

## [Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / If You're Reading This, You're Probably 'WEIRD'

So here's the thing, if you're listening to this podcast, you're pretty weird. You're probably very weird, and not just for all the obvious reasons you're thinking of. In social science, really certain corners of it, weird is now an acronym, stands for a certain kind of person, Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic. And weird people who have been, the people we've been surveying and studying for a lot of research on psychology, they actually turn out to be different, much more so than they, than we often realize or admit.

There are all these things we take for granted as basic elements of human psychology and ethics that are actually peculiar to the weird psychology. We take them for granted because we feel them, we take them for granted because we study ourselves and then use that to extrapolate to human nature, but we shouldn't. The idea that we have a stable self that exists across all contexts, that a person's intentions should be central to any evaluation of their actions, that guilt is a widely felt emotion, that self-esteem is crucial for happiness, we treat all these as truisms, but they're not.

At least, that's the argument made by Joseph Henrich.

Henrich is an anthropologist at Harvard who's done really deep, rich cross-cultural research and how different forms of human culture shape our psychology and into what those psychologies actually are.

His 2015 book, *The Secret of Our Success*, argued that what sets human beings apart from other species is our capacity for cultural learning.

His 2020 book, *The Weirdest People in the World*, takes that argument and extends it, arguing that beginning sometime in the Middle Ages, certain cultural and really religious shifts radically transformed the psychologies of individuals living in Europe and that then the emergence of this weird psychology was a prerequisite to everything from the development of market economies to representative government to human rights.

It's a really fascinating argument and if you take it seriously, it says something really quite profound about the indirect and unusual ways that human beings and human cultures evolve.

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Joe Henrich, welcome to the show.

It's good to be with you.

So the premise of your book is that you and me and basically all the people listening to this podcast and virtually all the people in the studies on which we have all based our ideas about what people are like, are a little weird or a little distinctive.

Tell me how.

Yeah.

So the main thing is that a lot of what you read in a psychology textbook or any of your typical psychology papers come from sampling one particular population.

And as psychologists and anthropologists and economists began to measure psychology around the world, we found a great deal of variation along things like individualism, the relevance of shame versus guilt, the importance of analytic versus holistic thinking, the role of intentionality and things like moral judgment, and a number of other areas, time, thrift, temporal discounting and I could keep going.

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But there's this interesting pattern of global variation and how people think about the world. I want to go through some specific pieces of this or maybe run a very quick experiment with the audience.

So I want to go through a bunch of different pieces of this, but let me start by having us all run a little exercise here.

So if you say to yourself the words, I am, what fills in the blank?

Just take a second.

So for me, I think of things like, I'm a journalist, I'm a Californian.

But there's a study on this you write about, Joe, and I was wondering if you could talk through the I am study.

Yeah.

It's called the 20 statements test and they ask people to fill in the I am and then blank or the who am I as another way of approaching it.

And they just look at all the things that people respond.

And so when you do this with populations in the USA, people say things like, I'm smart, I'm a kayaker, I'm curious, all these kind of things that relate to their attributes and their accomplishments and their aspirations.

So things about themselves as an individual.

But when you do this in other places, people very quickly translate the question into things about their relationships.

So I might say, I am a father, I am a brother, I'm a member of a certain group, and those tend to dominate.

So you get many more things about relationships as opposed to things about attributes, accomplishments and aspirations.

So this has to do with how people think about themselves.

Am I a node in a relational network or am I a unitary thing with my own unique attributions and ways of approaching the world?

And how big are these differences?

Because obviously there's going to be some overlap in the curve here.

Yeah.

At the extremes, you'll get American undergraduates who will give you no relationships.

They never mentioned that they're a child or something like that, a son or something.

And then if you go somewhere like the Masai in Kenya, they'll give you almost all relational attributes.

So it runs the gamut of the spectrum.

But of course, lots of places are somewhere in the middle.

What is a place that is in the middle?

And not just on this, but in a bunch of the things we'll talk about.

When we think about the poles, these different personality typologies can be, what is a place that seems to be more balanced between them than others?

Right.

The famous psychologist Richard Nesbitt started doing comparisons between immigrants from Asia that were attending the University of Michigan and then European descent Americans

at the University of Michigan, and he was finding differences.

But then people started studying Japan and China and Korea, places like that.

And so it was thought that there was this big difference between Asia, the East and the West.

But it turns out that for lots of things, Asia is actually somewhere in the middle.

And you got to go to places like the Masai in Kenya or somewhere like that where you have completely different social structure and whatnot to get the full range of difference.

So in the book, you call as part of a psychological profile that we're talking about in the West, the individualism complex.

Tell me what that is.

Right.

So for a long time, psychologists and anthropologists have been talking about this individualism complex.

And I think at the core of it is the notion that we think of ourselves as a unitary selves and not as a node in a relational network.

And that tends to have clustering around it, things like overconfidence, a reliance on guilt versus shame, a tendency of self enhancement.

So putting your best foot forward, emphasizing your attributes and suppressing your deficits or deficiencies, things like that.

And you make the point that these different psychological approaches, they don't just emerge for no reason, that they're ways of navigating and succeeding in different cultural institutions.

So what is the individualism complex adaptive to?

What would make it be the thing that we would select for?

Yeah, that's a great way of putting the question.

The way to think about it is in the world that individualists are trying to adapt to, they're small families and most of your relationships are optional and potentially ephemeral.

So there's a marketplace for finding friends, business partners and marriage partners.

The individual has a lot of choice in this and you're cultivating a unique self.

So you're trying to emphasize those traits which will make you interesting to possible friends, possible mates and possible business partners.

So it could be honesty, intelligence.

These traits tend to be dispositional in the sense that they are operative across context.

So when someone says you're honest, they don't mean you're just honest with your friends and dishonest with everybody else.

The suggestion is that you have this trait that stretches across lots of different kinds of interactions.

Whereas in other places, you're born into a network and you get by virtue of your birth lots of responsibilities, lots of social connections, definitions about who you're likely to marry, there could be arranged marriages involved.

So really what your job is is to figure out how to prosper within this pre-built network.

If you need to set up a business partnership, for example, you'll look not for someone who's trustworthy and smart, which you might do in the other world, but instead you're looking for someone who has connected to you through lots of social ties because those social ties

will make that person trustworthy.

You just touched on something that I found fascinating when I read about it, which is that when we talk about people in the weird basket, there's more of a sense of stability in our sense of self.

I'm curious to hear you expand on that a bit, like how unstable, how unstable is this in other places and why would stability be prized, particularly in a situation where you have more choice.

I mean, you might think in a situation with more choices and more options and more capacity to move between different kinds of institutions and groups and people that it would select for immutability, right?

You can be this here and that there, that it doesn't, isn't intuitive to me.

I'm curious why you think it is.

