People were also working more intensively because they had a different personality, a greater inclination to postpone gratification, a more clock-time mind set, and a wish to cultivate a reputation for self-discipline and punctuality.

In a chapter entitled “Escape Velocity”, Henrich brings up the incredible “innovation-driven economic and military expansion...of Europe after 1500” (p. 433). Those who prioritize genes and IQ believe that rising intelligence in England during the modern era was the driving factor behind the innovations leading to the industrial revolution. Possibly the best book proposing this argument is Gregory Clark’s *A Farewell to Alms* (2007). It argues that in the years 1250-1800 “economic success translated powerfully into reproductive success, with the richest individuals having more than twice the number of surviving children at death as the poorest” (Clark, 2007: 113). The result in the long run was that the more literate and intelligent members of British society “left twice as many children as the poorest.” While in the past the ruling aristocratic class was “barely reproducing itself” because the death rates from its professional pursuit of warfare were too high, the rise of an urbane, mercantile, and professionally minded elite, with many surviving children, brought a new situation in which the kind of people who survived and succeeded the most were those with the “smarter” genes and the middle-class values of hard work, patience, literacy and thrift.

This argument makes sense as far as it goes. But so does Henrich’s argument that we should not assume that inventions by lone geniuses automatically translate into the “successful diffusion and implementation” of technologies and widespread innovations in the economy. We should also not assume that lone geniuses were behind the major inventions and behind the

application of these inventions to industry and subsequent improvements (innovations) on these inventions. Henrich emphasizes instead the “growth of Europe’s collective brain” nourished by the spread of voluntary associations, charter cities and universities, knowledge societies and widespread publications, monasteries and apprenticeships. He provides very solid evidence showing that “the larger the population of engaged minds, the faster the rate of cumulative cultural evolution” (p. 436). The “larger the network of people learning or doing something, the more opportunities” there were for inventions and innovations/improvements in technology.

While this argument does not necessarily preclude Clark’s emphasis on rising average intelligence in modern Britain, it does challenge more directly Edward Dutton’s and Bruce Charlton’s thesis in *The Genius Famine* that geniuses were behind the industrial revolution in Europe (Dutton & Charlton, 2020). Henrich goes over a number of key innovations — the printing press, steam engine, spinning mule, vulcanized rubber, and incandescent light bulb — to show that multiple people interconnected with each other were developing the ideas associated with these innovations. He does not identify them as “inventions” because these innovations were “just novel recombinations of existing ideas, techniques...a tool taken from one domain and applied in another”. The collective brain of Europeans was expanded at an accelerating rate as individuals from all walks of life came together in voluntary associations “unconstrained by the bonds of kinship” with opportunities to become part of “sprawling networks of experts” in a wide variety of subjects and apprenticeships. Some of the salient points he makes are: The promotion of neolocal residence meant that newly married couples became head of their households at a young age, when people are “less risk-averse and less tied to tradition”. Monasteries, which diffused throughout Christendom independently of kinship groups, “carried with them the latest crops, agricultural techniques, production methods, and industries”. “The Cistercian Order, in particular, built a sprawling network of monastery factories that deployed the latest techniques for grinding wheat, casting iron, tanning hides, fulling cloth, and cultivating grapes” (442-446).

The “growing urban centers of the Middle Ages” were open to “residential-mobile artisans and craftsmen”. Cities expanded the collective brain of Europeans by bringing people with “different skills and areas of expertise to work on ideas and technologies together.” Data show that “four out of five apprentices were not sons of their master” in medieval guilds from the Netherlands. In 17th-century London, “the percentage of artisans trained by nonrelatives ranged from 72 to 93 percent”, whereas in India and China “almost all skilled artisans” were trained by a close family member. “More than three-quarters of the 4,000 masters” in Vienna in 1742 “had been born elsewhere” (p. 447). The number of people living in cities

of over 10,000 increased 20 times in Europe from 800 to 1800 whereas the urban population in China remained the same.

Evidence shows that “for each 10-fold increase in population size (from 10,000 to 100,000) there’s 13 times more innovation”, and it also shows that the collective brain of European nations expanded substantially from 1200 to 1900 as measured by the size of the urban areas and the interconnectedness of people (p. 451). The number of knowledge societies grew substantially after 1600, with analytically minded individuals networking through much of Europe via letters, books, pamphlets, technical manuals, and eventually scholarly journals and public libraries. The evidence shows a strong relationship between the number of knowledge societies in a region and the number of innovations. When talent was suppressed in one nation competing with another, say, the energetic and educated Protestant Huguenots in France, another nation open to Protestantism would welcome them to join their voluntary associations.

End of kinship norms = rise of ideological struggles and rise of WEIRD nationalism

Henrich presumes throughout that the end of kinship-imposed norms brought about an end to collectively-imposed norms resulting in a world of non-conformist individuals freely seeking the best means to achieve the highest returns according to impartial criteria. It is beyond his cognitive radar how the abolition of traditional institutions opened up a new ideological world where individuals, classes, religious groups, including ethnic-linguistic groups, would have the opportunity to push forth programs (including national-ism) on how their institutions and communities should be organized. The WEIRD modernization of Europe entailed the use of rational-impartial criteria wherein the validity of programs for reform came to be judged not only in terms of the economic interests and personal biases of the respective populations but also in terms of the reason-based arguments and evidential content given in support of these programs. The serious weakening of the monarchical order in Europe with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution of 1789 opened up an intense ideological struggle by a wide variety of WEIRD groups over what moral values, future orientation, and interests should underlie Western institutions. Many historians have identified the post-French Revolution period as “The Age of Ideology” — in reflection of the keen ideological struggles that ensued in the 1800s between Liberalism, Conservatism, Nationalism, Socialism, Marxism, Fascism and other isms (Schwarzmantel, 1997).¹⁸

