International Scholars Journals

Global Journal of Sociology and Anthropology ISSN 2756-3456 Vol. 10 (3), pp. 001-002, December, 2021. Available online at www.internationalscholarsjournals.com © International Scholars Journals

Commentary Article

The Human Behaviour Evolution

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Accepted 07 December,2021

COMMENTARY

Reconstructing human evolution is a notoriously challenging and perilous task. While it is well-established that our phylogenetic legacy exists in primates, especially anthropoids, and among anthropoids, the great apes, we are extremely derived in numerous parts of our biology. Consequently, reconstructing the pathway of how human behavior evolved is fraught with trouble.

Reconstructing the evolution of behavior from paleontology and archeology is limited and, at best, dependent upon connections among surviving primate taxa and/or extrapolations from the behaviour of modern humans to special circumstances previously. Nevertheless, humans want to know how they came to be and trying to explain our odd existence is probably among one of our longstanding characteristics.

Koenig and Borries concur that the socioecological model could utilize improvement and that many of the points raised by Thierry, like the need to incorporate phylogeny, are significant. Nevertheless, they argue that inconsistencies point the way to making improvements to the model and should be inspected intently. They note that efforts to test socioecological theory quantitatively are uncommon, and that prior to abandoning a working model, we need to really evaluate its worth. Finally, they emphasize that models provide a guideline for framing hypotheses and designing research, and it is unwise to abandon a working model without an alternative to replace it.

In "Cooperative Breeding and Human Cognitive Evolution," Judith Burkart, Sarah Hrdy, and Carelvan Schaik analyse the mental, motivational and cognitive outcomes of cooperative breeding and its role in the evolution of numerous parts of human cognition and behaviour, including the evolution of language. They argue that human social knowledge varies from that of other great apes due to the cognitive consequences of cooperative breeding added to an ape-like cognitive system. In doing as such, they create a plethora of new ideas and hypotheses ripe for testing.

In "The Emergence of Human Uniqueness: Characters Underlying Behavioural Modernity," Kim Hill, Michael Barton, and Magdalena Hurtado recognize two characteristics that are unique to modern human behaviour. One is our extensive reliance on social learning, which has led to our use of a huge repertoire of extra somatically stored common knowledge, which we call 'culture'. The other is our outstanding level of cooperation among unrelated individuals, including specializations in work, exchange of goods and services among people and gatherings, and complex social networks.

They provide a detailed discussion of these distinctive features along with the behavioural, cognitive, and emotional aspects of humans that underlie them. They then ask why particular features evolved in humans and no other animals and attempt to reconstruct when they appeared in human evolution and under what circumstances. In doing so, they survey the whole extent of human evolution and provide a large set of working hypotheses for future testing. Monique Borgerhoff-Mulder and Kristen Rauch survey the huge and developing writing on sexual theory in ''Sexual Conflict in Humans: Variations and Solutions,'' in which they describe examples of sexual conflict

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