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Deep within a French cave where no light penetrates are two curious structures: large rings of stalagmites, some broken and arranged like the rails of old-fashioned wooden fences. When discovered in the early 1990s, scientists didn’t know what to make of the formations, which appeared to be fire-scorched in places. Now, they may have an answer: The rings were built by Neandertals, who learned to explore caves extensively and engaged in complex building behaviors like arranging stones more than 175,000 years ago, much earlier than thought.


A new study undermines the idea that humans only understand tool use by learning from others.

http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/toddlers-instinctually-know-how-to-use-a-wild-ape-s-tools/?WT.mc_id=SA_EVO_20160523
SCI-NEWS.COM – Early Neanderthals Built Stalagmite Ring-Like Structures 176,500 Years Ago
An international team of archaeologists working in Bruniquel Cave in France has identified mysterious ring-like constructions that were built by early Neanderthals. The ring-like structures are 176,500 years old and are made of whole and broken stalagmites (dubbed ‘speleofacts’), according to the team.

SCIENCE DAILY – Powerful role of experience in linking language and cognition in infants
Even before infants understand their first words, they have already begun to link language and thought. Listening to language boosts infant cognition. New evidence provides even greater insight into the crucial role of language exposure in infants’ first months of life.
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160523141552.htm

SCIENCE DAILY – Why children confuse simple words
Imagine, for a moment, you are a parent trying to limit how much dessert your sugar-craving young children can eat. “You can have cake or ice cream,” you say, confident a clear parental guideline has been laid out. But your children seem to ignore this firm ruling, and insist on having both cake and ice cream. Are they merely rebelling against a parental command? Perhaps. But they might be confusing "or" with "and," as children do at times, something studies have shown since the 1970s. What seems like a restriction to the parent sounds like an invitation to the child: Have both!
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160523141237.htm

SCIENCE DAILY – Global data shows inverse relationship, shift in human use of fire
Humans use fire for heating, cooking, managing lands and, more recently, fueling industrial processes. Now, research has found that these various means of using fire are inversely related to one another, providing new insight into how people are changing the face of fire.
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160523141234.htm

SCIENCE DAILY – Great apes communicate cooperatively
Gestural communication in bonobos and chimpanzees shows turn-taking and clearly distinguishable communication styles.
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160524144925.htm

SCIENCE DAILY – High altitude archaeology: Prehistoric paintings revealed
Archaeologists have undertaken pioneering scans of the highest prehistoric paintings of animals in Europe.
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160525220033.htm

SCIENCE DAILY – ‘Wonderful’ and ‘thankful’ versus ‘battle’ and ‘enemy’
In a computational analysis of the words used by more than 65,000 consenting Facebook users in some 10 million messages, it was discovered that women use language that is warmer and more agreeable than men.
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160525161919.htm

SCIENCE DAILY – Migration back to Africa took place during the Palaeolithic
A research group has managed to retrieve the mitochondrial genome of a fossil 35,000 years old found in the Pestera Muierii cave in Romania. That woman was part of the first population of our species that inhabited Europe following the Eurasian expansion of Homo sapiens from Africa, and the lineage she belongs to reinforces the hypothesis of a back-migration to Africa during the Upper Palaeolithic, say investigators.
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160526105349.htm

SCIENCE DAILY – Baby talk words with repeated sounds help infants learn language
Babies find it easier to learn words with repetitive syllables rather than mixed sounds, a study suggests. Assessments of language learning in 18-month-olds suggest that children are better at grasping the names of objects with repeated syllables, over words with non-identical syllables. Researchers say the study may help explain why some words or phrases, such as ‘train’ and ‘good night’, have given rise to versions with repeated syllables, such as choo-choo and night-night.
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160527112647.htm

