

# Q&A Responses for Session One of “Evolutionary Science and Sociology”

Event link: <https://thisviewoflife.com/evolutionary-science-and-sociology/>

## Jonathan Turner:

Q: From Rosemary Hopcroft UNCC: My problem is with the idea that sociocultural systems evolve. They do evolve, but not the way living organisms do. Sociocultural systems are not subject to evolution by natural selection like organisms are, because when the organism dies all its components die, when a system dies, the components (individuals) don't all die.

**A: You have hit on the difference between sociocultural evolution and biological evolution. Every level of sociocultural evolution—from the individual organism (a human) through groups, organizations, communities, societies, and inter-societal system—can be subject to selection (if you prefer to keep the term “natural selection” reserved for biotic evolution of the organisms, I am ok. with this) and the responses of units at any level of social organization can generate new selection pressures on the levels above and below that unit. Even more fundamental, however, is that selection is not blind in the sociocultural universe; the units can feel the selection pressures, articulate what they are, plan a solution, and implement this solution; and as they do so, they may well generate new selection pressures on other levels of the sociocultural universe. Moreover, given these considerations, the unit of selection and the units evolving are very different in sociocultural compared to biotic evolution. The unit of evolution is a sociocultural formation, at any level of organization—from group to system of societies. It is not on a “meme pool” although cultural systems are subject to evolution, as part of a level of sociocultural organization. Thus, the parallel between biotic and sociocultural evolution is confined to two basic processes. Sociocultural phenotypes (i.e., what I am calling a sociocultural formation) are subject to selection and, thereby, evolve, but the nature of the phenotype (with capacities for agency), the nature of selection, the nature of the unit under selection, and the process of evolution of multilayered systems of sociocultural phenotypes make evolution of sociocultural systems very different than biotic systems. Thus, it is not useful to extend the Modern Synthesis too far into sociocultural analysis. When, however, we are addressing the evolution of humans as a species, it is appropriate to use the Modern Synthesis, but we must almost always supplement this with an analysis of sociocultural evolution because the human biological phenotypes (which includes capacities for agency and for “niche reconstruction”) is very much affected by its embeddedness in multi-layered sociocultural phenotypes—from the group all the way up to inter-societal systems which are also responding to biological pressures from natural**

**selection on human phenotypes and, at the same time, exerting their own selection pressures on the evolved psychology and biology of humans.**

Q: From Velikovsky of Newcastle: Question For Dr Turner - is your 'The New Evolutionary Sociology' (2018), the 'founding textbook' for Evolutionary Sociology? (Or - are there prior "founding textbooks"? eg Barkow (2005) 'Missing the Revolution')

**A: I do not think that either Richard or I saw this book as a founding textbook, because that would include much more than we discussed. What we saw the book as doing was this: Explaining to sociologists and social scientists more generally that there has been a great deal of thinking about the dynamics of evolution, considerably beyond what most sociologists realize. We presented a series of chapters that illustrate the potential for evolutionary analysis in sociology, drawing from a wide variety of methodologies and conceptualizations. Given that Richard is much more committed to incorporating sociobiology and evolutionary psychology into sociology than I, the book ended up being more comprehensive than if I had written it alone. That is why I begged Richard to do it with—to save me from my bigoted self. So, the book does cover a lot of the turf; yet the goal was not to summarize everything that is being done (for example, we spent little effort talking about “co-evolutionary analysis”) but, rather, to offer one set of options for reinvigorating evolutionary analysis in sociology. An underlying theme is that sociology needs to forget about some of the past forms of evolutionary analysis, although we must remember that sociology was born as an evolutionary approach to human social organization—if we count Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim as among the founders of sociology. Indeed, sociology as much as biology in the 1820s and 1830s was as much, if not more, evolutionary than biology. Spencer did not pay much attention to Darwin (one of his many mistakes) because he had produced the basic idea of natural selection nine years before Darwin, who did acknowledge Spencer as a kind of professional courtesy. Biological analysis was hurt by Social Darwinism, Eugenics, ethnocentric stage models, and early forms of functionalism, with the demise of these by the early 1920s leading to a deep distrust of bringing anything like biology into the discipline—a prejudice that is hard to break down. When functionalism was reborn, evolutionary analysis was also reborn. Functionalism has died a second death, but evolutionary analysis now prospers. Unfortunately many of those trying to analyze societies with evolutionary ideas have never studied societies; they seem to think that because they live in a society, that is all the knowledge that they need. Big mistake. E.O. Wilson may be a great biologist but he is a terrible sociologist, and this indictment can be applied to many in the contemporary revival of evolutionary analysis in the social sciences, often performed (sadly) by people not trained in sociology. It has always irritated me that I have read a great deal of biology and neurology over the last 35 years, but non-sociologists doing evolutionary analysis of sociocultural phenomena have read virtually no sociology. Such arrogance is very**

