**Adam Gifford, Jr.**

The human capacity to share intentionality ("intentionality" used here in the philosophical sense that mental representations refer to something or are directed at something) makes possible our ability to create social facts. Social facts are "[o]bserver-relative features [of the world that] exist only relative to the attitudes of observers" (Searle, John R. The Construction of Social Reality, 1995, p. 11). This ability makes possible human cooperation at all levels, and, importantly, the evolution of social institutions, including religion. Social facts, money for example, work because there is collective understanding of the functioning of money as a medium of exchange—like all social institutions, money is a shared mental construct.

Our large brains, language, and culture are products of the evolutionary pressures of living in social groups since social animals must develop complex forms of social knowledge to predict the behavior of other members of their group, manipulate that behavior, and ultimately foster the complex cooperation that makes our culture, collective intentionality, and complex social networks possible. For obvious reasons, this idea is often referred to as the Machiavellian intelligence hypothesis. In fact, our large brains evolved because they enabled our ancestors to suppress their more conniving Machiavellian tendencies by facilitating solutions to the problems associated with social living. The evolution of three capacities that are necessary for complex cooperation and culture drove increases in human brain size over that of our social but less cooperative cousins the chimpanzees. These closely related capacities are theory of mind, the sharing of attention, and the sharing of intentions. The evolution of religion, made possible by these evolutionary traits, it is argued, was an important component in the suppression of our Machiavellian tendencies.

Complex cooperation requires tight social bonding, which requires trust. For trust to evolve our ancestors must have: 1) overcome the incentive to defect when involved in cooperative activity, and 2) suppressed the proclivity to use violence to take resources from conspecifics, as is seen in nonhuman primates. Large brains and language were necessary for the evolution of religion that helped to control our Machiavellian tendencies, and by doing so greatly facilitated cooperation. Given all this, it seems that Homo sapiens' cognitive capacity evolved to deal with the free-rider problem. Our enhanced cognitive capacity and collective intentionality facilitated a level of cooperation not seen in non-human contexts, and this is what made complex culture and its ongoing evolution possible. Greater cognitive capacity fostered the evolution of social rules of governance and implicit institutions, like religion, that helped suppress free riding and provided rules of orderly behavior that increased cooperation by making behavior predictable. Though the social living hypothesis suggests that our big brains were not a product of the advantages of producing and using complex tools or an ability to exploit hard-to-acquire and varied food resources, these abilities were an important byproduct of the evolution of language, big brains, hyper-cooperation and ongoing cultural evolution.