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A New Theory or a New Ideology?
Reply to Gregory Sandstrom

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Gregory Sandstrom of the Lithuania University of Education (Vilnius, Lithuania) presents in his article an alternative to evolutionary theories. This is no small a pretension, and the fact that he presents his article to the *Evolution Almanac* suggests that he is quite sure about his views. The article has scholarly characteristics: there is a long list of references and 52 often rather lengthy footnotes. Regarding his references it should be noted that some ten titles of his list date prior to 1900 and contain critical views made by Darwin's contemporaries. Darwin's for that time rather shocking ideas raised heavy attacks mostly of the worried orthodox Christians. Well-known in this respect is the notorious 1860 debate between Darwin and bishop Wilberforce, where Darwin's friend Thomas Huxley saved the day for the evolutionists as Darwin was sick at home (Eiseley 1958: 134; Trinkaus and Shipman 1993: 79–80). The list contains also references to Karl Popper, Talcott Parsons, Pitirim Sorokin, and Theodosius Dobzhansky. These references are a bit surprising. With the exception of the one last mentioned, none of these scholars is known to be a specialist in evolutionism. A serious inadequacy in his references is the total lack of anthropological or archaeological works – and it is precisely in these branches of science that many publications with regard to evolution and evolutionism have been published recently. This negligence is felt through the whole Sandstrom's article, and considerably weakens his arguments.

After having read the title of the article one might reasonably expect that its core elements, 'Evolutions Puzzle', and 'Human Extension' would be clearly defined. This does not happen, however. Sandstrom only points to 'the warring controversy over evolution' and suggests that it should be put in its proper scholarly place. A 'new non-evolutionary way of thinking' will make it possible that the exaggerations of evolutionary theory can be 'more clearly recognized and guarded against' and more such general statements. This new theory, suitable for the human social sciences, is the Human Extension Theory. With the help of this Extension Theory the puzzling concepts in evolutionism, such as 'random', 'chance' and 'unguided' will disappear. He then quotes Sorokin, who predicted that Western social theory would leave the evolutionary paradigm, and go toward an ideational world view, which Sorokin defines as 'truths
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revealed by the grace of God'. This statement, however, does diminish the scientific pretensions of Sandstrom considerably. A definition of Extension is still not added – and, what is so puzzling in 'random', 'chance' and 'unguided' is not explained. In this way their mentioning remains just an act of Faith.

It is my intention to discuss Sandstrom's article on three different, though narrowly connected issues, namely his views on evolution and evolutionism, his Human Extension Theory, and his ideological contentions.

The general idea of his anti-evolutionism is clear. Sandstrom distinguishes the evolutionistic approach to the natural sciences which seems acceptable to him and the application of evolutionism to the human social sciences, which he rejects. He starts with doing away with the concept of natural selection. As an alternative he suggests 'human selection'. Yet, natural selection is an important evolutionistic concept that with modifications (necessary since the discovery of Mendel's laws of genetics; Trinkaus and Shipman 1993: 260–261) is still most useful – also for human beings for they are also products of natural selection. So, for example, changing surroundings or climatic change will influence the outward appearance of human beings as demonstrated by Stringer (2012), where he explains how the Cro-Magnon gradually became white, while they, as all other groups coming out of Africa, had been originally black. That human beings select their partners on certain characteristics, and that such a selection in the course of time will lead to new forms of appearance or character has happened all over the world and in all times. And, is this now natural selection – or human selection?

Sandstrom also suggests that a 'shift away of the Anglo-American interpretation of evolution based on conflict to a Russian-Canadian understanding of evolution based on "mutual aid thinking" and synergy' is the breaking out of peace instead of the 'gradual and unknown drift (*i.e.*, evolution) towards war'. This here is the place to investigate to what extent evolutionary changes are necessarily connected with war. Two examples of peaceful developments must suffice (both discussed in Claessen 2010: 19–20, and 26, where the relevant literature is mentioned).