**annoying but, more fundamentally, the analysis done by these non-sociologists is incredibly flawed and does not explain what they think they are explaining. So, arrogance coupled with mediocre analysis is, to me, a double sin.**

Q: From Velikovsky of Newcastle: Q for Dr Turner - What (approximate) percentage of Sociologists are (currently): Evolutionary Sociologists?

**A: Very, very small. It is so small I am not sure that I can use a whole number to express the percentage. Let me stick to sociology in the U.S., but I think what I say for the U.S. is also true of at least western sociology: Less than 1%. American sociology has, maybe, about 12,000 members in ASA with only 100 or so still members of the EBS section. Now, it is true that many biologically and evolutionary sociologists have dropped out of ASA, including my co-author and perhaps 20 others that I could name. But there are far more than 12,000 sociologists in the U.S. The total number probably exceeds 30,000. That is the reasoning of my less than 1% figure. I am not sure that 99% of sociologists are opposed to evolutionary sociology; indeed, I am sure that is not the case because I get a great deal of email from people in the U.S. and around the world asking for papers and books on evolutionary analysis in sociology. So, there is perhaps as many as 10% of all sociologists in the world interested in evolutionary sociology, and these tend to be younger scholars, and so, there is some hope, globally. Unfortunately, I think that American sociology is a lost cause, given that ASA appears to want to be a second-tier social movement organization (second-tier because people want to talk about, *endlessly*, social injustice but not do something that I did when I was young, get out the real world and try to actually DO SOMETHING by confront in public the problem. But, as I told students in the "teach-in" days on university campuses in the early 1970s, be aware if you confront real power and real problems with your body: those that you confront have guns and will use them. A week after my biggest talk to about 1000 students on one teach in day, the Kent State Massacre occurred.**

## **Doug Marshall:**

Q: Jill LaPlante: Q for Dr Marshall: How do you define rationality?

**A: Dr. LaPlante – I saw your question flash past in the chat near the end of my talk and realized with horror that I hadn't addressed this fundamental issue in my talk – which probably meant it made a lot less sense to people who hadn't read the piece. My bad for not getting back to it then. In any event, it seems like 'rationality' is defined at three different levels of resolution within sociology. At the widest, most inclusive, resolution, it means little more than "purposiveness" or "intentionality" such that rational behavior =**

consciously intended action. I don't find this a very satisfying or useful definition, and it's worth noting that it was basically only arrived at by RCT theorists after pretty much every other, more substantive, definition has been discarded as being unrealistic as a description of human beings. I've never I refer to it mostly because 'purposiveness' does seem to be an important and telling ingredient of rationality even at higher resolutions. [Looking below, I now see how you're defining rationality, and I feel it's in keeping with this interpretation. The RCT advocates were never very successful with this fall-back position because in practice, it had little predictive/explanatory value – in most situations, the theory ends up predicting that “people will do what they want to do”, which is almost theoretically vacuous – it is only not vacuous because more behavior is habitual and unthinking than was once believed, but the stricter interpretation of 'rationality' I hew to here is not adopted to make 'irrationality' an easy claim, but because I believe that the stricter 'rationality' (below) is a real and important phenomenon both historically and theoretically, and it is relevant to point out individual's divergence from it's assumptions] At the next higher level of resolution, we have Weber's idea of 'rational' behavior as the informed and calculating maximization of one's goal. At the highest level of resolution, RCT refines/formalizes Weber's concept by specifying the insatiable and single-minded pursuit of the goal, assumes individual, private benefits, privileges material (quantifiable) goals, and generally presumes fairly heroic powers of calculation. For the purposes of this argument, the key features of rationality that the observed behavior violates are the epistemic assumptions - that individuals can/will reliably identify and pursue their own individual material interests, and are motivated to seek and evaluate all available information relevant to that end. Contra these assumptions, what I think we see around the epidemic is that human individuals: do not seek or attend to freely available information, do not even attempt to evaluate what information they do access, are not able to identify their own interests, and/or are almost exclusively attentive to subjective, symbolic, non-material interests rather than their own outcomes. Basically, I'm pointing here at the lack of individual human epistemic rationality – the competent use of information to pursue individual benefits. I hope that helps – if not, the article might be a clearer exposition.

