Cultural Evolution: An Interdisciplinary Approach
Human Evolutionary Biology 1290
Fall, 2015

Course ID: 159565
Time: Tuesdays, 9am – 12pm.
Location: MCZ 529 (Museum of Comparative Zoology)

Instructors

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Joe Henrich</th>
<th>Nathan Nunn</th>
<th>James Robinson</th>
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<td>Department of Human Evolutionary Biology 24-26 Oxford Street MCZ 507D <a href="mailto:joseph.henrich@gmail.com">joseph.henrich@gmail.com</a> Office Hours: TBA</td>
<td>Department of Economics M25, Littauer Center 1805 Cambridge Street <a href="mailto:nnunn@fas.harvard.edu">nnunn@fas.harvard.edu</a> Office Hours: TBA</td>
<td>University of Chicago visiting the Department of Government K309, CGIS 1737 Cambridge Street <a href="mailto:jamesrobinson@uchicago.edu">jamesrobinson@uchicago.edu</a> Office Hours: TBA</td>
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Teaching Fellow: Leander Heldring
Office Hour: TBA
Email: lheldring@iq.harvard.edu

Course Description

Unlike other species, humans are heavily reliant on learning from others to acquire many important aspects of their behavior, and this cultural transmission has created a second system of inheritance that has driven much of our species genetic evolution. In addition to having shaped our species’ anatomy and physiology, cultural evolution has important implications for understanding human nature, and for how to tackle basic problems in psychology, economics and anthropology. The first third of this course will develop the basic principles and lines of empirical inquiry, while the remainder will apply, hone and refine them by exploring economic development, the history of modern institutions, and global inequality.

Course Materials and Resources

This course aims to integrate online resources, novel teaching technologies, broadly accessible texts, state-of-the-art research papers, multimedia class lectures, films, and contemporary popular media on relevant issues.

Books used in this course

- Henrich, J. (forthcoming). The Secret of Our Success: How culture is driving human evolution,


**Course requirements and grading**

**FAS students only:**

Your course grade will be based on five different components. The relative weighting in grading breaks down as in Table 1.

1. **Lecture Participation:** Students will be graded based on their class participation, which will include both the quantity and quality of their engagement in the lectures and class discussions. Comments that demonstrate an understanding of the assignment readings will be important.

2. **Take-home Tests:** We will have two take-home tests. These will occur around Class 5 and Class 9 during the semester. These tests will involve a series of opened essay or short answers that test not only student mastery of the material, but also their abilities to creatively apply it to new problems or questions. They will be open everything (book, internet, etc.), although students written responses must be entirely their own.

3. **Final Exam:** This in-class examination will occur on the assigned finals day. The precise format will be announced part way through the course.

**Extension School students only:**

For Harvard extension students the evaluation will be focused on comprehension of the lectures and reading materials. This will be tested by four short (5 page) review essays the deadlines for which are embedded in the syllabus below.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1: Grading Instruments</th>
<th>Percentage contribution</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Lecture Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>2 Test 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Test 2</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>3 Final exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
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## Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Class #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics and Assignments</th>
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| Class 1 | Sept 8   | **Introduction.** Introduction to the course. Review of Syllabus. Discussion of grading. Meet your instructors.  
**Key Interrelated Questions:**  
- How can we understand the evolutionary origins of humans?  
- In the last 10 millennia, how did our species manage to go from living in relatively small-scale societies of hunters and gatherers to massive nation-state?  
- What are “culture” and “institutions” and why are they important? How can you measure them?  
- Why are some nations rich and some poor?  
- Why has economic development proved so challenging?  
**Readings:**  
- Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010)  
- Henrich (forthcoming): Chapters 1 and 2  
- Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), Chapters 1 and 2. (Coop)  
| Class 2 | Sept 15  | **The Origins of Cultural Species:** How can we explain the origins of our unique species? What was the central driving force in human evolution? Think about what this means for building a science of human psychology and behavior.  
**Lead Instructor:** Henrich  
**Readings and videos:**  
- Henrich (forthcoming): Chapters 3 to 11.  
- Film: The Human Spark: [http://video.pbs.org/program/human-spark/episodes/](http://video.pbs.org/program/human-spark/episodes/) Watch *Brain Matters* and *So Human, So Chimp* |
| Class 3 | Sept 22  | **The Origins of Cultural Species:** In what ways does culture influence biology? Do people in different societies have different brains? How are sociality and institutions central to innovation, to technological progress? What determines the power of collective brains?  
**Lead Instructor:** Henrich |
| Class 4 | Sept 29 | Readings:  
| | | • Henrich (forthcoming): Chapters 12 to 17.  
| | | **Extension Students:** This is the date for the submission of the first review essay.  
| Evolution of Societal Complexity: Cultural evolution and the “collective brain” helped human society to function at large scale. But such cooperation comes with institutions, states, property rights, hierarchy and inequality, much of it consciously constructed. How did this emerge and how does it relate to cultural evolution?  
| Lead Instructor: Robinson  
| Readings:  
| | | • Flannery and Marcus (2014): Parts II and III. Chapters 6-16.  

| Class 5 | Oct 6 | Readings:  
| Institutions, Culture, and Geography: How do we understand the massive variation in the institutions of human societies in the world and how does this relate to culture and cultural variation?  
| Lead Instructor: Robinson  
| Readings:  
| | | • Ensminger and Henrich (2014): Chapters 1-4.  

| Class 6 | Oct 13 | Readings:  
| | | • Religions, Rituals, and Markets: How do religious beliefs, rituals, and market norms influence people’s psychology and behavior? How does this influence the evolution of complex societies and the formation of institutions? Is religion important for economic development?  
| Lead Instructors: Nunn and Henrich  
| Readings:  
| | | • Ensminger and Henrich (2014): Chapters 1-4.  


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<tr>
<th>Class 7</th>
<th>Oct 20</th>
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<td><strong>Politics:</strong> Cultural evolution emphasizes individual learning and evolutionary adaption, but human society is also shaped by collective choices and power. In this lecture we examine how politics (defined as the process by which a society makes collective choices) fits into cultural evolution. Can introducing politics fundamentally change the models we have seen so far?</td>
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<td><strong>Lead Instructor:</strong> Robinson</td>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) Chapter 8 “Not on our Turf: Barriers to Development” and Chapter 9 “Reversing Development”</td>
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<th>Class 8</th>
<th>Oct 27</th>
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<td><strong>The Historical Origins of Current Cultural and Institutional Differences:</strong> Where do the observed differences in culture and institutions come from? Can they be explained? What forces have shaped their evolution?</td>
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<td><strong>Lead Instructor:</strong> Nunn</td>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
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<td>Class 9</td>
<td>Nov 3</td>
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<td>Extension Students:</td>
<td>This is the date for the submission of the third review essay.</td>
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<td>Class 10</td>
<td>Nov 10</td>
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| Lead Instructors: Nunn and Henrich | **Readings:**                                                                 | Review Chapter 6 in Henrich (forthcoming).  
| Class 11 | Nov 17 | Industrial Revolution and the Great Divergence |
### Lead instructor: Robinson

**Readings:**

### Origins of WEIRD People: How did westerners become psychologically so unusual in global perspective.

**Lead Instructor: Henrich**

**Readings:**
- Henrich, Joseph “Weird Families”
- Henrich, Joseph “Big Families”

**Extension Students:** This is the date for the submission of the final review essay.

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**Academic Dishonesty**

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity ([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity)) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting "the wrong draft", or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism ([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism)), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two, free, online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.