1. Some 3,000 years ago a limited number of people lived at the shores of Lake Victoria in East Africa. The climate here is good, the land is fertile, and the lake provides water, fish, and possibilities for trade. Under such favorable conditions population increased and as time passed the whole shore of the lake became inhabited. The unabated population growth forced the societies involved to look for more areas of settlement and found these in the hinterland. There have not been found indications for war or conquest; the developments were peaceful. Those who went to the hinterland were mostly younger sons of younger sons and their dependants. They were certainly not banished to a wilderness; the land was there also fertile and the climate was good. Their only disadvantage was that they had no direct access to the lake any longer. If they

were able to share in any of the benefits offered by the lake, they were dependent on the generosity of the dwellers on the lake shore: their older brothers, uncles and cousins. In this way a situation had developed in which not everybody of the same age and the same sex had equal access to the means of livelihood. That is, there had evolved a stratified society. The example reveals how without a ripple a society could glide in a situation in which terms like 'rank' and 'stratified' are applicable – a structural change had taken place.

2. The second example comes also from Africa. In many cases leadership here is connected with the notion of 'the first'. It is believed that the person who first opened the earth for agriculture met with the earth spirits, with whom he concluded a kind of contract in which it was agreed that in exchange for certain specified rituals, he could procure fertility of women, cattle and land. This belief is widespread and is still found to play a great role as recent anthropological fieldwork reveals. Groups of cultivators in search of fertile land and want to settle in the area, and desire to make a claim on the fertility magic of the ritual leader, have to ask his permission, which is always given, and in return have to display a certain degree of obedience. Treading this peaceful path, gradually considerable territorial units emerge. The assumed influence of the ruler on fertility provides a strong form of legitimation for him.

In view of these cases the assumed necessary connection between evolutionism and war is not found to exist. It goes without saying that this does not imply that war or strife was without influence in the development of human culture (for more details see Claessen 2006). The 'shift away' propagated by Sandstrom thus is unnecessary. Yet repeatedly Sandstrom rejects the warlike aspects of Darwin's evolutionism and instead points to the great advantages of mutual aid. For the sake of clarity: war and mutual aid do not exclude each other. There is often found much mutual aid during wartimes. Mutual aid played already a role among the Neanderthals, as appears from the interesting case mentioned by Trinkaus and Shipman (1993: 340). In the Shanidar Cave in Iran, the 60,000 years old remains of a Neanderthal man of approximately forty years old were found. It appeared that this man had lived a very hard life. His head was damaged, and he had lost his left eye; the right lower arm and hand were missing – they were amputated. The right foot and the right leg were also damaged. The excavators argued rightly that someone 'so devastatingly injured could not possibly have survived without care and sustenance' (*Ibid.*: 340). That he survived for so many years after his trauma is a testament to Neanderthal compassion and humanity – for mutual aid.

In his section on Philosophy, Sandstrom points to 'the uni-directional, forward moving, upwards ideological character of old evolutionary theories'. An approach he strongly rejects, implying that such fallacies are, of course, not found in his Human Extension Methodology. This statement raises the question to what extent Sandstrom is au courant with recent research in evolutionism.

Apparently he still considers 'growing complexity' as its cornerstone, but there are reasons not to make growing complexity the essence of (cultural) evolution. There are many developments that do not lead to growth of complexity: stagnation, decline, and collapse are as characteristic of the development of human culture as growth and florescence (see *e.g.*, Tainter 1988; Yoffee and Cowgill 1988; Yoffee 1979; Claessen, Van de Velde, and Smith 1985; Claessen 2000). Moreover, how does Sandstrom's cope with phenomena such as cyclical developments? And, last, but not least, how does he cope with societies that never evolved to a higher level of culture, but yet underwent considerable changes such as hunters and gatherers (*e.g.*, Lee and Devore 1968; Coon 1971; Lourandos 1997; Roebroeks 2004). In conclusion, it seems wise to discard his idea of growing complexity as the cornerstone of cultural evolution. Instead one should look for a more satisfying characteristic. This could be the concept of *structural change*. Evolution then can be defined as 'the process by which structural reorganization affected through time, eventually producing a form or structure which is qualitatively different from the ancestral form' (Voget 1975: 862). Evolutionism then becomes the scientific activity of finding nomothetic explanations for the occurrence of such structural changes. The application of these views makes most of Sandstrom's assertions with regard to evolutionism redundant.

