

Review of: "Historical evolution of culture, mind, and language. Considerations basing on Everett's study upon the Pirahã"

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This article shows very clearly a central problem with the open review format, used by Qeios and several other platforms. This article would not have made it to publication, and probably not even to peer review, in any respectable journal. But here it is already published, with whatever prestige accrues to that, and since there is no editor to sort the what from the chaff before publication, the it shifts the burden to reviewers to refute it. As per Brandolini's principle of Asymmetry the amount of work required to refute shoddy work is an order of magnitude greater than the amount of work that went into producing the work itself. This means that unfortunately my review cannot be charitable or thorough, but must cut to the heart of the problem swiftly, to preserve my own time and effort for more worthy pursuits.

On it's face its claim is absurd and damaging in several ways: The central claim of the article is that a society of people living with us in the world today, are permanently stuck at the mental and cognitive stage of three year old children. The author has not visited this society but relies entirely on second hand reports. The reports make it clear that the people have a functioning society, they manage to hunt wild game, cultivate manioc, build houses, sail canoes, cook food, tell stories, practice animist religion, etc. Hardly congruent with what would happen if we let a group of toddlers alone in the forest.

The argument itself is not at all new - it was the standard view in the 16th to 19th century: indigenous people are childlike, stupid and ignorant, unable to learn civilization frozen forever at a "lower psychological stage". This is in fact the same argument used to justify their genocide by Europeans across the globe. It has been refuted in a vast literature in psychology, sociology and anthropology since then. The antiquatedness of the argument is clear from the bibliography, apart from *copious* self citation, and some newer linguistic literature (much of which is not actually cited in the article), the literature is primarily from before 1950. It is simply reviving this old idea, without adducing new arguments or evidence, other than Everett's description of the Pirahã.

However, it uses Everett's descriptions tendentiously and misrepresents his central claim. Everett, who in contrast with the author, has lived many years with the Pirahã, does not claim that they are childlike or unintelligent or stuck in the pre-operational stage, his explanation for the apparent "simplicity" of their lifestyle and the lack of recursion in their language, is that they share a set of strong cultural values that discourages them from speaking or thinking about that which they do

not know or have not seen, and to not make things more complex for themselves than they need be (the IEP). That is, Everett does not say that the Pirahã cannot perform those mental tasks, but that they do not, and will not perform them - which if true means that we cannot infer from their behavior anything about their cognitive abilities. The author points out that IEP is hardly a well-founded theory, and therefore tries to explain it instead by using Piagetian developmental psychology. The author tries to contradict Everett on several points, but without any actual empirical basis on which to do so, it ends up being an exercise in cherry picking those of Everett's statements that can be used to support the argument about their cognitive underdevelopment and omit the ones that contradict it. It is of course the case, that there is not generally an agreement among scholars who have in fact traveled to Brazil to corroborate Everett's claims about their accuracy - meaning that there is grounds for doubting the empirical claims, including the claims about lacking recursion, lacking numeracy etc. The article does not engage seriously with these debates and discussions and conflicting evidence and interpretations. It makes a series of very strong claims about "primitives" in general and the Pirahã in particular, based on the flimsiest of theoretical arguments, and without any empirical investigation or corroboration. It also fails to adequately consider other hypotheses, to point out where the data contradicts its hypothesis.

If Everett's reports and descriptions of Pirahã cognitive practices are indeed correct, they might as well be taken as a refutation of the Piagetian developmental model: It is perfectly possible to be an adult human in a functioning human society of one's peers without using the forms of cognition he believed are the "highest" and characteristic of modern Europeans. Indeed it seems to be the case that Piaget, who also never worked with non-European indigenous peoples, did the same sort of arm-chair psychology being carried out in this article, ascribing mental disabilities to peoples across the world that he thought were inferior to himself and his own culture. This is not science, but simply prejudice being cloaked in the idiom of science.

This article should be removed from the platform, it contributes nothing of value to any field of science, rather it is retrograde and actively damaging to the scientific understanding of human cognitive diversity, and it is also deeply unethical in the implications of its argument.

Qeios should, if it wishes to become a serious platform, find a way of filtering this sort of article from publication before requesting reviews. Otherwise it will just devolve into another forum where scholars with preferences for shoddy work, antiquated ideas, and low ethical standards can publish their work, without having to pass through normal peer review and without their work reaching the current minimum standards of their fields.