



Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution

By Peter J. Richerson, Robert Boyd

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Humans are a striking anomaly in the natural world. While we are similar to other mammals in many ways, our behavior sets us apart. Our unparalleled ability to adapt has allowed us to occupy virtually every habitat on earth using an incredible variety of tools and subsistence techniques. Our societies are larger, more complex, and more cooperative than any other mammal's. In this stunning exploration of human adaptation, Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd argue that only a Darwinian theory of cultural evolution can explain these unique characteristics.

Not by Genes Alone offers a radical interpretation of human evolution, arguing that our ecological dominance and our singular social systems stem from a psychology uniquely adapted to create complex culture. Richerson and Boyd illustrate here that culture is neither superorganic nor the handmaiden of the genes. Rather, it is essential to human adaptation, as much a part of human biology as bipedal locomotion. Drawing on work in the fields of anthropology, political science, sociology, and economics--and building their case with such fascinating examples as kayaks, corporations, clever knots, and yams that require twelve men to carry them--Richerson and Boyd convincingly demonstrate that culture and biology are inextricably linked, and they show us how to think about their interaction in a way that yields a richer understanding of human nature.

In abandoning the nature-versus-nurture debate as fundamentally misconceived, *Not by Genes Alone* is a truly original and groundbreaking theory of the role of culture in evolution and a book to be reckoned with for generations to come.

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Editorial Review

Review

"There have been a number of more or less complex variants on this . . . metaphor for genetic evolution and it is generally agreed that the most nuanced and sophisticated version is contained in the work of Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson, and laid out in considerable detail in *Not By Genes Alone*."

(Richard Lewontin *The New York Review of Books* 2005-10-04)

"Drawing on new ideas about multilevel selection, evolutionary psychology and . . . 'strong reciprocity' (the bestowing of rewards and punishments even where there is no direct personal gain for this behavior), Richerson and Boyd build a case for a special role for cultural processes in human evolution. . . . It is a book full of good sense and the kinds of intellectual rigour and clarity that we have come to expect from [the authors]."

(Robin Dunbar *Nature*)

"Ambitious and wide-ranging. . . . The writing is lucid, even eloquent. . . . Richerson and Boyd have done a rare thing: Casting their net widely across a range of disciplines, in order to tackle the most complex phenomenon of our species, and they have achieved consilience. Read and ponder."

(W. C. McGrew *Journal of Human Evolution* 2006-02-01)

"Writing in a much more accessible form than they have before, Richerson and Boyd lay out their case for the role of culture in shaping the human mind and behavior. . . . This book provides an excellent account of Richerson and Boyd's theory, and is a must-read for anyone interested in gene-culture coevolution."

(Susan Blackmore *Bioscience* 2006-01-01)

"[The] subject, the place of culture in human evolutionary dynamics, is relatively neglected, and is rarely as well debated as it is here. . . . Indeed, their text deserves to be considered by all of us in any field of archaeology."

(Don Brothwell *Antiquity*)

"This is an important work that is sure to generate lively discussion on a topic crucial to our understanding of ourselves."

(*Northeastern Naturalist*)

"Richerson and Boyd have produced an excellent explication and overview of the current state of the research on cultural evolution . . . and the relative roles of genes and culture in human evolution and behavior from the Pleistocene to the present--and they have done all this in a rigorous but non-technical, easily readable format. I think that both those who are just beginning to explore the evolutionary sources of human behavior and those who are currently engaged in work in this area will greatly benefit from reading this book."

(Adam Gifford, Jr. *Journal of Bioeconomics*)

About the Author

Peter J. Richerson is professor of environmental science at the University of California, Davis. **Robert Boyd** is professor of anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Prolific authors and editors, they coauthored *Culture and the Evolutionary Process*, published by the University of Chicago Press.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carson McDonald:

Information is provisions for folks to get better life, information presently can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even a concern. What people must be consider whenever those information which is from the former life are difficult to be find than now could be taking seriously which one works to believe or which one the actual resource are convinced. If you get the unstable resource then you have it as your main information it will have huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution as the daily resource information.

Marjorie Wright:

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Roman Morris:

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