

# 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

<p><b>Joe Henrich</b> 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</p>	<p><b>Nathan Nunn</b> Department of Economics M25, Littauer Center 1805 Cambridge Street nnunn@fas.harvard.edu Office Hours: TBA</p>	<p><b>James Robinson</b> 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</p>
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## 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

- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. Random House Digital, Inc.
- Ensminger, J., & Henrich, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Experimenting with Social Norms: Fairness and Punishment in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. New York: Russell Sage Press.
- Flannery, K. V., & Marcus, J. (2012). *The creation of inequality : how our prehistoric ancestors set the stage for monarchy, slavery, and empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Henrich, J. (forthcoming). *The Secret of Our Success: How culture is driving human evolution*,

*domesticating our species, and making us smart.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Nisbett, R. E., & Cohen, D. (1996). *Culture of honor: The psychology of violence in the South*: Westview Press.

## 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 assigned 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 open-ended

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-ended (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.

Table 1: Grading Instruments		Percentage contribution
1	Lecture Participation	15%
2	Test 1	20%
	Test 2	30%
3	Final exam	35%

### 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

## Schedule

Class #	Date	Topics and Assignments
Class 1	Sept 8	<p><b>Introduction.</b> Introduction to the course. Review of Syllabus. Discussion of grading. Meet your instructors.</p> <p><b>Key Interrelated Questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we understand the evolutionary origins of humans?</li> <li>• 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?</li> <li>• What are “culture” and “institutions” and why are they important? How can you measure them?</li> <li>• Why are some nations rich and some poor?</li> <li>• Why has economic development proved so challenging?</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010)</li> <li>• Henrich (forthcoming): Chapters 1 and 2</li> <li>• Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), Chapters 1 and 2. (Coop)</li> <li>• Morris, Ian (2010) <i>Why the West Rules – For Now</i>, New York: Picador. Chapter 3 “Taking the Measure of the Past”.</li> <li>• Nunn, Nathan. 2010. “Culture and the Historical Process,” <i>Economic History of Developing Regions</i>.</li> </ul>
Class 2	Sept 15	<p><b>The Origins of Cultural Species:</b> 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.</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Henrich</b></p> <p><b>Readings and videos:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henrich (forthcoming): Chapters 3 to 11.</li> <li>• Film: The Human Spark: <a href="http://video.pbs.org/program/human-spark/episodes/">http://video.pbs.org/program/human-spark/episodes/</a>. Watch <i>Brain Matters</i> and <i>So Human, So Chimp</i></li> </ul>
Class 3	Sept 22	<p><b>The Origins of Cultural Species:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Henrich</b></p>

		<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henrich (forthcoming): Chapters 12 to 17.</li> </ul> <p><b>Extension Students:</b> This is the date for the submission of the first review essay.</p>
Class 4	Sept 29	<p><b>Evolution of Societal Complexity:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Robinson</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flannery and Marcus (2014): Parts II and III. Chapters 6-16.</li> <li>• Flannery and Marcus (1996) Zapotec Civilization: How Urban Society Evolved, London: Thames &amp; Hudson. Chapter 8.</li> </ul>
Class 5	Oct 6	<p><b>Institutions, Culture, and Geography:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Robinson</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson and James A. Robinson (2001) "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation," <i>American Economic Review</i>, 91: 1369-1401.</li> <li>• Ober, Josiah (2015) <i>The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece</i>, Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 4 and 5.</li> <li>• Bohannon, Paul (1958) "Extra-Processual Events in Tiv Political Institutions," <i>American Anthropologist</i>, 60: 1-12.</li> <li>• Haber, Steven (2012) "Where Does Democracy Thrive: Climate, Technology, and the Evolution of Economic and Political Institutions," Working paper. <a href="http://stephen-haber.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Haber-Where-Does-Democracy-Thrive.pdf">http://stephen-haber.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Haber-Where-Does-Democracy-Thrive.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Class 6	Oct 13	<p><b>Religions, Rituals, and Markets:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructors: Nunn and Henrich</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensminger and Henrich (2014): Chapters 1-4.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norenzayan et. al. (forthcoming).</li> <li>• Becker, Sascha and Ludger Woessmann. 2009. "Was Weber Wrong? A Human Capital Theory of Protestant Economic History," <i>Quarterly Journal of Economics</i>, 124 (2): 531-596.</li> </ul> <p><b>Extension Students:</b> This is the date for the submission of the second review essay.</p>
Class 7	Oct 20	<p><b>Politics:</b> 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?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Robinson</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• De Waal, Franz (2007) Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes, Revised Edition, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.</li> <li>• Flannery and Marcus (2014): Part IV. Chapters 17-23.</li> <li>• Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) Chapter 8 "Not on our Turf: Barriers to Development" and Chapter 9 "Reversing Development"</li> </ul>
Class 8	Oct 27	<p><b>The Historical Origins of Current Cultural and Institutional Differences:</b> Where do the observed differences in culture and institutions come from? Can they be explained? What forces have shaped their evolution?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Nunn</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talhelm, T., X. Zhang, S. Oishi, C. Shimin, D. Duan, X. Lan, and S. Kiyayama. 2014. "Large-Scale Psychological Differences Within China Explained by Rice Versus Wheat Agriculture," <i>Science</i>, 344: 603-608.</li> <li>• Nisbett, Richard E. and Dov Cohen, 1996. <i>Culture of honor: The psychology of violence in the South</i>: Westview Press, Chapters 1-4.</li> <li>• Nunn, Nathan. 2010. "Shackled to the Past: The Causes and Consequences of Africa's Slave Trades," in Jared Diamond and James A. Robinson (eds) <i>Natural Experiments of History</i>, pp. 142-184.</li> <li>• Alesina, Alberto, Paola Giuliano and Nathan Nunn. 2013. "On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough," <i>Quarterly Journal of Economics</i>, 128 (2): 469-530.</li> <li>• Nunn, Nathan. 2014. "Historical Development," In P. Aghion and S. Durlauf (eds.) <i>Handbook of Economic Growth</i>, Vol. 2, pp. 142-184.</li> </ul>

