

Preface

He who despairs of the human condition is a coward, but he who has hope for it is a fool.
(Albert Camus)

The term “human condition” generally refers to what it means to be human and why we are the way we are. It is often expressed as the human predicament: our capacity for both good and evil, our “dark side,” or the “troubled state and nature” of the human being. It can also refer to our limitations, such as our inability to go where only our imagination can take us, our futile yearning for everlasting life, or our never-ending endeavors to construct meanings where there are none. Encompassing all of the human experience, from the biologically determined events of our lives to the ways in which we react to or cope with these, the human condition can be perceived either as such a broad concept, or it can be more narrowly defined, be it in philosophical or in scientific terms. The concept was popularized by André Malraux’s 1933 novel about the failed communist uprising of 1927 in Shanghai, *La condition humaine*, and his profound observation needs to preface the present volume: “In the realm of human destiny, the depth of man’s questioning is more important than his answers.”

All recorded human societies seem to subscribe to a universally accepted set of ideals of cooperation, love and altruism, which in some cases evolved in geographical isolation and is thus indicative of their universalism—and yet there can be no doubt that all these societies are also capable of great brutality, greed, hatred, and indifference to the suffering of others. This ambivalence accounts perhaps for the subconscious sense of guilt burdening us, nourished by religion. The human condition is defined by the feelings and emotions associated with our existence, our “conscious” experience of past and future, cognizance of the passage of time, and our vexed awareness of our mortality. It has led to a plethora of metaphysical questions and doubts, concerning the purpose of our existence, or that of the universe, to what happens to us upon death.

These are issues that can be dealt with, if perhaps reluctantly, by science, which at this stage in its evolution has no great difficulty in clarifying them satisfactorily. As a society we are, however, far from satisfied by these apparently nihilistic answers. Much the same will also apply to this book: after the last chapter, readers may

experience a vague dissatisfaction with the answers it offers. These may not be what readers had hoped for; they may sound too unsophisticated, too artless in fact. Could the answers to our profound questions about our condition really be as simple as I contend on these pages? But is it not true that whenever there has been a major insoluble problem in the history of science, the answer, when finally found, has always been very simple?

In this book the human condition will be examined not as a metaphysical or ontological issue, but rather from a scientific perspective. However imperfect our comprehension of reality may be, the more we have learned to interpret the nature of ourselves in our configured reality construct, the less opinionated we have become—which is in a way encouraging. Where science differs so fundamentally from other constructs of the nature of the world is that it accepts not a single human claim of finite truth; all its interpretations are contingent formulations that may change in the future. This will be reflected in the first chapter, emphasizing the overwhelming immersion in misinformation that is also a part of the human condition, but is often overlooked. Born ignorant into a society that still has almost no understanding of the epistemology of its knowledge base, we are in no position to justifiably speculate about reality or talk of objectivity. But science has become very adept in teasing out innumerable minutiae about the nature of the world, and if these tiny snippets were correctly assembled across disciplines, they could collectively provide credible hints about how some of the major puzzles might be solved. The main disadvantage of modern science is the overspecialization it engenders, which may not be apparent at the low-level, mass-consumption academic environment, but which now creates almost unbridgeable gaps between disciplines at the high end, at the cutting edge. That inexpedience will be avoided in this volume, which will develop its theses from the perspectives of several disciplines, but especially from archeology, paleoanthropology, genetics, evolutionary theory, cognitive science, neuroscience, and clinical psychiatry.

As noted in the first sentence of this Preface *why we are the way we are* is crucial in gaining insight into the human condition. In this quest, no progress can be expected without contemplating the human past: what occurred in the development of our species and subspecies that determined an evolutionary trajectory resulting in such an unusual primate? It may not be sufficient to glibly note that it is our mindless superstition and pointless rituals that separate us from other animals; nor will simplistic references to “conscious thinking” or “self-awareness” suffice, because there is no satisfactory definition or explanation for either banality, and in the end they explain nothing. Bearing in mind that the framework required in considering our past is provided by two disciplines of questionable credentials, Pleistocene (Ice Age) archeology and paleoanthropology (the study of extinct forms of humans), provides an immediate obstacle to meaningful inquiry. Both these disciplines are subject to the vagaries of fashionable fads, erratic sectarianism, anthropocentrism, academic fakery, and deference to authority, combined with an inherently poor susceptibility to falsification. Both present poor records of previous performance, and neither should be treated as science, in the proper sense of that word.

This state of affairs leaves us with the task of distilling from the accumulated “knowledge base” generated by these academic pursuits that part which can possibly be relied upon and which is relevant to our quest. This is obviously essential before we can consider how the human condition came to be what it is. In the following chapters it will be demonstrated that some of the most influential recent fallacies concerning human origins impact greatly on the research target chosen in this book, and that without teasing out these misconstructions, any notions relating to our primary subject, the origins of the human condition, would be illusory. In essence this involves interrogation of some of the most favored hypotheses of how and when human modernity evolved, and these are found not to meet any reasonable expectations we have of scientific propositions. Their empirical basis may evaporate upon close examination, their reasoning is often self-contradictory, and the ardency of individual protagonists in defending essentially unsupported theories can be disheartening. In this context the underlying problem soon becomes apparent: without some understanding of the emergence of what has been called “modern human behavior” it is impossible to know why we are the way we are, but the veracity of the information we have about this development is severely tainted by academic dogma. If this quest simply regurgitated what mainstream Pleistocene archeology offers us, the outcome would just be more mythology about our origins. Therefore, the first major task of this book is to clarify the status of the dominant hypotheses through critical and comprehensive review of the empirical data currently available.

