

Book Review

Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution, by Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd

STEPHEN SHENNAN

*Institute of Archaeology
University College London
31–34 Gordon Square
London, WC1H 0PY, UK*

When I read this book's predecessor, *Culture and the Evolutionary Process*, not long after it came out 20 years ago, it seemed to me to offer a new and more productive future for my discipline, archaeology. There were many features that were attractive but one of the most refreshing was its lack of dogmatism. Like many other humanities and social science disciplines, in the mid 1980s archaeology, in Britain at least, was going through a period of major upheaval. In the case of archaeology the so-called processual approach that had been pioneered by authors such as Lewis Binford in the 1960s, with its emphasis on culture as adaptation and its rejection of history, was being challenged by views that emphasised the meaning of artefacts rather than their function, and cultural uniqueness arising from specific histories rather than universal adaptive processes. You had to choose one camp or the other; there was no room for fence-sitting. The evolutionary approach of dual inheritance theory advocated by Boyd and Richerson rejected this dilemma. Adaptation was important but so were specific histories. It could not merely be assumed that adaptive problems called into existence their own solutions. The dynamics of culture itself were important. Moreover, the very features of human culture that made it adaptive also opened up the possibility of maladaptive developments. If one accepted this perspective, establishing the importance of adaptive payoffs or the specifics of particular histories in understanding patterning in the archaeological record was not a matter of making a dogmatic commitment *a priori* but something to be elucidated in particular cases as a result of empirical work.

However, this was not the only area of archaeology where dogmatism lurked. Dunnell (1980) had published a paper which rightly rejected the prevailing cultural evolutionism in archaeology, focussed on describing and explaining long-term change in social complexity, or, in more 19th century terms, the road from Savagery to Civilisation. He argued instead that only a Darwinian characterisation of the nature of evolution offered any hope of explaining the past as opposed to tendentiously describing it. For Dunnell this meant only

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Table of Contents Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution

1. Understanding the eBook Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution User Reviews and Ratings
 - Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution Free and Paid eBooks

- Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution Public Domain eBooks
- Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution eBook Subscription Services
- Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution Compatibility with Devices
 - Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Interactive Elements Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
- 8. Staying Engaged with Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Setting Reading Goals Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Not By Genes Alone How Culture Transformed Human Evolution
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development

- Exploring Educational eBooks

14. Embracing eBook Trends

- Integration of Multimedia Elements
- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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