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Running head: Discretion

Charm and Discretion, Yes. Bourgeoisie, No.

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Krueger's review raises an interesting pair of questions: Does adopting an evolutionary perspective on human behavior, as we do in *Solving Modern Problems with a Stone-Age Brain*, prescribe that people live according to the dictates of our inherited genetic programs? If not, then why use an evolutionary model to organize a book on how to live a fulfilling life?

The brief answer is that we believe an evolutionary perspective is indeed essential to understanding where our powerful psychological motivations come from, but that such an understanding does *not* translate into a prescription for a fulfilling life in the modern world. In fact, we would take that a step further. Not only does our book not provide this prescription - no such prescription could possibly exist.

What worked for our ancestors is not necessarily something that will work in the modern world. Living like the humble and charitable Osceola McCarty probably wouldn't have benefitted Genghis Khan; but living like Genghis Khan probably wouldn't have worked out so well for Osceola McCarty. Our goal in writing this book was not so much to "hold a middle ground" but more to show people that the path may in fact be a bit wider than it first looks.

As Krueger notes, we repeatedly remind readers to avoid the "naturalistic fallacy" (or the idea that what is natural is good). At the same time, it would be equally fallacious to go with the simple assumption that what is natural is bad. Some of our suggested solutions to our modern problems do involve acting in ways that come naturally, such as staying in contact with our family members. Others (such as arranging your shopping to reduce the odds of filling your kitchen with high-calorie foods) involve avoiding our natural impulses.

A key point is that an evolutionary perspective helps understand where many of our most important motivations came from, and why they are sometimes so irrationally powerful, but mindlessly enacting those powerful impulses is a bad formula for living in the modern world. Deciding on how to behave in the future is a very different question from understanding where our natural impulses came from, even though the latter can help inform why the former is sometimes so difficult. In line with this point, many of our suggested solutions were developed by psychologists who were not explicitly working in an evolutionary framework. For example, the notion of *stimulus control* was developed by psychologists working in a behaviorist tradition, but it is incredibly useful in circumventing some of the powerful impulses that cause us trouble in the modern world.

A full understanding of human behavior comes not only from understanding a bit about human evolution, but also about the mechanisms of attention, memory, and interpretation (topics studied by cognitive theorists), processes of learning (studied by social learning theorists), and variations and consistencies across cultures (studied by cultural theorists). Critically, none of these levels of analysis are independent of the others – what we pay attention to and remember depends in part on what we've learned, which depends in part on which culture we were raised in (issues we discuss throughout our social psychology textbook; Kenrick, Neuberg, Cialdini, & Lundberg-Kenrick, 2020). Importantly, though, cognition, learning, and culture are all made possible by, and constrained by, the bodies and brains we inherited from our ancestors.

What is the book *Solving Modern Problems with a Stone-Age Brain* about?

Roughly, the book asks about the potential conflicts between modern society and our evolved motivational systems (which were adapted to life in small groups of closely related and interdependent individuals). The structure of the book follows the structure of our research team's renovation of the pyramid of human motives (see Figure 1).

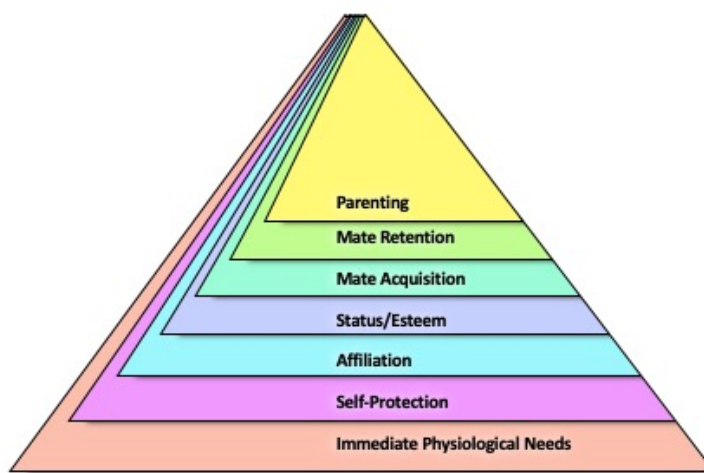


Figure 1: The renovated pyramid of human motives. From Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller (2010). Copyright Douglas T. Kenrick, used with permission.

In the course of writing this book, we delved into the anthropological literature on traditional non-Western societies, and in the first chapter, we argue that those different motives represent fundamental problems that people in all traditional societies, like all of our ancestors, would have had to solve. In the book's first chapter, we argue that if one of our ancestors had a to-do list, it would have looked like the list in Table 1. People living today still have to solve all the

same problems, but face some novel problems that can make solving these problems more difficult (despite, and in some cases, because of, all the conveniences of modern technology).

Table 1: Fundamental problems faced by our ancestors, examples of modern complications and of possible solutions.

Ancestral Problem	Modern complication	Examples of possible solutions
Survive (meet basic physiological needs for food, water, shelter, etc.)	<i>The World Health Organization</i> estimates that more people around the world now die of problems related to overeating than starvation	Stimulus control: It is very difficult to resist temptations and to force oneself to exercise, but much easier to arrange one’s environment to avoid temptations and encourage activity.
Protect yourself from attackers and plunderers	Although the dangers of physical violence are lower in modern societies, our powerful desire to know about threats fuels a continual intrusion of news about dangerous others	Turn off newsfeeds that deliver bad news about the same potential threats multiple times per day.

