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HUC

Some day I hope we have a conference devoted to Human Evolution and Culture. It is not just that an understanding of human biology and its evolution is the substratum of the flowering of culture. Here and there we accept the converse, that culture has had and will continue to have a major impact on our biological evolution. Consider how the mixing of peoples, the breakdown of racial isolates, affects the human gene pool today.

The central mystery is how the human brain, starting about 1 000 000 years ago entered the evolutionary pathway of enlargement in gross size and functional capacity that led to the uniqueness of modern man. How the capacity for language, art, reason was evolved long before its realization: written language is after all barely 10,000 years in history, and we do not believe there has been significant biological evolution in that interval.

Here and there, scholars accept that the capacity for social integration was the main driver in human evolution. The dark subtext is that

intra-species, namely tribal warfare may have been the principal mediator of natural selection, favoring those genotypes capable of group solidarity, and efficiency and sacrifice on behalf of the group.

AC Clarke similar – 2001 – Jambone with rocket

That somber note aside, scholars are working hard to acquire the data and assemble a consensus on the main narrative. We know that Homo sapiens is a single species, with no evident barriers to continued gene flow, since the dispersion from Africa about 200,000 BP. In my view, sexual selection – mate choice and reproductive success according to tribal cultural norms – has far outweighed natural selection as the driver for the cosmetically obvious attributes of skin color and body form. Genic assortment is far less evident for more deep-seated traits – with a few exceptions related to dire diseases, like malaria and the sickle-cell factor. Nothing is known about racial genetic factors in cultural attributes

like temperament, intelligence, or language picking and there is much anecdotal evidence to the contrary. Individuals within racial groups do of course vary substantially. We should be no more surprised at the Melanesian learning Greek than at the Attics having invented it in the first place. But the tools of analysis, and many aspects of evolutionary theory are all very primitive, and we may expect real knowledge on these matters to change during the next century.

Evst.

Meanwhile, humility and awe are the most appropriate posture.