

“BIG GODS, RITUALS AND THE EVOLUTION OF COMPLEX SOCIETIES”



Joe Henrich
Harvard University
May 17, 2017, 6:00-7:30
Building 50, Room 51A

Why do so many people believe in powerful, moralizing gods and engage in costly, complex rituals linked to these gods? Why has the character of these religious beliefs, commitments and rituals changed so dramatically over the course of human history? Operating within a broad evolutionary framework, we argue that intergroup competition operating over centuries and millennia has gradually assembled cultural packages that include beliefs in increasingly potent, moralizing supernatural agents, ritual practices that deepen faith, and other psychologically active elements that foster social solidarity, sustain internal harmony, increase fertility and promote large-scale cooperation.

*Dr. Henrich (UCLA, Anthropology, 1999) is currently a Professor of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. Before moving to Harvard, he was a professor of both Economics and Psychology at the University of British Columbia, where he held the Canada Research Chair in Culture, Cognition and Coevolution. In 2004, he won the United States' Presidential Early Career Award for young scientists, and, in 2009, the Early Career Award for Distinguished Contributions bestowed by the Human Behavior and Evolution Society. His latest book is *The Secret of Our Success: How culture is driving human evolution, domesticating our species, and making us smart.**

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