This results not only in a significant reassessment; it invites dramatically different interpretations and syntheses, and a renewed endeavor to correlate ideas about the human past with the findings of innovative new approaches to what being human means. Once the framework of reference is refurbished in this way, it soon becomes apparent that the pertinent models of the relevant life sciences are much more readily reconciled with it. Indeed, as Malraux was quoted above, the significance is in the depth of the questions asked. This reassessment, impossible in the context of archeological and paleoanthropological dogma, prompts a suite of entirely new questions. One of the most consequential of them is: what could have caused the inherent laws of biological evolution to be suspended for humans during the last fifty millennia or so? And yet, this question has never been asked by the mainstream. Nor has the question of why evolutionary natural selection apparently failed to select against thousands of deleterious genetic predispositions and defects, ever been asked by those concerned with the human past. Yet neuroscientists have prominently and extensively asked and debated this issue. They have been unable to arrive at any credible answers, simply because the disciplines taking care of human evolution are lagging many decades behind those dealing with the workings of our brain, and are in fact largely still struggling in the dark. Nor has there been a sustained attempt to deal with such key issues as why it should be that the etiologies of brain illnesses suggest that they involve largely the same areas of the brain that are the phylogenetically most recent; or why it should be that other extant primates are largely if not wholly free of such pathologies. These are far more consequential issues to our origins than endless polemics about favored craniometric interpretations or stone tool knapping practices.

These inequities in the state of research are so profound that neuroscientist Todd M. Preuss has referred to *Homo sapiens* as “the undiscovered primate.” A vivid demonstration of these inadequacies is provided by the greatest unsolved conundrum of evolutionary genetics: why evolutionary processes failed to select against the degenerative genetic predispositions of extant humans. The apparently quite recently developed toleration of maladaptive traits, which range from somatic features universally related to neotenization to mental disorder susceptibility alleles, and to almost countless other detrimental susceptibilities, remains supremely unexplored. Disorder susceptibility alleles have neither fixated, if adaptive, nor gone extinct, if maladaptive. Those that are rare, the single-gene Mendelian disorders, may escape selection precisely because they are rare, and the molecular bases of over 1700 of them have now been identified. However, the preservation of the mutations deriving from multiple mutant alleles at different genetic loci involved in the major deleterious etiologies has remained entirely unexplained until now.

Having been discussed at great length for a number of years, this puzzle has become the discipline’s “unresolved paradox.” The reason for this unsatisfactory state is very simply that the dominant hypotheses of recent human evolution, proclaiming replacement of all hominins by a new African species, render a solution impossible. If we account for *Homo sapiens sapiens* by either natural selection or genetic drift, as these hypotheses demand, there is simply no explanation for the neuroscientific paradox. A core purpose of the present book is to solve the paradox by replacing the old paradigm with a new one.

For the first time, a tenable and inherently plausible authentic solution is offered for the toleration of human neuropathologies by both natural selection and genetic drift. And for the first time, a credible explanation is presented for the extraordinary and sudden changes that led to “anatomically modern” people: the reduction in both brain size and somatic robusticity, as well as the loss of estrus, and many other features so crucial to appreciating what it is that made us what we are today. This book explains why the etiologies of brain illnesses suggest that the phylogenetically most recent areas of the brain are affected, which are the very same areas that underwrite our advanced cognitive abilities. It also explains the absence of neurodegenerative diseases in other primates, and why human males strongly prefer females presenting neotenus appearance and other features. And it offers clues for how, why and when dozens of mental illnesses and thousands of genetic impairments endemic to humans may have appeared. Without some appreciation of these issues such conditions have no causal context or explanation; we are merely trying to make sense of end effects at specific loci without an appreciation of how they came about. Science, however, expects some level of causal reasoning from us, and that is provided here.

In the realm of understanding the human animal, theoretical progress does indeed depend very much on the questions we ask, and there are many other questions asked in this book that were consistently eschewed by the mainstream. For instance, as the mental faculties of hominins increased with the rise to the top of the food chain, individual reliance was delegated to society and to objects, the latter ranging from tools to objects of storing symbolic information outside the brain (“exograms”). Orthodox Pleistocene archeology has shown little interest in the latter, designating

them to categories comprehensible within simplistic reality frames of reference, for example, by defining them as “art objects.” Moreover, it sustains a model linking the origins of these exograms to the advent of the purported African ancestors of our subspecies, another rather consequential bungle attributable to dogmatic intractability: the relevant empirical evidence to show the much earlier use of exograms has long been available, but was either ignored or explained away.

This book is obviously a wake-up call for some disciplines, while at the same time noting the patience shown by some others. The former have historically not taken kindly to such observations, having traditionally relied upon their inherently untestable status. Needless to say, this book is destined to be labeled “controversial” by the hegemonic disciplines it is critical of. However, the relevant hard sciences may take a different view and may be prompted into beginning to question the quality of the information and hypotheses provided by the humanistic gatekeepers of hominin history. If this should occur, a key purpose of this book would be achieved. It will not, however, bring about a paradigm shift in Pleistocene archeology; paradigm shifts do not occur in academic pursuits based on authority and internally unfalsifiable propositions.

Finally, those who believe in the exalted status of humans—that we share our image with a deity, or that as a species we have made this planet a better world—will categorically reject the key elements of this book. The biologically correct definition of our subspecies as a neotenus ape clashes significantly with their fantasies, which are simply another illustration of the human condition: we are prone to inventing grandiose self-delusions about our noble cause and character. Apparently, the truth about ourselves is so unbearable that we need to lie about it to ourselves, in the same way as we need to invent nirvanas and paradises, and beliefs of salvation. *Homo sapiens sapiens* truly is in need of some therapy.

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