

Collections nonetheless represents a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding the decolonization and transformation of museums. Its insights are not only relevant to anthropology, they also extend to the fields of cultural studies, museology, and postcolonial studies. It facilitates interdisciplinary discourse and enhances comprehension of the multifaceted processes of decolonization. Despite some minor shortcomings, the book is a valuable resource for anyone engaged with the re-evaluation of colonial histories and the future of ethnological museums and its collections. The book provokes thought and encourages readers to become actively engaged with the significant changes that are required to create museums that are more equitable and inclusive. In conclusion, the book provides an exhaustive examination of the challenges and prospects that are inherent in the decolonization of ethnographic collections, offering invaluable insights into the role, responsibilities, and transformation of museums in the context of a postcolonial present.

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Henrich, Joseph: *The Weirdest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*.

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Joseph Henrich is a scholar of many trades: anthropologist, behavioral economist, and evolutionary and social psychologist. Currently at Harvard University, he has so far come to the attention of a wider public mainly for his 2016 book, *The Secret of Our Success*, on human cultural evolution. His latest work, *The Weirdest People in the World*, is something of an extension to *The Secret of Our Success*, as it zooms in on the special path the 'West' has taken over the last two millennia.

In his new book, Henrich calls himself and all other Westerners 'weird'. He claims that most studies in modern experimental psychology and behavioral economics suffer from a fundamental bias: they have mostly been carried out among young, educated,

relatively wealthy Western university students representing an urbanized elite. These study samples therefore lack adequate cross-cultural representation. Therefore, Henrich argues, while the majority of such studies claim to yield results about human psychology in general, they are, in fact, investigations of only a very limited segment of the world population. In other words, they are blind to the huge range of cross-cultural variation in psychological traits. Furthermore, when performed with representative global cross-cultural samples, many psychological tests and behavioral experiments, Henrich argues, show results in which Western populations end up on the extreme end of the statistical distribution. This makes the West psychologically 'weird', an adjective which he also uses as an acronym (W.E.I.R.D.) to denote Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic.

Starting from this observation, Henrich embarks on a journey across cultures and through time to investigate whether there are any causal connections between the observed psychological peculiarities of modern Western populations and the economic, political and military success of the West in, essentially, dominating large swathes of the globe over the last five hundred years or so. Unsurprisingly, Henrich's answer to this question is a clear 'yes'. What comes as a bigger surprise, though, is the time and place at which Henrich locates the root causes of why 'the West became psychologically peculiar and particularly prosperous': Henrich identifies them as developing in western Europe from about the 4th to 5th centuries AD onwards, i.e., commencing just around the transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. At that time and place, so the book's 'forensic' line of argument goes, the Western Church brought about what Henrich refers to as its Marriage and Family Program (MFP), a set of continuously evolving new regulations and edicts pertaining mainly to marriage and family planning. These directions included, among others, marriage regulations (especially strict prohibitions on cousin marriage), incest taboos, rules on inheritance, the dissolution of different types of large family (i.e. kin-based) organizations, a preference on neolocal post-marriage residence, relatively free selection of spouses as opposed to arranged marriages, and an evolving emphasis on monogamous nuclear families.

According to Henrich, these fundamental changes in the Western Church's dogmas on family and social structures catalyzed a set of intertwined transformations in the psychological traits of early medieval West European populations. These encompassed, among other things, stronger individualism (more emphasis on individual achievement and meritocratic values), elevated impersonal trust (as exercised, e.g., in big markets), stronger analytical thinking, a tendency towards social conformity, a predominance of feelings of guilt over feelings of shame, and a higher degree of moral judgement. This mix of psychological traits, Henrich argues, are the essential characteristics that make Western populations psychologically 'weird' when compared cross-culturally.

Through cascading effects, and enhanced by later transformations such as the Reformation and Enlightenment, these key ingredients of (early) medieval Western European psychologies led, Henrich explains, to the transition from traditional kinship-based social structures to pre-modern, 'proto-WEIRD' states. Among the most

important steps in this impact chain, Henrich lists accelerated urbanization, the proliferation of impersonal markets, the rise of voluntary associations (e.g., guilds and universities) and the inception of representative government and the rule of law. According to Henrich's analyses, all of these processes fundamentally shaped the WEIRD mindsets of Western populations so as to result ultimately in the accelerated economic growth, technological advance, scientific progress and global expansion of the West.

Henrich's central claim – tracing the West's success back to ecclesiastical family planning and social reforms during Carolingian times – is admittedly bold. At the same time, the evidence he presents to substantiate his postulate is likewise extensive: ethnographic case studies from all continents and a wealth of historiographical works are analytically integrated with an array of psychological and behavioral studies. The main tool Henrich employs for these analyses stems from the field of biocultural co-evolutionary processes, namely the theory of cumulative cultural evolution as developed by Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd. This approach proves useful for Henrich's endeavor to demonstrate how a group's culture impacts on the group members' individual psychological traits, as well as on their collective 'coevolved social psychologies'. Here, it would have been helpful for the reader to be given an explanatory excursion on how precisely, in the context of neural plasticity, a group's cultural traits are translated into individual and collective psychologies by being inscribed in people's neural circuits, especially as Henrich himself – employing an analogy from physics – states: 'The cultural evolution of psychology is the dark matter that flows behind the scenes throughout history' (p. 470).