I mean, the key idea is that there could be reputational effects and in the individualistic world, a lot of people are in the same category, sort of like strangers who you interact with, who you might turn out to have a profitable interaction with, mutually beneficial, could be a friendship, could be a business partnership.

And so you want to be known as someone who's honest or someone who's intelligent across all these different contexts, whereas in the relational world, you'll have some kinds of cousins, for example, that you have a quote, joking relationship.

So anthropologists have documented the joking relationship between what they call cross cousins, which is when your parents are opposite sex.

And that's like a very funny, playful relationship.

But then with other kinds of cousins, the same genetic distance, you'll have to have a relationship of respect.

You'll have to defer to them in conversation.

There's no joking around.

The same thing you might have your father and then your father's brother.

If it's an older brother, you have to really defer to that older brother and you wouldn't speak in his presence and you take his orders and that kind of thing.

So you just have to be mutable across these different contexts.

How you're going to behave with your professor is quite different than how you're going to behave with your friends.

And you can see that flattening increasing, you know, probably even in our lifetime.

So my undergraduates show up in my office at Harvard and say, hey, Joe, how's it going?

That gives you a sense of the kind of just general stranger category.

Why do you think we have seen that flattening?

I mean, this has gotten a lot flatter in America than it's been in other places.

I take your point that it is getting flatter still.

There seems to be a general trend against almost any kind of formality, right?

I just moved away from San Francisco, but something that has always struck me there is how much the fashion is flattened.

The very, very rich people just shop at REI and wear a lot of Patagonia and REI branded vests.

I mean, this goes back to Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg and Hoodies.

But there is something there about trying to at least aesthetically collapse distinctions and create a kind of flatness that, you know, would not have been even seen as desirable in other times.

Whether it's true, I think we can argue that.

I don't think it is true.

But the desire to make it seem true is very present.

Yeah.

And I think that's just the spreading of this notion of egalitarian individualism.

You know, we're all just individuals.

We have these traits and we can interact freely and we don't have to be scared or anything of other people.

Whereas in lots of societies, the very structural organization of the society is rooted in hierarchy and respect for authority.

And that has a bunch of downstream implications.

It means that it's easier to come to decisions, politics works a little bit differently.

But you know, you might not go into business with someone, for example, that is very hierarchical, you know, at a different place than you, for example.

Can you make a distinction between self-esteem and other esteem?

Tell me about that.

Yeah.

So in an individualistic society, one of the things you're trying to do is cultivate a set of traits that will make you stand out that other people will find appealing as well.

So you might have a rule, for example, that you go to the gym every day.

And if you don't go to the gym, you might feel guilty and that could affect your self-esteem because you're not living up to the traits that you think.

But that doesn't induce shame.

Other people don't judge you for that necessarily.

You know, your brother doesn't, people don't look down on him because you failed to go to the gym or abide by some of your other norms.

Whereas in other societies, there's a much more shared set of rules and things like shame affect your close relatives.

So if you do something really shameful, then it actually makes your family feel shame and it brings everyone lowers their reputational standards.

So there do seem to be these big differences.

So you know, the relationship between self-esteem and happiness and stuff seems to be very important

in weird populations, but not so important in other places.

So a lot of what we think of as, you know, good psychology, clinical psychology is actually a kind of weird psychology.

I was really struck by this, that you write that, quote, in the few non-weird societies where it has been studied, having high self-esteem and a positive view of oneself are not strongly linked to either life satisfaction or subjective well-being.

And I want to hold on that for a minute because it gets at something that I think is really profound inside of your work, which is not just that in different cultures, people act

differently or rate different things or have a different answer to the question of I am, but that when you do shift them along these dimensions, the way you experience the world actually might be pretty perceptually different.

I mean, I think to try to inhabit the idea that having high self-esteem, right?

Having highly of yourself would not affect how you felt about you or your life is pretty strange, right?

That's actually a bigger perceptual gap than I think most of us think about day-to-day.

So what do you make of that finding, but also how do you, having done a lot of this work, how do you think about the contingency or distinctiveness of your own perspective?

How different do you think it would be to experience a world from within the cognitive structure of some of the societies you've studied or going back into the past, some of those that you have read about?

Yeah.

I mean, I think that there's a way we can get inside of this if we think, you know, there's a lot of talk in our society about cultivating your true self and finding your passion and this kind of thing.

And if you grew up in a world where the real emphasis and the thing that everybody was supposed to do was cultivate their family, care for their elders, and people took real pride in child rearing and social connections and strengthening their family over time, the things that might make you happy would be fulfilling all those culturally acquired goals as opposed to achieving some kind of personal state of being unique and special and having set yourself apart from others.

So I just see it as having gotten different kinds of goals early on.

So there's another divergence between weird and non-weird populations that I think is interesting here, which is the degree to which we take into account people's intentions when we judge their actions.

Can you give me a few examples of how that might differ?

So the way we measure this is with the simple anecdote.

So we have a simple story that we give people where someone is at a busy market, they have a bag with a few items in it, and in one story, they put the bag down to look at some items that are displayed on a counter and someone else comes up and takes the bag and disappears off.

By varying the story in different ways, we can make it clear that the person had a very similar bag, which they put down right next to it, and then they accidentally picked up the wrong bag, or a case where it's clearly a theft and they were trying to make off with the goods.

And then we ask people questions about how blameworthy the person is, how much they should be punished, things like that.

And what we find is that we go all the way from weird societies where it's all about the intention.

Really, people want to kind of forgive the guy who made a mistake, all the way down to there's no difference.

The person is out their goods one way or another.

Another way to think about this, if you accidentally burn someone's house down, or if you



intentionally

burn someone's house down, the bottom line is the person has no house.

So it just turns out that how important those intentions are, those mental states, and you can do it with beliefs or intentions, really varies across societies from places where it's not important at all to places where it's super important, it's probably the most important single factor.

This predicts a bit where we're going to go in this conversation, but a big thing of your work is about how these differing temperament, psychologies end up netting out in cultural and governmental and societal institutions.

And so how do societies that differ dramatically on this question of intentions, how do their legal or retributive or judicial systems end up differing?

Yeah.

And so you can see this in the history of European law where there's a lot of discussion and kind of logic chopping and labels for different mental states that characters might have when doing something that could be a crime.

Like, did they intend to do it?

Did they think the thing that they did could do it?

So there's all these ways that lawyers break down the mental states of the actors and each of these has implications for the nature and details of the crime and the degree of culpability and the punishment, all these kinds of things.

But lots of societies have just done the simple thing.

Like if you go back and you look at pre-Christian law codes, if you accidentally shoot a guy with an arrow, then you have to pay a certain blood price to his family and nobody cares if the arrow glanced off of a deer or if you are just trying to kill him.

And then you see this in lots of other societies where intentionality either plays a no role or a smaller role than the sort of obsession over the details of the mental states.

And just to make it clear that this is also part of religion.

