10

Conclusion

The work I have presented here is not done. This book does not just list modeling results, but also develops a general framework which can be used more broadly to address questions having to do with social categories and inequity. I hope the inquiry here has shown the usefulness of this framework, and that others will find it helpful in further exploring these topics.

This book tells a story about coordination, and ultimately about how the demands of coordination can lead to disadvantage for certain groups of people. As we saw, types can act as a solution for complementary coordination problems, allowing for efficient population-level patterns of behavior unavailable to populations without types. For this reason, types such as gender can emerge spontaneously to solve complementary coordination problems. This process leads to behavioral patterns where gender roles are both conventional (to varying degrees) because they might have been otherwise, and functional in that they facilitate coordination.

The conventions that emerge via this process can be inegalitarian. But once types are established in a population, deeper patterns of inequity can emerge. Despite certain evolutionary pulls toward fairness, there are many reasons why unfairness is actually expected in populations with different social groups. Asymmetries between groups—in material conditions, minority status, etc.—increase the likelihood that inequitable conventions arise. Inequity tends to compound, so that those with more get more. Once such inequities arise, they can have implications for other aspects of social behavior, like who chooses to interact with whom.

There are certain features of this story that I have emphasized. First is the fact that this process proceeds under relatively sparse conditions. Extremely simple actors playing complementary coordination problems

and learning can develop types and type-based coordination conventions. Once types are in play, cultural evolution to solve bargaining problems leads to inequitable patterns of division even in the simplest models. As I have argued, these results are robust across changes to modeling assumptions.

This robustness has also led me to emphasize a different way of thinking about inequity and rigid gender norms. These emerge from processes driven by the basic structures of our social situation—structures that are themselves hard to do away with. What this means is that when we take steps to ameliorate the outcomes of these processes, we should expect our fixes to be temporary. The structures driving inequity are still there, and social dynamics can easily carry us back to inequitable patterns of division. The battle for social justice is against a hydra that grows a new head each time any one is cut off.