Q: From Steve Gilbert: For Dr. Marshall: How does society counter the epistemic attack being waged against science?

**A: Hey Steve – Of course, that's the \$64k question to which I'm not sure I have any reasonable answer, which is why I shrugged and demurred to answer during the session. But, as I do have some strong feelings about this topic, even if not solid solutions, I'll take this opportunity to say my piece.**

For starters, I think that science education in this country could use a real revamp in a couple of dimensions. In my experience, there is plenty of drilling about one or another

version of the classic, “observe, hypothesis, test, revise” as if the value thereof is self-evident. But it’s not: Science education needs to more explicitly make the case for why this, and the other aspects of science, together make it the most reliable tool for arriving at valid knowledge of the world. In particular, a focus on how accurate understanding is a socially emergent property of certain groups – that is that even though individuals have myriad limitations and biases that can make it hard or impossible for them to by themselves ascertain truth, under some conditions, these can be overcome and accounted for by the way sciences takes place between individuals. In practice, this would mean, 1. Prefacing science courses with an honest discussion of the limitations and biases that severely curtail individuals’ ability to recognize truth – i.e. imbue students with a healthy dose of epistemic humility and 2. Expanding our standard account of the “scientific method” to extend beyond what happens in the lab to emphasize its social dimensions – the significance of publications and presentations, peer review, and the competitive incentive structure that powers its search for truth. Popper minimally defined “scientific statements” as those that could be falsified, it might behoove us to augment that definition with a caveat that it must also be something that others have been institutionally motivated to falsify.

I will not belabor the point, but it’s also high time for some academics – especially sociologists – to turn the page on “postmodernism” as it has been typically conveyed in their classes for the last couple decades. While I’m willing to grant that its positing of an era in which the modernist ‘grand narrative’ of the advance of science is collapsing might be descriptively true (indeed, that’s what we’re talking about here), this is usually incorporated with more normative claims that the epistemic privilege accorded to scientific accounts of reality in the modern era are unjustified, and that science is merely an assertion of interests comparable to any other way of knowing. These accounts neglect the ways in which science, unlike any other way of knowing, is effectively designed to minimize and overcome the limitation and biases that render every other route to knowledge into mere ideology, not to mention its unparalleled and obvious success at actually understanding the universe well enough to achieve difficult and even miraculous things. To be sure, it would be naïve to presume, as some modernist have, that scientific advance will inevitably produce beneficent outcomes, or won’t bring about our end as a species, but that’s another question – it’s singular ability to ascertain empirically accurate understandings of the universe is beyond question.

Q: From Velikovsky of Newcastle: Q for Dr Marshall - So, is Harari right to say, we can happily be "culturalists"? (ie There are some "bad" units of culture: ideas, processes, products) eg: misinformation, disinformation, anti-Science ideas, etc ?

