

Lecture Three: The Evolution of Cognition

With this lecture we begin dealing with the central conceptions of the theory that David Hays and I developed. We started with cognition and our ability to formulate abstract concepts. That ability is subject to cultural elaboration and evolution.

Much of the conceptual territory David Hays and I cover in this essay has been well-trod by others. The significance of writing and of mathematics have been much commented-on. But the underlying cognitive capacities have not been brought into the picture. That is what David Hays and I do in “The Evolution of Cognition.” We argue that human culture has, so far, evolved four general mechanisms for formulating abstract concepts. These mechanisms are associated with, in order, speech, writing, arithmetic (in the Arabic notation), and computing. Nothing in the theory precludes the evolution of further classes of mechanism. Though we do not discuss this in the essay, one might also consider the social mechanisms that have evolved to support the cognitive mechanisms.

The Evolution of Cognition

<http://asweknowit.ca/evcult/CogEvol.shtml>