Let me now turn to Sandstrom's favorite, alternative theory. It seems that (the not defined) Human Extension Theory means something as 'human activities and inventions will change their culture; human inventions can be exchanged and in that way enlarge also the cultural repertoire of other groups'. Is this a new view? It is forcing open doors. In his recent book *Lone Survivors* (2012) Chris Stringer makes clear how for (evolutionary) progression human beings must be living in not too small groups, as did, for example, the Cro-Magnon. Then there will be always present older people who can teach the youngsters techniques, strategies, customs and mores. There will also be available marriage partners for the young people – or marriage partners can easily be exchanged with neighboring groups. All these circumstances give the group in question a good chance of survival, continuation and further development. Where, however, a group is but small – as was the case with most Neanderthal groups – the chances for survival and development are smaller. There are but few older, experienced people to teach youngsters, important knowledge can get lost by lack of people who can disseminate it; there will be no marriage partners in the band for the young people and as other Neanderthal groups suffer of the same shortages, chances of survival are less than among the Cro-Magnons. It should be added here, that for more than a hundred thousand years only Neanderthals lived in Europe, and thus were during that time not endangered by the later arriving Cro-Magnons (see Auffermann and Orschiedt 2003; Palmer 2000; Trinkaus and Shipman 1993). Everywhere in human society there

is need for teaching and learning, for the young to be prepared for their future life; I am tempted to say for their ‘struggle for survival’ – and in fact that is their future, even if we should take the term ‘struggle’ not too literally (not even Darwin did that: Darwin 1995 [1872]: ch. 4). A detailed survey of teaching and learning in 18th century Polynesia shows how the young were prepared by older people (parents, members of the family, priests) how to survive in the island world of Oceania (Claessen 2009). In this sense is human extension from all times and all places. In view of the data on education presented above, it is not clear why one should not be allowed to use the Darwinian metaphors ‘struggle for survival’, or ‘survival of the fittest’ to characterize these developments. It should be clear that in most cases the term ‘struggle’ does not mean a fight, or a war but is used in a figurative sense, namely hard working to reach the goal of relatively comfortable living. When a peasant has to work hard to get some food out of a poor piece of land, he is ‘struggling’ for survival indeed (see for cases Haring and De Maaier 1998).

Interestingly, Sandstrom states in his section on Linguistics, that – contrary to evolutionism – the Human Extension Theory opens up all possibilities for multi-directional developments. As we saw above, however, new developments in evolutionism do explain multi-directional moves as well as the Sandstrom theory. This should have been known to Sandstrom. It might have saved him a lot of unnecessary theorizing.

In his section on Philosophy, Sandstrom states that only in the Human Extension Methodology concepts such as ‘innovation diffusion’ are revived ‘and attributed with a teleological orientation that evolutionary theory lacks’. He adds ‘Social mobility and innovation occur because we choose them, not because they just happen without any choice’. It would have been useful if Sandstrom had taken notice of the views developed by Philippe van Parijs some thirty years ago. Van Parijs (1981: 47–50) takes as departing point the situation that our distant ancestors, when problems of whatever nature presented themselves, strove to find a solution which would seem to them to yield a ‘good’, ‘favorable’, or ‘positive’ result. We no longer know how they saw ‘good’ or ‘positive’. It seems highly unlikely, however, that people would choose some solution from which they expected little joy. Van Parijs speaks here of to ‘optimize’. He then states that in search for solutions people generally do not make a choice from the whole gamut of theoretically possible solutions, but are much more likely to take refuge in known, tried and trusted solutions, like those developed in their own society or among their neighbors; generally people choose for the local. He then suggests the term ‘local optimization’ to characterize the behavior of the people who have been faced with a choice. And so there is sometimes the distribution of an innovation, consciously chosen; formerly we used to speak of acculturation or diffusion to indicate such situations.