¹⁸ According to Kenneth Minogue, with the end of the traditional order in post revolutionary France, an aggressive ideological style of practicing politics took over “always in terms

This should be a main take-away insight of Henrich's book: Ideological struggles are originally Western because they can only occur in societies where individuals can give reasons to a mass audience freed from tribal norms in support of their claims about how to construct a new social order. Because individuals come from many different backgrounds, with varying personalities and class interests, ethnic attachments and historical memories, including moral visions about the future, which are heavily influenced by contextual factors, there will always be different ideological claims with their own built-in reasons and forms of argumentation. No ideology can claim to embody strictly impartial and universal principles for humanity.

Henrich tends to assume that increasing WEIRDness is about "building broader social networks" across the world beyond xenophobic and irrational nation-states, leading to a globalized world where individuals act strictly on the basis of scientific criteria in a cooperative and harmonious way, with intergroup competition becoming a contest between market agents seeking the most rational means to maximize returns that translate (via the support of a managerial elite) into increased welfare of all. With the spread of affluent WEIRD states and harmonious "interfirm competition," he implies, the world will see an end to the still irrational ideological struggles of the post-French revolutionary era, with social scientists offering strictly impartial accounts based on coevolutionary gene-cultural principles. He can't see that advocating for cultural nationalism (for civic liberal principles and for a collective attachment to a nation's heritage, folkways, and historical memories) can be done in a WEIRD way (along with the interests and biases that come along with all ideological programs) by giving reasons for its beneficial effects, and by offering scientific evidence about how diversity destroys social trust and social capital.¹⁹ He can't see that it is possible to

of oppression, followed by struggle and leading to emancipation". These are the words of Martyn P. Thompson in the Foreword of Minogue's book, *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology* (ISI Books, 2008), who further says that "Marx was arguably the most thoughtful of all the innovators" in this ideological style, though there were many other advocates of different isms driven by the goal to emancipate humanity from the "shackles of false ideas by establishing and applying for the first time, a genuine 'science of ideas'" (x-xiii). Michael Oakeshott blamed this ideological style on modern rationalism's privileging of technical knowledge at the expense of traditional knowledge, authority, and prejudice. I tend to be a Hegelian in thinking we can judge the importance of hierarchy and white identity politics by the giving of reasons in their support through the social practice of open inquiry and critical argumentation.

¹⁹ The evidence that diversity reduces trust and participation in one's community while creating various social pathologies is now overwhelming. Despite the bias of academia for diversity, and the strong bias of research funding agencies, it keeps growing, though

rationality justify the soundness of traditional family values, hierarchy and limited democratic rights, on the grounds that these values are healthy for the progression of societies and the raising of children.

Unfortunately, open argumentation in Western universities about the merits and demerits of immigrant diversity, or traditional family norms, is very difficult to conduct in a liberal open manner. The officially declared mission of almost every university in the West, including Harvard where Henrich works, is to promote “diversity, inclusiveness and equity” — as if the merits of these values were already proven beyond further thinking. It was likely within this ideological atmosphere that Henrich decided (for the first time in his career) to publish an article (2021) extolling the benefits of mass immigration a few months after the publication of *The WEIRDest People*.²⁰ This atmosphere may also explain why he sidesteps how WEIRD Europeans were able to conceptualize themselves as members of nation-states in terms of broader identities such as language, religion, common history, and ethnic ancestry — in the degree to which they were freed from kinship tribalism. The identification of the peoples of the world within clearly demarcated nation states, in combination with liberal legal codes that recognize the equal rights of everyone including minorities, was indeed one of the greatest accomplishments of WEIRD Europeans, comparable to the creation of the polis in ancient Greece. Without this identification, humans would have been forever bickering with each other along kinship and tribal lines. According to Steven Pinker’s research (2011), the rates of violence experienced by tribal and nonstate societies were much higher than they were after 1600 when nation

barely anyone talks about it, including Henrich, who prefers to repeat what he hears from the globohomo establishment. While many are familiar with Robert D. Putnam’s extensive research on the downside of diversity, they are unaware of recent studies showing that increasing cultural and racial diversity beyond a certain proportion of the population eventually brings more harm than benefits to the host population. Keep in mind that many of the following studies are 10 to 20 years old, when immigrant diversity was just accelerating in Europe, and its downside was not as palpable: Costa & Kahn (2003); Delhey & Newton (2005); Dinesen & Sønderskov (2016); Dinesen, Schaeffer & Sønderskov (2020); Fieldhouse & Cutts (2010); Hooghe et al. (2009); Lancee & Dronkers (2011); Öberg, Oskarsson & Svensson (2011); Rice & Steele (2001); Ziller, 2015).

²⁰ He declared in a PBS interview last year that “Every time you turn up immigration you turn up innovation” (<https://twitter.com/Margarise/status/1324155603590156289>). I suspect this was a calculated move to counter potential criticisms that he was a “Western cultural supremacist” in arguing that Europeans became affluent due to their personality traits for honesty, punctuality, lack of nepotism, and fairness, rather than the colonial exploitation of nonwhites, which is the standard explanation in academia.

states were consolidated in Europe. Despite mass atrocities inflicted by nation-states in the 20th century, the rates of violent death during this century, particularly after the 1950s, were clearly lower than at any previous time in history.

