

Origins of Xenophobia Workshop
March 30-April 1, 2012

Guiding Questions based on ongoing discussions (to be refined):

1. Is in-group preference (and signaling for discrimination in cooperative interaction) independent of out-group hostility. Do these two usually coevolve, and if so, why?
2. Do proximate cognitive and emotional mechanisms that incite functional (fitness enhancing) out-group hostility and avoidance frequently produce maladaptive out-group hostility in modern human societies where socio-ecological conditions differ dramatically from ancestral conditions under which these mechanisms evolved?
3. Is xenophobia, as measured by individual behavioral patterns, significantly different from institutionalized xenophobia and do the two types lead to different expectations about what will become common and spread? Does institutionalized xenophobia amplify or ameliorate the impact of individual behavioral xenophobia in most cases?
4. Can transmission of ideas (culture) result in types or levels of out-group hostility that would not evolve if genetically encoded?
5. Under what conditions will individuals be members of multiple different groups with specific cooperative or competitive functions that cross cut memberships at multiple size levels (eg. member of a sports team, an ethnic group, a religion and a nation state – all with different membership) vs. belonging to a single “in-group” that organizes all their important cooperative and competitive behaviors with others?
6. What is the relationship between contextual influences and evolutionary mechanisms? Evolutionary mechanisms can be diverse and will not fall into just one kind, ie that we should expect a variety of evolutionary mechanisms governing ingroup - outgroup behaviors and that we need to keep both of these issues in mind with regard to the biological origins of human behaviors such as xenophobia.
7. In the context of our discussions of government and self-rule, we asked the question, What are the biological equivalents/precedents to the giving up of self-rule? We suggested that this can be found in those systems that have tighter integration and division of labor, such as the origin of multicellularity or symbiosis--we agreed that this needs to be explored further.
8. In conjunction with the previous point: How do regulatory systems that promote integration/cooperation develop? Are there shared mechanisms in play at the biological and political level?
9. Is it the case that the evolution of well-integrated groups requires the presence of a threat/competitive group?
10. What forces drive inclusiveness?
11. What does our understanding of biological origins of these behaviors mean for historical, political studies?