

ORIGIN OF SHYNESS - II

Late in high school I read William Golding's 1955 novel *The Inheritors*. It's the story of a small band of hunter-gatherers who have little speech, but communicate also with hand signals and telepathy. They encounter a larger band of loud talking, heavy drinking, more violent people who enter their territory equipped with the bow and arrow, a weapon the silent people have never seen before.

The end of that story, with the little band all dead except for two mute children being carried off in dugout canoes, haunted me for years.

Though Golding didn't say it in his book, he apparently said elsewhere that he was writing about Neanderthals (In case you're wondering, this is the same William Golding who wrote *Lord of The Flies*).

Neanderthals are considered to have been a subspecies of Homo Sapiens. It's a little known fact that their brains were, on average, slightly larger than ours. Their skulls/brain cases reveal differences too – their frontal lobes were smaller, but the back (where visual centers are found) larger. Maybe that's why Golding removed speech from his people and gave them increased telepathy.

What does that have to do with shyness?

Well, I think shyness has an ancient origin. Shyness is found throughout nature. Deer are shy, rabbits are shy, foxes, cougars, bears, leopards and tigers are all shy. At least one quarter of the human population – 1.7 billion people – is shy (one in four people is an introvert). Psychologists say the shyness of the other animals is not the same thing as human shyness, but I think they're wrong. I think it's the same instinct in a new setting.

Without going too deeply into the science of human origins, let's consider that humanity in the form of the hominids is supposed to be 7 million years old, the current date used for our split from the chimpanzees. During that time there were many species of hominid. As new fossils are dug up, new ones continue to be identified – the count is currently about nineteen.

The first to stand fully erect and have a brain size comparable with modern humans was Homo Erectus. It appeared in Africa about 2 million years ago, then spread to Europe, Asia and the Far East. It evolved into many different subspecies or races and in its late versions had a brain not much smaller than ours.

If you met a member of Homo Erectus on the subway dressed in 21st century clothes, you probably wouldn't pay them much notice.

Between 300,000 and 200,000 years ago a new species arrived - Homo Sapiens. The earliest versions are known as Archaic Homo Sapiens and were midway in body structure between Homo Erectus and full Homo Sapiens, evidence that we evolved from at least one version of Homo Erectus.

The evidence is still unclear whether Sapiens arose only in Africa, or whether it evolved from Erectus elsewhere in the world too. In fact, there is a school of anthropology led by the University of Michigan's Wilfred Wolpoff that says Homo Erectus and Homo Sapiens are the same species. I'm a follower of Wilpoff, but here I'm trying to give you the standard view.

By 100,000 years ago Homo Sapiens is supposed to have replaced Erectus entirely. The usual explanation is that Sapiens exterminated Erectus and any other hominids that got in its way.

This in a nutshell is currently the most accepted view of human history.

Think of this - one hundred thousand years ago the brain size of Homo Sapiens was the same as today. We probably looked little different than we do today too, except that we may still have been covered with fur. But about 40,000 – 50,000 years ago something unusual happened. Technology (stone tools, etc) suddenly began to evolve at an unprecedented rate, and art appeared for the first time. Complex language is also believed to have started at this time.

Why? The only thing known for sure is that, at least in some places, the size of social groups began to increase then. Some small family bands grew larger, or banded together, evolving into the cultural entities we call tribes.

Keep in mind that little family bands of hunter-gatherers continued to exist. During the 20th century there were still Bushmen in the remote interior of the Kalahari desert, the Efe or 'pygmies' were still in the Congo forest, and other hunter-gatherers still lived on islands in the Pacific Ocean and remote parts of Australia.

Very few of these cultures were allowed to survive into the 21st century - civilization has always had an aversion to "primitive" lifestyles. The way of life of the hunter-gatherer seems to have deeply offended us. While lands have been protected all over the world for the sake of endangered species, almost none have been set aside for the hunter-gatherer.

Today we live in the greatest tribes that have ever existed – nations. There are billions of us now, and the assumption in most scientific circles is that all of us carry the genes of only one hominid - Homo Sapiens.

Homo Erectus, the Neanderthals, Archaic Homo Sapiens, the whole lot are assumed to be extinct – you're not supposed to think for a moment that any genetic remnant of those forgotten people could remain in your DNA. That seems to be a taboo idea in the science of human origins.

Yes, we're supposed to be one people now, with one basic brain, one fundamental nature, and one generally consistent set of behaviors. If you don't have that nature, or you behave in any different way, or if you even physically look too much out of place, watch out. You will be told that you have a disorder.

Yes, if your difference is physical – if you are a dwarf, for example – you will get advice to not have children with a person like yourself, lest your genetic condition (which is probably tens of thousands of years old and probably persists because it is natural), should be repeated in your children.

If your difference is behavioral – maybe you lack the customary social instincts - then you will be asked to behave as if you do have them.

Oh, will we ever be free of this strange desire to have everyone look and behave alike?

Never mind that Neanderthals were around as late as 30,000 years ago, or that heretic anthropologists argue that there are Neanderthal traits, even Homo Erectus traits, in living populations - or that Australian anthropologists recently found fossils of a miniature Homo Erectus people on the Indonesian island of Flores that are only 13,000 years old (local people on Flores insist that the little people are still out there in the bush).

No, those of us with unusual genes and quirky behaviors are supposed to understand that we shouldn't have them, and that we are suffering because of them, so we need to change, or at least take drugs to suppress them.

Here, if you haven't figured it out already, is what I think.

During the long struggle to take over the planet, I think the new social form of Homo Sapiens probably eliminated some, but not all. I don't disagree that in the distant past social humans tried to exterminate the rest of us. I just don't agree that they were successful.

When the Homo Sapiens herd rolled over these other people and they found themselves inside it, what choice did they have but to accept it? Some may have joined voluntarily. Some, like Goldings silent children in *The Inheritors*, may have been dragged in against their will to be pets and slaves.

With no empty lands left to escape to, all the defeated peoples - the dwarves, the giants, the speechless, the shy and solitary – who knows how many different peoples? – must have reluctantly accepted places in the herd that had overrun them. Then over tens of thousands of years living inside the herd the descendants of all forgot who they were. In this way, I think a huge re-mixing of the genetic pot began about 100,000 years ago and continues to this day.

Yes, I think shy people are a simpler people from the past without complex social instincts. I think we were one of the last to come in from the forest. In the wilderness we were confident and happy, so we remained there as long as possible. Now, trapped inside this colossal human herd that is growing exponentially, our discomfort, anxiety and alienation are growing with it.

