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**Stream B:** Cultural Change and Evolutionary Theory

**Title:** On the Ontology of Cultural Units: Comparing Daniel Dennett and Dan Sperber

**Abstract:** In recent decades there has been much discussion of whether cultural units undergo a process akin to biological natural selection. If we are to discern whether cultural evolution is a misnomer or bona fide evolutionary process, it is essential that we have a detailed, rigorous account of cultural units. My presentation provides such an account. Specifically, I build on Dan Sperber's (1996) epidemiological theory of culture and Daniel Dennett's most recent (2017) review of memetics. I claim that Sperber proposes many categories that are beneficial to fine-grained analyses of cultural transmission and evolution. Yet I also argue that his account is unduly anthropocentric and pays insufficient attention to the material means, the actions and artifacts, whereby representations spread throughout populations. I then present my attempts to improve upon Sperber's taxonomy, which – I hope – will not only contribute to discussion of cultural evolution but also to discussions of cultural niches particularly and ecological niches generally. In short, I build upon Dennett's discussion of "semantic information", arguing that we should construe cultural units *functionally* (qua the transference of semantic info, along with actions and artifacts that enable and further such transference), rather than limiting the domain of culture to a particular ontological type.

**Bio:** Stephen Sanders has a MSc in Social and Cultural Psychology from the London School of Economics. He currently works as a Research Assistant at University of California, Irvine, and aspires to a PhD in Evolutionary Psychology.