**A: Hey Immanuel (wee joke there), that's an interesting question. But my answer is "yes". Academics, especially sociologists, often have a hard time shedding our acquired attachment to detachment™ - our determination to understand beliefs, ideas, events "on their own terms", of applying a healthy dose of "verstehen" to everything others say or do. This is, by and large, an admirable instinct that the world could use more of. But this also overlooks that there exist bad-faith actors who willfully and knowingly seek to infect others with maliciously anti-social or maladaptive 'memes' (for want of a better term, as per Dawkins). It is irresponsible for us, as sociologists, as academics, as citizens to fail to push back against these bits of culture and those who intentionally and knowingly propagate them. I'm not thrilled with the "culturalist" term, since it could seemingly refer to entire cultures, rather than particular elements thereof, but I'm not sure what a better, less loaded or potentially misunderstood, term to offer.**

**Q: From Gregory: Doug Marshall said, "Just because something's natural doesn't mean it's inevitable." Is evolution both natural and inevitable in human societies? If not, when don't societies evolve or what stops their evolution? Isn't the non-evolution of society a major question here also? It seems a frustration is being expressed here that "society hasn't evolved" in certain ways.**

**A: Hi Gregory, I think it's important to distinguish between 'evolution' and 'change' – and the difference isn't that 'evolution' applies only to progressive change, but that it applies only to change due to the classic "differential reproduction" mechanism in either the biological or cultural sphere. That said, I'd argue that societies inevitably change, and that societies inevitably evolve, but that not all change is evolutionary, and not all evolutionary change is societally adaptive. I think that what Jon and I are both expressing is that the current moment in history provides an opportunity to recognize that the mechanisms of cultural and biological evolution have a real relevance to understanding and explaining what is happening and to predicting what might happen next.**

## **General:**

From Simon Bowden: Isn't it the case that humans and human sociology must have evolved in parallel (dual inheritance) and you can't separate the two systems? Basically Tooby & Cosmides

**J.T: I think that you can separate them. This is why I have not embraced dual inheritance models. It is not that they are wrong, it is that they give up trying to determine what is biological and what is sociocultural. They do affect each other, obviously, but approach has been to see if it is possible to determine what traits among humans, including their**

evolved psychologies, have a biological basis driven by natural selection (biotic) and what traits of humans and human patterns of sociocultural cultural organization have a purely biological basis (relatively few), a purely sociocultural basis (many more), and of course basis built up interaction between biological and sociocultural evolution. The problem with Cosmides and Tooby is that they simply asserted in their early work (which most evolutionary psychologists no longer emphasize) which for them led to the postulate that for every behavioral propensity there was an evolved "module" in the brain which, as I learned more and more about the brain, cannot be true. Indeed, they created a kind of functionalism: A adaptive need for certain kinds of behavior increasing fitness led to the evolution in the late Pleistocene of a relevant brain module, whose location was rarely specified and, moreover, whose evolution is not really discussed except to say that the module evolved to resolve this or that adaptive problem. Sounds very much like the discredited version of functionalisms in sociology. It is, of course, very reasonable to seek out the biology (and evolutionary origins) of human behaviors, but one has to do a great deal more than simply pronounce that there is a module or some biological basis for this or that behavior.

My approach to doing this kind of analysis is outlined in my new book that just came out: *On Human Nature: The Biology and Sociology of What Made Us Human* (2021, Routledge)

D.M: Hey Simon, Yes, you're right about the dual inheritance – and of course in practice, the two systems, for the most part, can't be separated, but I don't think that means that we can't analytically disentangle their relative roles in producing particular phenomena and/or trace the ways their interactions produced those phenomena. And indeed, there's a lot to be learned by doing so.

From Luiz Lopez: It is about to be rational or about be "sincere" with others about evidences. "Sincerety" implies in cooperation among the actors. In a exploitation/competition game is more adaptative fool others and favour irrationality.

J.T: To be honest, I have never found game theory all that useful because it builds on assumptions of "rationality" which, at the very least, are overdrawn. Still, I have found some aspects of game theorizing useful. Humans are rarely rational; and even when they try, they cannot know all of the options and contingencies involved; and so, it is irrational to think that one can be completely rational. Cooperation, as I have argued again and again (see, for example, J. H. Turner, *On The Origin of Human Emotions* (2000, Stanford) and just about every time that I talk about things like cooperation, social bonding, attachments, rituals, and anything that makes humans social *is driven by emotions*. Indeed, rationality as is now understood by neurologists (e.g., Hanna and Antonio

Damasio) depends upon emotions to load the valences that are being weighed. So, I don't find "games" about rationality as doing very much explaining. And having at one time in my career done a lot of computer simulations, I know how the dice in this game can be loaded to produce certain outcomes. We would be far wiser to be studying emotions, *per se*, (their neurology and behavior manifestations) and the interpersonal mechanisms as well as sociocultural situations that arouse different emotions than constructing simulations on computers. I am being too extreme here since I find some of these quite interesting and intriguing, such as work by Noah Mark (sociologists) and Brian Skyles (philosopher).