Class 9	Nov 3	<p><b>The Interaction of Culture and Institutions:</b> Where do institutions come from? Does culture have an impact on the formation of institutions? How do institutions shape culture?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Nunn</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowes, Sara, Nathan Nunn, James A. Robinson, and Jonathan Weigel. 2015. "The Evolution of Culture and Institutions: Evidence from the Kuba Kingdom," Working Paper, Harvard University.</li> <li>• Nunn, Nathan. 2012. "Culture and the Historical Process," <i>Economic History of Developing Regions</i>, 27(S1): 108-126.</li> <li>• Becker, Sascha O., Katrin Boeckh, Christa Hainz, and Ludger Woessmann. 2014. "The Empire is Dead, Long Live the Empire! Long-Run Persistence of Trust and Corruption in the Bureaucracy," <i>Economic Journal</i>, forthcoming.</li> </ul> <p><b>Extension Students:</b> This is the date for the submission of the third review essay.</p>
Class 10	Nov 10	<p><b>Genes, Culture, and their Coevolution:</b> What is the role of genes in understanding economic development? Are their genetic differences in humans that matter?</p> <p><b>Lead Instructors: Nunn and Henrich</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Chapter 6 in Henrich (forthcoming).</li> <li>• Laland, K. N., Odling-Smee, J. &amp; Myles, S. 2010. "How Culture Shaped the Human Genome: Bringing Genetics and the Human Sciences Together," <i>Nature Reviews Genetics</i> 11(2): 137-148.</li> <li>• Ashraf, Quamrul and Oded Galor. 2013. "The 'Out of Africa' Hypothesis, Genetic Diversity and Comparative Development," <i>American Economic Review</i>, 102: 1-46.</li> <li>• Guedes et al. 2013. "Is Poverty in Our Genes? A Critique of Ashraf and Galor, "The 'Out of Africa' Hypothesis, Human Genetic Diversity, and Comparative Economic Development," <i>Current Anthropology</i>, 54 (1): 71-79.</li> <li>• Callaway. 2012. "Economics and Genetics Meet in Uneasy Union," <i>Nature</i>, 490 (7419): 154-155.</li> <li>• Cesarini, David, Christopher T. Dawes, James H. Fowler, Magnus Johannesson, and Paul Lichtenstein. 2008. "Heritability of Cooperative Behavior in the Trust Game," <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</i>, 105: 3721-3726.</li> </ul>
Class 11	Nov 17	<b>Industrial Revolution and the Great Divergence</b>

		<p><b>Lead instructor: Robinson</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pomeranz, Kenneth (2002) "Political Economy and Ecology on the Eve of Industrialization: Europe, China, and the Global Conuncture", <i>American Historical Review</i>, 107(2), 425-46.</li> <li>• Rosenthal, Jean-Laurent and R. Bin Wong (2012) "Before and Beyond Divergence: A New Look at the Economic History of China and Europe," in M. Aoki, T. Kuran and G. Roland eds. <i>Institutions and Comparative Economic Development</i>, London, 64-78.</li> <li>• Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) Chapter 4 "The Weight of History", Chapter 6 "Drifting Apart".</li> </ul>
Class 12	Dec 1	<p><b>Origins of WEIRD People:</b> How did westerners become psychologically so unusual in global perspective.</p> <p><b>Lead Instructor: Henrich</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henrich, Joseph, Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richardson (2012) "The Puzzle of Monogamous Marriage" <i>Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B.</i> 367, 57-669</li> <li>• Henrich, Joseph "Weird Families"</li> <li>• Henrich, Joseph "Big Families"</li> </ul> <p><b>Extension Students:</b> This is the date for the submission of the final review essay.</p>

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