So if you get to Protestantism, it's all about faith, right?

You can somehow get to heaven by just having faith.

Faith alone, no good works matters.

The Catholics are more about the good works and the faith together, right?

So Protestantism is kind of extreme on how important this is.

In other religions, people don't talk a lot about mental states.

It's really like, are you doing the rituals or you're part of the community or you engaged and you know, that kind of thing.

I think there can be a tendency to look at the evolution, the selection towards the psychologies or caring about intentions or whatever it might be.

As almost like teleological, right?

We are evolving towards a higher moral state, the arc of the universe is bending towards a kind of moral justice.

I don't think you see it that way.

And so make the case for me on some of these, like for instance, you know, the relational dynamics or the intentional dynamics or taking into account of attention, the ways in which our particular way of looking at this, you know, may not be some better way of doing

it necessarily just different, right?

When you talk to people in these societies and you kind of try to explain the way you see it or the way the place you come from sees it, what do they tell you?

What do you hear that you find convincing?

So one of the things that always sticks in my mind, I was talking, I do work in these remote islands in Fiji and I was discussing with this old Fijian elder, you know, why it is when they have a council meeting to make decisions about the how things are going to happen in the village that only a small number of elders has a discussion with the chief, everybody else just sits quietly in the background.

And then that small committee of old guys will make a decision without any input from anybody else in the room.

And I said, why not do like majority vote?

Like everyone could just vote and you can make a decision that way.

You know, naturally I thought of that because where I come from.

And he was like, you know, forget about women, right?

We only got as far as discussing what the men might do.

He says, well, how can an 18 year old who has no children and has never taken care of the clan or the family have the same way in on this decision as I have someone who has grandchildren and who has taken care of this big, very successful clan.

Those things just don't seem like they should be the same, right?

So there's a certain logic to that.

That kind of makes sense.

Tell me about the passengers dilemma experiment.

So this is a kind of experiment vignette type experiment from sociology.

And in the experiment, you're in a car and your friend is there.

And you can kind of vary.

You can make it a family member too, but in the basic version, it's a friend.

The friend is driving too fast for the conditions, a little bit recklessly, and they hit someone and kill them.

And then, you know, a law case is going to occur and your friend's lawyer says, if you testified that your friend was going under the speed limit, that he'll get off.

It'll be fine.

Nobody else was there.

Or you can tell the truth in court.

And I've even presented this in class and, you know, my classes are pretty diverse.

Some members of the class can't believe that anybody would tell the truth in court.

But this varies tremendously across populations with Canadians.

90 percent of Canadians will tell the truth in court.

At least that's what they say they would do.

Whereas in other places that it would be crazy to tell the truth in court,

you got to help your friend, your friend needs you, aren't you a good friend?

And so those are two virtues that are trading off.

But how you trade those virtues off has a big effect on the effectiveness



of legal institutions, right?

This is a place to go back to the question asked a second ago, where I think the non-weird response actually makes a lot of intuitive sense, you know, in this particular case, right?

You're trading off the interest in a way of this faceless, impersonal institution, the legal system over someone you care about.

It's not a case where they did something where to go back to the point of intention very deeply.

I mean, they weren't trying to do this maliciously, right?

They made a mistake anybody can make.

And so you can kind of, I think, see the, not just a rationality, but in some very deep way, the morality of siding with those who are nearest to you, right? Siding with the people you care about.

How do you understand it?

Does that evolution away from that happen?

Because I do think that would have been the much more normal reaction, almost all through history.

And then eventually you get to Canada.

How do you get to Canada?

Well, one of the things that I try to push in the book or try to really press on is this idea of an interpersonal pro-sociality or morality versus an interpersonal.

So one is, you know, this morality you have with strangers towards arbitrary rules, whether it's paying your taxes, giving blood to strangers, all these things that help make society run.

But it's really kind of faceless and you're not really helping anybody, you know, versus the kind of more normal human morality where, you know,

I got friends and family and I want to do stuff to help them.

And those are my priority.

Now, of course, everybody has that interpersonal morality,

but it's a question of how much emphasis you're putting on one and how that you're going to make the trade-offs versus that sort of general principle, don't lie in court.

It's required to make the system run.

People can't be always lying in court.

So it's that kind of trade-off.

And then much of my book is about trying to lay out how that unfolded over centuries to get us to the place where we are today.

And you shouldn't think of today as an end point.

I mean, I think things are dynamic and directions are changing and that sort of thing.

Let's talk a bit about that space of evolution, though.

And I want to I'll keep going through some of the dimensions of weirdness, but I am interested here because something your book is at pains to argue

is we have a bit of I think it's fair to call it now myth in weird societies

that what caused all this was our devotion to higher order enlightened principles,

impersonal rules, we care about markets and codes of ethics and ethical philosophy.

And I think you show pretty conclusively and we'll get into the way family structures change, but I think you show pretty conclusively that religion has been just this unbelievably powerful driver of cultural evolution.

And arguably is behind a lot of the personality changes.

It made things like the Enlightenment, like believing in something like the Bill of Rights possible.

So so tell me a bit about the role of religion and what you might call non-rational principles in getting us to this place where impersonal structures and principles can be so dominant.

So the first is kind of an anthropological observation is that if we look at the database of as religions in different societies, many societies have relatively weak whimsical, they might have a morality like a person, but they look it looks quite different than the kind of big moralizing gods that we would find in Islam or Christianity and religions like that. So I've long been interested in how the beliefs in these more powerful, more moralizing gods emerged.

And myself and lots of collaborators have made the case that societies that had beliefs in these more powerful, moralizing gods were able to galvanize more cooperation in larger groups.

So if you believe that God was incentivizing you with, say, heaven and hell, then that can lead people to behave in somewhat more pro-social ways and allow, you know, trade, mutually beneficial transactions, larger cooperation, cooperation and warfare.

And so simple experiments that we've done is one is just to go around the world to different societies and, you know, we're going to remote villages in Africa and Fiji and Nuginian stuff and just, you know, asking people questions, getting measurements of their degree to which they believe in a God that is moralizing and punishing, that has control over the afterlife.

And we find that if we give people a choice between allocating money in a way that the experimenter can't be sure what they did to their community or themselves versus some co-religionist, distant stranger who they don't know, they're more fair.

They're not totally fair, but they're more fair towards the stranger in this monetary allocation when they report believing in these more powerful, moralizing gods and then as a kind of addendum to that, you can take people who do believe in the moralizing gods and unconsciously slip them cues of religion or of their God and then have them do these monetary allocations that economists like.

And then they're more generous or they're more adhering to the pro-social norms, more equal divisions with the distant stranger when we've unconsciously slipped them cues. There's also cool natural experiments where you can use the call to prayer and the call to prayer gives them a little boost.

They're a little more pro-social after the call to prayer.