Prior to the centralization of power by monarchs in the late medieval and early modern era, the authority to wage war, to tax the population, to administer and enforce the law, were personally owned, hereditary rights of a feudal class with patrimonial/tribal authority. Patrimonialism is a form of authority that retains aspects of the old patriarchal kin-based rule centered on extended family lineages, with the difference that it projects the rule of the patriarch onto a broader segment of the population atop kin-based relations. With the rise of absolutism in the 17th century, the ruler came to justify his right to complete sovereignty over a territory on the basis of divine and natural law, with kin-based norms playing a minimal role. It was argued that a sovereign ruler had a right to monopolize all power and justice away from private feudal families because that is the rational way by which God ordained all creation to be ordered, for the purpose of achieving the common good and the peaceful coexistence of people within a territory.

During the late 18th and 19th centuries, the idea came to prevail that the right of the government to rule comes from the people who inhabit the territorial state, and that a legitimate national state presupposes a territory that is made up of people who actually have a common ethnic lineage as well as a culturally constructed civic identity. While the formation of absolutist states and modern nation states had eliminated intra-group feudal warfare, it certainly did not eliminate inter-state competition and power struggles. But with the spread of the idea that the territories of a nation are justifiable only on the basis of common ethno-cultural identities and the representative consent of the governed, equality under the law and equal rights for all citizens, the notion of national self-determination spread, with the result that empires were dissolved, many new European nation states were created by formerly suppressed ethnic minorities, and the League of Nations was born to ensure the self-determination and peaceful coexistence of all peoples.

The reality of WWII, however, brought this humanitarian ideal to an end. It showed that nationalism is an ideology like any other ideology driven by ethnic interests, personal biases, and aggrandizing peoples, rather than driven solely by reason-based arguments about the “right of national self-determination” and the importance to ethnic groups of a homeland where they can protect their heritage and interests. The persistence of disputes over the legitimate ethnic borders of European peoples, the determination of the highly powerful Germanic peoples to unify themselves within one nation state, and particularly the attempts by the National Socialists to conquer lands with non-Germanic peoples, resulted in the

complete discrediting of ethnic nationalism, leading to the prevalence of the idea that Western nations should only have a civic identity.

For some time, up until the 1960s, when White-only immigration policies prevailed in the West, it was commonly believed among the liberal-minded nations of the West that they could have both a civic-liberal and a broadly Christian and ethnic identity. But with the rise of hostile globalist elites and the ascendancy of cultural Marxism, the notion of a strong cultural identity among Europeans (in Canada, Australia, and the United States) came to be equated with “racial supremacy”—even when these nations came to recognize the equal rights of minorities in a state of peaceful interstate economic competition. Today, the idea of civic nationalism based on Western liberal values alone without much emphasis on cultural heritage has also been discredited. Multiculturalism took over, the borders of European nation states were set wide open, and the ideology of liberalism came to be identified with the elimination of European identities and the promotion of immigrant-based race mixing.

Henrich wants us to believe that WEIRD Europeans never created ethnic nation states with strong civic-liberal identities. We are supposed to believe that WEIRDness inevitably leads to the dissolution of national identities, a process of “residential mobility” across national borders, and a scaling up involving global companies manned by WEIRD creatures from all over the world. We already examined Henrich’s argument about how intergroup competition has been “the driving force in societal evolution”. In the course of history, those groups that managed to scale up their cooperation beyond bands, clans, and tribes have been the most successful and the ones driving up societal complexity and evolution.

Henrich ignores the role of culturally constructed ethnic-liberal identities in the formation of nation-states. The terms “ethnic group” or “ethnicity” remain unexamined. He writes a lot about clans and tribes without addressing the ways in which ancestry, a common ethno-linguistic heritage, similar cultural and religious symbols, played a role in the scaling up process and the formation of larger national groups. This absence weakens his analysis of the types of groups Europeans created after their kinship networks were dissolved. We are supposed to think that, as individuals were freed from kinship ties, they went on to create voluntary associations based on impersonal norms without any sense of their broader ethno-cultural identities other than the new identities they forged with “strangers” as members of these associations. It is true that universities, monasteries, guilds, and cities were not based on kinship ties and obligations, but included individuals from a variety of backgrounds. It is also true, nevertheless, that the abolition of kinship groups opened the door to the construction of broader national identities. Henrich does say in passing that warfare had the effect of

scaling up cooperation among WEIRD Europeans at the level of “national institutions” and promoting “national identities” and that the Hundred Years’ War “made the English more ‘English’ and the French more ‘French’” (p. 339).

While in the non-Western world warfare promoted a scaling up process that remained anchored in kin-based groups and interpersonal networks, in the proto-WEIRD world of medieval Europe warfare had the effect of promoting “national identities”. But rather than focusing on these national identities, Henrich’s statistical focus is entirely on the proliferation of voluntary associations. “Nation-states” and “nationalism” do not appear in the index. He links the growth of these voluntary associations to the psychological effects of war without really linking the formation of ethno-linguistic nation states to warfare. His aim is to demonstrate that intergroup competition in the West was increasingly “domesticated” away from warfare into peaceful competition among voluntary groups consisting of individuals unattached to any ethnic or national-level group. Rather than focusing on the rise of centralized nation states in the modern era, he provides evidence showing that the percentage of Western people who think that “most people can be trusted” has been increasing in recent years with the deregulation of banks “spurred by the arrival of ATMs, banking, and new credit-scoring systems”.

