

Seth Abrutyn

Weberian Agency in Sociocultural Evolution: Entrepreneurship, Assemblages, and Differentiation

Abstract: Recently, New Evolutionary Sociology (NES) has proposed three sociological forms of selection pressure: Spencerian, Durkheimian, and Marxian. While the specification of these selection processes represent a major advance, the question of how and why deliberate, purposeful sociocultural transformation occurs remains open. To address this gap, this paper suggests adding insights from Weber's work on carrier groups, working out a Weberian theory of selection in two moves. First, Weber's carrier groups are better candidates than memes to be the sociocultural analogy to genes. Carrier groups develop, protect, and propagate cultural assemblages that consist of world views, material/ideal interests, and an ethic, with carrier groups and their assemblages being the Weberian units of selection. Second, Weber's historical sociology suggests three phases of sociocultural evolution that highlights the diversity of selection processes and measures of success: (1) a foundational stage in which carriers act like mutations, (2) a diffusion stage where carriers emulate gene flow, and (3) a sedimentation stage where carriers institutionalize their assemblages. After delineating a Weberian selection process, implications for NES, cultural sociology, and sociology's conventional historiography are addressed.

Keywords: New Evolutionary Sociology, Max Weber, Sociocultural Evolution, Cultural Sociology

Introduction

Evolutionary theory, both the questionable, dubious, and uneven versions of the classical era (Turner and McCaffree 2021) as well as the exciting diverse array of contemporary versions (Blute 2010, Runciman 2009, Turner and Machalek 2018), remains a central strand in sociological theory; even if viewed with a range of suspicion to outright rejection by a not insignificant portion of the discipline. In recent years, efforts to rejuvenate sociobiology by either incorporating its descendent (evolutionary psychology) or through more nuanced efforts that focus on gene-culture interactions have proliferated (Blute 2010), as the American Sociological Association section on *Evolution and Society* changed its name to *Biology and Society*. The move to individual-level approaches has, unfortunately, obscured exciting developments in sociologists interested in questions concerning *sociocultural* evolution as old as the classics (Boehm 2012, McCaffree 2022, Runciman 2004, Turner and Maryanski 2009, Turner et al. 2018).

One interesting direction this burgeoning perspective has taken is around the thorny issue of *selection* at the group or collective level. Turner and colleagues (2018) recently posited three types of evolution, labeling them eponymously after the classical theorists

they associated them with: Durkheimian, Spencerian, and Marxian. Identifying these three different selection processes made important advances in identifying the diverse array of evolutionary paths structural or cultural formations might take in addition to continuing to bury the problematic unilineal models of evolution. However, like most important advances, questions remain open. In particular, two specific sets of questions warrant attention. First, *how* and *why* do these processes accelerate, decelerate, shift gears, or fizzle out? Second, and closely related, how do people and agency fit into the story? Both questions have generally been ignored, especially when scholars examine key processes like differentiation (Luhmann 1977, 1995), which come to feel tautological and teleological without some sense of how humans fit into the transformation of systems. To answer these questions requires a deeper examination of the way collective action works in an evolutionary context; one possible way to do this would be to add a *Weberian* selection process.

I am aware that most sociologists know Weber viewed evolution and nomothetic versions of comparative sociology skeptically, but there is no need to remain beholden to a theorist's philosophic, scientific, or ideological commitments today.¹ Indeed, I am not the first to point out that there is a selectionism in Weber's theorizing (Runciman 2001), while Weber (1920 [2002]: 13) himself once observed: »that [in order for a] kind of conduct of life and attitude...»adapted« [to its particular circumstances,] be »selected« and emerge victorious over others, it obviously had first to come into being... as an attitude held in common by groups of people.« This line of thinking is consistent with essays on charisma (Weber 1968) or his famous discussion of »the switchmen« of history in his essay on world religions (Weber 1946d). in the first case, charismatic leaders (or, more importantly, the small collective of close adherents they mobilize), are institution smashing forces, working to tear down structures and reconstitute cultures they see as unjust, immoral, and unfit. And while there is always a tension between charisma and discipline or routinization, charismatic carrier groups are only as successful as their capacity to create lasting institutional structures while »bottling« their charisma into the positions and divisions of labor as a means of keeping discipline from being empty and rote (see Eisenstadt's introduction in Weber 1968). In his essay on world religions, Weber spells out what these carrier groups are »carrying«: a cosmology designed to bring normative order to the practical ethic—or the habits of everyday life (Swedberg 1998)—by linking the distal, substantive values of the cosmology with the material and ideal interests that motivate people to act in the first place and provide them with justifications for their actions.

1 Notably, one reviewer pointed out that there was some debate about Weber's evolutionary contributions among German scholars several decades ago (see, for instance, Schluchter 1979; Schmidt 1981). Unfortunately, this debate was never translated into English owing, I would argue, to the lack of interest North American scholars have shown towards evolution more generally and Weberian scholars have shown towards Weber being an evolutionary thinker (cf. Runciman 2001). It seems an urgent task that this debate be translated or summarized for an English audience to shed more light on these ideas.

From this, we can surmise two things. First, carrier groups are, in a less-than metaphorical sense, like genes carrying information.² Unlike genes, however, these carrier groups are intimately tied to the creation, production, and destruction of what I will call »cultural assemblages« (Patterson 2014), and thus modification by descent or reproductive fitness does not fit perfectly. Rather, carrier groups actively produce cohesion, reduce conflict, and create a sense of shared culture and inclination to cooperate—or »organismality« (Queller and Strassmann 2009), or they do not (Turner 1995).³ In turn, their success at producing cohesion within their own group does not ensure their cultural assemblages success automatically; that is, it is not reproduced simply by »passing« on, but also by projects designed to attract new members via moral and emotional appeal.

Second, what makes them selectionist, in Weberian terms, is that there are myriad historical contingencies—but a finite number as we will see—that either facilitate carrier group's efforts or stymie them, with the most extreme being the near-total extinction of members. While, again, I'm not the first to point out that group selection is possible a very real thing (Boyd and Richerson 1992, Wilson 2002), a Weberian selectionism is truly social, agentic, and empirically-grounded because selection is not (always) blind, unintentional, or a product of environmental forces. Rather, Weberian evolution, through carriers or institutional entrepreneurs as Eisenstadt (1964, 1980) called them, is a process characterized by sometimes unintentional, but generally speaking purposive, contested, socially-motivated collectives, historical contingencies, and rarely fully finished projects.