Would it be fair to gloss your view of human beings here to say that you believe

much less, I think, in a human nature than is, I think, the culturally dominant story and what you tend to believe in is much more of a cultural nature, that we are actually quite plastic under different cultural equilibriums and as such can be moved and changed and shifted and formed into many more shapes as human beings, depending on what culture we grow up in.

Then I think a lot of us appreciate now.

Yeah, I think that is a fair gloss.

The only place where I'd want to shape that a bit would be,

I mean, I teach human nature as a general education requirement at Harvard.

And the thing I emphasize in that class is that we're a cultural species that are our reliance on this cultural learning is actually part of our evolved phenotype.

So we've genetically evolved to come into the world as babies and start imitating and acquiring and using cues to figure out who to pay attention to and drinking in all this.

So we have a lot of extra brain and we have changes in our developmental cycle, which allow us to acquire social norms during mid childhood, say ages five to ten.

We internalize them.

So we use them to help us navigate the world.

We're willing to pay costs if the norm demands those costs.

But that can lead to all kinds of different ways of thinking about the world, because even something like whether we see a visual illusion depends on the world we construct. So one of my favorite experiments are these the Mooler Liar Illusion, which is the two arrows where one, the arrows are in and the other, the arrows are out.

Well, if you grow up in a world without carpentered corners and anthropologists have done the work in the 1960s, you actually don't see that illusion.

So you literally see the world differently.

And I think that captures a lot of some of the stuff we were talking about earlier with the role of self-esteem and stuff.

You literally see the world differently.

You have a great line here, were you right?

You can't separate culture from psychology or psychology from biology, because culture physically rewires our brains and thereby shapes how we think.

Your example there with carpenters corners is, I think, a pretty good example of that.

So how does culture rewire our brains?

The idea is that we come in with a degree of plasticity in order to help us acquire the information processing that allows us to navigate the institutional landscapes, the incentives that are built up in the institutions.

So just my favorite example and the one I start the book off with is when you learn to read, you get specialized neural circuitry in your left ventral hemisphere.

And it impinges on some of your facial processing.

So literate people are right biased in their facial processing,

but nonliterate people are much more symmetrical in their facial processing.  
So what neuroscientists thought was a product of humans,  
a right bias in the brain in terms of processing faces, turns out to be a  
product of literacy because you spend all this time as a child building this machine  
that can read, you know, it reads automatically.  
One of the fun things I say in the book is that, you know,  
if I show you a word, you can't stop yourself from reading it.  
Even though this is just a learned skill,  
it's a thing that most cultures didn't do over human history.  
But now it's an automatic piece of our brain.  
It takes up neurogeography.  
It affects things that have nothing to do with reading.  
So you process speech differently.  
Once you've learned to read, we have a thicker corpus callosum.  
So we know the actual biology is different.  
But this is all due to, you know, this this cultural value on reading.  
So let me then use this as the bridge over to this other set of ideas.  
I kind of think of you as known for two big ideas.  
One is weird cultures, the weird personality type.  
And obviously, there are many other co-authors on that and everything.  
But the other, and in some ways,  
a part of your work that has shaped my thinking more is on cultural evolution.  
So people are very familiar with individual evolution.  
The idea that there is a selection pressure and, you know,  
so much in who we are can be traced back to what gave us biological fitness to  
reproduce. What is cultural evolution?  
How do cultures evolve?  
What are the pressures on them that help them do that?  
And then how does that then differ from individual evolution?  
Yeah, so I come at this by thinking about how natural selection would have shaped  
our genes to give us minds that allowed us to acquire information from other people.  
So it begins with the individual and how they can adaptively learn when they  
should learn from the group, say, say, some kind of conformist effect,  
when they should attend to prestigious people,  
how they should integrate information from different people.  
But if everyone's doing that over generations,  
you can get products and those products can be technologies that are so complex  
that no individual could figure out them in their lifetime.  
And eventually people don't even know how it works.  
They just use it and it does work.  
Another thing would be an institution.  
So, you know, institutions long, predate written laws.  
So something like marriage is just a cluster of social norms about who can marry who,  
what the relative responsibilities are in the marriage, who pays, who,

you know, that kind of thing.

But then the social structure, then everybody who comes after that has to grow up in this world that's where the social networks have been organized by, you know, some norms about who marries, who and where people have to live after they get married. So in that sense, it creates this this cultural niche that people's minds have to adapt to.

And I make the case that this has been going on for over a million years and has shaped much of our genetic evolution.

So our genes have had to respond to the fact that we create these cultural products. The simplest example is fire and cooking.

So there's good evidence that that goes back pretty far.

But if you look at our physiology, our

stomachs and our large intestines, our teeth and stuff, we're an animal that's dependent on cooked food, cooking denoters, the proteins that breaks things down. Essentially, it's digestion outside the body.

And so it means there's much less need for all the digestive tissue that we see in other apes. So if you think about other apes, they have this big spreading rib cage that comes out and they have these large stomachs.

That's actually for their large intestines to give them extra space to break down fibers and process meat and things like that.

But humans don't have that because we cook the stuff and then we do the digestion outside. So it's shaped our physiology, but it's strictly none of us know how to make fire innately. This has to be learned from growing up in a particular place.

So it's a it's a simple example of gene culture co evolution.

But I think that social norms and institutions and the creation of languages has also fed back and shaped aspects of our genetic evolution.

Walk me through how human children develop compared to newborns in other species.

The first thing is that biological anthropologists study this and it looks like children are born premature in the sense that very young human babies are helpless and they seem to come out too early.

And the main reason many think that they come out too early is that their heads are getting too big. So, you know, we have a basic primate body design.

And if that head gets too big, it can't get out through the uterus and whatnot.

And so babies come out before that head gets too big.

And then the baby has had continues expanding and it can be taken care of.

And humans have all these extra parents, these column, aloe parents that help and food sharing, all that kind of stuff creates this environment where you can raise a very altricial, helpless baby in this kind of world. But humans also have this unique period after about age five or something called middle childhood.

And that's where we have quite big brains, but we still have little bodies.

And this seems to be the period when kids learn all of this stuff while growing up.

So it looks like selection has monkey around with gestation.

