Humans evolved to become *Homo negotiatus* . . . the rest followed

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Abstract: Social animals need to share space and resources, whether sexual partners, parents, or food. Humans, however, are unique in the way they share as they evolved to become *Homo negotiatus*; a species that is prone to bargain and to dispute the value of things until some agreement is reached. This evolution had far-reaching consequences on the specific makeup of human psychology – a psychology that has for trademark a compulsive preoccupation with the self in relation to others. I propose that the understanding and sharing of intentions are probably the consequences of such evolution, and not its origins.

We evolved to become *Homo negotiatus*, a species keen to count and compare. It is a species that takes advantage or gets even not only by taking, but also by giving. That does not make *Homo negotiatus* a nicer, kinder species compared with other animal species. Obviously not. It does not mean either that close primate relatives do not show some precursor signs of sharing by negotiation (de Waal 1982, 1996).

However, as pointed by the classic anthropological work of Mauss (1967), human societies seem particularly keen to hold at their core the propensity to offer gifts with the explicit motive of strengthening social ties among its members. Gifts allow for the maintenance of social ties over time, the guarantee of a social debt in a society that holds reciprocation as a core value. Mauss showed that gift giving and reciprocation are indeed an organizing core of many small society cultures all over the world. It appears to be a human universal.

There are many plausible stories as to why humans evolved to become *Homo negotiatus*. One story is that the combination of food surplus, food storage, and greater density of group living triggered profound changes in the way humans shared their resources (Diamond 1997). From coercive dominance (the physically more powerful gets the lion's share principle), humans were channeled to engage in actual trading and complex reciprocation via gifts and other bartering chips. In this new way of sharing, the most prestigious and richer individuals became the rulers, getting the lion's share by giving and trading favors, not only by forceful coercion. Favorable environmental (e.g., climatic) circumstances, technological progress, or any other causes leading to food surplus could have triggered a host of changes in the life of our ancestors, including transactions based on shared values, the birth of bartering, and ultimately the establishment of explicit rules and trade regulations. It is only in recent time (maybe 10 to 15 thousand years) that public (external) memory systems such as symbolic tallying to record current and past transactions seem to have emerged. Such emergence could possibly have ratcheted up a host of other cultural artifacts, including complex writing systems by which the oral tradition articulating the memory of shared values became objectified (externalized) via public documents and decrees. The emergence of such inventions had a formidable, exponential impact on how we coexist and share as a species.

Regardless of the plausibility of such an account, the fact is that we have evolved to become *Homo negotiatus*, not only relating to one another by ways of forceful and instinctive reactions, but also by ways of seduction and lengthy intersubjective negotiation. Humans seem to find particular comfort and reassurance in actively aligning their own experiences with the experiences of others. This does not mean that intersubjectivity is a uniquely human

trait. All group-living animals share experiences, all prone to emotional contagion. They alarm one another, fly together in the face of danger, and bunch up to fight back predators. However, humans have the special inclination to probe actively and seek for intersubjective agreement.

Humans have the insatiable need to feel and understand the same as others and, if that is not the case, they attempt by any means to reestablish any lost equilibrium with peers. This process is particularly evident in human mother and infant interactions that are universally characterized by complex affective mirroring and emotional coregulations (Gergely & Watson 1999; Rochat 2001; Stern 1985).

Learning to agree on the value of things by ways of negotiation and reciprocation (what all human children have to do in order to behave adaptively in the culture of their parents) entails the development of specific psychological capacities. These capacities are what set humans apart from any other species. It is the privilege of developmental researchers to witness how these capacities emerge in ontogeny.

Aside from the capacity to understand and share intentions that would presumably form the origins of cultural cognition (Tomasello et al.), I would like to suggest that one of the necessary building block of *Homo negotiatus* is first and probably foremost a unique sense of self. A sense of self that is evaluative in relation to others.

In ontogeny, the first signs of self-preoccupation and self–other compulsive comparison become evident by the middle of the second year, when children start to show not only explicit self-recognition (Lewis & Ramsey 2005), but also unmistakable signs of embarrassment in front of mirrors (see Rochat, 2003, for a developmental account of emerging coawareness). By their third birthday, children express pride, shame, and other secondary or evaluative emotions (Kagan 1981; Lewis 1992). By the time children start to blush, they also begin to lie. They edit and cover up truth to keep face in relation to others in potentially embarrassing circumstances (Lewis et al. 1989; Polak & Harris 1999).

In his seminal work comparing the expression of emotions in man and animals, Darwin (1965) viewed shyness (embarrassment) as a precursor of blushing. He witnessed blushing in his son at around 3 years and shyness months earlier, pointing to the fact that blushing causes the selective crimsoning of the face, precisely the region of the body that is most visible and attended by others. It is the face that is typically and desperately covered in bouts of embarrassment when feelings are exposed. Following Darwin, this is a unique product of human evolution. It is also the expression of a unique psychological process: the never-ending process of intersubjective negotiation by ways of active self-presentation.

Only humans engage, at least to the extent they do, in self-editing and self-advertising via, for example, body adornments and alterations (e.g., plastic surgery, tattoos, piercing, and makeups). These practices are pervasive across ancient cultures – for example, some 4000 years ago in ancient Egypt (Bianchi 1988). The well-preserved 5,000-year-old frozen body of the “Iceman” found a few years ago in the Austrian Alps shows, aside from an arrow wound, deliberate symbolic scaring and tattoos (Fowler 2001). Even older human remains of Pleistocene Australian aborigines (12,000-year-olds and up) suggest deliberate body alteration, in particular forced skull elongation (Brown 1981). All that is part of the basic human need to affiliate. They are signs of deliberate acts of self-presentation and therefore the expression of active, reciprocal

negotiation of values and affective experiences with others. My intuition is that, in evolution, the motivation to negotiate and reciprocate preceded humans' unique ability to understand and share intentions. In an analogous way, in ontogeny, the need to reciprocate is a necessary condition to the emergence of theories of mind. New, more sophisticated understandings of the self and of others emerge from the primary motivation of finding some agreement on the values of all things: a universal trademark of human cultures.