In what follows, I elaborate these ideas into a more systematic theory of Weberian evolution aimed not at supplanting current efforts to develop better sociological theories of evolution, but to supplement. While some Weberians (as well as historical sociologists) may be skeptical, my intentions are aimed at leveraging Weber to flesh out problems in

- 2 Biological analogizing has a sordid history in sociology. The meme, for instance, has been deemed the equivalent cultural unit to the gene, but the vagaries surrounding what culture is and consequently what it transmits or passes on produce formidable challenges regardless of its proponents' confidence. Likewise, the search for distinct modules in the brain that parallel modifications like bipedalism or brachiated wrists has been met with skepticism from many corners (Gould and Lewontin 1979, Richardson 2007, Turner and Maryanski 2008). Thus, we must proceed with caution at all times. In the case I make herein, I do think carrier groups as genes carrying and diffusing cultural patterns—not culture, per se—works, but carrier groups also assume a Lamarckian quality in that they also actively produce, create, and destroy culture, thereby transcending the 1:1 fidelity between biology and sociology.
- 3 At risk of invoking the criticisms leveled against the organismic analogy (Levine 1995), the term organismality has support in the biological sciences as a measure of the degree to which a species displays the capacity for altruistic behavior and collective action. As Queller and Strassman (2009: 3146 f.) argue, human societies can approach relatively high levels, but unlike other multi-cellular superorganisms, balancing high cooperation with low conflict—particularly tamping down the latter—is challenging. As I will argue throughout, there are compelling reasons to revisit the idea that societies, or at least some communities, can and do achieve organismality and, therefore, reveal qualities akin to other animal societies. Military units, for instance, reflect highly formalized versions of organismality, while other geographically and socially bound places like high schools, Indigenous communities, prisons, and so forth also can achieve this state (Abrutyn and Mueller 2018).

the new evolutionary sociology while also suggesting potentially fruitful links between evolutionary and historical sociologies. Below, I begin with some very brief conceptual work, as Jonathan Turner has repeatedly fleshed the outlines of new evolutionary sociology out in numerous other texts (Turner and Machalek 2018, Turner et al. 2018). From there, the Weberian conceptual tools necessary for thinking about cultural assemblages, carriers or entrepreneurs, and selection are presented followed by the three Weberian »phases« of selection. Where appropriate, the clear connections between Durkheimian, Spencerian, or Marxian selection and Weberian are made explicit. The paper ends with some brief implications.

Selection, Adaptation, Agency

For several decades, mainstream sociology has resisted evolutionary processes because of lingering biases (Sanderson 2007), while much of the evolutionary ideas that have flourished until recently have been »neo-Darwinian,« or some form of refurbished sociobiology (Blute 2010). However, a small but growing evolutionary sociologists have both argued for a distinct set of evolutionary processes at the cultural level (Turner and Maryanski 2008) and the idea that with the rise of kinship institutions some 300,000 years ago, that cultural and structural forces have been more impactful sources of evolution than biology (Abrutyn and Turner 2023). Thus, while genetic selection remains essential to understanding how humans became humans, cultural selection—sometimes at the level of the group (Boyd and Richerson 1992, Wilson 2002)—has been responsible for largely explaining how humans moved from foraging to megasocieties. Consequently, we need to identify distinct selection processes, which Turner and Abrutyn (2017) have begun to do.

Spencerian selection, for instance, conceptualizes selection as working on the *absence* of structural or cultural formations in the face of new and/or old exigencies. Specifically, these exigencies tend to be caused by internal or external changes in population, production, distribution, and reproduction processes; and, power (Turner 1995). Evolution, then, proceeds along the lines of structural differentiation that solves these problems, at least temporarily. Durkheimian selection operates more closely to classical Darwinian selection in which competition between social units over scarce resources and the capacity to reproduce itself—in this case socially, but potentially biologically too—represents the key source of pressure. Unlike Darwinian selection where the fittest wins, Durkheim (1893 [1997]) emphasized the incredible human ability to create resource niches through structural and symbolic differentiation and expand existing niches through specialization. Finally, Marxian selection occurs similarly to Spencerian, with inadequate structural solutions to exigencies, but unlike the latter, the emphasis is on conflict between competing groups for power. Further distinguishing Marxian from Spencerian selection, evolution is often punctuated as successful groups may completely reconfigure the political and economic spheres overnight.

For better or worse, these three forms of sociological selection remain tied to a broader tradition of differentiation theory (Alexander and Colomy 1990, Luhmann 1982, Parsons

and Smelser 1956, Radcliffe-Brown 1965). Yet, besides a few efforts to introduce agency into differentiation theory (Abrutyn 2014b, Colomy 1998, Eisenstadt 1964), these models remain limited in their ability to explain why and how differentiation occurs as well as how and why it fails or, as is sometimes the case, retrogresses to *less* differentiation (Lechner 1990, Rueschemeyer 1986). That is, Spencerian, Durkheimian, and Marxian (to a lesser extent) link causes and outcomes while skipping a key step in which humans respond to the former in order to create the latter; an issue common in many historical takes that Weber's sociology potentially deals with (Coleman 1986). The omission of agency found in these classics has largely found its way into most macrosociological models of evolution, such as those focused on differentiation theory (Luhmann 1977, 1995), technological capacity (Lenski 1970), or the NES (Turner and Machalak 2018) pay little attention. In a sense, the evolution of functional systems like polity (Luhmann 1995) or law (Luhmann 2004) are interesting in their own right, but they obscure the multi-level nature of social evolution (Turchin 2016), especially the role human groups play (Wilson 2002), as well as the smaller spans of time in which punctuated change unfold (Abrutyn and Lawrence 2010, Boyd and Richerson 1992).

In this sense, then, a Weberian selectionist intervention seems fruitful not only as a means of exhausting the classical canon's contribution to a more sophisticated sociocultural evolutionary theory, but also because of the central role interests—real, imagined, or anticipated—play in shaping the ›tracks‹ of history (Weber 1946a: 180 ff.) alongside the distrust in nomothetic logic that introduces contingency at every turn. The strength in this approach, as we will see, is that evolution need not be teleological or tautological. Weber's agents—carrier groups, in his terminology—may incite great change not because of a societal need or exigency, but for their own interests and, in the face of success, reverse engineer their claims and narratives. Indeed, a tenuous balance always exists between the interests of the carrier group and the benefits (or costs) other strata—or society *writ* large experience from their innovations (Colomy 1990a, 1998). While I will return to some of these points in the concluding section, I turn now to a greater discussion of the agents of sociocultural evolution.