And then we have very short nursing periods or shorter nursing periods and other animals, probably because we have, you know,

we can break down the food with cooking and processing other ways.  
And then we have this new period, middle childhood,  
where we learn all the norms and get a lot of the details of the culture.  
And then finally, when we have that, then we get the body expansion.  
And then adolescence you can think of as like apprenticeship time.  
So adolescence, you start doing adult like things,  
working with adults, eventually, you know,  
getting up into proficiency by the time you're 20s.  
Anthropologists studying hunter-gatherers,  
you don't really even get the best hunters.  
This is think about the male occupation usually until say mid 30s, 40s or whatnot.  
So there's a lot of knowledge that you have to learn in order to be the most  
competent person in the community.  
So we have these genes, we have these aptitudes, we have these capabilities,  
but they don't.  
I read a lot of sci-fi that has some kind of mechanistic way  
of moving one culture's ideas into the next generation, right?  
You stick a computer chip or a download into an AI or read a book about spiders,  
where they sort of somehow encoded in a sack.  
But we don't have that.  
And so the societies that have competed each other and that sort of have won  
this cultural evolution game, at least for now or for a period,  
have developed what are fundamentally cultural  
technologies that have helped them cooperate and pass knowledge around.  
And a lot of these in your books seem to be encoded in religion.  
And you have this view, I think, of religion as having, at its explicit level,  
write a story about God and or gods and how the world works and moralities.  
And then beneath that, a set of things like ritual and collective dance and other  
things that are really incredibly powerful technologies of cultural transmission.  
So can you tell me about how those two things interact?  
Why are the structures of religion such an important part of your book and an  
important part of this sort of cultural evolution story?  
Yeah, so it really comes from my background,  
PhD, is an anthropology.  
And when you look across diverse human societies,  
you don't see the need partitioning that we tend to think about the world.  
Like a typical partitioning where we have like the political scientists study  
politics, the economists study economics, there's some theologians and stuff who  
take care of religion.  
But in other societies, the religion is woven throughout the production system.  
And then there's rituals associated with production, which is part of exchange.  
All of this is justified by mystical beliefs and  
reified in rituals, which people do.  
And we now know that rituals actually have a big effect on bonding people and



whether it's the marching together or moving together in synchrony or listening to music together or just doing it repeatedly seems to have these interesting psychological effects.

So societies have evolved and figured out ways to do that.

And as you mentioned, one of the features of cultural evolution that is probably not an important feature of genetic evolution for humans is this competition among societies.

So you get this sorting of different institutions.

And, you know, so you get production systems and distribution systems, but they're interwoven with religion and religion makes them do better.

So one of the societies that I discuss in the book is the Arapesh from New Guinea.

And there, if things are going poorly for the village, they'll reinstate some rituals, but they think they're doing it to appease the God, their God, who they think is causing bad stuff to happen because he's not happy. Now, this often leads to good things happening because they've done the ritual and they've rebonded and now they're cooperating again.

So they got kind of the wrong theory about, at least in my view, they have the wrong theory about the world, but it causes them to do something that's really helpful, which is kind of redo the rituals, rebond and begin cooperating again as a group.

So this process has affected the evolution of religions and eventually gives us the kind of big, powerful, moralizing gods that we're all familiar with.

I've heard you talk about a study about which kinds of communes, and I happen to be very interested in communes, survived and thrived, at least lasted for longer periods of time in the 20th century, and how it maps on to this sort of question of religion as a bonding force.

Can you talk about that?

So in the United States, there was a great awakening and a proliferation of communes.

Some of the communes were religious and some weren't.

And then you can kind of use this as a laboratory and then ask the question, which one lasts the longest and has the most number of members?

Well, one group that clearly won was the Mormons.

And then there's also a group called the Hutterites.

Other groups like the Shakers had a norm where you weren't allowed to have sex, right?

The group could only grow by in migration.

That one didn't make it.

And notably, the ones that were religious in context were the ones that had the longest duration.

So the ones were just a bunch of political ideologues getting together and forming a group.

They tended to sputter out and they didn't win the long race.

I took your book as being fundamentally pretty pessimistic on two things that I think are fairly widely believed right now.

One is the ability to change cultures dramatically just by telling them to change. But almost every major story of change I could think of from the book was pretty indirect. You created a lot of cooperation usually around a religious story. And that ended up having these very profound downstream impacts. Whereas the much more straightforward, you know, we're all going to do this because it's the right thing to do. And we're a bunch of rationalists who have decided to live together in this way. It doesn't seem to have a lot of staying power. And so kind of downstream from that, I think it would be intuitive for a lot of secular, weird people to believe. They're probably much better at shaping societies more profoundly and potently because, you know, we're free of all this superstition and Kant and weirdness. But in fact, it seems to me a lesson potentially in the book is it's actually going to be much harder for societies to evolve if they don't have the cooperative power provided by belief and rituals that emerge from belief and in something higher, that there seems to be some kind of capacity of that to get people to do the somewhat illogical, very difficult things like say, don't eat pork or take the Sabbath off to talk about sort of Jewish examples, but you can pick them from whatever religion you want, that end up bonding a community together at the level that allows them to sort of achieve really, really great things. Is that your view that a lot of this is indirect and that we will lose something pretty profound if we continue to secularize in terms of our ability to have this kind of cultural evolution? I definitely agree with the first part, this kind of enlightenment notion that, you know, we built the world through rationality and if we could just convince people to be rational, they will. So that I'm definitely pessimistic on. And I think there's tons of examples from economic development to all kinds of things that support that. One of the things that I'm interested in is whether we can harvest insights from religion, use of ritual, things like that to improve secular, impersonal institutions, build better organizations, that kind of thing. So I'm not in favor of spreading supernatural agents because we think they'll be effective, but I think there's wisdom embedded in religious traditions that maybe is underused in impersonal secular institutions. I want to press on this for a minute because I don't quite buy what you just said. OK. And I'm not I'm not 100% believe that you buy it because so many of the examples you give and of the actual research you give has to do with the way really, truly complex rituals, I mean, very complex dances and fasting and collective movement and things you just really can't get people to do. You can't go to people and say you should fast once a week and do a lot of dances and do a lot of praying and so on, because ultimately this maps on to some kind

of human synchronicity mechanism that's going to help you cooperate.  
The real lesson I took from the book is that religion, because it gives you a reason to do things that don't themselves have an obvious logical justification, allows you to band together these cooperation mechanisms. Kind of nothing else does.

I mean, you can't be just in a political system.

Can you imagine Joe Biden coming out to the Democratic Party tomorrow and saying, listen, a really important thing for us Democrats is to work together.

And as such, I am asking all of you to stop eating fish three days a week.

And once every six months, I would like you all to go to the ocean and I would like you to grab a bunch of paper and throw it in as a way of expunging your sins. Like he's not going to do that because nobody would do it, but it would probably be very good for cooperation on Democrats if they did it.

And that this just seems to me to be an actually pretty big thing.

You know, I think it's often talked about why do Mormons do so much better in America than most other groups?

And they have a lot of very complex religious rituals that have sustained in ways that most other religious groups have not been able to sustain the rituals. And as such, there's a really high level of prosocialty and cooperation in Utah, much higher than in other places in the country.

And so it does seem to me that something is being lost.

It probably cannot just be gained through rationalism because it is in some ways the illogic and complexity of the thing itself that is working.

But nobody's going to do that precisely because it is so illogical and complex.

Unless they believe there is some kind of punishment that is indirect for not doing it.