The extensive research of Anthony Smith, the most prolific scholar on the origins of nation states and nationalism, has confirmed that the modern states of Europe were more than the “imagined communities” or “invented traditions” that Hans Kohn, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson wrote about (Duchesne, 2015). Nation-level infrastructures, official languages, centralized systems of taxation, national currencies and unified laws were culturally constructed by elites seeking powerful territorial states with mass appeal on the basis of actual ancestral ties and territorial roots. As Smith argued in his book, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, modern nations were not created ex nihilo on the basis of modern techniques and civic values alone, but also on the basis of “myths, memories, symbols, embodied in customs and traditions” by “fairly homogeneous ethnies” (Smith, 1991). The minorities that did not identify with the core ethnic group did so in reflection of their own distinctive sense of ancestry, language, and overall cultural identity. Immigrant multiculturalism, not Western nationalism, is encouraging non-white tribal identities in the West and creating post-nations characterized by declining punctuality,²¹ declining professionalism, declining impartiality, declining trust, combined with rising in-group non-white favoritism and nepotism.

²¹ A new attack on Western culture is that “the standards of professionalism...are heavily defined by white supremacy culture” (Gray, 2019).

Europeans are the true cultural species

The last chapter of Henrich's book is entitled "The Dark Matter of History", a metaphor from the world of physics. Physicists believe that dark matter accounts for approximately 85% of the matter in the universe, although they can't see this matter directly. They can only describe its nature on the basis of shadows attributed to it without observing its source. In using this term, he is implying that the WEIRD psychology of Westerners is the "dark matter" that lies beneath their unique historical trajectory. This psychology was undetected, or never uniquely attributed to Westerners as such, because social scientists were trained to believe that the psychological dispositions of the world's peoples were the same. But Henrich has now revealed for us the WEIRDness of Westerners, and has proposed how they came to acquire this psychology, which should raise the question: if he has brought so much light upon the perennial subject of Western uniqueness, and if this psychology entails free will, intentionality and reason-based institutional arrangements, why identify this psychology as the "dark matter that flows behind the scenes throughout history"? His implied answer is that Westerners have been unaware of their culturally evolved WEIRD history until his book came out. In the same way that scientists have explained for us the underlying laws of motion of the physical world, Henrich is suggesting he has revealed the hidden factor shaping the course of modern Western history.

There is a fundamental difference in awareness about the origins and nature of one's society between non-WEIRD peoples who create institutions by following norms closely tied to the evolutionary imperatives of kinship, and WEIRD people who create voluntary institutions freely adjudicated by them on the basis of relatively impartial principles over and above the evolutionary mandates of kinship. Don't get distracted by Henrich's use of the words "culturally-mandated" when he writes about kin-based norms and practices, cousin marriage, patrilocal residence, and ancestor worship. These practices, to be sure, were culturally mandated and transmitted through learning from generation to generation, for humans don't act according to instincts alone. We should not underestimate, however, the contrast between kinship-based norms and the culturally-mandated norms of Western societies conceptualized in a state of relative mental independence from age-old customs and biologically determined sexual impulses. The Western norm of monogamy, which stood in opposition to the genetic-biological predisposition of high-status males for polygynous marriages, was unnatural and strictly cultural. Henrich can thus be confusing when he writes about the "cultural learning" of the "human species" as such, in abeyance of his own thesis about the cultural WEIRDness of Whites. The influence of free deliberation and the role of reason in history increases in the degree to which

humans have the opportunity to choose their own normative paths in life rather than following customs set in stone without reflexivity.²²

Europeans were the only people to become aware of the downside of kinship ties, proposing new norms based on impartial criteria, consciously creating nuclear families as superior over polygamous-cousin marriages to the well-being of children; and constructing broader identities based on liberal citizenship and ethnic ancestry above clannish/tribal natural bonds. We can therefore say that they abolished the blind control of biologically based customs over their social relationships. Henrich knows that Europeans were unique in creating institutions based on rational grounds and individual choice. And yet he believes that European free rational deliberation did not play an autonomous role in the making of the very WEIRD West that is identified with free choice and rationality. The WEIRD rationality employed by Henrich to understand history is that of the third-person point of view, which is typical of the omniscient scientist, the neutral observer who understands the historical subjects he is explaining while the historical subjects don't know what they are doing but behave pretty much like inanimate objects or sentient but unconscious beings without self-chosen purposes.²³

²² As John Stuart Mill observed (1956: 71) “The human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminate feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom makes no choice...If the grounds of an opinion are not conclusive to the person's own reason, his reason cannot be strengthened, but is likely to be weakened...He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision.”

²³ Evolutionary psychologists are very good at explaining “cultural universals”, answering why certain cultural practices, patterns, traits, or institutions are common to all cultures. But they have a hard time explaining why humans, once the necessities of survival are met, spend so much time and resources on cultural activities with no overt Darwinian purpose: philosophy, music, and dance. Darwinian explanations, it seems to me, become weaker when we examine the highest expressions of these cultural universals, not their common, basic levels. Why did the Greeks invent true competitive sports — the Olympic games — rather than the Egyptians or Mesopotamians (Miller, 1991)? Why are Europeans responsible for the invention of almost all forms of athletic competition (Bellis, 2019)? Evolutionists can speculate about the “adaptive” functions of dance and sports, but they don't have much to say about the evolutionary dimensions of each specific form of dance, or about the unparalleled history of Western choreographic notation (Guest, 1998). Predation and mating needs cannot account, on their own, for the incredible variety of classical musical compositions, and the fact that Europeans

