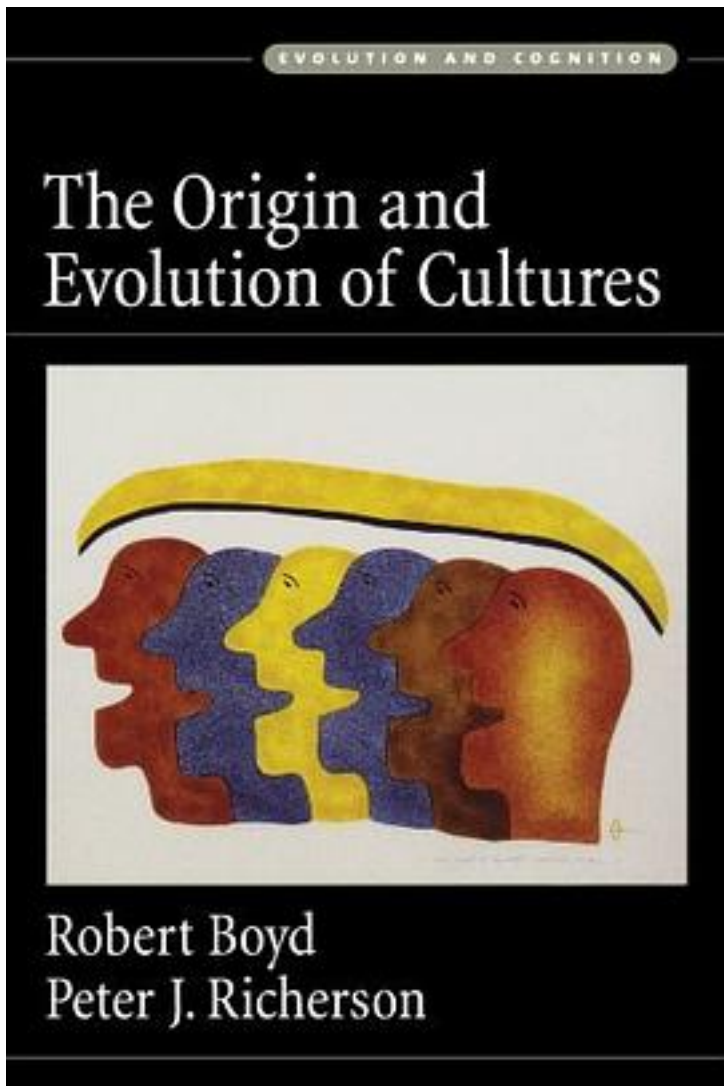


The Origin and Evolution of Cultures



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Over the past 25 years, Boyd and Richerson have become well-known across a wide range of disciplines for their path-breaking work on evolution and culture. This work collects twenty of the influential but relatively inaccessible published articles that form the backbone of this research. It could not be more timely given the growing influence of evolutionary psychology. The papers - which were published in a diverse set of journals and which are not easily available - are conceptually linked and form a cohesive, unified evolutionary account of human culture. Their interdisciplinary research is based on two notions. First, that culture is crucial for understanding human behavior: unlike other organisms, socially transmitted beliefs, attitudes and values heavily influence our behavior. Secondly, culture is part of biology: the capacity to acquire and transmit culture is a derived component of human psychology, and the contents of culture are deeply intertwined with our biology. Taking off from these two assumptions, Boyd and Richerson's novel idea is that culture is a pool of information, stored in the brains of a population, that gets transmitted from one brain to another by social learning processes. Among their conclusions: culture can account for both our astounding ecological success as well as the maladaptations that characterize much of human behavior. Interest in Boyd and Richerson's work spans anthropology, psychology, economics, philosophy, and political science, and has influenced work on animal behavior, economics and game theory, memes, and even archaeology.

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