SAPIENS – The Birth of the "Neanderthals"
A discovery in an archive reveals the Gibraltar skull’s role in the identification of our sister species.
http://sapiens.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=80f6cf678900daf984bf763b7&id=94481fdca0&e=dc0eff6180
SAPIENS – Lions, Tigers, and Bears, Oh ... and Hominins?
Animalia Blog: Researchers seeking to discover the truth about human origins are turning to animal hybrids for insights. What they’ve found may lead to more questions than answers.
http://sapiens.us11.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=80f6cf678900daf984bf763b7&id=b6f66073e0&e=dc0eff6180

PUBLICATIONS
NOTHING OF INTEREST

Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B – 5 June 2016
PAPERS
J. A. J. GOWLETT – Review article: The discovery of fire by humans: a long and convoluted process
Numbers of animal species react to the natural phenomenon of fire, but only humans have learnt to control it and to make it at will. Natural fires caused overwhelmingly by lightning are highly evident on many landscapes. Birds such as hawks, and some other predators, are alert to opportunities to catch animals including invertebrates disturbed by such fires and similar benefits are likely to underlie the first human involvements with fires. Early hominins would undoubtedly have been aware of such fires, as are savanna chimpanzees in the present. Rather than as an event, the discovery of fire use may be seen as a set of processes happening over the long term. Eventually, fire became embedded in human behaviour, so that it is involved in almost all advanced technologies. Fire has also influenced human biology, assisting in providing the high-quality diet which has fuelled the increase in brain size through the Pleistocene. Direct evidence of early fire in archaeology remains rare, but from 1.5 Ma onward surprising numbers of sites preserve some evidence of burnt material. By the Middle Pleistocene, recognizable hearths demonstrate a social and economic focus on many sites. The evidence of archaeological sites has to be evaluated against postulates of biological models such as the ‘cooking hypothesis’ or the ‘social brain’, and questions of social cooperation and the origins of language. Although much remains to be worked out, it is plain that fire control has had a major impact in the course of human evolution.
http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/371/1696/20150164

STEPHEN J. PYNE – Research article: Fire in the mind: changing understandings of fire in Western civilization
For most of human history, fire has been a pervasive presence in human life, and so also in human thought. This essay examines the ways in which fire has functioned intellectually in Western civilization as mythology, as religion, as natural philosophy and as modern science. The great phase change occurred with the development of industrial combustion; fire faded from quotidian life, which also removed it from the world of informing ideas. Beginning with the discovery of oxygen, fire as an organizing concept fragmented into various subdisciplines of natural science and forestry. The Anthropocene, however, may revive the intellectual role of fire as an informing idea or at least a narrative conceit.
http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/371/1696/20150166

Royal Society Biology Letters – May 2016
COMMENTARIES
RACHAEL G. FALCON – Stay, stray or something in-between? A comment on Wlodarski et al.
Original article: RAFAEL WLODARSKI, JOHN MANNING, R. I. M. DUNBAR – Stay or stray? Evidence for alternative mating strategy phenotypes in both men and women
http://rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/12/5/20151069

R. I. M. DUNBAR & RAFAEL WLODARSKI – Reply to Falcon
http://rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/12/5/20160213

PAPERS
ANTONY ROLAND ENNOS AND TAK LOK CHAN – Research: ‘Fire hardening’ spear wood does slightly harden it, but makes it much weaker and more brittle
It is usually assumed that ‘fire hardening’ the tips of spears, as practised by hunter–gatherers and early Homo spp., makes them harder and better suited for hunting. This suggestion was tested by subjecting coppiced poles of hazel to a fire-hardening process and comparing their mechanical properties to those of naturally seasoned poles. A Shore D hardness test showed that fire treatment slightly increased the hardness of the wood, but flexural and impact tests showed that it reduced the strength and work of fracture by 30% and 36%, respectively. These results suggest that though potentially slightly sharper and more durable, fire-hardened tips would actually be more likely to break off when used, as may have been the case with the earliest known wooden tool, the Clacton spear. Fire might first have been used to help sharpen the tips of spears, and fire-hardening would have been a mostly negative side effect, not its primary purpose.
http://rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/12/5/20160174
DUSTIN R. RUBENSTEIN, CARLOS A. BOTERO & EILEEN A. LACEY – Discrete but variable structure of animal societies leads to the false perception of a social continuum