Institutional Entrepreneurs

Charismatic carriers and ethics

It has long been fashionable to look for a cultural equivalent to the gene, like the meme or something similar (Dawkins 1976), and yet culture is neither replicated in fidelity nor is simply carried inside the individual (Lizardo 2017). Conversely, Weber intriguingly posited *carrier groups* as the locus of cultural innovation, diffusion, and sedimentation. More specifically, Weber saw carrier groups as the progenitors and champions of world views, »ethics,« and the material and ideal interests that serve to bridge the realm of ideas and that of habits and practices—or, what Bendix (1962: 260) terms Weber's conceptualization of *culture*. Though often vaguely defined in Weber's work and in commentaries

on Weber, world views are the foundation for a sense of collective identity that provides a relational position vis-à-vis other people or groups. They are comprised of the sorts of anchors that materialize in social infrastructure and external representations of the group: a shared history, sense of place, and mutually dependent destiny. Though Weber (1946b) often thought about them in religious terms, world views could be institutionalized such that those who did not belong to the carrier could orient themselves accordingly (Kalberg 2004). World views are contrasted with the notion of ethic, which is also only vaguely understood in sociology, but which tends to refer to the concrete repertoire of behaviors and practices loosely premised on, justified by, and prescribed/proscribed through world views (Swedberg 1998: 134 ff.). Premising them on world views does not mean people are consciously comparing or thinking about the alignment between how they see the world and how they act, though certainly some elites responsible for self-referential tasks often do speak in theoretical terms about the ideal relationship (Luhmann 1977).

Linking the two are interests (Weber 1946d: 180 ff.), which are facilitated and constrained by world views and made tangible or concrete—in fact or intersubjectively—via practices and habits (Merton 1979, von Ihering 1968: 137). Interests differ from world views in two respects. First, the latter are highly abstract knowledge systems that usually are the concern of virtuosi in a sphere of social action (Sharot 2001) and become only relevant in taken for granted, internalized knowledge that is associated with habitual or routinized feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Put slightly different, interests are the broad array of things that we like (Martin and Lembo 2020), some of which are deemed serious like money or status while others are less tangible like love or joy, and seem to bridge the abstract world of beliefs and the concrete world of practice. Weber (1946a: 180 f.) famously split these into two types, material and ideal, to distinguish between the basic things people wanted like food or sex, health or wealth, or things that are immediately rewarding in the literal and figurative sense of the word, and intangible things like aesthetic pleasure, justice, grace, love, and so forth, that are not easily obtained or quantified when doing so (Lizardo and Stoltz 2018). Consequently, while we rarely think about how our perspective of the world informs our actions, what we find »interesting« (Martin and Lembo 2020) or offers us affordances (Abrutyn and Lizardo 2023) often does directly impact our behavior. At the level of the group, where interests are presumed to be shared, collective action in carrier groups coalesce around real, perceived, or anticipated interests. These interests could be existential, threatening the viability or livelihood of its members, or they may be highly abstract such as the pursuit of meaning, justice, peace, beauty, and so forth; or they may simply be about getting together and enjoying activities. What matters is groups become carriers when they believe they have a distinct world view that needs spreading, not necessarily for the sake of other's health and welfare, but for the sake of the group's existence.

As new members are welcomed, adherents attracted, or structures crystallized, ethics become the routinized behavioral repertoires presumed to channel batches of people towards realizing their interests, even if there is little objective evidence that they do in fact realize them. Again, elites may talk about and purposefully organize their life so that world views and ethics align, but the trick is making practices a taken for granted matter.

Taken together, these three elements (world view, interests, and ethics), which I will

call a *cultural assemblage*, add far greater depth to a cultural theory of evolution. For one thing, cultural assemblages are central to the creation of a sense of »group« serving as the core elements by which a sense of history, destiny, and collective identity are erected and serve to tether individual members' own personal identities. But, not just any group: one that feels compelled to articulate and develop these assemblages beyond the boundaries of their daily lives. They become carriers when they feel that their assemblage deals with the ultimate grounds of moral and affectual reality. As such, an assemblage can either increase or decrease the solidarity between members, encourage altruistic behaviors, and become the foundations for corporate action. Additionally, assemblages are the mechanism by which carriers attract new members, contrast their contribution vis-à-vis existing assemblages, and build a collective movement beyond the initial purveyors of the assemblage. Finally, cultural assemblages are the substance routinized into institutional structures, shifting the source of discipline from the group's own ability to generate solidarity and corporate action into taken for granted organizational structure that can detach the ethical components from the pursuit of distal ultimate values.

From carriers to entrepreneurs

One of the most important uses of Weber's carrier groups, was Eisenstadt (1963, 1982), who called them *institutional entrepreneurs*. They were institutional in so far as their impact was felt in their differentiation of new or reconfiguration of old social spheres, or »social orders« like polity, religion, or law (Weber 1946a, c). He labeled them entrepreneurs for several reasons, not least of which because they innovated symbolically (proposing new or modified world views), organizationally (new ways of linking members together and to the burgeoning institutional core), and normatively (often through moral frames saturated in affect and juxtaposed with existing immoral world views). Embarking on projects often centered on one or more of these types of innovation (Colomy and Rhoades 1994), entrepreneurs are involved in high risk/high reward gambits; gambits predicated on either delegitimizing existing moral orders (Colomy 1990) or in setting their own world views and ethics apart from existing elites (Abrutyn 2014a). The risks are different than conventional economic entrepreneurs whose investments may falter, as institutional entrepreneurs may be stamped out symbolically or, worse, violently by a fearful elite. The reward, however, can be near-total material and symbolic independence from existing structures of domination. That is, they can come to be core elites of an institutional sphere or, depending on the time and place, *the* pool of elites (Eisenstadt 1980).

The advantages to introducing institutional entrepreneurs and swapping out carrier groups are several. First, while both are forces of evolutionary change, entrepreneurs have received a significant amount of empirical elucidation of massive (Abrutyn 2014a; Abrutyn and Turner 2022; Joosse 2018) and gradual, smaller change (Colomy 1990; Colomy and Rhoades 1994;). In addition, Colomy (1990) distinguished between conservative »strategic agents« and those likely to change the system. The term carrier evokes the idea of preservation, which is not the only means by which agents can qualitatively trans-

form structure and culture. Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, are capable of any form of ideological commitments and innovations. They may be conservative reactionaries whose zeal to preserve changes the social order or they may be radicals; or, they may be Colomy's accomodationists who initially stumble into being change agents and mobilize with purpose once they recognize their opportunities.