His claim that Enlightenment intellectuals “positing grand theories [...] about constitutional governments, liberty, natural rights, progress, rationality, and science” (p. 398) were not responsible for the making of the modern West makes a lot of sense. The essential kernel of the ideas attributed to the Enlightenment were elaborated in the Middle Ages as these ideas became thinkable to a population that was becoming increasingly individualistic and WEIRD after the Church’s demolition of the strong kin-based institutions of the Germanic tribes that had taken over Europe. The ideals of liberalism were formulated gradually, long before the Enlightenment era. “By 1200”, as Henrich observes, there were incipient notions of natural rights “already in circulation”, articulated by Catholic scholars and lawyers during the so-called “Papal Revolution” of the twelfth century. Urban centers with charters offering citizens “legal protections, tax exemptions, property rights, mutual insurance, and freedom from conscription” proliferated during the medieval era. Lawyers trained in universities enjoying corporate autonomy formulated principles for individuals in a world with growing occupational specializations, and “increasingly focused on [individual] attributes, intentions, and dispositions” (p. 399).

It is hard to envision how anyone living in a kinship group, where everyone is a member of a collective group with a prescribed set of obligations, no matter how intelligent, would ever come up with the notion that individuals have “natural rights” as individuals. The notion that individuals have rights to life, liberty, and property would be unthinkable in societies where political power and privileges flow directly out of lineage ties, family descent, or the divine commands of religions rooted in kinship. It is likewise hard to envision how kin-based people would learn how to think analytically about properties like mass, electric charge, gravity, and geometrical points. Kinship-oriented people are deeply socialized to think in contextual terms about how objects fit within their overall world of interpersonal relations and in terms of the mythical/religious views sustaining these relationships. Liberal ideas with actual institutional consequences could spread only in an emerging world of individuals increasingly relying upon their

are responsible for all the greatest classical music. Only by reducing art forms to their lowest common denominator, in order thereby to delineate their supposed adaptive functions, as Steven Pinker does, can Darwinians handle high cultural accomplishments, without knowing why Europeans invented almost all the schools of painting in history, almost all the philosophical outlooks, and almost all the disciplinary fields taught in our universities, including the theory of genetics, which itself testifies to a high level of awareness about genetic determination and our ability to manipulate genes according to our own criteria (Pinker, 2010: 126).

own choices, interacting regularly with strangers in impersonal markets, and forming voluntary associations.

The question that needs answering is whether the Greek imposition of monogamy set them on their WEIRD rationalist history or whether this cultural imposition was instead a product of a psychology that was already latently WEIRD. And if the Greeks were already latently WEIRD, why? MacDonald believes that the origins of the monogamous family system of Europeans should be traced back to the “harsh evolutionary pressures of the Ice Age”. This environment selected for smaller family groups in relative social isolation, as contrasted to the “extended kinship networks and collectivist groups” that were typical in the non-Western world. In the north-western climes of Europe there were strong selective pressures for males to provision simple households or nuclear families characterized by monogamy, exogamy and bilateral kinship, because the ecology and availability of resources could not have selected for large polygynous families.

But MacDonald does not quite explain why monogamy was adopted in the southern environment of ancient Greece. We should also draw a distinction between the adoption of monogamy to cope with scarcity of resources, and evolutionary pressures from the reason-based prohibition of polygamy in ancient Greece among high-status men. The latter is an act of a true “cultural species”. It is not clear whether monogamy was invented prior to the ancient Greeks as a culturally mandated norm.²⁴ As I see it, the prehistorical Indo-Europeans were already latently WEIRD in their uniquely aristocratic warbands relatively

²⁴ The evolutionary psychologist Peter Frost (2020) cites and reinforces MacDonald's argument about the way the environment in northern Europe selected for weaker kinship ties, nuclearized monogamous families, late marriage, and a relatively high proportion of unmarried people. But Frost acknowledges that “as we go farther back in time, we have less data to work with” — for the period before the Church openly imposed its family program. The case for weaker kinship ties in northern Europe is, nevertheless, reasonably based on the principles of evolutionary theory. But it also stands to reason that, as chiefdoms emerged in northern/central Europe, among the Germanic tribes that brought Rome down and created the first medieval kingdoms, the tendency for polygamy kicked among men with plentiful resources. There's historical evidence for widespread polygamy in this era along with customary laws based on kinship. It is all relative, of course. The evidence also shows that prehistorical Indo-Europeans and Germanic peoples were more willing to extend interpersonal trust beyond close kin in the formation of contractual feudal relations.

independent of kinship ties and in their latently individualistic heroic ethos.²⁵ But this is an incredibly complex subject beyond the scope of this extended review. Let me conclude with some thoughts on the relationship between kinship and reason in ancient Greece.

The claims of kinship versus the claims of reason in ancient Greece

It would be a mistake to think that reason became self-authorizing, self-legislating, and self-grounding, as it was claimed to be in the Germanic world of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, the moment kinship relationships were weakened and monogamy was introduced in ancient Greece. The claims of kinship were still strong in ancient Greece. While different clans and tribes coalesced around city states after the eighth century BC, tribal groups with their own names and ancestral ties were still common, at the time of the first Presocratic philosophers.²⁶

Notwithstanding the imposition of monogamy during the time of Solon (630–560 BC), before the rise of Socratic philosophy (470–399 BC) there were no philosophers making rational claims about moral standards over and above the traditional norms prescribed by particular city-states, even though we find attempts in the Presocratics to formulate universal concepts about nature, that *nous* governs the world, that there is reason in the universe. Social practices and norms were accepted unreflectively as the way things were. Only after the consolidation of city-states, during the age of Socrates, do we see philosophical arguments about the universal meaning of friendship, courage, self-restraint, wisdom, justice. We witness philosophers conceptualizing reason-based standards by which to question the values of one's community. Socrates and Plato spoke about human life as it ought to be. However, these new ideals could not achieve much influence yet. Socrates was put to death. The sophist's argument that a view from nowhere was impossible, that all value judgments were relative to a particular community, and that there is no justice as such, was dominant among elite members. It is a very complicated cultural history. The contextual thinking of the Sophists was itself a product of a culture transcending its particular context with a capacity to reflect upon, and thus distance itself from, its own contextual thinking.