From Jill LaPlante: My understanding of rationality is that it is "merely" the ability to arrange actions towards a particular goal (system 2), in contrast to merely reacting according with our emotions/impulse (system 1). Typically when we call something "irrational", it is due to misinterpreting the goal. The person being accused of irrationality is pursuing a different goal, with bounded rationality

**J.T:** Well, "bounded" rationality is one way to define away the problem because the presumption is that the options facing someone who makes a decision are known. But the neurology of making decisions is very different than this. Each option that a person has is valenced by emotions, often complex and even contradictory emotions, and whatever decision is made is actually made by emotions which push the neocortical parts of the brain (above the cingulate gyrus) or bias it in ways that lead to a decision. Humans are ALWAYS reacting to any situation with emotions; what is called rationality is assessing options that these emotions have made salient and choosing among these options. There is no center for rationality; there is simply a constant interaction between subcortical and neocortical portions of the brain via direct neurological networks and mediated process involving the activation of neurotransmitters, neuroactive peptides, more general hormonal systems, ANS system, and musculoskeletal systems. Much behavior among human is goal oriented and this provides some focus for neocortical deliberations and the activation of particular body systems, but rationality however defined is bounded, not just by the structure of the situation (e.g., bounded within some constraints of the situation) but also by the operation of the very complex dynamics by which emotion centers directly, and indirectly, load up what is perceived as an option and what is felt to be a rewarding option (in terms of the arousal of positive emotions, or avoidance of negative emotions) which can be idiosyncratic for different individuals.

**D.M:** [see answer to Simon above]

From Marcel Harmon: I understand Dr. Turner's frustration, but I wouldn't say that the non-academic world is completely ignoring behavioral scientists. I'm an anthropologist and not sociologist, but there's a whole world of applied behavioral scientists that I live in. I'm often frustrated on a day-to-day basis, but I and my fellow colleagues in the applied world have also gotten some people to listen.

**J.T: I am sure that you are correct. My frustration is that the one discipline (maybe including some anthropologists as well), sociology, that is set up to examine the social universe and its complexity is, compared to economic and psychology (and even political science), the least consulted by those who have the power to affect people's lives. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, American sociology tried to demonstrate its usefulness to foundations (Ford, Carnegie, and later NSF and NIMH) and at times to community-oriented applied work in surveys. Steve Turners and my book, *The Impossible Science* (1990), reviewed these efforts. And sociology has several organizations devoted to organizing sociologists, such as the Applied Sociological Association, the Sociology of Practice section of ASA, and Clinical Sociological Association (not sure I got names quite right) and some have engaged in credentialing practitioners. So there have been efforts but these are they not always appreciated or considered important by potential clients. I think that part of the problem is that sociologists do not have one paradigm (like economics) to simply impose on problems (always based on the mathematics as opposed to reality of "rationality"), whereas sociologists inevitably see the complexity of sociocultural forces in play and their interaction effects on each other. The result that we cannot provide a simple formula for addressing many problems, and moreover, a sociological world view goes against most of the much simpler assumptions of economics and perhaps also the ideological biases of potential clients.**