Thus, what made them evolutionary forces, in Eisenstadt's mind, was their capacity to act as a sociological equivalent of mutations. A sort of Lamarckian source of evolution, they were creative forces that could be maladaptive, neutral, or adaptive. In most cases, entrepreneurs make little mark besides historical footnotes, but when they succeed they leave indelible marks such as the religious entrepreneurs in China or India or ancient Israel that reconfigured the world in the first millennia BCE in previously unimaginable ways (Abrutyn 2014a, Eisenstadt 1986b). Following Weber's own thoughts, others have noted that these spheres become real in their self-referentiality (Luhmann 1995) and in their differentiation and jealous protection over physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space (Abrutyn 2014b).⁴ All of which is to say, entrepreneurship could culminate, in the most transformative of circumstances, in exceedingly autonomous social orders or spheres that supported the continued activities of their carrier groups, sedimented these group's cultural assemblages for generations to come, and fashioned the feelings, thoughts, and actions of myriad other strata across a population.

In short, entrepreneurial carriers are the dynamic, agentic force missing from nearly every model of sociocultural evolution. This was Weber's (1946d) big innovation: to emphasize the trajectory of historical change was shaped by the group »switching« the direction upon which the »train« was headed. They represent an historically contingent force that is both a unit upon which Turner's three types of social (and sometimes natural) selection operate and, also, a mechanism of selection as well. While some innovations are stumbled upon, their true capacity for transformative, qualitative structural and cultural change comes from their deliberate effort to pry open or leverage structural holes, struggle for and secure material, human, and symbolic resources, and constitute/expand autonomous institutional spheres. As students of social movements know, change is not linear and, therefore, they also represent a corrective over implicit and explicit progressivist and/or unilinear models of evolution. In a word, they bring all the virtues of Weberian historical sociology to evolutionary theorizing, along with the possibilities of linking evolutionary sociology to a robust cultural sociology that has been drawing from cognitive science for some time (Lizardo 2017). For the most part, this cluster of cultural research emphasizes the mechanisms by which people acquire cultural meanings that direct them and that provide potential pegs upon which new relationships can be hung. These processes matter if we are to understand how transformation is not just structural, which scholars like Eisenstadt are much better at explaining when they discuss new divisions of labor, but also cultural in Weberian or Eisenstadtian terms. Later, I'll return to

4 To these explicit Weberian roles—founders and routinizers—I would add they are the sociocultural equivalent to gene flow, or the movement of individual genetic carriers from one population to another.

these points. For now, it is best to turn to the heart of the Weberian selectionist argument and the three phases or subtypes of evolution his entrepreneurial carriers are capable of.

Rethinking Selection Processes

For Weber, the master social process is rationalization, which meant inchoate social associations and communities, over time, move towards greater rationality. Charismatic leaders and their retinue initially experience freedom to express and innovate, but eventually are met with basic organizational pressures related to the problem of succession, of socializing/training neophytes, and of sustaining an adequate flow of material resources for biological reproduction. Routinization of structure and culture are inevitable. Thus, within this process, there are three identifiable entrepreneurial phases: founding, diffusing, and sedimentation. The boundaries between these phases or entrepreneurs is not necessarily clear-cut in all cases, but they do encompass different dynamics and selection processes. The first is analogous to biological mutation in two ways: while entrepreneurship is a near-continuous source of diversity upon which social selection operates, projects are often neutral, maladaptive, or, occasionally, adaptive and innovations can range from the simple to extraordinary. Diffusion is closer to gene flow, as entrepreneurs or their assemblages spread across a population through both effort and various types of biases (Henrich 2001) and, with or without entrepreneurship, spread to other populations that become aware of the innovations. The last form of Weberian selection finds entrepreneurship occurring within the structure and culture of established institutional spheres, and thus draws Weber closest to Spencerian, Durkheimian, and Marxian selection processes.

Phase 1: Founders

At the earliest moments of Weberian selection, real, perceived, or anticipated exigencies motivate an individual's (or more likely, a small group of individuals') project. On the one hand, like mutations in the biotic world, founders are a common feature of any social system. That is to say, there are always people that are dissatisfied or feel injustice. They reflect the sometimes random, sometimes deliberate source of diversity and variation. Indeed, human ingenuity mixed with big brains that are subject to various biases means just about anyone can »feel« that there are problems and those problems require solutions; even if, they are not objectively a problem. On the other hand, there are certain times and places in which founders flourish. In moments of major cultural decay or under exceptionally intense environmental pressures, we would expect entrepreneurship such as the emergence of the Ghost Dance cult among the Sioux in the late 1800s (Wallace 1956). Less spectacular conditions, however, also are fertile ground. Founders sometimes emerge (1) in the liminal spaces between institutional spheres, where problems of communication between spheres can grow salient or (2) in »subsystems« or spaces close to the core and among actors responsible for linking the center to the broader society (Abrutyn 2014b).

They may also appear in unsettled times (Swidler 1986), or more accurately, when a class of people or a specific group feels their status is threatened or eroded (Eisenstadt in Weber 1968: xxviii). Thus, in settled and unsettled times, founders can innovate in ways that create new symbolic, normative, and/or organizational patterns designed to reconstitute the practices and beliefs of an indefinite number of people.

Notably, founders are small, nimble, and often labeled threats. On the material level, the co-optation of charisma outside of the legitimate order threatens elites, their privilege and power, and their own claims to honor. Their conceptual threat, however, is just as existential. The earliest religious entrepreneurs during the Axial Age purposefully sought to erect a symbolic and organizational gap between the supernatural and the mundane, thereby elevating their own status to equals or even above the political elite (Eisenstadt 1982, 1986). Many sought to do this by differentiating religious space, time, and social relationships, and consequently, autonomous religious orders (Abrutyn 2014a). Because of the size and scale of the Axial Age, it may seem as though evolution only happens rarely, however, less spectacular examples abound. Beginning around the late nineteenth century, medical entrepreneurs began to struggle for their own independence and capacity to develop an autonomous medical sphere, whose evolution accelerated with the advent of penicillin and, just as quickly, regressed in the 1970s (Starr 1982). Thus, evolution can happen in smaller scales like the evolution of a medical sphere or specific fields like baseball as a distinctive self-referential sport (Leifer 1998).

