This book not only provides an insightful analysis of a highly innovative field of human–machine interaction, it also leaves us with a powerful conceptual tool to continue thinking about agency in human–technology interactions. I am looking forward to seeing the concept of *intraversions* applied in future research across a wide range of other fields of practice.

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Whitehouse, Harvey: Inheritance: The Evolutionary Origins of the Modern World. 358 pp. London: Hutchinson Heinemann, 2024. ISBN 978-1-529-15222-7

In this book, Harvey Whitehouse sets forth a tantalising proposition: that by learning how humanity has evolved, we might be able to use our natural biases to reduce friction among ourselves and with the environment we are a part of. Our current path, Whitehouse says, is like a herd stampeding towards a cliff: it is up to us if we end up falling or if we change course before it is too late. The content relating to the subtitle, the evolutionary origins of the modern world, is the basis on which his proposal is built. Only by knowing how we got here can we envision a way of using the same traits that brought us here to alter our direction. Whitehouse builds his ambitious argument as an anthropological jigsaw puzzle, not limited to a single site or society, but combining his own observations and studies from different corners of our world.

Weaving together insights from several decades of research that combines ethnographic observations with experiments, Whitehouse pieces together a *longue durée* portrait of our species' cultural evolution. He argues that three natural biases – which have been repeatedly observed in all human societies – explain our path up until now: conformism, religiosity and tribalism. He calls them natural biases because they describe deep-rooted cognitive needs to conform, to believe and to belong (p. 4). Conformism refers to how we avidly copy others in order to fit in or be accepted. Religiosity designates our inclination to acquire and spread ideas about supernatural beings, influences or meanings. Tribalism is a profound feeling of belonging to a group that may lead to a willingness to risk life and limb on battlefields. These three biases, Whitehouse argues, have enabled us to cooperate and function in increasingly large-scale societies.

The structure of the book develops the three biases in three different sections: the first explains the mechanics of the evolution of each bias; the second shows how each bias is relevant in our lives; and the third suggests potential adaptations that could improve our relations among ourselves and those with other species and our planet. Whitehouse also adds an epilogue to explain that the scale of our social world is of crucial importance, arguing that, having lived in megasocieties, with millions of in-

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habitants, humanity could now become a Teratribe, in which the billions now living on Earth would unite to address issues common to all.

In light of events of the last few months (as of March 2025), when neopopulist regimes around the world are seeking to divide rather than unite, such good wishes appear farther away than ever before. We appear to be entering a time of Big Man geopolitics where science is put in doubt as has not happened for a long time, and where raw power is exercised indiscriminately. Then again, this might be a phase that has been surmounted and laid behind us. In any case, it is refreshing to explore potential ways of using the same cognitive toolkit we have developed over millennia to seek solutions to some of our collective challenges.

This volume also offers insights into Whitehouse's unusual yet highly productive and provocative anthropological career. He describes this book as one of 'unnatural history' because it refers not only to the biological evolution of human psychology, but also, and crucially, to processes of cultural evolution. 'This is not a case of nature versus culture, but of understanding how the effects of nature and culture work together', he argues (p. 7). With first-hand descriptions of field research, collaborations and findings that helped inform each of his argumentative steps, Whitehouse explains his choices, doubts, findings and decisions along the way. Previously labelled 'cognitive anthropology', his work engages with experiments or quantitative studies that are perhaps closer to those of psychology or other disciplines. By insisting on an anthropological perspective, however, his inquiries pay close attention to how symbolism is lived in practice by examining people's interpretations, contexts, customs and actions. One of the tools he uses is the Global History Databank he set up at Oxford University, which is a massive collection of historical and ethnographic information.

With this wealth of data, Whitehouse depicts the necessary cultural evolutionary steps that have allowed humanity to live in increasingly larger and more interconnected groups. Each step was crucial to gain the upper hand in a particular moment in our evolution, and we now live with their accumulated legacies. One example is imitation or, as Whitehouse calls it, 'copycat culture'. In his view, humans copy the behaviour of others they deem older, wiser or more important. As he claims in his previous book, we are all ritual animals (Whitehouse 2021) and reproduce what others do in order to be accepted in their group. Of course, other animals also imitate behaviours that will provide them with food or other benefits. The difference is in what psychologists call 'overimitation', that is, 'the copying of behaviour that doesn't contribute to an end goal' (p. 29). As such practices add up, Whitehouse argues, conformism takes shape. But the type of conformism Whitehouse describes is not an extreme following-the-rules type, but rather a wish to belong in a group. Similar conceptual build-ups sustain the other two natural biases that are central to the volume.

