Bellwood (2009) The Dispersals of Established Food Producing Populations

Bellwood, Peter.


The point of this article is to argue the hypothesis that, to paraphrase, the spread of agricultural society was most positive and coherent if the populations involved were already mostly, if not entirely, dependent on agriculture as their means of sustenance. While this idea may seem obvious to some, all issues must be explored thoroughly and scholarly before they can be considered to be resolved.

Overall, this article does its job incredibly well. Every subsection of the article was both interesting and extremely relevant to the subject at hand. Bellwood correctly cites every statement he makes that isn't common knowledge, he doesn't use any general terms and is almost too specific with all of his claims, and he goes extremely in-depth with his argument, exploring every facet of the idea pretty thoroughly. The whole article flows together in a way that makes sense, he uses sound logic, and possibly most importantly - his conclusion follows directly from the claims made in the rest of the article.

In the first paragraph of the article, Bellwood states his hypothesis and gives all of his reasons for it being true - mainly focusing on the vast differences of a hunter-gatherer society vs. an agricultural society. They just don't mix. This idea is a recurring theme throughout the article. Another reason hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies is their different levels of mobility. Agricultural societies have a need to stay fairly sedentary, whereas hunter-gatherer societies need to be constantly on the move due to over exploitation of their surroundings which was necessary for their survival in many circumstances. Lastly, hunter-gatherer's (remove hyphen) tend to be both hostile and stronger than agricultural societies, a fact which alone could have greatly hindered the spread of agriculture through the world.

The only real problem I have with this article is that it doesn't really explore any other points of view. It maintains an extremely narrow minded point of view. Articles of this nature should both state opposing arguments and explain why those arguments are either invalid or less likely than the argument they are trying to articulate. Also the article is a tad confusing at times, because the author is too specific in many of his statements, which leads to less help than confusion on the part of the reader. I took a look at the article and I agree with both of your points. His “hypothesis” does not seem particularly new to me, which may be why he doesn’t contrast it with earlier ones. Some of his writing is terribly convoluted.

In general, the article is interesting. I am a geography major and thinking about an anthropology minor so this sort of thing is exactly what I’m looking to study. Bellwood makes a great argument throughout the article and certainly convinced me of his views. I especially liked the last subsection of the article before the conclusion which described why it was that agricultural society took so long to spread, which was primarily due to the type of food resourcing an area already possessed before true agriculture came about, as well as geographic and environmental issues. The article was not only interesting but scholarly, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in history, geography, or anthropology itself, as it pertains heavily to all three.