

The Central Role of Culture in Cognitive Evolution: A Reflection on the Myth of the "Isolated Mind", [Merlin Donald](#)

Introduction

Human symbolic culture constitutes a distinctive, species-universal trait, usually thought to be the result of our having evolved special cognitive capacities, such as language. Seen from this vantage point, the flow of influence runs from cognition to culture, in that order, and the task of evolutionary psychology should be to decide how and when the basic cognitive foundations of modern culture came into being. According to this doctrine, the coevolutionary brain-culture spiral that characterized hominids must have been driven primarily at the cognitive level. Thus, cognitive evolution triggers cultural evolution, which triggers further brain evolution, and so on. This is the conventional meaning of brain-culture coevolution.