Notably, in this earliest stage, the entrepreneurial unit—that is the founder(s) and their retinue—acts as the unit of selection and not a selection mechanism (Richerson and Boyd 1992). Their survival is precarious as they may not attract material and human resources to support their activities or elites may try to stamp out their assemblages. Because of this, much of the innovation focuses inward on promoting solidarity among members, reducing conflict, and engendering collective action so the group can move quickly in the event that relocating or hiding is a necessary solution to a threat. As such, symbolic and normative innovations rise to the fore, as leadership tries to build up forms of control commitment without threatening the cohesion that naturally builds among people oriented towards the same cause (Kanter 1968), under the same real or imagined threats, and sharing in responsibilities of achieving this cause and carrying out an important mission. In addition, during this phase the skill of framing the entrepreneurial project is of paramount importance, reflecting the very personal idiosyncrasies of early charismatic carrier groups.

Phase 2: Cultural Diffusion

If a founding group can endure, and it grows such that direct, reciprocal relationships become impossible for all the members, then cultural assemblages become increasingly important to integrating and regulating, as well as legitimating the increasingly hierarchical nature of a group that gets bigger, denser, and more diverse. Well-developed configurations also allow the group to radiate outward, drawing more human and material

resources into its orbit. It is at this point that entrepreneurs (or, more perhaps more accurately, their cultural assemblages) become not only units selected upon but a force of social selection as well. Accordingly, carriers begin to seek out, pry open, or otherwise create structural opportunities. It is at this point that a «community»...arises in connection with a [charismatic movement] as a result of routinization, i.e., as a result of the process by which either the [charismatic leader] or [the charismatic carrier] secure the permanence of« (Weber 1922: 60) the dissemination of knowledge and practices. By community, Weber means the carrier assumes »the form of a permanent organization [that distributes] fixed rights and duties« (Weber 1968: 62), as well as regulates the everyday activities of those drawn within the physical or cognitive orbit of the entrepreneur. More abstractly, entrepreneurs begin (1) assembling and articulating an amalgam of normative, symbolic, and/or organizational formations, (2) strengthening claims to monopolies over their innovations as both signs of their charisma and as advantage against potential threats to their privilege, and (3) purposefully working to draw greater amounts of human and material resources.

At this phase in the evolutionary process, there are four distinct, yet interrelated, pragmatics that accelerate the selection process. First, entrepreneurs continue to focus on monopolizing the problems they purport to resolve with their innovations. These »solutions« are key to their claims, as well as to sustaining and expanding a resource base that supports their material existence. Second, they must deal with threats from both existing elites who will increasingly have to develop a response as well as competitors within their own ranks who may arise because of organizational weaknesses, self-interest, or the problem of succession. Third, entrepreneurs must find and sustain alternative bases of human and material resources if they are to gain the capacity to become structurally and culturally independent from elites. Fourth, tensions between the initial framing of their project and the pressures to adapt a frame to a larger and more diverse coalition can encourage competitors, serve as points for existing elites to exploit, and also undermine the material support they receive from certain strata. These four selection processes accelerate as entrepreneurs begin to differentiate physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space, carving out *place* for their routine activities and a »headquarters« necessary for expansion.

The Axial Age, again, serves as a good example of the first selection pressures. Historical contingencies often determine the response by elites, which range from accommodation strategies that may lead to power-sharing agreements (e.g., the Chinese literati) (Gernet 1982) to full-blown efforts to eradicate the group by any means necessary (e.g., the Northern Kingdom of Israel's campaign against Yahwists (Smith 1971 [1987])). Political entrepreneurs can also try to co-opt the entrepreneur, by either assimilating them into the polity or claiming their innovations as their own. In each of these cases, the initial *raison d'être* of the carrier may begin to shift from solving an exigency to survival-mode. It may also be emboldened in the face of threat, using that threat to close ranks and search for alternative bases of resources. For Axial Age religious entrepreneurs, one of the most common strategies across cases was symbolic and organizational reconfiguration of the »community,« distinguishing their jurisdictional claims through trans-political, ecumenical terms in contradistinction to political institutions that remained bounded

by geography and the limits of administrative and military power (Mann 1986). In many cases, this process resembles the sort of Marxian selection Turner outlines, but the State is not always the prize entrepreneurs pursue nor is it a necessary condition for their survival. Buddhist entrepreneurs succeeded in being elevated during Ashoka's reign over the Indian subcontinent (c. 268–232 BCE), but were subsequently sent out of India for good when the empire collapsed (Keay 2000). Buddhism, nevertheless, proved adaptive as it spread throughout Southeast Asia.

The second selection process is more purely Weberian as entrepreneurs struggle against competitors. Whether one finds the contemporary religious economies tradition satisfying in its entirety or not (Finke and Stark 1988) does not detract from the point that expansion can be curtailed by competing carriers; particularly where elites endorse pluralism (Berger 1969). Modern religious entrepreneurs in the West, for instance, cannot claim a monopoly over the religious sphere, weakening their own claims and therefore structural and cultural independence. Conversely, when medical doctors united and founded the American Medical Association and successfully lobbied the US government for the right to self-govern, they secured a massive victory over rivals that ranged from the truly absurd ›snake-oil salesmen‹ to the more dangerous homeopaths (Starr 1982). And though the success against their competitors did not mark the end of medical evolution in the U.S., it was a watershed moment in the narrative.

The final selection pressure is the search for diverse bases of resources. The earliest religious carriers were not really religious in their orientation, at least not in the sense that we understand them today, because they were embedded in the King's retinue (Machinist 1986). They were fully dependent on the State for their privilege for the same reason the merchant class was: there were so few people/strata with disposable wealth to support their activities. An interesting example of a successful search, however, takes us into Europe in the 11th/12th centuries when legal entrepreneurship carried legal-rational cultural assemblages across western and southern Europe (Unger 1976). Initially, Pope Gregory VII instituted a series of major reforms designed to draw clear jurisdictional boundaries (the so-called investiture crisis) between the Church and Henry IV's Holy Roman Empire. He chose to fight the political establishment through law, allowing the first universities in Bologna, Salerno, and Paris to develop robust and relatively independent legal entrepreneurs and cultures (Berman 1983). What began as a religious project soon became a hybrid religio-legal project, as religious entrepreneurs sent to these law schools came back with new rational-legal world views and ethics that gradually transformed the Church into a corporate entity in the modern legal sense (Collins 1986a). As more and more legal entrepreneurs were trained by an increasingly standardized and routinized legal education, the demand for their services spread both because of their own concerted efforts and because other elites or aspiring strata were subject to mimetic isomorphic forces (Berman 1983). In evolutionary terms, gene flow occurred as legal-rational assemblages spread to the polity (Royal law), the estates (Aristocratic law), the city (Urban) and economy (Mercantile) law. By the end of his life, Weber had come to recognize the diffusion of the legal-rational ethic as a foundational force behind the rise of the West (Weber 1927 [2002]). This position did not negate his Protestant Ethic thesis, which focused on

the congruence of a Protestant religious ethic with a European civic strata forged through this legal-rational ethic and the peculiar world view/interests it carried with it (Weber 1946b, d).

