

Armin W. Geertz

This presentation is based on the book *The Emergence and Evolution of Religion: By Means of Natural Selection* by Jonathan H. Turner, Alexandra Maryanski, Anders Klostergaard Petersen and Armin W. Geertz (Routledge 2017). Our aim in this book is to provide a more robust biological and neurological explanation together with sociological explanations of religion as a basic type of sociocultural formation. Religion arose not because of a narrow set of cognitive propensities (ToM, HADD, etc.), rather it emerged from many cognitive, emotional and behavioral propensities that were hard-wired for millions of years into the neurology of higher mammals, higher primates, great apes and hominins. Contrary to many evolutionary psychological accounts, we argue that the biology and psychology of religion is very old and not a recent addition in the late Pleistocene by Darwinian natural selection. Furthermore, the institutionalization of religion occurred not just because of human evolved psychology but also because of selection pressures on human populations generated from population growth, settlements, and differentiated institutional systems. In other words, other types of natural selection come into play as religion develops in ever-larger and more complex societies. The selection at play works on superorganisms composed by individuals and corporate units organizing their activities. Our understanding of selection takes account of teleological actors and systems that create various sociocultural phenotypes which in turn provide further selection pressure on corporate units. Darwinian natural selection produced behavioral capacities and propensities among hominins and humans over the last 5 to 6 million years that made human societies possible and fitness-enhancing. Once these capacities are part of the phenotype of organisms and sociocultural superorganisms develop, biological explanations lose traction. We postulate therefore multilevel selection beyond the genetic into various sociocultural levels. We do not presume to explain everything, but we argue that at least five selection processes are present in the evolution of religion: 1) the biological, 2) societal and population-level selection pressures to produce regulatory mechanisms [which we call Spencerian Selection, Type-1], 3) selection pressures on corporate units due to competition for resources [which we call Durkheimian Selection], 4) selection pressures on polities through geopolitical war [which we call Spencerian Selection, Type-2], and 5) selection pressures on institutional change due to internal conflict [which we call Marxian Selection]. Our goal in positing these selection processes is to expand and extend the power of evolutionary theorizing rather than keeping it confined to evolutionary theorizing in biology, strictly speaking.