Make and keep friends	Ancestral groups involved built-in networks of nearby relatives and in-laws motivated to help one another	Make yourself useful, base friendships on real commonalities, beware of false friends.
Get some respect	Modern society involves many more rungs on the social ladder, but also many more ladders one could climb.	Find out which jobs are in demand, show up and work hard, be a team player, avoid robo-parasites that steal productive time.
Find a mate	We have many more mate choices than our ancestors did, but mobility and technology bring dangers of exploitation.	Shop locally, know the characteristics associated with good (short or long-term) partners, enjoy being single
Hang onto that mate	The modern world involves more contact with attractive alternatives that can disincentivize doing the work required to hang onto a partner	Beware of self-serving biases regarding your partner's contributions vs. yours, and of technological aids to infidelity.
Care for family members	Extended and life-long familial bonds have been replaced by small nuclear families, often geographically isolated from one another	Keep your kin as close as possible, nurture real (and virtual) relationships with them, and with step-relatives

Each chapter covers one of the fundamental motives, and highlights someone in the modern world struggling with that motive, such as Sharon Clark, who fell for a charming stranger named

Giovanni Vigliotto, only to discover he was already married to over 100 other women. We delve into the problems traditional people have faced in trying to address each particular motive, and then examine the data on how those same problems unfold within the modern world, and how our ancestral motivational systems are often parasitized by modern technology. We finally consider research-based ways to help our friends, our relatives, and ourselves overcome modern problems of evolutionary mismatch and technological parasitism.

What are we not saying?

As authors, we both do indeed live in a modern American suburb, and work in white collar jobs at a university. Since Krueger used the term bourgeoisie, it is important to note that that word connotes a set of materialistic and capitalistic values, and it implies the pursuit of personal happiness and even self-indulgent luxury. Rather than promoting the pursuit of personal happiness and luxury, though, we instead generally present findings suggesting that acting in ways that help others will make you feel better about yourself, and will also make you a more popular group member and leader (e.g. Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Ko et al., 2020; Krems, Kenrick & Neel, 2017; Maner, 2017; Wiesel, Barlev, Martos, & Kenrick, 2022). We discuss Wrangham's (2019) review of cross-cultural evidence that individuals who acted like selfish bullies may have gained some payoffs, but were often faced by alliances of their group-members who drove them into exile or assassinated them. So, selfishness had risks as well as rewards, then and now. Although we present data suggesting that materialism is associated with lowered well-being (Dittmar, et al., 2014), we don't advocate financial martyrdom or poverty, and throughout the book we discuss ways to protect our assets from technology that preys on our fundamental motives.

In the book, we acknowledge that many people might not be happy with the humble path of Osceola McCarty, and might want instead to use as their role-models people like the Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Samantha Power or the Nobel-prize winning biologist Jennifer Doudna. Our opening case studies in different chapters include Marie Curie, Daniel Kahneman, and Robert Cialdini, all highly successful by modern standards, but successful in large part because of their having formed mutually supportive social relationships.

In a related vein, Krueger's inference that we are pro-monogamy doesn't match our own assessment. In the book, we encourage people to assess what type of relationship they personally would like to have, and then offer suggestions based on that assessment. We do discuss research on how best to maintain relationships, and historically, much of that research has been conducted with monogamous couples. But we acknowledge that our ancestors, like those of us living in the modern world, were often in polygynous relationships, and sometimes split up after having children. We argue that regardless of what sort of relationship people want, though, getting along with current and past partners is important to a satisfying life. We also talk about research on the benefits of being single and discuss same-sex attraction. In line with our arguments against the naturalistic fallacy, we argue that a fulfilling life in the modern world does not mean doing everything one can to replicate one's genes.

At the end of the book, we do get somewhat personal, as Krueger notes. We explicitly evaluate our own current progress toward solving each of these fundamental problems, make our own list of things we can do tomorrow to better meet our personal goals in each of the seven areas, and we encourage the reader to do the same.

With regard to the pyramid, Krueger suggests a couple of additions: “the desire to express oneself and be seen...and the desire to judge others.” Briefly, we would view the desire to “express oneself and be seen” as facets of the status motive (our conception here is parallel to what Maslow, 1943, called “esteem needs”). People express themselves and want to be seen to gain respect from their group members (even when they do so in disrespectful and obnoxious ways, they are trying to stand out from the crowd). Self-expressive displays can in turn serve other motives, such as attracting mates (Griskevicius, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006; Sundie et al., 2011). The desire to judge others, on the other hand, may be linked to several of the motives in the pyramid – to evaluate others as potential threats, as potential allies, as potential sexual competitors, or as potential threats to our family members’ well-being, for example. There are a number of interesting conversations one could have about what is and is not included in this pyramid, some of which readers can find in Schaller, Neuberg, Griskevicius, and Kenrick (2010), and Schaller, Kenrick, Neel, & Neuberg (2017).

Whatever its functional significance, the desire to judge others may be one of those ancestral inclinations that does not serve us all that well in the modern world. In any case, we would certainly discourage people from using the research and theory presented in this book as a tool to judge others, or even as a tool to judge themselves. There are many ways to live a fulfilling life. Instead, we hope people think of the ideas presented there more as a map than a compass, showing them a variety of ways to live a fulfilling, and enjoyable life.

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