I have also felt that applied sociologists have not been taught the theories that might make their work easier. I have over many years now been working on a book, with the title: *Theoretical Principles of Sociological Practice and Policy Making*. My goal was, and still is (although at my age, it is not certain that I will ever finish the book, given my easy distraction to pure theory projects) to lay out "rules of thumb" derived from more abstract theories that can be applied to generic kinds of problems that always emerge when humans try to organize. Sociologists need to be able to have a solution to problems of clients that is more than intuitive, more than based on based experience, more than based on some simple theory of what rational actors should do, and so on. Sociology has advanced theoretically way beyond what the average sociologist understands, especially given the rather weak training in theory in graduate programs these days and also given that much theory is "critical" which is code for ideology rather than theory (by the way, I share most of the ideologies of other left-leaning sociologists, but I am not about to take someone's money and tell them my ideology). Rather, would want to use what I know as theoretical relevant to a client's problem in order to make recommendations (and these often go against my ideology because it clearly has utopian elements that are not, as the

world is structured, practical and probably never possible). The problem, then, with much public policy analysis and with some applied sociology is that it is heavily tinged by implicit moralities. But that is only one of the problems; the other problem is that we have not as a discipline tried to codify theories into practical applications. It is asking applied sociologists to do too much to also be theorists; it is more reasonable to ask theories to provide theories in a format that can be USED to address real world problems. This is what I have been plodding along with for well over two decades, but again I get distracted by new purely theoretical project or by evolutionary sociology, and a lot of other things. And suddenly, I am running out of life... But over the years, I have spent time with applied sociologists (and other labels of people doing applied work) and outlined the theories that would be relevant for the problem at hand.

From Patricia: more of a comment than a question..I am reading "This Changes Everything" by Naomi Klein which speaks to the decimation of public infrastructure and deregulated capitalism as it applies to climate change. Even though the book was published pre pandemic there are many common themes with this discussion. The issue is as the previous speaker mentioned is that "who is listening" We have had this information for years about climate change and sociological infrastructure. It does feel like we are often preaching to the choir

**J.T: Perhaps the Pandemic and its brutal destruction of human life, particularly in the U.S., will alert people to these larger issues—global warming, environmental degradation, persisting poverty, and many other world-level problems that the U.S. or any nation cannot ignore. One can only hope but even now it seems to be a hard sell to those who simply do not want to hear the bad news. At one time, I really thought that sociology could change the world. That is why I selected sociology in 1964 as my field of graduate study (I had other options ranging from biology to philosophy). Now going on 60 years later, I am not so sure but I must say I find the young (defined optionally at my age as anyone younger than 30) seem to be much more aware of what must be done. My generation that went to college and graduate school in the 1960s was pretty good at talking about the issues, and demonstrating in safe havens of college campuses; and in so doing, did change many people's world view. But, if we look at the really big problems facing the world, the U.S. does not seem to be doing very much, although perhaps the new administration can mobilize the upcoming generations to dig in and address these problems that, indeed, could change everything including the prospects for human life on earth. But is sociology ready to give those who want to change things useful knowledge (not ideology but actual knowledge). We have the knowledge but we are no longer fully training student in our discipline, nor are we codifying it in ways that can be used (see above). I am not so sure, and I am not even a bitter old man; I tend to be optimistic about sociology and its prospects for saving the world but I now have my doubts. The one thing that I know will *not* work: training students in ideologies and the turning them loose. If**

**one is going to be a professional sociologist, he or she must have knowledge about the dynamics of the social universe that they can use to change the social universe. Sociologists do not need to be in social movement organizations professionally (personally, of course, is a different matter), but they do need to be able to provide useful knowledge about how the social world operates. And if we cannot this, I am not sure of what the contribution of sociology will be to eliminate the world's problems.**

From Luiz Lopez: Increase in world "authoritarianism" appears to spike some years after world economical crisis. Does economical crisis works like ecological stress that make social systems retrocede back at least partially. But it appears that the long trend (200 years) favor more "rational" pro social societies.