I mean, the kind of thing I had in mind is would be in the service of some notion of just let's take the US since that's that's where we are.

It would be in some notion of some kind of set of American commitments, principles.

We have lots of principles, lots of commitments, which we like national service.

So you graduate high school,

everybody does either military or national service or something like that.

It's a shared sacrifice.

You're together with your fellow Americans, you're working.

Another thing would be the ritual of saying the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of the day.

If you want to build national identity, you need tools like that.

Now, of course, I would immediately caution that if you build too strong an American identity, we kind of need a global identity at the moment.

So you have to think about those kinds of things.

But there are ways to introduce costly activities and they would be justified by commitment to truth justice in the American way, say, or some larger, some super US commitment or something like that.

But those kinds of policies at least are ideas.

I want to loop back then to weirdness, because one of the stories that the book is telling is that weirdness, this sort of psychological profile and the world built on top of the psychological profile, which is our governments and our institutions and our markets and so much of it, you really describe this as a world the Catholic Church built. Tell me how the Catholic Church built it. I think that the oldest and most important of human institutions is the family. And weird people tend to have a peculiar view of the family because many of us grew up in these monogamous nuclear households that are either loosely or not very connected to other households in the area. But that's not the story for most of humanity. And in fact, the kinship unit was the center of production and distribution and often a religious center with ancestor cults and things like that. Chinese is the classic case. And what the church unknowingly did unwittingly did was it adopted a series of prohibitions and prescriptions that dismantled the intensive kinship systems of Europe and broke them down over centuries into monogamous nuclear families. Now, some people will be familiar with the famous incest taboos where at first, the Catholic Church around the sixth century outlaws marriage to first cousins. And then it becomes second cousins and then eventually stretches out to six cousins, which are so distant that most people we can't even track who your six cousins are. So essentially a taboo is anybody in your relational circle. It includes affinal relatives, so in-laws, and it includes spiritual relatives. And it forces you to get married to people quite socially distanced from you. And so this, the idea is this would have begun to rewire the social network. There were also laws about inheritance where the church wanted the individual to inherit and not the group. So it broke down collective inheritance, which is very common across lots of societies. And this occurred over centuries and actually transformed the church from within. And then the church began developing secular procedures and new law procedures. And these became models, which were then used in secular systems, charter towns, developed a network of bishoprics, which is one of the ways we're able to figure this out. We look at how long different regions of Europe were under a particular bishop. And then we look at a lot of things, but one is the contemporary psychology. One of the things that emerges from this is a set of more impersonal institutions that you really understand as helping to explain why some regions have developed in the way they have, why others haven't. I thought in many ways the strongest bit of data here is from Italy. Do you mind talking through that? So Italy has long been a puzzle for social scientists, because on the one hand, Italy in the north, it's famous for the Renaissance and the emergence of the banking industry in the South is famous for corruption and the mafia and whatnot. So what's going on in Italy? And what most people don't realize is that Northern Italy was under something

called the Carolingian Empire.

So this is Charlemagne around the year 800.

He has this large empire.

He's teamed up with the Pope and they're gradually creating the Paris system.

And one of the things that the Carolingian emperors are concerned about was implementing this marriage in the family program.

So Northern Italy gets this high dosage of the marriage and family program.

While Southern Italy is some of its under the Orthodox Church centered in Byzantine, Islamic rulers are present in places like Sicily.

Sardinia seems to be outside of most of this.

And so Southern Italy only gets incorporated under the Pope in a sense and part of this whole enterprise much later in history than Northern Italy is.

So what we were able to do is take, say, rates of cousin marriage from 20th century Italy, and we can use that to explain variation in corruption, whether people put money in banks, their kind of general trust, a number of different measures.

And so it helps, I think, explain this kind of puzzle that's Italy.

So I find this whole all the evidence you present on this so great, actually.

I love arguments like this.

I love arguments that something we didn't understand had effects we would have never predicted that led to the world that we now live in.

And I also want to maintain some skepticism because in anything like this, we're sort of working backwards.

We can see one part of Italy in one way, another one the other way.

Now we're trying to test against data we have.

And there is just a lot of correlational data here.

I mean, you're looking at, say, modern day democratic attitudes or working hours and then like the percentage of Catholic missions in an area 500 years ago.

And so I guess one question I refuse, what is your actual confidence level that this explains a very high level of modern development?

And maybe one way of asking it is that in the past,

however many decades, we've seen a tremendous rise in East Asian countries.

Right. They have had developmental stories that are sort of unlike any other region in that period.

And without it been something this would have predicted, right?

You know, when you kind of think of pushing the story forward as opposed to backwards, if you were sitting there in 1950 trying to imagine which countries would escape poverty and then which would it be able to escape the middle income trap?

Would you have said, oh, yeah, like South Korea and Japan and a couple of these are really going to do it?

What is I guess your level of confidence that this can explain as much as you're trying to explain with it?

Great question. So we talked a bit about Italy.

I could tell you the story about Europe, which would be similar, the rest of Europe.

So I think one of the ways to get at these ideas, because, you know,

if you're a historian, you could possibly think of all kinds of different contingencies.

## [Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / If You're Reading This, You're Probably 'WEIRD'

You could try to think of things that are uncontrolled for that may be relevant.

So what I like to do is let's test it somewhere else.

So there's data from the just the Democratic Republic of Congo.

So totally different place.

Don't tell me any stories about particular European rulers or anything particular to Europe.

What we have is the city of Kananga, where people migrate from villages all around the DRC.

And those villages are varying distances from historical Catholic missions.

So if we look at those people today, those from villages that were closer to historical Catholic missions

have simpler families, fewer kinship ties and a more morally universalistic psychology.

So they have more of the weird kind of psychology that I think traces to this taking a part of the family.

OK, let's go to China. We can test it in China because

so that now the church is out of the picture, but the details of the agricultural systems affect the intensity of these kinship systems.

So in rice growing parts of China, you get very intensive clans.

We can check that with data on clan genealogies, you know, going back a thousand years.

And then we can look and see if that can explain contemporary variation among Han Chinese.

So throw out anybody who's not Han, just look at Han Chinese.

So get ridding messy variation.

And then we find that people from counties or provinces that have differing amounts of rice growing have the expected changes in psychology.

We can do a similar thing in India.

And then most recently, some colleagues from the University of British Columbia looked at the United States and so cousin marriage began to pop up in parts of the US.

And then secular laws outlawed cousin marriage.

And so you can see a decline in those subgroups, in those kinds of families that were intermarrying.

And then long term economic prosperity, so higher incomes.

So it's kind of a natural experiment because different states in the US crank this on at different times.

And because we have the continuous US census, or at least my colleagues at the University of British Columbia do, they can show these long term effects.

So there's just a lot of different converging lines of evidence that help build my confidence that there might be something to this.

And then, of course, as a scientist, I'm like, well, what's the alternative explanation you want to offer for this?