²⁵ Cotesta (2015) reinforces the argument I made in *Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (2011) that prostration was a custom widely practiced in non-Western cultures but not in the West for it was incompatible with the aristocratic libertarian spirit of Europeans.

²⁶ See Wikipedia for a list of ancient Greek tribes:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ancient_Greek_tribes

In the tragic drama of Aeschylus (525–455 BC) and Sophocles (497–406 BC), there were two incomparable conceptions of the good: the moral imperatives of kinship loyalty versus the moral imperatives of the city-state; and beyond the particularities of each city-state, the moral imperatives ascertained by reason as such. However, before the modern era, throughout the medieval era, reason still sought these imperatives in some cosmic order existing beyond time and outside subjective consciousness. Something outside man was in charge of dictating the moral precepts by which he should organize society. Only with the onset of the modern era, though with anticipations in the Christian principle of inner conscience, do we find an emphasis on the ultimate authority of thinking for oneself about what is to be decided as truthful, rather than appealing to some external cosmic order. Only in modern times do we find the principle, which begins with Descartes, that truth can only be ascertained by a subject who thinks freely and draws its truthfulness from within his own cognitive activity.

The ancient world and the medieval world were still far from this modern view. The ancient world remained caught between the moral imperative of kinship norms and the notion that reason could discover what was absolutely true through a process of intense education until one's mind learned to apprehend the nature of the cosmic moral order. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* we have a conflict between the rules of kinship vendetta and the orderly procedures and laws of the city-state, between the barbaric furies and vengeance of clans and the civilized self-restraint and balanced judgment of the city-state. In Sophocles' *Antigone* we have a conflict between the stubborn determination of Antigone to follow the immemorial claims of kinship, which required her to perform proper burial rites for her dead brother, in defiance of the edicts of the city-state that she should not perform burial rites because he had been accused of committing treason against the laws of the city-state.

Yet, for all this, and in time, the claims of reason would grow considerably in ancient times. Starting with the consolidation of city states and Solon's rule, and culminating in Plato and Aristotle, the Greeks would promote a whole new ideal of education, *paideia*, in which the emphasis was on what is best for the education of man as a man, what it means to be a good citizen, rather than what it means to perform one's kindred obligations, and what are the eternal standards of excellence rather than what constitutes excellence for a particular people (Jaeger, 1986).

Once the mind was discovered (Snell, 1953), and the highest intellects of the age began to rely on their reason, increasingly freed from the envelopment of

nature and kin-based prescriptions, reason became an agent in its own right.²⁷ Learning can be cumulative so long as humans realize that the logos of the world can be revealed to those who know their minds are the agents through which the rationality of the world can be grasped, which is possible only as humans become conscious of their consciousness. This started in ancient Greece long before the Catholic Church imposed its family program. Yehuda Elkana (1986) believes that the Axial Age breakthrough of classical Greece was all about the “emergence of second-order thinking”.

People in all cultures think. This is “first order thinking”. Thinking in a logical way, building things, going about one’s survival in a rational way is also first order thinking. The novelty of classical Greece was to introduce second order thinking, which is “thinking about thinking”. Elkana sees geometrical proofs as a “second-order idea par excellence” because this way of thinking seeks systematic justification for its claims, “a way to [rationally] convince the student rather than to supply the truth”. Although the pre-Socratics used logical reasoning and spoke about “increasingly transcendental entities” such as a higher mind, *nous*, as an intelligence ordering the universe, they did so, according to Elkana, in a dogmatic fashion, as rigid statements about the ultimate nature of reality without thinking reflexively about alternatives to their claims.

Second order thinking presupposes more than the negation of mythical authority and the proposal of cosmologies about the intelligibility of things. It presupposes acceptance of alternative ways of thinking about the world. The creation of the polis, Elkana says, was “one of the greatest cultural inventions of the Greeks” in putting speech and “free debate” as a “political power” replacing “brute force”. In the polis, political ideas were subjected to debate and public criticism; politics was no longer a matter of ritualistic words or formulaic statements. The polis, in other words, encouraged second order thinking. The Sophists introduced second-order thinking with their argumentative skills and their rhetorical ability to engage “opposing arguments”. Herodotus’ awareness that each culture possesses its own norms and modes of behavior was an example of second order thinking in anthropology.

Clearly, Elkana offers a mixed bag of impressions, from the rigorous proofs of geometry to the anthropological view that each culture has its own normative standards. I prefer the Hegelian idea that the discovery of the mind (which can be equated with the emergence of thinking about thinking) was the key to the Greek

²⁷ Academics enthralled with primitivism and tribal cultures, including the pagan world of Europe, against modernity, don’t realize how undeveloped the mind was before humans discovered the faculty of reasoning in separation from the surrounding world, their bodies, and mysterious forces (Duchesne, 2020).

Axial breakthrough.²⁸ Discovering the mind as a faculty in its own right, as the seat of reasoning, as the only entity in the universe that can examine itself and establish its claims through itself, freed from external determinations, is quintessentially what consciousness of consciousness means.

