



## The Origin Of Humankind

*Richard E. Leakey*

Download now

Read Online →

# The Origin Of Humankind

*Richard E. Leakey*

## **The Origin Of Humankind** Richard E. Leakey

“The name Leakey is synonymous with the study of human origins,” wrote *The New York Times*. The renowned family of paleontologists—Louis Leakey, Mary Leakey, and their son Richard Leakey—has vastly expanded our understanding of human evolution. *The Origin of Humankind* is Richard Leakey’s personal view of the development of Homo Sapiens. At the heart of his new picture of evolution is the introduction of a heretical notion: once the first apes walked upright, the evolution of modern humans became possible and perhaps inevitable. From this one evolutionary step comes all the other evolutionary refinements and distinctions that set the human race apart from the apes. In fascinating sections on how and why modern humans developed a social organization, culture, and personal behavior, Leakey has much of interest to say about the development of art, language, and human consciousness.

## **The Origin Of Humankind Details**

Date : Published August 23rd 1996 by Basic Books (first published 1981)

ISBN : 9780465053131

Author : Richard E. Leakey

Format : Paperback 190 pages

Genre : Science, Nonfiction, Anthropology, History, Biology, Evolution

 [Download The Origin Of Humankind ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Origin Of Humankind ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Origin Of Humankind Richard E. Leakey**

---

## From Reader Review The Origin Of Humankind for online ebook

### Stephen says

This is a classic on human evolution in a similar way that "A Brief History of Time" is a classic in Physics. Short and concise, yet deeply insightful, and written by a scientist who happens to write well and not a "Scientific Writer" (see Matt Ridley, Thomas Friedman). The only thing missing from it is some of the more recent research on Genetics/DNA and evolution that was done after the time of publication. Evolution is a fascinating topic. How things evolve over time is endlessly interesting. How something like the human brain developed is one of the great puzzles of evolution. Human evolutionary history makes for great reading.

---

### Sophia says

I had to read this in one day, so I kind of read super fast lol..

But overall this book was ok. I think I would've understood more if I really studied more of the chapters.

---

### David Latham says

Very interesting and on one of my favourite subjects, evolution. I'm sure by the time I read this book in 2015 there would be quite a bit of out of date information, but still good for a layman and it sparked my interest in early human civilisation, a period I've never personally cared about but came to look at with fascination. when did that spark of human understanding as we know it begin? When would we as a person be able to hold a conversation, as long as we knew the language with one of our ancestors. are we truly new to this world or was there something special right at the beginning of our evolutionary tree that set us apart? I don't believe in miracles of the holy kind but sometimes they happen in the scientific sense- and human evolution, the rise of us as a dominate, sentient creature can be counted as one of them.

---

### Robert says

**Richard Leakey's** *The Origin of Humankind*, is the third in Basic Book's Science Masters series. I thoroughly enjoyed it, as I did reading two other books in the series, one by **Paul Davies** (The Last Three Minutes) and another by **John Barrow** (The Origin of the Universe). All three entries are short, easy-to-read books on cutting-edge science that boost the reader's scientific literacy.

In Leakey's brief summary of the evolution of humankind, I came to appreciate the theories behind the appearance of *Homo sapiens* on Earth. The fossil record and genetic evidence have shaped researchers' views on how humanity appeared with our sense of self and a consciousness not readily found in other animals. As Leakey writes, "The emergence of fully modern language and fully modern consciousness were no doubt linked, each feeding the other. Modern humans became modern when they spoke like us and experienced the self as we do."

As a technologist by training and trade, I understood how innovation and the rise of a diverse set of technologies could lead to the rise of language. Leakey reports, "Only when the Upper Paleolithic cultures

burst onto the scene 35,000 years ago did innovation and arbitrary order become pervasive. Not only were new and finer tool types produced but the tool types that characterized Upper Paleolithic assemblages changed on a time scale of millennia rather than hundreds of millennia. [Glynn] Isaac interpreted this pattern of technological diversity and change as implying the gradual emergence of some form of spoken language.”

And to achieve a spoken language, humanity’s biological evolution cooperated. *Homo sapiens*’ physical structure, specifically in the throat area, produced an expanded pharynx, a large sound chamber located above the vocal cords, which was the key to producing fully articulate speech . . . Also, “the low position of the larynx allows humans to produce a greater range of sounds, [but it] means that we cannot drink and breathe simultaneously. We exhibit the dubious liability for choking.”

Language differentiates us from other animals. According to University of Hawaii linguist Derrick Bickerton, “Only language could have broken through the prison of immediate experience in which every other creature is locked, releasing us into infinite freedoms of space and time.”

Enjoy your freedoms and read this book some time.

---

### **Arif Abdurahman says**

Sambil nunggu Sapiens yg dibeli pas harbolnas yg entah kapan sampainya, baca seri sains KPG yg rada jadal. Leakey menerangkan sejarah mula yang menjadikan manusia manusiawi dan berbagai pertentangan ilmiah dalam penelitian soalnya. Dari kera yang berjalan dua kaki, asal usul calon manusia yg berawal di Afrika, sampai spesies Homo sapiens punya bahasa, kesadaran, daya cipta dan kecakapan teknologi.