Animal societies are typically divided into those in which reproduction within a group is monopolized by a single female versus those in which it is shared among multiple females. It remains controversial, however, whether these two forms of social structure represent distinct evolutionary outcomes or endpoints along a continuum of reproductive options. To address this issue and to determine whether vertebrates and insects exhibit the same patterns of variation in social structure, we examined the demographic and reproductive structures of 293 species of wasps, ants, birds and mammals. Using phylogenetically informed comparative analyses, we found strong evidence indicating that not all reproductive arrangements within social groups are viable in nature and that in societies with multiple reproductives, selection favours instead taxon-specific patterns of decrease in the proportion of breeders as a function of group size. These outcomes suggest that the selective routes to sociality differ depending upon whether monopolization of reproduction by one individual is possible and that variation within and among taxonomic groups may lead to the false perception of a continuum of social structures. Thus, the occurrence of very large societies may require either complete reproductive monopolization (monogyny/singular breeding) or the maintenance of a taxon-specific range of values for the proportional decrease in the number of breeders within a group (polygyny/plural breeding), both of which may reduce reproductive conflict among females.

http://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/3/5/160147.abstract?etoc
Unpeeling the layers of language: Bonobos and chimpanzees engage in cooperative turn-taking sequences

Human language is a fundamentally cooperative enterprise, embodying fast-paced and extended social interactions. It has been suggested that it evolved as part of a larger adaptation of humans' species-unique forms of cooperation. Although our closest living relatives, bonobos and chimpanzees, show general cooperative abilities, their communicative interactions seem to lack the cooperative nature of human conversation. Here, we revisited this claim by conducting the first systematic comparison of communicative interactions in mother-infant dyads living in two different communities of bonobos (LuiKotale, DRC; Wamba, DRC) and chimpanzees (Tai South, Côte d'Ivoire; Kanyawara, Uganda) in the wild. Focusing on the communicative endeavour of joint-travel-initiation, we applied parameters of conversation analysis to gestural exchanges between mothers and infants. Results showed that communicative exchanges in both species resemble cooperative turn-taking sequences in human conversation. While bonobos consistently addressed the recipient via gaze before signal initiation and used so-called overlapping responses, chimpanzees in more extended negotiations, involving frequent response waiting and gestural sequences. Our results thus strengthen the hypothesis that interactional intelligence paved the way to the cooperative endeavour of human language and suggest that social matrices highly impact upon communication styles.

Ancient Human Migration after Out-of-Africa

The serial founder model of modern human origins predicts that the phylogeny of ancestries exhibits bifurcating, tree-like behavior. Here, we tested this prediction using three methods designed to investigate gene flow in autosome-wide genotype data from 3,528 unrelated individuals from 163 global samples. Specifically, we investigated whether Cushitic ancestry has an East African or Middle Eastern origin. We found evidence for non-tree-like behavior in the form of four migration events. First, we found that Cushitic ancestry is a mixture of ancestries closely related to Arabian ancestry and Nilo-Saharan or Omotic ancestry. We found evidence for additional migration events in the histories of: 1) Indian and Arabian ancestries, 2) Kalash ancestry, and 3) Native American and Northern European ancestries. These findings, based on analysis of ancestry of present-day humans, reveal migration in the distant past and provide new insights into human history.

