



Human Evolution

John L. Bradshaw

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The last decade has seen an explosive burst of new information about human origins and our evolutionary status with respect to other species. We have long been considered unique as upright, bipedal creatures endowed with language, the ability to use tools, to think and introspect. We now know that other creatures may be more or less capable of similar behaviour, and that these human capacities in many cases have long evolutionary trajectories. Our information about such matters comes from a diverse variety of disciplines, including experimental and neuropsychology, primatology, ethology, archaeology, palaeontology, comparative linguistics and molecular biology. It is the interdisciplinary nature of the newly-emerging information which bears upon one of the profoundest scientific human questions - our origin and place in the animal kingdom, whether unique or otherwise - which makes the general topic so fascinating to layperson, student, and expert alike. The book attempts to integrate across a wide range of disciplines an evolutionary view of human psychology, with particular reference to language, praxis and aesthetics. A chapter on evolution, from the appearance of life to the earliest mammals, is followed by one which examines the appearance of primates, hominids and the advent of bipedalism. There follows a more detailed account of the various species of Homo, the morphology and origin of modern H. sapiens sapiens as seen from the archaeological/palaeontological and molecular-biological perspectives. The origins of art and an aesthetic sense in the Acheulian and Mousterian through to the Upper Palaeolithic are seen in the context of the psychology of art. Two chapters on language address its nature and realization centrally and peripherally, the prehistory and neuropsychology of speech, and evidence for speech and/or language in our hominid ancestors. A chapter on tool use and praxis examines such behaviour in other species, primate and non-primate, the neurology of praxis and its possible relation to language. Encephalization and the growth of the brain, phylogenetically and ontogenetically, and its relationship to intellectual capacity leads on finally to a consideration of intelligence, social intelligence, consciousness and self awareness. A final chapter reviews the issues covered. The book, of around 70.000 words of text, includes over 500 references over half of which date from 1994 or later.

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