---

### **Emily says**

tHAnks for not using words that are too big my guy .

---

### **Mary H. says**

I would recommend this book to people who are getting interested in the beginning of human history. It is very informational and covers a variety of topic spanning from the eve gene, beginnings of art, to the difference in the structural anatomy, to the structural evolution that allows humans to make a variety of sounds that allow humans to speak a language, and becoming self-aware. He also makes theories easier to understand so he goes back and references other things that he has mentioned earlier, which helps you to understand the whole idea and context. He also tells the readers hypothesis that has problems with them to help show the different ideas they have had on the meanings of different types of things and the flaws the idea had. An example of this is on page 110 where he states, ”An obvious problem with the hunting-magic hypothesis was that the images depicted very often did not, a noted, reflect the diet of the Upper Paleolithic painters”.

---

### **Paul Heikkila says**

Well, I should have read this 24 years ago when it was new. Even so, Leakey's approach, giving us various theories of human origin -- art, language, mind -- and telling us which he leans towards, while giving the others their due, contrasts with the much more up to date Tattersall book (Masters of the Planet) which I recently read where everything seems much more settled. I'm glad I read them both.

---

### **Pat says**

Very nicely written brief overview of a complicated subject.

---

### **Steve Van Slyke says**

I bought and read this book when it came out in 1994. An upcoming trip to Africa in 2017 caused me to pull it from the shelf and read it again. I've upgraded my original rating from 4 to 5 stars primarily because of how prescient Leakey was and how measured and thoughtful he was regarding competing theories of human origins.

For example, when the book was written, the Mitochondrial Eve theory that all humans came from a single female in Africa, and that there was no subsequent mixing with other species as modern humans entered Eurasia was almost considered a settled debate. Leakey states he doubted this and that he could only assume that the state of molecular biology hadn't quite reached the stage needed to get the full picture. He was convinced that there had to have been some mixing, interbreeding with other human species as the first homo sapiens entered Eurasia.

Developments in DNA technology and new discoveries have proved him right. We now know that today all of us of European origins have somewhere between 2 to 4% Neanderthal DNA and some southeast Asians have a similar amount of Denisovan DNA.

This book is not all that dated and still a very worthwhile read, especially for those who want to understand the fast-moving history of the science of paleoanthropology.

---

### **Meki says**

Provides a high level overview of the evolution of ape like creatures into modern homo sapiens (a bit dated surely given its publication date). Fascinating to learn about the techniques archeologists and biologists use to answer questions - not just what and when, but also why - about species that lived millions of years ago from meagre fragments of bone fossils and the sediment layers they're found in...

---

### **Jacqui says**

If you're interested in man's roots, there are several authors you must read:

Birute Galdikas  
Dian Fosse  
Donald Johanson  
GHR Von Koenigsman  
Glen Isaacs  
Jared Diamond  
Ian Tattersell  
Lev Vygotsky  
Margaret Meade  
Noam Chomsky  
Richard Leakey  
Shawna Vogel  
Sue Savage-Rumsbaugh

...but the man who started it all with his Margaret Meade-like charisma and down-to-earth writing style was Richard Leakey. His work in Olduvai Gorge caught the public's imagination like nothing before.

If you want to meet Richard Leakey, you must read his short little summative book, *The Origin of Humankind* (Perseus Books 1984). In this manuscript, he explains in plain English so all of us non-doctoral candidates can understand what he has concluded after a lifetime of research it is that differentiates you and I from other animals. Much has been made of the human-ness of our close cousins, the Great Apes. Between chimpanzees, gorillas, bonobos, even orangutans, we see a lot of ourselves in their actions, decisions, parenting, culture. These blur the line between what really makes us human and them not. Heck, genetically, there is only 1.2% difference in our DNA--how different could we really be?

There have been tests to answer that very question. Those tests are what drove Jane Goodall into the field to see how exactly chimps were animals while she was human. Every test she ran them through, they passed. What happened when she returned from the field to show this to her scientific colleagues? They changed the tests--moved the goal posts.

At one time, the hurdle was that the animal species must be able to use tools. That fell to Goodall's first fieldwork research in Tanzania. Then it was they must be able to use tools to make tools. That fell, too--I believe again to Goodall's research. Then it was they must be able to identify themselves (Sue Savage-Rumsbaugh crushed that one?), problem solve, visual thinking--what about symbolic thinking? I come away shaking my head, trying to clear out the multiplying requirements. If we are all part of the same human bush, I want to know. You should want to know, too.

Richard Leakey tackled that complicated problem in this 170-page book. He starts by discussing human evolution, how we differ from other primates in unique ways. He then discusses several areas that anthropologists have a difficult time finding in other species--art, language, ethical judgments, and mental skills. Yes, anthropologists do find them in other species, but not consistently and not the way man uses these. You'll find the discussion fascinating.