And then I want to let those compete.

And I actually believe there's definitely something to it.

But I wonder how much when we think about the pace of global development and the sort of weight of what is needed to achieve these institutions and the sort of impersonal nature of them and the ability to have a society where you're not operating in high trust kinship networks that allows for kind of very modern forms of economic cooperation.

And I guess one thing that makes me wonder about the weight given to Catholicism here



is that it would make me think that development in much of Latin America and Africa would have been stronger than it's been, particularly around these kinds of institutions and their level of corruption and so on, because, you know, if you just run a search on what countries have very, very high levels of penetration of the Catholic Church, you'll get a lot of the countries in Latin America and in Africa. But you wouldn't see that line up all that cleanly with the kinds of markets and institutions that you're talking about spring from this. So so how do you think about the places where there is a lot of Catholicism but you don't seem to be seeing the effects that you're claiming for it? Well, let me first I want to finish the other half of your question. So 1950 and looking at East Asia, what you see there is the adoption of a lot of Western civil law. So, you know, China ends polygyny, it burns the genealogies, it's trying to destroy its clans. The one child policy, which comes later, that ends all cousins. So if you don't have cousins, you can't have cousin marriage. So they essentially do in a period of about five decades, what the church took 500 years to do in terms of completely altering the family structure. So they're implementing the marriage and family program that the church implemented and they have the full power of the Chinese state to do it. And the Japanese actually get started on this first in 1880. The major restoration is about actually copying in some cases, literal civil codes that were copied from Europe that have all these rules about marriage and the family. And in societies with high levels of conformity, hierarchical decision making, you can implement these things much more quickly than amongst a bunch of disagreeable individualists. So what would be great is if I could predict the future, right? But at least based on that, the kind of East Asian part fits. Now, we've tried to deal with your other question in the following way. So this is we have nighttime satellite illumination data from the entire world. And we think we can use that as a proxy for economic growth. And then we have the map, which appears in the book of the intensity of different kinship structures around the world. And what we can do is we can look at places like Latin America and Africa and elsewhere. And we just compare different ethnic groups in the same country. So, you know, we're removing all the country level stuff, country level politics from this and just comparing ethnic groups within the same country. And what we find is that ethnic groups that had more intensive kinship traditionally are darker, the averaging data from, you know, right around 2010 or so. So it looks like economic prosperity measured as light illumination is associated with groups that traditionally had weaker kinship intensity. And our story is that because of the institutions built in Europe

for the ones that have expanded around the world and now dominate, they fit within the kind of psychology and the social structure that goes along with low intensity kinship structure.

And so it's easier for them to engage in world markets and become more prosperous. One thing I find interesting about the point just made on some of the East Asian societies is that it does go in the opposite direction of one of the concerns I was raising earlier, which is, you know, what you're saying is that they were able to impose much more directly and much more by force what the Catholic Church did sort of indirectly, right?

If the Catholic Church was saying, well, God doesn't want you to do this.

China just said, well, we don't want you to do this.

And actually we're going to put a much sharper constrain around it than anyone else will.

And I'm not here to support the one child policy and do not support the one child policy.

But it does, I think, suggest and not, again, taking the point that China went way, way, way too far on this and had very bad years as part of that.

It does, in a way, suggest that there is the ability to run this kind of social cooperation and limiting game more directly.

Yeah, although the interesting part, it'll be, I mean, I guess China is kind of a test case moving forward because it's easiest for China to do that, right?

Earlier on, the more hierarchical, the more conformist people are as that process begins to move along and people are becoming more individualistic and whatnot.

The ability of the state to do that, to work through elders, to rely on conformity and stuff, will get trickier, although I guess technology could compensate.

I actually wanted to ask you about technology because you've talked a lot here about the ways in which cultural evolution can be set off and can run indirectly through religion and other kinds of things that create a lot of human cooperation.

But technology also seems to me to be a force that certain technologies will emerge.

I mean, the birth control pill is a very canonical example here,

but you can also think about the factory or air conditioning and all kinds of new forms of cooperation, new settlement patterns, new family structures, new ways of structuring out the life cycle begin to emerge from that. So how do you think about technology and technological change within the context of cultural evolution?

The first point is I agree that for sure technology can have those kinds of effects.

I think about technology as itself a product of cultural evolution.

The way social science kind of works, sometimes people want to put technology in its own bin separate from culture, but it's very clear that people learn, if you just go to the smallest scale human societies, people learn how to make the relevant tools from other members of their community. This is passed on. If you look at the larger scale societies, people still have to learn how to do whatever engineering stuff in the factories, making the tools from other people.

This could be passed along indirectly through books and things like that, but there's lots of tacit knowledge that goes into, you know, even modern industrial production that has to be moved from one craftsperson or one engineer to the next. So it's all cultural transmission all the way down. And one of the things I focus on the book is what are the conditions that lead to more rapid technological change? So I have this idea of the collective brain, which is that the particular institutions in a certain place in the psychology, trust in

strangers, things like that lack of conformity will actually energize and create more rapid innovation. So at the end of the weirdest people in the world, I'm trying to explain the industrial revolution. And why did you have this explosion of new technologies, which did change things in the way you mentioned all at once, you know, beginning in the English midlands and then spreading out from there. And talk me through a little bit more of your explanation for that. Yeah. So my story is that most ideas are recombinations of existing ideas already circulating in the cultural milieu. So the more diverse minds are able to interact and share ideas, the more likely you are to create novel recombinations and lead to the diffusion of ideas. I mean, even the famous geniuses like Einstein, if you look at special relativity, it's a combination of a set of ideas that others were in the process of putting together. And he just happened to be the first guy to really congeal them together. But this is true of lots of different technologies. In a book I'm writing now, we actually have data from the complete U.S. patent database showing that, you know, nearly all patents are actually combinations of existing technologies. So that seems to be the case. And then larger cities as a piece of evidence tend to produce more patents per capita, so more creativity per capita. And that's just the idea that there are more people closer together. And it kind of makes everyone smarter. You're more likely to bump into someone who has something useful that you put together with something else, and then you're off and running. Things like, you know, the spread of Starbucks seems to energize patenting, which is a surprising thing to a lot of people because people had a third place where people from different companies could come together, swap ideas, and, you know, you can actually look at the details of what the new patents are and see that happening. One thing that recurs throughout some of the stories of the book is that a lot of these religious and cultural changes made possible more migration and more migration, made possible more mixing of ideas, more innovation, you know, a lot of what we take for granted now in modernity. How do you think about migration in the modern world? Is that something if you were kind of architecting societies for more innovation and more cultural and more rapid cultural evolution that you would be trying to turn up the dial on? Yeah. So, and I have a big project on this. So, we've combined the full, complete U.S. census with a complete patent database, and what we're able to show is that migrant shocks to the U.S. we can look at what counties they end up in, and then we can measure the diversity of those counties by looking at last names as they appear in the census. And what we find is that what we're calling socio-cultural diversity, which is this measure of last name variation, is a huge predictor of patents in the coming decade, and immigrant shocks add richness to that diversity. So, it's just more evidence that immigrants have really driven a lot of innovation in the U.S. And we wondered, we said, well, maybe immigrants, if you have too many, it will like cause problems. It might cause problems, but we can't find any kink in the curve. This seems to be more immigrants, more innovation. So, we looked for like a hump shape. You might say maybe there's an optimal number of immigrants, but it doesn't look like the U.S. has hit that. And there's very interesting papers done by Petra Moser and colleagues showing that when the U.S. put in immigration quotas in 1924, cutting out or limiting from certain populations, you got a decline in the groups in the patenting domains that those groups had previously been attributing to. And it even meant that Americans got less creative in those domains. So, the immigrants are not just bringing in ideas that