The pre-Socratics started this train of thinking about thinking. They started relying on reason to determine what was true rather than on external spirits, demons, myths, and accepted traditions. Relying on reason means standing above the ways of thinking of a particular culture. When the historian Herodotus recognized that each culture has its own norms and behaviors conforming to its own habitat, he was standing above the accepted claims of his own culture, and thus taking a universal stand, even though he suggested there were no universal standards.²⁹ It was for Socrates and then Plato to search for absolute standards. Plato sought these standards in the mind's apprehension of an eternal cosmic order. Although the Greeks discovered the mind, they saw this mind as a particular, imperfect expression of a cosmic mind, for they had not achieved full self-consciousness and could not realize that only the thinking self in a state of dialogue with others could be the highest authority in charge of conceptualizing the nature of things. This was the accomplishment of the modern age, and we can thank Henrich for emphasizing the indispensable role of the Catholic Church in demolishing (consciously, as I argue) the re-strengthened kinship ties brought onto the center of Western civilization by the Germanic tribes that conquered the Roman world.

²⁸ For a discussion of the Axial Age achievements of ancient Greece in comparison to the Axial civilizations of China, India, Israel and Persia, see Duchesne (2019).

²⁹ Herodotus was one of the first ethnographers in history (Skinner, 2012). In fact, the stark contrast Henrich draws between the analytical mind of Europeans and the contextual or holistic mind of non-WEIRD people is misleading. Westerners were the first to consciously argue for the validity of contextual thinking, to develop self-conscious philosophies and methodologies for the investigation of how thinking is mediated by historical time and social context. Pragmatism, hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, structuralism, postmodernism, phenomenology are some of the alternatives they articulated. The non-WEIRD "contextual" world did not develop a single methodology or self-conscious philosophy explaining what their contextual thinking was about. They were unconsciously contextual because they were enmeshed in their kinship groups (Duchesne, 2020-2021).

References

- Bellis, M. (2019). *The History of Sports, from Ancient Times to Modern Day*. ThoughtCo (May 25).
- Carneiro, R. (2012). The circumscription theory: A clarification, amplification, and reformulation. *Social Evolution & History* 11: 5-30.
- Chadwick, H. (2001). The early Christian community. In: J. McManners (ed.), *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*. Oxford Univ. Press.
- Cipolla, C. (1967). *Clocks and Culture 1300-1700*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Clark, G. (2007). *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World*. New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Cochran, G. & Harpending, H. (2009). *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution*. Basic Books.
- Colish, M. (1998). *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition 400-1400*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.
- Collins, R. (1990) *Weberian Sociological Theory*. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Costa, D. & Kahn, M. (2003). Civic Engagement and Community Heterogeneity: An Economist's Perspective. *Perspective on Politics* 1: 103-111.
- Cotesta, V. (2015). *King into Gods: How Prostration Shaped Eurasian Civilizations*. Leiden: Brill.
- Crossan, J. & Reed, J. (2004). *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom*. San Francisco: Harper.
- De Vries, J. (1994). The industrious revolution and the industrial revolution. *Journal of Economic History* 54: 249-270.
- Delhey, J. & Newton, K. (2005). Predicting cross-national levels of social trust: Global pattern or Nordic exceptionalism? *European Sociological Review* 21: 311-327.
- Diamond, J. (1997). *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Dinesen, P.T. & Sønderskov, K.M. (2016). *Does ethnic diversity in local residential areas erode trust in other people?* Carlsberg Foundation (February 5)
- Dinesen, P.T., Schaeffer, M. & Sønderskov, K.M. (2020). Ethnic diversity and social trust: A narrative and meta-analytical review. *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 441-465.
- Duchesne, R. (2011). *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*. Leiden: Brill.
- Duchesne, R. (2015). The Greek-Roman invention of civic identity versus the current demotion of European ethnicity. *Occidental Quarterly* 15(3): 37-71.

- Duchesne, R. (2019). The European idea of progress supersedes the Axial Age. *Occidental Quarterly* 19(3): 33-74.
- Duchesne, R. (2020). Jean Piaget and European formal operational cognition. *Occidental Quarterly* 20(1): 15-56.
- Duchesne, R. (2020-2021). The European transcendental mind stands above the Chinese embedded mind. *Occidental Quarterly* 20(4): 27-69.
- Duchesne, R. (2021-2022). An evolutionary perspective on Western civilization: Origins, moral nature, and prospects for the future. *Occidental Quarterly* 21(4).
- Dutton, E. & Charlton, B. (2020). *The Genius Famine: Why We Need Geniuses, Why They're Dying Out and Why We Must Rescue Them*. Univ. of Buckingham Press.
- Elkana, Y. (1986). The emergence of second-order thinking in classical Greece. In: S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*. SUNY Press.
- Fieldhouse, E. & Cutts, D. (2010). Does diversity damage social capital? A comparative study of neighbourhood diversity and social capital in the U.S. and Britain. *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 43: 289-318.
- Frost, P. (2020). The large society problem in Northwest Europe and East Asia. *Advances in Anthropology* 10: 214-234.
- Goldhill, S. (2002). *The Invention of Prose*. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Gray, A. (2019). The bias of 'professionalism' standards. *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (June 4)
- Greif, A. (2006). Family structure, institutions, and growth: The origins and implications of Western corporations. *American Economic Review* 96 (2): 308-312.
- Guest, A.H. (1998). *Choreo-Graphics: A Comparison of Dance Notation Systems from the Fifteenth Century to the Present*. New York: Gordon & Breach.
- Hanson, V.D. (1999). *The Other Greeks, the Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization*. California Univ. Press.
- Harper, K. (2013). *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*. Harvard Univ. Press.
- Harris, W.V. (1989). *Ancient Literacy*. Harvard Univ. Press.
- Hart, M. (2007). *Understanding History*. Washington Summit.
- Harvey, F.D. (1966). Literacy in the Athenian democracy. *Revue des Études Grecques* 79: 585-635.
- Hatch, E. (1895). *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*. London: C. Green & Son.
- Havelock, E. (1963). *Preface to Plato*. Belknap Press.

