

Re: evolutionary success of humans

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- *From:* John Wilkins <john@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Mon, 28 Nov 2005 22:50:44 -0500 (EST)
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JoeSP wrote:

> "Earle Jones" <earle.jones@xxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote in message=20
> [news:dma84h\\$2g6e\\$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:news:dma84h$2g6e$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)
> =20
>> In article <[dm2s1n\\$2cgt\\$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:dm2s1n$2cgt$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)>,
>> "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

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>>had it easier than cavemen, who in turn were better off than apes.
>>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

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> 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

> demand, life then begins to become nasty, brutish and short.

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> 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.

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Diamond, or rather those who he is relying upon, such as David Rindos' *Origins of Agriculture* (1984), deals with this: monocultural societies (that

have a single staple food source) are unusually sensitive to fluctuations in

the productivity of that staple. Moreover, they tend to have major deficits in

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their overall dietary needs, lacking vitamins and minerals that contribute to growth. HGs, OTOH, tend to have wide and diverse ranges of food, and are able, if they survive the first five years, to grow taller and more healthily.

Skeletal evidence suggests that agrarian societies tend to grow shorter, live shorter, and have more diet-related illnesses. On the other hand, the energy budget for these societies is much higher than HG societies, and so the population density is much higher. It's a trade-off, or it was until we were able to transport varieties of food quickly and freshly (i.e., in the past 140 years or so) – either you live long and well but have a very high neonatal and child death rate, or you have a lowered under 5 death rate with lower health, shorter lifespans and shorter stature.

HGs tend on average, if memory serves, to work about 2–4 hours a day seeking food in most environments. The rest of the time, they live doing social things. This makes sense as an ancestral lifestyle – we needed to socialise if we were to evolve our present traits. Farmers work 16 hours days in backbreaking labour, and tend to be socially isolated. Urban lifestyles are something else again.

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University of Queensland – Blog: evolvethought.blogspot.com
Nihil tam absurdum quod non quidam Philosophi dixerit – Cicero

• *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*
◇ From: JoeSP

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