Phase 3: Sedimentation

If an entrepreneur is successful in the fullest sense of the word intended in this essay, then they have constructed an institutional sphere that clearly demarcates physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space. Its core, which maybe be singular like a political capital or multitudinous—e.g., financial centers in a global economy (Sassen 1998)—becomes the gravitational center (Shils 1975), and becomes a center of production, reproduction, and self-referentiality (Luhmann 1995). The sphere continues to deal with exigencies, but the self-referential nature of some entrepreneurs in some subsystems, expands the number of concrete problems while simultaneously generalizing these problems under one or more substantive values. Thus, a religious entrepreneur may be initially a force of protest against unjust political action, but as Weber would argue, once rationalized, its repertoire and concerns expand to include congeries of external exigencies related to morality and the supernatural and the typical litany of internal dilemmas associated with organizations (Kalberg 1980). In doing so, the sphere becomes as much, if not more, of an environment for new evolutionary pressures as the biotic environment (Abrutyn and Turner 2022). Indeed, assuming biological evolution is more relevant than social and cultural evolution is one of the biggest errors neo-Darwinian social science makes by attempting to import biological evolution to human societies (Turner and Maryanski 2008). Arguably, by the time kinship became the dominant organizing principle in human societies some 300,000 years ago, sociocultural evolution became *the* driving force of human evolution (Turner and Maryanski 2009). The last Weberian phase reflects this, but shifts from human evolution *writ large* to the social order or sphere as the unit of selection. As cultural assemblages are routinized and sedimented into structure and culture, solidarity is replaced with hierarchy, authority, taken for granted mechanisms, and organizational structure. And, it is the stability and endurance of this routinization that becomes the selected on when the environment changes.

Key to the sedimentation phase is the fact that unlike the founder or diffusion stage where entrepreneurs remained relatively mobile, entrepreneurship was as tethered to the institutional order as the elites they initially opposed were. Institutional differentiation and self-referentiality meant carving out a core that is physically, temporally, and cognitively autonomous. Clusters of buildings house routine entrepreneurial activities that occur at specific hours, days, and so forth. Some buildings are the true centers, like the White House, the Vatican, a sport's league's headquarters, while other buildings contain secondary entrepreneurs, or the actors responsible for support services to the core (Abrutyn 2014b), translating elite messages to other elites or the public, and acting as a buffer between the world and the core. Washington D.C. is replete with anonymous and labeled buildings filled with a civil bureaucracy of nameless actors. In many spheres, the core is »portable« or »replicable«. Catholic parishes dot the Western world's landscape, acting

as a proxy core structuring and enculturating the phenomenological experience of the congregants belonging to the parish. Likewise, the 30 Major League Baseball (MLB) stadiums that, in essence, serve the same purpose as a house of worship, pull people into the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic sphere of sport.

Other institutional entrepreneurs find themselves in the overlaps of two or more spheres, acting as liaisons between them. Law firms, for instance, serve as a bridge between the legal core where kinship, religious, economic, or political conflicts are translated into legal language. Liaisons tether themselves to their natal institution because of their training and source of reward, but are also capable of innovating in ways that increase the diversity of the institutional ecosystem *and* can potentially become forces of massive transformation as well because of their position further from the core. Some liaisons take on the paradoxical qualities of secondary and liaison entrepreneurs. When »foreign« entrepreneurs »retain« their services, such as the in-house lawyers for McDonald's or MLB, they reproduce legal ethics and world views *within* the economic or sport spheres, respectively. However, finding themselves further from the legal core with their primary source of reward and authority coming not from the legal sphere but from the sphere to which they do their legal activities frees them up and orients them to multiple assemblages. Indeed, their actions may be perceived or in fact be corrupted or polluted, or they may come to serve as one further source of variation upon which entrepreneurship can select in the event of (social) environmental change or crisis.

Finally, in this ecological analysis, an established institutional sphere or complex (the configuration of all institutional spheres), implies a boundary between the social system and whatever lies beyond. This may be purely metaphorical, as margins or peripheries or »non-space« may exist *within* the boundaries of society—e.g., so-called disorganized space is often defined as such by the core and while the core attempts to discipline this space through intensified monitoring and sanctioning, all systems of all sizes have real limits. In any case, these margins are the potential sites of new founder carrier groups. The closer the margin is to the core, the more focused the new cultural assemblage is on repudiating and destroying the core, while marginal entrepreneurship that is distant may simply be random and abstractly focused on the scourge of organization and civilization.

During the sedimentation phase, selection processes take on many forms. The most obvious form shares affinities with Spencerian selection (Turner and Abrutyn 2017). Biotic environments may change or be perceived as changing in ways that pose new problems for the existing sphere. In addition, other institutional spheres and their entrepreneurs may also become the source of »environmental« change posing problems. Politics may create new regulations that appear as threats or pressures for adaptation, for instance (Eisenstadt 1963). Finally, the institutional sphere itself, as an environment housing an assortment of other types of social units like secondary entrepreneurs embedded in broader fields of organizations, may produce pressures on different spaces. Perhaps the sphere becomes too rigid, overcentralizing and consolidating resources, and consequently stripping one or more fields of necessary resources

Notably, sedimentation does not stymie entrepreneurship; quite the contrary, it may accelerate or, at least, encourage it. For instance, the history of political evolution is full

of existing entrepreneurs responding adaptively—sometimes successfully and sometimes not—to new environmental challenges. Naram-Sin (c. 2254–2218), the grandson of Sargon of Akkad, was the first king to declare himself a god as well (Nissen 1988). Faced with a growing polity and internal tensions founded on the lack of a centralized priesthood and competing local, city priests throughout his kingdom, in one fell swoop he centralized control over all of the temples (and, therefore, the priests). Other entrepreneurs try to co-opt, assimilate, or elevate the innovations of lower-order corporate and individual actors. Constantine and Ashoka were emperors that elevated (Christian and Buddhist) cultural assemblages in an effort to expand their symbolic power vis-à-vis their sprawling political territory (Mann 1986). Additionally, and sometimes because of the unintended consequences of adaptive projects primary entrepreneurs embark upon, secondary entrepreneurs are often in high-leverage positions, capable of using their monopoly over knowledge and practices as a means to prying open new structural and cultural holes (Eisenstadt 1964, 1980, 1982). Once Constantine elevated Christianity, for instance, religious entrepreneurs set to work on using their new found structural and cultural freedom in building an increasingly discrete religious sphere (Chadwick 1967). The key, here is that selection is usually a process *within* the extant structure, or premised on the structure.