Whitehouse illustrates each of his argumentative points with ethnographic vignettes of his own fieldwork, as well as experiments or observations. One of the experiments was among inmates in the UK participating in the Twinning Project, which aims to

twin every prison in England and Wales with their local professional football club to teach ex-offenders coaching skills that could help them after their release from prison (pp. 289-290). Set up as a collaboration, this study showed how routinised ritual practices helped shape future-mindedness and reduce impulsiveness among participants. These traits meant participants behaved better in prison and were less prone to join criminal groups. This is one of the cases where Whitehouse describes collaborations with former students and other scholars from different academic disciplines, explaining his aims, adjustments and findings at each stage. Such openness is refreshing, as it lays bare the difficult path of sociocultural research. A constant reference in his book is his own doctoral research in Papua New Guinea, alongside reflections of what he has learned in hindsight. This narrative style, interweaving his own experiences, observations and reflections with references to historical records, ethnographic literature, or experiments, adds credence and relevance to his own analyses.

A key element of Whitehouse's argument is that there is currently a ritualistic vacuum for collective ceremonies that are crucial for increasingly large societies. The rituals that Anderson identified as central to nation states' imagined communities (Anderson 2006) are only fragmentary and uneven across countries. In Whitehouse's view, large-scale religious rituals which provide a stronger symbolic glue to bring together people are lacking. A similar argument has been made by Seligman and Weller (2012) in their book about ambiguity. Seligman and Weller argue that modern systems have established such static criteria in bureaucratized rituals that they significantly reduce the much-needed ambiguities that have historically made life more manageable. What Whitehouse brings to this discussion is a formidable scaffolding of evidence that elucidates our own cultural evolution.

Whitehouse's proposal to extend our community to include not only all humans but also all natural beings seems extremely idealistic at the moment. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to reflect on our current predicaments in light of the conceptual scaffolding he provides. Could it be that new social media rituals with the mass concerted actions and reactions of millions of participants are filling in the gaps left by other symbolic institutions (mainly religions but also nation states)? But if this is the case, how could we break the vicious cycles of conspiracy-theory rabbit-holing? Are such practices not also reinforcing our natural biases towards conformism, religiosity and tribalism? Like many anthropologists, Whitehouse openly argues in favour of taking lessons from all walks of life or cultural settings. Perhaps by noticing how cycles of imitation and changing allegiances have occurred throughout human evolution, we could concert an effort to stop the destructive impulses of neopopulisms.

In any case, I highly recommend this book to anyone wishing to grasp a bird's eye view of human cultural evolution. As many have insisted beforehand, the best anthropology must take history into account. It is no coincidence that some of the brightest minds in our field have gifted us creative narratives of our species' path through the

ages, like David Graeber's *Debt* (2011), James Scott's *Against the grain* (2017) or Marshall Sahlins' *Apologies to Thucydides* (2004).

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Loyen, Ulrich van: Nachkriegsschamanismus. Beiträge zu einer Kultur der Niederlage.
151 Seiten. Wien: Turia + Kant, 2024. ISBN: 978-3-98514-084-8

Dass wir gegenwärtig eine Zeit der globalen Zusammenbrüche und eine fundamentale Erschütterung sicher geglaubter Werte und politischer Machtkonstellationen und Institutionen, bis hin zur viel zitierten Krise der Demokratie, erleben, steht außer Frage. Der Ethnologe und Siegener Medienwissenschaftler Ulrich van Loyen diagnostiziert nun gar eine „Kultur der Niederlage", die er durch die Konjunktur der wiedergängerischen Figur des Schamanen markiert und von einem Revival der Indigenisierung begleitet sieht. Das bedarf einer Erläuterung.

Das schmale Essay-Bändchen, das letztes Jahr unter dem Titel *Nachkriegsschamanismus. Beiträge zu einer Kultur der Niederlage* bei Turia + Kant erschienen ist, steckt voller bemerkenswerter Gegenwartsbeobachtungen und anregender Ideen zur Internationalisierung und historischen Instrumentalisierung der Figur des weltenwandernden Heilers. Van Loyens Ausgangsthese bezieht sich auf die westeuropäische Faszination für Schamanismus nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, die mit einer versuchten Ent-Schuldigung der Täter durch die Rückbesinnung auf alternative Modernen und der Überhöhung indigenen Wissens zusammenhänge. Von den Alliierten und der Geschich-