He does skip one trait I think has never been refuted: Man is the only species I know that chooses to think rather than sleep or eat. Most animals spend their days hunting or resting up to hunt. The great apes throw play into the mix, but are there any species that choose to think about their future, problems, create solutions, explore for the sake of adventure in the way we do?

You can read this book in a weekend. It'll change your thinking for a lifetime. Don't miss it.

---

## **Kaelan Ratcliffe says**

### **\*\*\*\*\* Origin of Mind \*\*\*\*\***

This book nearly convinced me to become a paleoanthropologist, so not bad for a second hand purchase from a charity book store! So interesting and varied is the work presented in these pages, that I found myself wanting to look into more detail beyond the brief introduction *Richard Leakey* provides here.

The first half of the book can easily be described as laying out what is known of our species origins and its trajectory to present day, based on what has been discovered via ancient bones, and ancient campsites. It's quite a standard run through, but fascinating non the less. I would advise caution due to this being a few years old now, however I don't believe this to be highly out-dated at the time of this review. Its also worth noting how little evidence there is for this area, even by some scientific standards. So it's not hard to see how experts have drawn large conclusions with little evidence.

The second half is where things get really interesting. Language, its implications, (potential) shamanistic wallpaintings, our inclusiveness or separation from the rest of nature, consciousness and its origins, animals and their ability of self awareness, all are brought to the table for discussion. It's makes for a fascinating and enjoyable read, especially knowing that if any of these questions were answered, it would change how we perceive ourselves forever. What could be more incredible than that!

It's in all our interest to understand this area of work, we're all the same species after all!

---

## **Bianca Ichim says**

It was so nice to read a book that tries to explain abstract things without considering the possibility of "miracles". I also liked how the author inferred that humans should not be seen as noble creatures that have nothing to do with animals, because that's what we actually are, with a couple of improvements over the millennia.

---

## **Claudia says**

Read this book to update my knowledge of early man.

The book explored the various definitions as to what exactly defines modern man. At what moment in time can we say "this" is where "we" began? There is no consensus. Each theory is presented with pros and cons and discusses evidence that supports or refutes the theory.

There are 4 key stages or events that most anthropologists agree are pivotal:

1. The human family begins with bipedalism 7 million years ago.
2. Bipedalism proliferates.
3. Brain capacity becomes larger. Modern human's brain volume has increased threefold.

#### 4. Modern humans appear.

But what happened to make us definitively modern man? Not just using tools opportunistically (Australopithecines-2 million years ago-Lucy) but crafting tools for a specific purpose? (Homo Erectus-2 million years ago) Burying our dead? (Neandertal-40,000 years ago). The appearance of art in the Upper Paleolithic era? (Homo Sapiens-35,000 years ago). When agriculture arose? (10,000 years BC). Or when language developed? And just what in the fossil record could point to self awareness?

And just when did we develop language which cannot be etched in the fossil record? The best current paradigm is that language arose in the Upper Paleolithic. Human behavior about 35,000 years ago seems to suggest language was extant on the basis of burial of the dead, the appearance of art, an increase in technology, observations of regional differences in culture, evidence of long distance contact and trade, meat eating humans, larger living areas, and use of material other than stone: bone, antler and clay. There is no consensus, however, as to whether spoken language was sudden or gradual.

Returning to Africa, the site that his world famous parents made their incomparable contribution to early man, Richard explains how two sets of primates became separated.

15 million years ago across Africa from east to west was forest. Living in this forest were primates-chimps and apes, with the latter being more numerous. The earth's crust began to tear and separate in a line running from the Red Sea through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and into Mozambique.

This caused the land to rise, blister like, in Ethiopia and Kenya and created highlands. The rise in land caused the eastern portion to be thrown into a rain shadow. The trees started to disappear.

12 million years ago, these tectonic activities continued and eventually created the Great Rift Valley. This created an east-west barrier to animal migration and created a mosaic of ecological conditions resulting in apes living west in the humid arboreal region and humans on the eastern portion on open land.

I also appreciated the eras of Upper Paleolithic art being named, identified, and characterized:

1. Aurignacian-34-30,000 years ago. Characterized by small ivory beads, and animals (mammoths and horses) and humans carved from ivory found in Vogelhard, Germany.
2. Gravettian- 30-22,000 years ago with the appearance of clay figurines.
3. Solutrean- 22-18,000 years ago where cave paintings appeared.
4. Magdalenian-18-11,000 years ago when caves at Lascaux and Altamira were painted that have decidedly shamanistic overtures. Why would they paint bison and horses that seem to morph with human features when their diet consisted of ptarmigan and reindeer. Could it be that they depicted these animals not because they were "good to eat" but they were "good to think"?

A fascinating book that delves into how we define what it means to be a modern human being and yet concludes no one can unravel the fugue and point to a moment in time that what ever it is that makes us modern human beings occurred.

---