

Re: evolutionary success of humans

Source: <http://sci.tech--archive.net/Archive/sci.bio.evolution/2005-11/msg00367.html>

- *From:* "JoeSP" <olegp@xxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Mon, 28 Nov 2005 01:28:25 -0500 (EST)
-

"Earle Jones" <earle.jones@xxxxxxxx> wrote in message
[news:dma84h\\$2g6e\\$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:news:dma84h$2g6e$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)
> In article <dm2s1n\$2cgt\$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>,
> "Ron O" <rokimoto@xxxxxxx> wrote:
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> *
> Jared Diamond (Guns, Germs, and Steel author) wrote that the biggest
> mistake ever made by man was the invention of agriculture. Ref:
>
> The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race
>
> By Jared Diamond
> University of California at Los Angeles Medical School
>
> Discover Magazine, May 1987
>
> Pages 64-66
>
> Illustrations by Elliott Danfield
>
> "To science we owe dramatic changes in our smug self-image.
> Astronomy taught us that our earth isn't the center of the universe
> but merely one of billions of heavenly bodies. From biology we
> learned that we weren't specially created by God but evolved along
> with millions of other species. Now archaeology is demolishing
> another sacred belief: that human history over the past million
> years has been a long tale of progress. In particular, recent
> discoveries suggest that the adoption of agriculture, supposedly our
> most decisive step toward a better life, was in many ways a
> catastrophe from which we have never recovered. With agriculture
> came the gross social and sexual inequality, the disease and
> despotism, that curse our existence.
>
> At first, the evidence against this revisionist interpretation will
> strike twentieth century Americans as irrefutable. We're better off
> in almost every respect than people of the Middle Ages, who in turn
> had it easier than cavemen, who in turn were better off than apes.

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- > Just count our advantages. We enjoy the most abundant and varied
- > foods, the best tools and material goods, some of the longest and
- > healthiest lives, in history. Most of us are safe from starvation
- > and predators. We get our energy from oil and machines, not from our
- > sweat. What neo-Luddite among us would trade his life for that of a
- > medieval peasant, a caveman, or an ape?
- >
- > For most of our history we supported ourselves by hunting and
- > gathering: we hunted wild animals and foraged for wild plants. It's
- > a life that philosophers have traditionally regarded as nasty,
- > brutish, and short. Since no food is grown and little is stored,
- > there is (in this view) no respite from the struggle that starts
- > anew each day to find wild foods and avoid starving. Our escape from
- > this misery was facilitated only 10,000 years ago, when in different
- > parts of the world people began to domesticate plants and animals.
- > The agricultural revolution spread until today it's nearly universal
- > and few tribes of hunter-gatherers survive."
- >
- > earle
- > *
- >

It appears that Diamond was only partially right. I'm sure that life wasn't so "nasty, brutish and short" during the periods of plenty, or during times of expansion and conquest. But basic rules of biology dictate that populations increase during the good times, and when resources fall short of demand, life then begins to become nasty, brutish and short.

The archaeological record is full of Neolithic evidence for starvation, disease and violence on a scale comparable to modern times. Genocide was practiced then as now, but it's probably not accurate to declare one age superior to another in the quality of life. Population dynamics tend to make those decisions for us.

- ***Follow-Ups:***

- ◆ ***Re: evolutionary success of humans***
◇ *From: John Wilkins*

- ***References:***

- ◆ ***evolutionary success of humans***
◇ *From: pauldepstein*
- ◆ ***Re: evolutionary success of humans***
◇ *From: Ron O*
- ◆ ***Re: evolutionary success of humans***
◇ *From: Earle Jones*

Re: evolutionary success of humans

- Prev by Date: *Re: current path of human evolution*
- Next by Date: *Re: Group selected altruism – (was: Hamilton's rule)*
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