Undoubtedly, Henrich's work constitutes an important contribution to cultural anthropology, Big History, comparative cross-cultural psychology, economic history, behavioral economics and other disciplines. Nevertheless, a few points around which the book may be challenged should be discussed briefly. The author himself issues multiple disclaimers to state that he does not intend to construct a 'West versus the rest' dichotomy. Nevertheless, given the overall approach of his study and the results reported, ending up with such a bipolarity appears to be an outcome he just cannot escape. Thus, critics will probably be quick in accusing him of some form of 'Occidentalism'.

Moreover, Henrich's usage of the terms 'the West' and 'WEIRD' does not seem entirely unproblematic. Of course, he plays with the double meaning of 'weird' as both an adjective and as an acronym. Sometimes, however, he uses WEIRD for historical populations predating the age of industrialized, rich democracies. Furthermore, in some passages, he uses 'Western' and 'WEIRD' interchangeably, which they clearly are not. How the 'Western world', 'Westerners' etc. ought to be defined remains rather vague. In this context, it should also be noted that the term 'the West' has been used historically in a broad range of meanings (see, e.g., Winkler 2009). Some commentators even go so far as to suggest that 'the West' is a political and cultural idea(l), rather than any fathomable entity existing in the real world.

A few historical periods do not receive sufficient attention in Henrich's broad sweep through history. For instance, the role the Renaissance – along with humanism – may

have played in the rise of the West remains unexplained. In a related matter, the deeper causes for why the Iberian powers Spain and Portugal initiated the West's global expansion, while England and other northwestern European powers were to follow with significant time lags, deserve further scrutiny.

Henrich argues his case with confidence – perhaps slightly too much. Notwithstanding the issue of what actually constitutes the 'West', its fuzzy nature and fleeting boundaries, the reasons for the West's global success have, of course, puzzled thinkers for a long time. Even the question of whether particular psychological characteristics and cultural values may have been a key driver for it is by no means new. It goes back at least to the work of Max Weber (1904–1905/1934). What is new about Henrich's contribution is the idea that the Western Church's implementation of new dogmas on marriage and the family in early medieval, Carolingian-era Western Europe fundamentally altered people's psychologies, thereby setting in motion a cataclysmic chain of effects that transformed European societies from traditional kin-based populations to pre-modern states – another problematic dichotomy.... This claim is as innovative as it is radical and is certainly worth considering. Nevertheless, given the complexities and intricacies of the centuries-long socio-cultural dynamics involved in the rise of the West, it appears unlikely that a set of social reforms initiated by the Western Church in early medieval times constitutes its sole cause. In all likelihood, structural preconditions, in conjunction with highly dynamic processes of cultural evolution and change prior to as well as following what Henrich claims to have been the key 'switch' in European history, will have been major factors too.

Fortunately, a range of other potential factors – whether they actually constituted root causes, co-drivers or contributing factors remains for future research to determine – have already been investigated by other scholars such as Jared M. Diamond (1997) and David S. Landes (1998). These two seminal books aptly frame Henrich's contribution in both time and space, with Diamond outlining the structures and preconditions of the natural environment that ultimately gave Europe the edge over other parts of the world, and Landes providing a global economic history that emphasizes how, in the long term, different cultures, ideologies and policy decisions determine a society's economic success. From studying Henrich in conjunction with Diamond and Landes, a comprehensive and complex picture of the West's ascent emerges. Of course, these three authors do not form an exclusive 'Holy Trinity': other studies ought to supplement and extend them. In addition to Max Weber's classic treatise and Heinrich August Winkler's four-volume *History of the West*, cited above, these should certainly include Wolfgang Reinhard's (2016) monumental history of European expansion, as well as Barry Cunliffe's (2015) Deep History narrative of Eurasia, leading up to the time where Henrich picks up the story.

While perhaps lying beyond the scope of the present book, some further reflections on the past trajectories, current state and potential future pathways of WEIRD psychologies would have been useful, for instance: Might the particular pathway the West took to rise to its late twentieth-century level of economic prosperity, techno-scientific

progress and military might be the only possible one? Put differently: Could the West have ascended to the peak of its global dominance without becoming psychologically WEIRD? Are WEIRD psychologies still an exclusive trait of Western populations? If not, when have they ceased to be so, and what are the processes involved in the ongoing mutual adaptation and hybridization of WEIRD and non-WEIRD psychologies? How can the resurgence of China and other non-Western powers be explained in respect to culturally evolved social psychologies? Is the half millennium-long global dominance of the West slowly coming to an end? Has its WEIRDness usurped the entire world?

Anthropologists, psychologists, historians and economists will be among those benefitting from Henrich's book, as will anyone wondering why, for some five hundred years, societies from the northwesternmost tip of the Eurasian landmass have come to exercise dominance over much of the globe. The inhabitants of Asia's 'appendix', together with their many far-flung overseas descendants have, weirdly enough, settled to call themselves 'the West'. Disputed though this term may be, Henrich offers us some fresh and challenging stimuli for contemplating the question 'Why the West?'. However, for more comprehensive and balanced insights into solving this riddle of cultural history, it seems indispensable to delve more deeply also into the contributions of other scholars such as those referred to above. Thus, Henrich's book forms just one piece in the highly complex and non-trivial puzzle of explaining the temporary (?) civilizational success of the West – nevertheless, it is a significant piece of the puzzle.

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