Hengel, M. (1974). *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*. Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press.

Henrich, J. (2010). *Polygyny in cross cultural perspective: Theory and implications*. <https://www.vancouverun.com/pdf/affidavit.pdf>

Henrich, J. (2015). *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smart*. Princeton Univ. Press.

Henrich, J. (2020). *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Henrich, J. (2021). Why immigration drives innovation. *Economics*: January 9. <https://economics.com/why-immigration-drives-innovation/>

Hooghe, M., Reeskens, T., Stolle, D. & Trappers, A. (2009). Ethnic diversity and generalized trust in Europe: A cross-national multilevel study. *Comparative Political Studies* 42: 198-223.

Jaeger, W. (1961). *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. Harvard Univ. Press.

Jaeger, W. (1986) [1939-1944]. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. Vol. 1: *Archaic Greece and the Mind of Athens*, Vol. 2: *In Search of the Divine Centre*, Vol. 3: *The Conflict of Ideals in the Age of Plato*. Oxford Univ. Press.

Lacy, W.K. (1968). *The Family in Classical Greece*. Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press.

Lancee, B. & Dronkers, J. (2011). Ethnic, religious and economic diversity in Dutch neighbourhoods: Explaining quality of contact with neighbours, trust in the neighbourhood and inter-ethnic trust. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37: 597-618.

Landes, D. (1983). *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*. Harvard Univ. Press.

Long, A.A. & Sedley, D.N. (1987). Free will. In: A.A. Long & D.M. Sedley (eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Vol. 1: *Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary*. Cambridge Univ. Press.

MacDonald, K. (1990). Mechanisms of sexual egalitarianism in Western Europe. *Ethology and Sociobiology* 11: 195-237.

MacDonald, K. (1995). The establishment and maintenance of socially imposed monogamy in Western Europe. *Politics and Life Sciences* 14(1): 3-23.

MacDonald, K. (2019). *Individualism and the Western Liberal Tradition: Evolutionary Origins, History, and Prospects for the Future*. Kindle Direct Publishing Edition.

MacDonald, K. (2021). Understanding Western uniqueness: A comment on Joseph Henrich's *The WEIRDest People in the World*. *Mankind Quarterly* 61: 723-766.

- McCullough, M. (2020). *The Kindness of Strangers: How a Selfish Ape Invented a New Moral Code*. Basic Books.
- Miles, M.R. (2005). *The Word Made Flesh. A History of Christian Thought*. Blackwell.
- Mill, J.S. (1956) [1859]. *On Liberty*. Macmillan.
- Miller, S.G. (1991). *Arete: Greek Sports from Ancient Sources*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Murray, O. (1980). *Early Greece*. Harvard Univ. Press.
- Öberg, P., Oskarsson, S. & Svensson, T. (2011). Similarity vs. homogeneity: Contextual effects in explaining trust. *European Political Science Review* 3: 345-369.
- Patterson, C. (2001). *The Family in Greek History*. Harvard Univ. Press.
- Peters, F.E. (1970). *The Harvest of Hellenism: A History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Pinker, S. (2010). Art and adaptation. In: B. Boyd, J. Carroll & J. Gottschall (eds.), *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.
- Pinker, S. (2011). *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Viking.
- Rensberger, B. & Farquhar, M. (1995). *The birth and death of democracy*. Washington Post (September 13).
- Rice, T. & Steele, B. (2001). White ethnic diversity and community attachment in small Iowa towns. *Social Science Quarterly* 82: 397-407.
- Russo, L. (2004). *The Forgotten Revolution: How Science Was Born in 300 BC and Why It Had to Be Reborn*. Springer.
- Saller, R.P. (1994). *Patriarchy, Property, and Death in the Roman Family*. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Scheidel, W. (2008). *Monogamy and polygyny in Greece, Rome, and world history*. Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics (June).
- Scheidel, W. (2009). A peculiar institution? Greco-Roman monogamy in global context. *History of the Family* 14: 280-291.
- Schwarzmantel, J. (1997). *The Age of Ideology: Political Ideologies from the American Revolution to Postmodern Times*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Siedentop, L. (2015). *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*. Penguin Books.
- Skinner, J.E. (2012). *The Invention of Greek Ethnography. From Homer to Herodotus*. Oxford Univ. Press.

DUCHESNE, R.

EUROPEANS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WEIRD

Smith, A.D. (1991). *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Snell, B. (1953). *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*. Harper & Row.

Southern, R.W. (1953). *The Making of the Middle Ages*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.

Trigger, B. (1993). The state-Church reconsidered. In: J.S. Henderson & P.J. Netherly (eds.), *Configurations of Power*. Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press.

Witte, J. (2015). *The Western Case for Monogamy over Polygamy*. Cambridge Univ. Press.

Wittfogel, K. (1957). *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. Yale Univ. Press.

Ziller, C. (2015). Ethnic diversity, economic and cultural contexts, and social trust: Cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence from European regions, 2002–2010. *Social Forces* 93: 1211-1240.