Addendum: Conflict, Contestation, and Linearity

For the most part, I've outlined an argument about multi-linearity and contingency befitting of Weber's legacy, yet mostly presented the theory linearly for rhetorical reasons. In this short addendum, I would like to cover two key elements inherent to Weber and, therefore, Weberian selection, that guards against making the mistakes of the old functionalist and stage model theories. First, the role unintended consequences, very clearly illustrated in *The Protestant Ethic*, play in evolution and, second, the near-continuous specter of conflict, contestation, and adaptation that make sociocultural evolution an »incomplete« (Colomy 1990) or uneven (Abrutyn 2014b).

In terms of the former, an example may suffice. One of the most important periods of western history was the Gregorian Reformation that began around 1175 CE and stretched into the 13th century (Berman 1983). During this period, the Catholic Church looked to centralized, consolidate, and carve out religious autonomy vis-à-vis the Holy Roman Empire and Henry IV. For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, they chose to draw legal boundaries and use law as a weapon against the emperor and the landed gentry throughout Europe, as well as against rogue parishes (Collins 1986b). In the process of doing so, they supported the autonomy of cities and universities with the express interest in fomenting legal scholarship. Most of the papal circle by the late 12th century were trained jurists, for instance. The unintended consequences came in the structural and cultural support of legal entrepreneurship and, eventually, a legal sphere differentiated from the religious and political. It took centuries, to be sure, but the Church eventually lost autonomy as law became the basis of the Nation-State, of an

ascendant urban, merchant class, and a core foundation for positive science (Abrutyn and Turner 2022).

In terms of the second wrinkle in Weberian evolutionary processes, Colomy (1990b) argued that with greater consolidation comes greater probabilities of resistance within and without the entrepreneurial group. Secondary elites or support actors are very often unintentional sources of resistance. As they specialize and their own spheres of influence within an institutional domain (e.g., bureaucrats in a polity or a department in an economic organization) grow and their knowledge and practices become monopolized, their goals may diverge from that of the entrepreneur (Rueschemeyer 1977). This is a recurring problem throughout the evolution of the polity, as transportation and communication technologies severely constrain the political center's capacity to control peripheral territories further and further away (Collins 1981). But, it is also quite apparent in every market-driven autonomous economy, where meta-markets arise that strain to free themselves from lower-level markets (Collins 1990). There is no reason to see evolution as progressive, linear, or uncontested, even though a macroscopic view of multiple millennia can present this image (Lenski 1970).

Implications

New Thoughts on Sociocultural Evolution

There are several gaps in new evolutionary theory (Turner and Machalak 2018). The most pressing revolve around how much biological language to import if we are to avoid metaphors. For instance, the issue surrounding what is selected upon remains as sticky today as in the past. Some, like Blute (2010), continue to press the idea that social evolution works on phenotypes or gene frequencies within a population, which sometimes is extended to some micro-unit similar to a gene (e.g., meme). Others, like Turner, assert that *all* units of social reality can be selected upon from the micro to the macro. A Weberian analysis offers a delimited set of things selection works on. The carrier group in the first two phases is selected upon, initially in its capacity to remain a cohesive unit and biologically reproduce its members and, later, to be able to adapt its assemblages to the responses of various other strata. The cultural assemblage is also a unit of selection as they vary in terms of their capacity to reduce conflict, encourage cooperation, and attach individuals to the group affectively. Finally, the social sphere becomes a unit of selection in the last phase. Exigencies put pressure on these spheres, their elites and secondary elites, and the crystallized assemblages' ability to channel a significant portion of the population's feelings, thoughts, and actions in ways that engender cultural reproduction and the capacity for collective action.

Additionally, the ideas of fitness and adaptivity are fleshed out by Weber. Assemblages, in particular, are successful in so far as they move corporate units—groups, organizations, communities, and so forth—towards greater cohesion, lower conflict between members, and greater affiliation with the collective—the qualities Queller and Strassman (2009) characterize as organismality. The more the assemblage achieves these qualities,

the greater we would predict individual goals and desires overlap with that of the group's (Kanter 1968). Organizational innovations, for instance, that make members' contribution to carrier group activities inseparable increase group-level attachments (Lawler 2002). They also increase the amount of investment individuals make towards the group as well as increase the likelihood of recurring, frequent »communion« (Kanter 1968), or ritualized interaction and communication that serves the purpose of solidarity-building as much as achieving some sort of stated end (Collins 2004). In addition, greater investment and frequency of communion-style rituals encourage individuals to increase the sacrifices they make (e.g., eschewing alternative social relationships or investments), which often take on a normative, or moral, tone. These innovations nearly always involve some sort of mortification process (Kanter 1968), often invented to initiate new members as well as act as a means for old members to publicly renew their own commitment. Mortification, which is in essence an admissions process designed to strip members of their past biography to prepare them for accepting and later reconfirming a new identity fully subordinate to the singular authority of the group (Goffman 1961).

Consequently, the more cooperative and altruistic they become, the less likely they are to have conflict with each other, and the more social power the carrier group can leverage. Groups that have high cohesion and low conflict, for instance, can withstand tragedies that threaten the group and, instead of weakening attachment, can in fact strengthen it (Festinger 1964). This is obviously most important in moments where carriers are threatened by State actors who attempt to literally destroy, exile, or kill members or the entire group. The group must be nimble, capable of hiding its secrets, running, or even fighting against insurmountable odds.