**J.T: Early sociologists like Spencer and economists like Pareto who turned to sociology recognized that there are oscillations in many social dynamics, particularly economic and political dynamics Some sociologists continue to work with these ideas [see forthcoming books by Kevin MacCafree Routledge], and ecologists turned sociologists like Peter Turchin (see his blog and many books on geopolitical dynamics). Well, now I would not portray anything as a rational in societies, and just what is "pro social" in this context of rationality. Has the U.S. seemed like a rational society over the last four years? The oscillation should be stated more analytically as (1) movement of polities from highly centralized consolidations of coercive and administrative power to less centralized forms relying more on incentive and symbolic bases of power (that is, the changing ratios among coercive, administrative, incentive, and symbolic bases of political power) as well as (2) movement from low levels of productivity and distributions of goods and services to higher levels of productivity and distributions (as shaped by technologies, human capital, physical capital, transactional capital (money), structural formations, and cultural formations). These two interact, of course, overly centralized polity built around coercion and administrative force will, over the long haul, become less productive (even China in the long run if it goes too far on its current path). None of this is "rational." It just is; and sociologists have been developing pretty interesting models of these dynamics, from world system analysis to historical cliometrics to formal theorizing on geopolitical and geoeconomics processes. But predictions are hard to make because there is so many contingent forces in play, but we can as sociologists can still make a contribution by developing theoretical models, based on present-day data and historical data, to make prediction and to provide guidance to those in power who make the big decisions.**

From Sage at TVOL: Cultural Attraction Theory helps distinguish forms of cultural evolution that evolve according to social adaptation vs. the many, many other "biased transformations" that select upon the cultural tokens that are actually seen vs. the infinite variety that could exist. Five

Misunderstandings of Cultural Evolution and Four Misunderstandings of Cultural Attraction Theory cover the field (California and Paris schools, respectively)

**Sound interesting because, indeed, evolution is constrained by biases that are built into sociocultural phenotypes (thus closing of many alternative available before biases were institutionalized in social structure and culture).**

From John Crisp: I'm a translator from French. Sociology is one of the academic subjects that I do a lot of work in - every sociological article coming out of French universities at the moment adopts a specifically "Foucauldian" perspective.

**J.T: The problem with Hot Names—and Foucault indeed “hot” is that it creates fads and foibles that soon fade. Hence, for all of the cleverness of Foucault, I don’t think his kind of work is a good model for sociology. It is interesting history in some cases, and even philosophy, and his work makes one think. But, this is for conversation over wine and in a café. What the world needs is empirically tested theoretical ideas that can help reorganize element of the sociocultural universe (at least from my hard core positivist perspective, in which sociologists these days are increasingly less interested)**

**D.M: Hi John – Thanks for the data point – I’d argue that that’s entirely relevant to the problems Jon and I are talking about.**

From Simon Bowden: I wonder how natural selection selects for truth?

**J.T: I doubt that it does. Very different kind of question. Selection works to hone adaptations to environments. And this is what kind of truth? (I don’t know what the word quite means in this context). Perhaps truth that saves a population at one point in time but is harmful if the environment changes, especially the environment of human social organization which, on the one hand, resolves certain adaptive problems but inevitably creates new adaptive problems. Hardly the “truth” that most seek when they utter the phrase “seeking truth”, which I think is in many ways a label for some other emotional-cognitive state.**

From Jill LaPlante: The anti-scientific rhetoric from within our discipline is strong!

**J.T: Sad but true. Sociology may have to be reborn and renamed. My preference: Department of Social Physics (and I could add, Engineering, but that would seem scary to many sociologists who seek to re-engineer the social universe with an emotionally laden ideology)**

From Ed Gibney: Finland has been fighting Russian disinformation for a long time. They have a program in all their schools to counter it. Has anyone studied the details there?

**J.T: I simply do not know, but this important question reveals a fundamental problem that social media and computers/cell phones have created.**

From Ed Gibney: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/fact-from-fiction-finlands-new-lessons-in-combating-fake-news>

From Robert Kadar: Perhaps market the discipline differently such as "Scientific Foucauldians". "Darwinian Marxism." Yes, it will annoy people, but at least they'll want to engage with it. ;)

**J.T: But that is the problem: the faddishness of it all is what attracts, not the science part but the Big Name Part, attached to critical ideologies of the present day. Maybe it is a good co-optive strategy to get people in the door, however. Worth a try because sociology is in a desperate position of defining itself as irrelevant to most major problems in the world.**

From Eric Johnson: Robert: Or Socialist Darwinism? <https://thisviewoflife.com/on-the-origin-of-socialist-darwinism/>

**J.T: How many Marxists would walk in that door and sit down to listen? Not many**