
Neanderthals in Plato's Cave: A Relativistic Approach to Cultural Evolution

George F. Steiner

Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

400 Oser Avenue, Suite 1600, Hauppauge, NY 11788-3619

www.novapublishers.com

978153611904, \$195.00, Hardcover, 226 pp.

www.amazon.com

Synopsis: George F. Steiner's monograph, *Neanderthals in Plato's Cave*, is a phenomenal contribution not only to the field of cultural evolution in anthropology but also to an expanded multi-disciplinary array of related domains (e.g., archaeology, neuroscience, cognitive development, anatomy, to name only a few). It also serves as a resource for subject initiates.

Steiner begins with an exhaustive review of the literature on human cultural evolution and proceeds to lay out a paradigm for the study where the tenets of dual inheritance theory are viewed through non-synchronous changes toward modernity in three distinct areas:

Anatomical Modernity. Here, modernity is identified as a – biologically, respectively, culturally conditioned - transition from robust to gracile phenotypes with globular braincase development as its main signature and outcome.

Behavioral Modernity. The second area results from a biological process called *neoteny*. Neoteny manifests itself, as mentioned above, in physiological aspects of appearance: the retention of “juvenile traits in adulthood / a globular braincase / bulging forehead,” etc. Its concomitant psychological aspects are “curiosity / playfulness / creativity / sociability / reduced levels of aggressiveness and hierarchy.” Behavioral modernity is – very much like anatomical modernity - suggested to be of two distinct types, namely: culturally-acquired “ahead of time” or, biologically-acquired, in “due time.”

Cognitive Modernity. The third area involves the development of the ability to shift contextual focus between associative and analytic states of consciousness to the eventual loss of that at will ability as it becomes subsumed in specialization to

culturally-created information. The loss is compensated for with various shamanistic access / sharing techniques, with the information accessed being encoded and stored externally, as *exograms* meant to aid memory.

Steiner makes the point that where human cultural evolution stands today is not an end, nor have humans somehow become superior. Instead, the process continues with the next stages of tomorrow's modernity to be determined by today's anatomical, behavioral and cognitive variables. Moreover, Steiner corrects the prevalent linear approach to cultural evolution and presents apparently ancestral stages as parallel achievements.

Critique: The monograph is exceptionally well titled, well written, and cutting edge with its focus on neoteny and exograms. It is a must for (paleo)anthropology scholars and a great resource for students of hominin evolution, as well as a fascinating read for those uninitiated who want to know more on this topic. The book adds depth, clarity and a novel perspective to the subject of cultural evolution.

Neanderthals in Plato's Cave is enthusiastically recommended specifically for academic libraries' anthropology collections and for community libraries in general.

—*Bonnye Matthews,*
Award Winning Writer of Prehistoric Fiction