By distinguishing between multiple levels and types of adaptivity and fitness, evolution can become a more common process that always is working on lower-levels of social organization with major transformative moments being rarer. It also moves us away from having to characterize evolution as something positive in the fullest sense of the word, as carriers may be adaptive in the sense of cultural reproduction but maladaptive for individual member's health—e.g., some mortification rituals are intensely shameful and the process Goffman (1961) calls disculturation carries severe consequences for ex-members. Likewise, carrier groups may never have the opportunity to diffuse or sediment their assemblage. They may have strange practices, like celibacy, that lead their artifacts outliving them, like the authors of the Dead Sea scrolls; they may be stamped out while the elite assimilate some of their innovations into broader structural and cultural formations; or they may unintentionally or intentionally seek to spread their assemblages. It is this latter outcome that further expands Weberian selection's ties to cultural sociology.

Putting the Cultural in Evolution

A second key implication involves the light advances in cultural sociology provides evolutionary theorizing. For instance, what increases the odds a cultural assemblage, or aspects of it, will act like both a centrifugal and centripetal force, radiating outward across a

population while drawing more and more people nearer to the carrier group? One thing we learn from cultural sociology is that »settled« times make it more challenging for entrepreneurs to efficaciously frame their project as necessary, just, and moral (Swidler 1986). The elite's response may serve to delegitimize the group and its claims as well, or severe rebuke may engender empathy and raise attention to the goals and innovations of the entrepreneur. The messaging itself must also be crafted right. Weber (1946d) argued Protestantism »stuck« and »spread« because of the articulation of meanings directed at a burgeoning, civic middle-class strata. Put differently, assemblages that carry *rhetorical force*, are *resonant* in so far as not being radically opposed to existing schema, and which are easily *retrieved* are more easily diffused (Schudson 1989). In addition to rhetorical force, resonance, and retrievability, Schudson (1989) argues culture is picked up by others when it is *resolute* in so far as closely coupling beliefs to actions. Finally, cultural assemblages that are *retained*, or sedimented amplify the other R's. To this, I would add cultural assemblages that offer, subjectively or in fact, *rewarding* role repertoires will be especially motivating and diffuse (Turner 1978). All of this is to say, cultural assemblages that can be internalized into cognitive mechanisms, like schema, that transform external culture into pragmatic (Gross 2009) or non-declarative knowledge (Lizardo 2017)—that is, the sort of subconscious, practical muscle-memory that is often difficult to access consciously but which drives a lot of automatic cognition and behavior—will produce the most commitment.

Additionally, several structural features of carriers contribute to the degree to which their assemblages readily spread. In a review of thousands of studies of cultural diffusion, Henrich (2001) found three biases making people susceptible. First, indirect-biases make people likely to be influenced by people they trust—e.g., those they differentially identify with—presuming that feelings, thoughts, and actions they express are appropriate, worthy, valued, and so forth. Second, prestige-biases reflect the fact that people are more likely to adopt thoughts and behaviors from those they deem honorable or hold in high esteem. Third, conformity-biases explain why diffusion often follows an S-curve, beginning slowly, and then rapidly spreading through a population until it plateaus.

As assemblages diffuse, three things happen. One, entrepreneurs are able to find alternative bases of human and material resources. Operations cannot be expanded without these resources. Moreover, as the cultural assemblage spreads to more community members, it begins to transform practical knowledge, making the ethic and its attendant interests increasingly taken for granted (Goldberg and Stein 2018). Finally, diffusion always generates new exigencies. What these exigencies look like, in reality, always are historical and empirical questions. As noted above, one exigency comes in the form of elite responses. These may be hostile or they may be parasitic; in both cases, entrepreneurs must respond. Another exigency comes with successful diffusion: to handle the new logistical loads of managing more people and resources, routinization of organization becomes pressing, and thus entrepreneurs further tweak their projects to meet these new internal problems. Other exigencies are always possible, and thus diffusion is neither a linear process nor is it safe from selection pressures that may reverse or wipe out any gains made.

Revisiting the Standard Sociological Historiography

Evolutionary theorizing has long held stage models in high regard, elevating—even while criticizing—a Marxian historiography of one sort or another (Lenski 1970), while ardent defenders and critics of Weber continue to evaluate the claim that the West's history turned on the axis of the Protestant Reformation (Cohen 2002). A Weberian selectionist theory, however, pushes us to think a little differently about the historiography that we employ to make sense of these questions, as well as many others. Given the centrality institutional entrepreneurs play, there appears to be epochal qualitatively transformative moments that help illustrate sociocultural evolution and whatever strange path the human species is on. 5,000 years ago, the evolution of urban polities (Eisenstadt 1963) happened independently in several locations and continued, through recurring adaptation and political entrepreneurship, for the next 2500 or more years. By the end of the first millennia BCE, it appears the polity had reached its apex in solving problems based on the agrarian state model. At that point, religious evolution accelerated as religious assemblages and their carriers exploded throughout the old world, carrying world views and ethics that were designed to integrate disparate populations that in the old political model, would not have been considered consanguine (Eisenstadt 1986a). Both epochal periods have much to offer a sociological theory of evolution, as they underscore the role exigencies, entrepreneurship, and adaption work across all three phases.

But, these analyses can be transposed on several other epochal moments. The aforementioned Gregorian reformation appears to challenge sociologists to re-center the importance of law and legal evolution as one cause of the West's rise to prominence. It also casts new light on the evolution of the city and economic autonomy, science and the university, and, yes, the Protestant Reformation.

Less ambitiously, this theory also pushes us to think about the last two centuries and the way religious carriers and religion itself has evolved. The story of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, the adaptation of German Jewry in the late nineteenth century that transformed how contemporary Jews understand worship, the explosion of cults in unsettled times, and the more recent rise of fundamentalist religious carriers across the world (Almond et al. 2003) all point to fruitful paths for expanding on this initial theoretical sketch. The medical institution briefly discussed above also provides an excellent example of how evolution is neither linear nor complete, as medical entrepreneurs have faced a series of setbacks beginning in the 1970s that have altered how the sphere of American medicine looks and feels. Finally, less examined institutional spheres, like sports or the media or art, could very well benefit from evolutionary analyses that give some strong theoretical purchase to key spheres of contemporary social life as well as, in the case of art and to a lesser extent sport, some that stretch back millennia.

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Address:

Seth Abrutyn, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology
 Department of Sociology
 University of British Columbia
 6303 NW Marine Dr.
 Vancouver, BC V6T1Z1
 Canada
 seth.abrutyn@ubc.ca