
Reciprocal causation or hermeneutic spiral? Anthropological reflections on the theoretical integration of organismic development and niche construction with culture history.

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Abstract

Theorists of organismic development and theorists of niche construction currently argue for enlarging the scope of the modern evolutionary synthesis, while anthropologists and others have adopted models from population biology to study the evolution of culture. While welcome, these efforts remain problematic for anthropologists whose understandings of individual development and cultural change cannot be captured by formal theoretical models that focus on individuals and ignore material culture. In this paper, I begin by reviewing attempts to theorize connections between development, niche construction, and cultural evolution that rely on some version of "reciprocal causation." I then argue that the shortcomings of these attempts can largely be overcome by adopting archaeologist Ian Hodder's notion of the "hermeneutic spiral," but only if theorists of niche construction and biological development are willing to reformulate key assumptions about "the individual," "the cultural," and "the social."

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