



Homo stupiens: Reviewed

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Received Date: March 13, 2021; Published Date: March 22, 2021

Opinion

In his breakthrough work, the author overcomes the unfortunate legacy of Darwinian thought to the behavioral sciences and proposes a cognitive model of the human brain which is based on the commonplace observation that much of normal human behavior is maladaptive. While the Darwinian model is so useful in relating genetically engineered structures and functions to environmental contingencies of all other species, humans appear to be anomalous in their processing of information not according to their natural environment but according to linguistically shaped and socially determined psychological constructs—i.e., schemas.

Thus, we are not products of natural selection but of cultural selection in that conduct is judged by groups as confirming or confronting basic, binding values. Each group has its own defining values, which vary as people do, but there is a common sacred belief system which shapes the behavior of members of the different groups. This basic process is essentially religious in essence in that assumption which determines group conduct are usually beyond criticism. The world's major religions serve as prime examples of such systems: Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity, for example, are self-contained, self-confirming intellectual constructs which are beyond the intellectual abilities of their devotees to analyze objectively. Likewise, Capitalism, Socialism, Communism and Fascism are economic systems

which are subject to criticism by outsiders.

All such systems build up positive feedback loops which reinforce belief in them by the devout. Such loops are structured by the language of the group as well as its social structure. The language invariably defines intense values which determine ethical conduct. What is right and good (or wrong and bad) are predetermined by the inherent implied by terms used to describe individual behavior. Self-sacrifice by the individual for the good of the group is a cultural universal, but the status of women varies greatly from society to society: In fact how a group deals with its elderly, young, disenfranchised and needy tells much about its basic commitment to an inclusive or exclusive culture. The social element is mostly a reflection of who you are. If you are an alpha, you go to the front of the line. If you are an omega, too bad, Status determines how you are treated and regarded.

In all human cases, natural selection may operate on the cultural group, but within the group, cultural selection operates on the individual. This constitutes an entirely new view of the human condition and leaves the individual sorting out what is best for him/her and the reference group in both the long-term and for the short-haul. The selection factor is not genetic but cultural.