Pleistocene footprints show intensive use of lake margin habitats by Homo erectus groups

Reconstructing hominin paleoecology is critical for understanding our ancestors’ diets, social organizations and interactions with other animals. Most paleoecological models lack fine-scale resolution due to fossil hominin scarcity and the time-averaged accumulation of faunal assemblages. Here we present data from 481 fossil tracks from northwestern Kenya, including 97 hominin footprints attributed to Homo erectus. These tracks are found in multiple sedimentary layers spanning approximately 20 thousand years. Taphonomic experiments show that each of these trackways represents minutes to no more than a few days in the lives of the individuals moving across these paleoecosystems. The geology and associated vertebrate fauna place these tracks in a deltaic setting, near a lakeshore bordered by open grasslands. Hominin footprints are disproportionately abundant in this lake margin environment, relative to hominin skeletal fossil frequency in the same deposits. Accounting for preservation bias, this abundance of hominin footprints indicates repeated use of lakeshore habitats by Homo erectus. Clusters of very large prints moving in the same direction further suggest these hominins traversed this lakeshore in multi-male groups. Such reliance on near water environments, and possibly aquatic-linked foods, may have influenced hominin foraging behavior and migratory routes across and out of Africa.

The mitogenome of a 35,000-year-old Homo sapiens from Europe supports a Palaeolithic back-migration to Africa

After the dispersal of modern humans (Homo sapiens) Out of Africa, hominins with a similar morphology to that of present-day humans initiated the gradual demographic expansion into Eurasia. The mitogenome (33-fold coverage) of the Peștera Muierii 1 individual (PM1) from Romania (35 ky cal BP) we present in this article corresponds fully to Homo sapiens, whilst exhibiting a mosaic of morphological features related to both modern humans and Neandertals. We have identified the PM1 mitogenome as a basal haplogroup U6*, not previously found in any ancient or present-day humans. The derived U6 haplotypes are predominantly found in present-day North-Western African populations. Concomitantly, those found in Europe have been attributed to recent gene-flow from North Africa. The presence of the basal haplogroup U6* in South East Europe (Romania) at 35 ky BP confirms a Eurasian origin of the U6 mitochondrial lineage. Consequently, we propose that the
PM1 lineage is an offshoot to South East Europe that can be traced to the Early Upper Paleolithic back migration from Western Asia to North Africa, during which the U6 lineage diversified, until the emergence of the present-day U6 African lineages.

http://links.ealertnature.com/ctt?kn=79&ms=NET0NDC2MDES1&r=OY4NjUE1NzU3NQS2&b=0&j=OTlyOTgzMTY3S0&mt=1&rt=0

PRADIPTAJATI KUSUMA et al – Contrasting Linguistic and Genetic Origins of the Asian Source Populations of Malagasy

The Austronesian expansion, one of the last major human migrations, influenced regions as distant as tropical Asia, Remote Oceania and Madagascar, off the east coast of Africa. The identity of the Asian groups that settled Madagascar is particularly mysterious. While language connects Madagascar to the Ma’anyan of southern Borneo, haploid genetic data are more ambiguous. Here, we screened genome-wide diversity in 211 individuals from the Ma’anyan and surrounding groups in southern Borneo. Surprisingly, the Ma’anyan are characterized by a distinct, high frequency genomic component that is not found in Malagasy. This novel genetic layer occurs at low levels across Island Southeast Asia and hints at a more complex model for the Austronesian expansion in this region. In contrast, Malagasy show genomic links to a range of Island Southeast Asian groups, particularly from southern Borneo, but do not have a clear genetic connection with the Ma’anyan despite the obvious linguistic association.

http://links.ealertnature.com/ctt?kn=651&ms=NET0NDC2MDES1&r=OY4NjUE1NzU3NQS2&b=0&j=OTlyOTgzMTY3S0&mt=1&rt=0

PloS One – 29 May 2016

PAPERS

GREGORY PARK et al – Women are Warmer but No Less Assertive than Men: Gender and Language on Facebook

Using a large social media dataset and open-vocabulary methods from computational linguistics, we explored differences in language use across gender, affiliation, and assertiveness. In Study 1, we analyzed topics (groups of semantically similar words) across 10 million messages from over 52,000 Facebook users. Most language differed little across gender. However, topics most associated with self-identified female participants included friends, family, and social life, whereas topics most associated with self-identified male participants included swearing, anger, discussion of objects instead of people, and the use of argumentative language. In Study 2, we plotted male- and female-linked language topics along two interpersonal dimensions prevalent in gender research: affiliation and assertiveness. In a sample of over 15,000 Facebook users, we found substantial gender differences in the use of affiliative language and slight differences in assertive language. Language used more by self-identified females was interpersonally warmer, more compassionate, polite, and—contrary to previous findings—slightly more assertive in their language use, whereas language used more by self-identified males was colder, more hostile, and impersonal. Computational linguistic analysis combined with methods to automatically label topics offers means for testing psychological theories unobtrusively at large scale.

