

FOURTH GENERAL EMAIL: PROMOTING DEBATE ABOUT THE EVOLUTIONARY IMPERATIVE TO TRANSITION TO A GLOBAL SOCIETY

This is the fourth in the series of emails that I am circulating widely to evolutionary scientists about the evolutionary imperative for humanity to transition to a cooperative global society.

As with all previous major cooperative evolutionary transitions, the move to a global society is essential to suppress destructive competition at lower levels. Currently, this destructive competition between Nation States, corporations and others is driving the threat of nuclear war and environmental degradation (including global warming). These could end human civilization this century. Evolutionary science possesses specialist knowledge about the function of major evolutionary transitions and how they are organised. As a consequence, evolutionary science has a critical role to play in facilitating the transition to a global society and the survival of human civilisation.

In my third general email I raised the issue of how evolutionary science might be brought to a position where it fulfils this critical role successfully. I suggested that there first needed to be a period in which the central ideas underpinning this initiative are debated and discussed in depth amongst evolutionary scientists. I asked for any suggestions that recipients of the email might have about how this debate might be fuelled. My email also invited alternative proposals about how this initiative might be advanced. Finally, I asked for details of any serious critiques of the science that underpins it, so that I could answer these in subsequent emails.

The purpose of this email is to outline the feedback that I have received to date, and to suggest further steps that can be taken to advance the initiative (a PDF of this email is [here](#). PDF's of the previous three emails are [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) respectively).

Fuelling the debate – Seminar Presentations

A number of responders to my third email suggested that I make myself available to deliver presentations about the initiative and the science that underpins it. These 'Zoom' presentations could be incorporated into the seminar series that are typically run by evolutionary science departments and other relevant institutions. Alternatively, the presentations could be made to one-off workshops or groups. Given the purpose of the presentations, ample time would need to be provided for discussion and questioning (and vigorous questioning and discussion would be explicitly encouraged).

I have already made two presentations along these lines in the last week or so.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you want to explore this possibility further.

Attracting support from 'leading' evolutionary scientists

A number of responders suggested that the 'fence sitting' on this issue by 'leading' evolutionary scientists was to be expected given that the initiative will inevitably become politically controversial. This is the case even though the science underpinning it is increasingly becoming accepted by evolutionary science. As a consequence of the likelihood of political controversy, the potential leaders might fear that their involvement in the initiative could damage their hard-won reputations and legacies.

However, as some responders pointed out, the potential leaders are likely to change their positions as the initiative gains momentum, and as it becomes clearer that opposition to it will leave them on the wrong side of history. Ultimately, they will come to see that their reputation and legacy will be damaged more if they fail to overtly support the initiative. A growing number of people are working to ensure that this is the case.

Criticism of the science underpinning the initiative by some kin selectionists

The only substantive criticism of the science underpinning the initiative has come from a few researchers who see kin selection as the main mechanism that has produced major cooperative transitions in the past (invariably, these are researchers who have not worked on the evolution of complex human societies where kin selection is not significant)).

These kin selectionists argue that evolutionary science does not support the view that a global human society needs to be organised by a system of global constraints that supports cooperation and suppresses destructive competition. In fact, one kin selectionist suggested that the key implication of evolutionary science for organising a global society is the need to ensure high relatedness, but that this would be “unpalatable” for most.

But the science on this is clear: what is common to all major cooperative transitions (and will be essential to a global transition) is the emergence of a system of constraints that acts across the cooperative to support cooperation and suppress free riding. This aligns the interests of the members of the group with those of the group as a whole. High relatedness, as well as governance, are both examples of such systems of constraints. In relation to major transitions, kin selection organises complex cooperation by establishing systems of constraints that operate across the group, just as does appropriate governance.

Apparently, these narrow kin selectionists fail to see that, from the perspective of major cooperative transitions, relatedness is “a means” for spreading genetic constraints across a group. The genetic constraints predispose individuals that contain them to act cooperatively and to suppress free riders who don’t. And the reproduction of the constraints across the group enables the constraints to capture the benefits of the cooperation they organise. Analogously at the cultural level, socialisation and related processes are “the means” for spreading cultural constraints across a group. Again the constraints predispose individuals that contain them to act cooperatively and suppress free riders who don’t. And the reproduction of the constraints across the group enables the constraints to capture the benefits of the cooperation they organise. The resultant genetic and cultural systems of constraints have the same potential to organise complex cooperation as does the governance of a human society that reaches across the society to constrain individuals to act cooperatively and to suppress free riders.

For more detail about how the operation of kin selection in major cooperative transitions can be better understood as a management process, see Sections 3.5 to 3.7 inclusive of my recent paper ‘Towards a general theory of the major cooperative transitions’ which is [here](#).

Furthermore, the version of the first general email that was sent to many theorists who focus on kin selection differed somewhat to the version I sent to others - it included an overview of the case in favour of the proposition that kin selection as it operates in major transitions is better understood as a form of management. A PDF of the first general email that also includes this overview as an additional extract is [here](#).

However, I would emphasize here that, as I have detailed in previous emails, it is not necessary to accept Management Theory in order to understand the evolutionary necessity for a transition to a global society that is underpinned by global constraints/governance - key group selectionists and kin selectionists have recognised the need for such a transition.

Furthermore, I would be more than happy to deal with this issue at length in any seminar presentation to an audience that is interested in this topic.

Understanding the evolutionary ‘big picture’ – the necessity for post-Piagetian levels of cognitive development

In the third general email, I indicated I would provide a link to a short article which argues that analytical/rational levels of cognitive development are insufficient to enable an understanding of the evolutionary ‘big picture’. The article goes on to identify the nature of the higher level of cognition that is required, and how it might be developed. The article is [here](#).

Removal from the mailing list

This is a reminder that anyone who wishes to stop receiving these emails can achieve this by responding to this email with the word ‘Remove’ somewhere in their reply.

Kind regards.

John Stewart

<http://www.evolutionarymanifesto.com>