

Review of: "How WEIRD is the US and why does this matter for the rest of the world?"

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The aim of the paper is to refute from a decolonial point of view the claims of Joseph Henrich, which he made in his book *The Weirdest People in the World*. More concretely, the author of this paper tries to show that 1) Heinrich's definition of culture is imprecise, essentialist, and individualist, 2) his statement that US culture is particularly weird is wrong, and 3) his claim that culture has an impact on economic development is incorrect.

I have several serious problems with this paper in the current form.

1) It is not clear why the refutation of Henrich's claims leads to a progress in science. Many things that get published are so bad that they are not even worth discussing. The author has a responsibility to show, what kind of knowledge we could gain from a refutation of Henrich's claims.

2) The author does not provide a definition of decolonial approach, nor does he tell the reader what the most important theoretical points of this approach are. It is not possible to judge the conclusions of the author, if we do not know the theoretical framework that the author has used to come to these conclusions. This is a very serious point, because the author criticizes Henrich for not providing clear definitions. He criticizes Henrich for something what he does not do either.

3) The author probably uses the term "essentialist" incorrectly. Essentialism is a philosophical method in order to receive correct definitions of terms. For example, the essence of a "woman" is to bear children (and everybody, who cannot bear children is not a woman). Does this method guarantee "correct" definitions? Of course, it doesn't. Now feminists use the term "essentialist" in order to criticize statements that ascribe specific characteristics to "women." The usage of the term "essentialism" is in this context appropriate. However, the author uses the term "essentialism" in the sense of "cultural determinism," which is clearly not anymore the same meaning. I would recommend the author to be a little bit more precise in the choice of his terminology.

4) The accusation that Henrich made "essentialist" or better "cultural deterministic" claims is based on the author's own statements obviously wrong. The author cites Henrich that culture "*can* shape our brains," but then he rephrases this in his own words as: "the culture an individual is born into has 'rewired' his or her brain and *inescapably* shapes his or her perspective on the world" (emphases added). There is without a doubt a big difference between "can shape" and "inescapably shapes." The author should be fair in the presentation of the ideas of the person that he wants to criticize.

5) Henrich is criticized for using an individualistic definition of culture. So what? The author has here a responsibility to show that an individualistic definition of culture leads to wrong conclusions or is for other reasons not suitable for an analysis of culture.

6) The author rejects the claim of Henrich that the US culture is particularly weird. He cites Inglehart's World Value Survey (WVS) and Hofstede's IBM study in order to proof his point. The author declares that the USA is not particularly extreme on the two dimensions in the WVS. However, he gets this result only, because he looks at the two dimensions independently of each other. If the two dimensions are combined the English-speaking countries (including the USA) are actually weird, because they should not exist according to Inglehart's theory. Inglehart predicted that societies move during the industrialization period from traditional to secular-rational values, and *later* in postindustrial societies from survival to self-expression values. Based on this theory no culture should exist with the combination of traditional and self-expression values. However, English-speaking countries consistently over several surveys fall into this category. That is indeed weird (of course, this could also imply that the English-speaking countries are not weird, and that Inglehart's theory is just wrong – but this conclusion would also question the scientific value of the WVS).

The author furthermore presents his own improved data from Hofstede's study, and he concludes that US culture is not extreme. However, the same data gives me the impression that the US looks pretty extreme in this data set. Does a culture need to be extreme on all possible dimensions, or does a culture only need to be extreme on a few decisive ones in order to be regarded as weird? The problem is that there is a lot of room for interpretation either way.

Additionally, I would like to point out that both Hofstede's and the WVS are not very good studies. Both surveys have serious theoretical flaws. The GLOBE study actually has a much more robust theoretical framework. What is missing in the paper is a justification of the choice of the surveys.

7) The biggest problem, however, is the discussion of the question whether Henrich's claim that culture has an impact on economic development is correct or not. The author proposes as an alternative hypothesis that cultural autonomy or self-determination is a prerequisite for economic development, whereas culture does not influence economic development. But instead of providing any evidence for his claims, the author concludes this from his assumption "that culture does not necessarily either hinder or speed up economic development." In other words, what he is supposed to show with evidence, he simply assumes. Unfortunately, this has absolutely nothing to do with basic scientific methods.

In the current form the paper has too many serious (basic scientific) flaws and therefore should not be published.