Regarding Sandstrom's statement that 'everything human-made extends to and/or from a human decision to act or to make something', he should be pointed to the hard-core evolutionist Robert Carneiro, who wrote in 2002 that every human action that is not physically coerced is preceded by an idea. 'Ideas are necessary antecedent states of mind preceding almost any human action' (Carneiro 2002: 83–84). He continues by stating that though ideas are the proximate cause for action, 'this does not make them the ultimate cause'. Ideas cannot be accepted as given, they must be traced to their sources. Ideas have consequences, but they also have causes, conditions that call them forth. This line of reasoning makes Sandstrom's statement redundant. That the Extension theory finally would make us acknowledge matters such as human decision-making is proven as nonsense in view of Van Parijs's and Carneiro's analyses mentioned above.

Let me finally go into some of Sandstrom's ideological statements. These come most clearly to the fore in his expostulations about education. Let me give some quotations:

'Learning draws a distinction between biological and cultural heredity because it is a form of cultural reminiscence, not just a deterministic behavior'. And 'Human voices caring about the upbringing of their children desire a purpose for education and for their communities. This view, however, is discarded in neo-Darwinian evolutionary theories as ideology takes over pedagogical science'. These would be rather breath-taking statements if they were true. Not the idea that parents will choose for a community oriented education, but that neo-Darwinism would discard such a wish. Sandstrom does not give a source for this assertion. But he has more to say about the pedagogical field. Again a quotation: 'If we teach children that they differ from other animals only in degree, but not in kind, then the dramatic consequences of this teaching should be acknowledged up front and without equivocation. Once it is recognized that evolutionary pedagogy is often used to support (scientific) atheism, as it was in public schools during the Soviet period and as it is currently taught in the USA and China, then an alternative can be sought that provides a more inspiring foundation for humanity'.

This is the type of ideologically based statements that is difficult to counter. To do so one should formulate different ideological statements – which are as improvable as those of Sandstrom. Let me limit myself to the matter of the 'dramatic consequences' for children when they are informed that they differ only in degree from animals. Most probably only children brought up in a most orthodox Christian family would be shocked – but probably not very much. Normal children are not so soon dramatically surprised. Only if their parents make a great fuss about it, they may come to think that the nearness to animals is terrible... To generalize on such shaky grounds is scientifically not convincing. Apart from that, I never knew that in the USA, as well as

in the former Soviet Union and present day China a scientific atheistic pedagogy is current. An empirical foundation for such contentions is apparently asking too much.

According to Sandstrom, the evolutionary psychologists have ideologically distanced themselves from the ‘traditional philosophical/theological meaning of human beings as “created in the image of God” and as different in kind from (other) animals’. This is a religious statement – which he, of course, is free to make – but not in a scientifically intended article. It explains why Sandstrom is anti-evolutionistic. A scholarly comment here is of no use, is not possible, in fact. Sandstrom places himself here outside science and presents us instead with his credo.

This should do with his ideological statements.

In the remaining pages of his article, Sandstrom repeats and summarizes his views. Some of his final statements are rather strongly worded. To give one example: ‘The notion that “competition” and/or “conflict” is at the basis of human-social progress is potentially damaging rather than helpful or healing. It is born of a hyper capitalistic, Victorian, Anglo-Saxon, Malthusian-inspired, Wall Street motivated view of humanity’. It is a pity that Sandstrom does not support this view with empirical data, or with references to scholars who share this view. It would have been interesting! On the next page he moderates these views a bit, for here is willing to admit that tension is possible between two or more persons or groups – but this does not mean ‘that they inevitably must struggle or clash’, for human nature ‘also seems inherently bent toward cooperation’.

This positive note seems to be a good point to finish this review of Sandstrom's article. An article that contains, speaking generally, a prejudiced, weakly underpinned and ideologically marred discourse.

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