http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0155885

YI WEI et al with FRANCESCO D’ERRICO – An Early Instance of Upper Palaeolithic Personal Ornamentation from China: The Freshwater Shell Bead from Shuidonggou 2

We report the discovery and present a detailed analysis of a freshwater bivalve from Shuidonggou Locality 2, layer CL3. This layer is located c. 40 cm below layer CL2, which has yielded numerous ostrich eggshell beads. The shell is identified as the valve of a Corbicula fluminea. Data on the occurrence of this species in the Shuidonggou region during Marine Isotope Stage 3 and taphonomic analysis, conducted in the framework of this study, of a modern biocoenosis and thanatocoenosis suggest that the archeological specimen was collected at one of the numerous fossil or sub-fossil outcrops where valves of this species were available at the time of occupation of level CL3. Experimental grinding and microscopic analysis of modern shells of the same species indicate that the Shuidonggou shell was most probably ground on coarse sandstone to open a hole on its umbo, attach a thread, and use the valve as a personal ornament. Experimental engraving of freshwater shells and microscopic analysis identify an incision crossing the archaeological valve outer surface as possible deliberate engraving. Reappraisal of the site chronology in the light of available radiocarbon evidence suggests an age of at least 34–33 cal kyr BP for layer CL3. Such estimate makes the C. fluminea recovered from CL3 one of the earliest instances of personal ornamentation and the earliest example of a shell bead from China.

http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0155847

ALEXANDRA L. QUITTNER et al – Symbolic Play and Novel Noun Learning in Deaf and Hearing Children: Longitudinal

In the largest, longitudinal study of young, deaf children before and three years after cochlear implantation, we compared symbolic play and novel noun learning to age-matched hearing peers. Participants were 180 children from six cochlear implant centers and 96 hearing children. Symbolic play was measured during five minutes of videotaped, structured solitary play. Play was coded as “symbolic” if the child used substitution (e.g., a wooden block as a bed). Novel noun learning was measured in 10 trials using a novel object and a distractor. Cochlear implant vs. normal hearing children were delayed in their use of symbolic play, however, those implanted before vs. after age two performed significantly better. Children with cochlear implants were also delayed in novel noun learning (median delay 1.54 years), with minimal evidence of catch-up growth. Quality of parent-child interactions was positively related to performance on the novel noun learning, but not
symbolic play task. Early implantation was beneficial for both achievement of symbolic play and novel noun learning. Further, maternal sensitivity and linguistic stimulation by parents positively affected noun learning skills, although children with cochlear implants still lagged in comparison to hearing peers.

http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0155964

NOTHING OF INTEREST

PLoS Genetics – 26 May 2016
NOTHING OF INTEREST

PNAS – 25 May 2016
PAPERS
SABRINA ENGESSER, AMANDA R. RIDLEY & SIMON W. TOWNSEND – Meaningful call combinations and compositional processing in the southern pied babbler

Human language is syntactic in its nature: meaningful words are assembled into larger meaningful phrases or sentences. How unique this ability is to humans remains surprisingly unclear. A considerable body of work has indicated that birds are capable of combining sounds into large, elaborate songs, but there is currently no evidence suggesting that these structures are syntactic. Here, we provide important evidence for this ability in a highly social bird. Specifically, pied babblers combine two functionally distinct vocalizations into a larger sequence, the function of which is related to the function of its parts. Our work adds important evidence to the variation and distribution of combinatorial vocal mechanisms outside humans and provides insights into potentially early forms of human syntactic communication.