make themselves rich, they're bringing in ideas that they're mixing with the native-borns and making everybody more creative. Speaking of county by county data, I know something you've been working on is mapping within America how psychologically weird, again on this one scale, a county is against how it seems to be voting. And I know that research isn't out yet, but is there anything preliminarily you are seeing in the data that's interesting? Yeah, so this begins with a paper by my colleague Ben Anke in Economics at Harvard. And what Ben did was he went to this

psychologist, there's a psychologist named John Height, who's been collecting data at [yourmorals.org](http://yourmorals.org),

which you can go in there, you answer a bunch of questions, and it kind of puts you on a place within a five-dimensional morality scheme. And those dimensions are cool, but to simplify things, you can simplify this down to one big and most important dimension, which runs from moral universalism,

where people are seeing others as more or less equal, the sort of in-group-out-group differences minimized, people care about a lot of harm and fairness, not so much about hierarchy and loyalty and some of these other dimensions of morality, down to the more parochial end, where people have a smaller circle of cooperation, and they're very concerned about loyalties and hierarchy. So you get this spectrum, and you can measure that at the U.S. county level because the data set is rich enough. And what Ben is able to show, and this is published in a top econ journal, it's a very reliable result, a bunch of backup studies and stuff, is that counties that were more morally parochial were more likely to vote for Donald Trump, and it was that vote total over and above what Mitt Romney or John McCain got. So it's this sort of extra Trump boost from being high on moral parochialism. And then so what we did is we, well, we wanted to know if that would replicate for 2020, and that seemed to be the case there. And then we tried to explain the variation. Okay, so there's this county level variation.

And the first thing to note is that if you plot from 2008 to 2019, what you see is a divergence.

So the urban areas maintain, maybe they go up a little bit in moral universalism,

whereas the rural counties are going down the whole time, declining in their moral universalism, getting more parochial. Okay, so we have temporal variation. And then the question is,

can we explain that? And the two factors that came out of our first set of analyses is first shocks of any kind. So economic shocks seem to drive, make people more morally parochial, and weather shocks. So climate change hits some US counties more than other UNOS counties.

And if you get hit with a shock, hurricane say flood, fire, you get a bit more morally parochial.

And the final thing that seemed to matter, and this is not, we're not sure how to deal with this, is that movement. The Americans have been moving less and less and they're staying put more, but places that stayed disproportionately more, meaning most people stayed where they were born, seem to also be more morally parochial. And that makes sense with this kind of distant

ties idea that you move to a new place and you got to like make new friends and you create new social networks. If you stay in the same place, you kind of establish long term family and friend ties and whatnot. And that works towards more morally parochialism. So that could be related to the economic shocks and stuff and the sort of directions of the causal hours there that's

causing us some challenges. One just obvious trend we seem to be seeing over the past 100 years, past 50, I think past 20, is the world is getting weirder, right? This directionality seems to be happening in a lot of places. Does that become a worrying monoculture at some point? I mean,

it was a dimension of cultural evolution, but if it becomes everywhere, do you get a situation where there's not enough diversity, where as a species over indexed on individualism or something like that? I mean, do you worry about the world getting too weird? Is it possible the competitive advantage will be going in the other direction, sort of like the Mormons in America? Do you see something happening here where what's been a competitive advantage will become a disadvantage, or at least something that is more widespread than would probably be optimal?

Yeah, this is a very common question. And what's behind the question is that there's this linear trajectory that we've been going on. And I guess I think that what I'm seeing, and I don't have any quantitative data to offer you, but as what were European institutions like Take Universities or Democratic government has spread to all these different places, in some cases, it's a copy of the Constitution of the US Constitution has spread widely. But then it has to interface with the existing local institutions. So if you just take, we were talking about China and Japan before, I think what's emerging there is somewhat weirder psychology, but the societies are often also going off in new directions. So think of something more complicated than a two dimensional line we're going along. So I mean, one dimensional line, but rather there's there's different ways of going. So I don't think there's really a kind of unilineal thing going on here. I think there's something more complicated going on. And what we need to do is just do the more psychological work

to really map the space of all the different possibilities and see where things are going to what degree, you know, if in China there's some capitalist type institutions or some free markets, but obviously at the political level, there's not democracy, but although at the lower level there's democracy. So it's complicated and we haven't sorted it all out yet.

Well, when you look on psychological surveys, how are people differing? When you say something sort of new is emerging, are we able to see on the same surveys where people are showing a different set of preferences or tendencies? Yeah, I mean, so like one example that makes China challenging and this kind of illustrates the bigger problem is that if you ask people to generalize trust question, which is the survey, they seem very trusting. But then if you ask the more detailed set of questions, you know, do you trust foreigners, do you trust people you met for the first time versus people who live around you and you analyze those, they don't look like very trusting. So in, you know, in Australia, in the US, if you ask people to generalize trust question, it goes along with, it's correlated with that in-group, out-group trust I was describing, whereas in China, there seem to be unrelated. So it's as if life is structuring itself in a way so that most people you interact with, you trust. But if you ask me about foreigners, I don't trust those people. So that's a kind of more complicated picture. And I haven't seen any analyses yet to kind of look for the kind of multi-dimensional shape that we're, that I'm talking about.

I think that is a good place to come to an end. So always a final question. What are three books you would recommend to the audience? Well, let's see. I really like Why Europe by Michael Mitterell, if you wanted to learn more about Europe. I still think everybody should read Jared Dimon's Guns, Germs and Steel. And I really like this book, A Chosen Few, How Education Shaped Jewish History, because it really emphasizes how early changes in a religion of a particular group had big long-term consequences. Joe Henrich, thank you very much. Great to be with you.

This episode of the Ezra Clangio is produced by Roger Karma. In fact, checking by Michelle Harris, Mary-Marge Locker and Kate Sinclair, mixing by Sonia Herrero. Our production team is Emma Vagau, Annie Galvin, Jeff Geld, Roger Karma and Kristen Lin.

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