http://www.pnas.org/content/113/21/5976.abstract

DOBROMIR RAHNEV et al – Causal evidence for frontal cortex organization for perceptual decision making

The frontal cortex has long been understood as the seat of higher level cognition. Recent research, however, highlights its role in modulating perception. Here, we present a theoretical framework for frontal involvement in perceptual decision making and test it with the causal technique of transcranial magnetic stimulation. We find that progressively rostral regions of frontal cortex are involved in the control of progressively later stages of perceptual decision making. These causal findings are further corroborated by functional MRI and simulations of a dynamic model of decision making. Our results point to a critical role of the frontal cortex in the control of perceptual processes and reveal its intrinsic organization in support of modulating perception.

http://www.pnas.org/content/113/21/6059.abstract

Frontiers in Psychology – 27 May 2016
PAPERS
AMITAI AMIR, TEHILA KOGUT, & YOELLA BEREBY-MEYER – Careful Cheating: People Cheat Groups Rather than Individuals

Cheating for material gain is a destructive phenomenon in any society. We examine the extent to which people care about the victims of their unethical behavior—be they a group of people or an individual—and whether they are sensitive to the degree of harm or cost that they cause to these victims. The results of three studies suggest that when a group (rather than a single individual) is the victim of one’s behavior, the incidence of cheating increases only if the harm to the group is presented in global terms—such that the cheating might be justified by the relatively minor harm caused to each individual in the group (Studies #1 and #3). However, when the harm or cost to each individual in the group is made explicit, the tendency to cheat the group is no longer apparent and the tendency to cheat increases when the harm caused is minor—regardless of whether the victim is an individual or a group of people (Study #2). Individual differences in rational and intuitive thinking appear to play different roles in the decision to cheat different type of opponents: individual opponents seem to trigger the subject’s intuitive thinking which restrains the urge to cheat, whereas groups of opponents seem to trigger the subject’s rational mode of thinking which encourage cheating.


KLAUS LIBERTUS & DOMINIC A. VIOLI – Sit to Talk: Relation between Motor Skills and Language Development in Infancy

Relations between walking skills and language development have been reported in 10- to 14-month-old infants. However, whether earlier emerging motor milestones also affect language skills remains unknown. The current research fills this gap by examining the relation between reaching and sitting skills and later language development, respectively. Reaching and sitting were assessed eight times, starting when infants (N = 29) were around 3 months of age. All assessments were completed and recorded remotely via videoconference using Skype or FaceTime. Subsequently, infants’ language and motor skills were assessed via parent questionnaires (Communicative Development Inventories and Early Motor Questionnaire) at 10 and 14
months of age. Results revealed a significant correlation between the emergence of sitting skills and receptive vocabulary size at 10 and 14 months of age. Regression analyses further confirmed this pattern and revealed that the emergence of sitting is a significant predictor of subsequent language development above and beyond influences of concurrent motor skills. These findings suggest that the onset of independent sitting may initiate a developmental cascade that results in increased language learning opportunities. Further, this study also demonstrates how infants’ early motor skills can be assessed remotely using videoconference.


Frontiers in Neuroscience – 27 May 2016
NOTHING OF INTEREST

NOTHING OF INTEREST

PeerJ – 25 May 2016
NOTHING OF INTEREST

Philosophy Now – June/July 2016
ARTICLES
MARY GREGG – Knowledge & Language
I want to draw your attention to the way language shapes our interaction with knowledge. Since my goal is not to show what knowledge is but how it is perceived, ‘knowledge’ will be simply taken to mean knowledge of ideas and facts as well as of people and things. I will focus on the ‘possession vs relationship’ dynamics employed in language and its implications, and will use English and French to illustrate the point. First I will consider the use of possessive pronouns in each language, as each indicates a type of relationship to or with an idea. Then I will cover the role of types of knowledge, since each type demands a special treatment, and therefore understanding, of knowledge.
https://philosophynow.org/issues/114/Knowledge_and_Language

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EAORC website information is at http://martinedwardes.webplus.net/eaorc.html