



Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness

Ian Tattersall

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness

Ian Tattersall

Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness Ian Tattersall

In *Becoming Human*, noted anthropologist and renaissance man Ian Tattersall explores what makes us uniquely human, the qualities that set us apart from our ancestors, and the significance of our knowledge. A worldwide tour of discovery, Tattersall takes the reader from 30,000-year-old cave paintings in France and anthropological digs in Africa, to examining human behavior in a New York restaurant. And by offering wisdom gleaned from fossil remains, primate behavior, prehistoric art, and archaeology, Tattersall presents a stunning picture of where humankind evolved, how Darwin's theories have changed, and what we reliably know about modern-day human's capacity for love, language, and thought. Widely praised in the media, and an Amazon.com Top-10 bestseller, *Becoming Human* is an amazing trip into the past and into the future.

Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness Details

Date : Published July 8th 1999 by Mariner Books (first published 1998)

ISBN : 9780156006538

Author : Ian Tattersall

Format : Paperback 272 pages

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

 [Download Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness Ian Tattersall

From Reader Review *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness* for online ebook

Skip says

Another great story from Tattersall. Published in 1998 so just a touch dated.

Barry says

Tattersall recounts pretty much the same stuff as in his other books. One point he drives home is that people with bones that look just like ours have been around for over 100,000 years; but for the first 60,000 of those, they didn't really act like us. It's only in the last 40,000 years or so that we see artifacts that seem like modern people had made them: carvings, cave art, body ornamentation. Tattersall thinks that by 100,000 years ago our brain was pretty much as it is today, but something happened about 40,000 years ago that allowed the invention of language.

Charlene says

This was an interesting read. They chose related articles. It wasn't mind blowing but was worth reading if you like evolution. After learning more about human evolution, I feel like they could have chosen better topics.

Dave Schey says

It may be a little outdated but is still a worthy read.

Daniel says

A little dated (what with new research turning up human ancestors every day it seems, and with new research suggesting ape-like body styles are a new adaptation, not an old one), and sometimes dry.

Still, it's a masterful treatment of the subject. Well worth the read.

Jeremy says

I usually tend to focus on the *commonalities* between us and the other primates, but this is an interesting book describing the evolutionary history of humanity's *unique* attributes. Particularly, the modern vocal tract seems to have arisen as an exaptation for language; symbolism and true speech is shown to be one of

the major dividing lines between us and our prehuman ancestors.

I appreciated the emphasis on the punctuated equilibrium model, which has the useful effect of decoupling the superficial link often posited between evolution and inevitable technological "progress". There was more stability than is generally supposed, and speciation events were more unique, driven by isolated (or quasi-isolated) populations. The other primates are not "failed humans" who neglected to grasp the ladder of evolution which would lead inexorably to homo sapiens - though we share a common ancestor, they were shaped by environmental factors which were distinct from our own.

I was surprisingly let down by the last - rather polemical - major chapter, "Becoming Human." His analysis of religion, in particular, is very weak, based as it is on his dependence on a transcendent Neoplatonic conception of an abstract incorporeal deity existing outside and "higher" than nature and the material universe. We Mormons, of course, would reverse the entire premise: we *are* capable of envisioning God, because He is a human like us, who did not create all existence instantaneously and simultaneously from nothing, but rather organized worlds without number out of preexisting material according to law. Our Gods have been "resolutely anthropomorphic" because that's how we encountered them. Reproduction is not primitive or low, it is one way we are similar to Deity.

Still, a good read!

Leonardo says

Usado en Visión de Paralaje Pág.258

Franz says

Readable book about the human animal, its primate cousins, distant and not so distant ancestors. Why did our species make it and the Neanderthals fail? Why are we so much better at using tools and more linguistically talented than our nearest primate relatives or any one else? May be a bit out of date--written 13 years ago, that's a long time in the sciences--but so engagingly written and a great starting point for exploring the place of homo sapien on the evolutionary tree

Ellee says

I've been a little lax in posting, so am hoping to catch up a bit tonight. :) I finished reading *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness* by Ian Tattersall about three weeks ago. This book discusses aspects of human evolution and how people differ from our closest living relatives - chimpanzees, gorillas, and other living primates. The book also discusses the accomplishments of our now-extinct antecedents in a fair amount of detail.

Some of Tattersall's observations are far from original (e.g. the cave paintings at Lascaux are impressive), but others - to the typical layperson seem somewhat controversial at first glance (e.g. that chimps and gorillas can't communicate like people can and that sign language experiments have pretty much failed all around). As a layperson with (realistically) only basic knowledge about human evolution and very little knowledge

about recent developments (the last 10-15 years) in anthropological research, I found this book a breath of fresh air. Tattersall challenges the body of "common knowledge" and in doing so forces the reader to confront his/her own prejudices about how humans developed and what makes us unique in the world.

Highly recommended for all laypersons with an interest in anthropology/human evolution. Anthro students used to reading journals in these fields are unlikely to find much new and will probably prefer something more technical. Very readable for the layperson, though. Very little jargon.

Clarissa says

This was well written and very interesting. I wish more was known about ancient hominids. The book is about what is known about the evolution of hominids. I was especially interested in the sections where Tattersall talks about how it looks as if neanderthals were not capable of speech.

Stephen says

Something we forget about natural selection is that it is not a continual refining process that makes better, and better widgets. If a species is successful and widespread it will stay the way it is with little or no change. In short, nothing is perfect nor will it ever be. Instead what you find is episodic innovation where change occurs when a species is isolated and reduced to small numbers. This is when completely new species emerges. This book is a nice quick read on the evolutionary history of the hominid branch of primates. I like the parts about the early Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals particularly.

Ralph Hermansen says

I would give Tattersall a "good", but not "excellent" rating for this book. When he discusses fossil evidence, he is so heavily nuanced that he almost says nothing at all. When he talks in generalities, I long for him to provide some facts to substantiate the conjectures. Usually a superb illustrator, in this book he has provided virtually none. On the plus side, he took on a challenging task, and worked hard to accomplish it.

I agree with him on many points that he makes.

Ralph Hermansen 9/7/06

Brett Williams says

The beautiful and the ugly about human animals

Tattersall gives us primitive social history; a bounded evolutionary history; and a most surprising – though distressing – anatomical history of these expensive organs we carry about in our skulls. Expensive because they consume over 20% of our calories whether we use them or not. Given the state of civilization and

politics it may be no surprise we burn hardly more calories when thinking than asleep.

The goal here is to find why humans are different. Chimps make tools, dolphins have the largest brain-to-body-mass ratio of any species on earth, Neanderthal ceremonially buried their dead, gorillas can be taught sign language, baboons engage in deception as they attribute states of mind to others to predict their behavior. Jane Goodall even witnessed bands of chimps make coordinated war on each other not so unlike the way humans did in earnest once accumulations from the agriculture revolution gave us something serious to kill for. But others have not painted cave walls in southwest Europe (30000ya), wrote sonnets or split atoms. As far as we know, claims Tattersall, a dramatic difference is rule based, abstract language. Arbitrary sounds associated to objects (the sound “house” only means “house” to those who speak English) or more intangibly, to symbolic references – mathematics, metaphysics, democracy. The order of these arbitrary sounds convey their own meaning. “Man paints house.” “House paints man.” Hence the rules – grammar – such that listeners using the same code understand correctly the intended message. Without the rules and vocabulary, a foreign tongue - if you’ve ever heard one - sounds like one continuous modulated word.

Throughout the book we wonder if we are really better off now than in the harsh, survivalist past. Through success in controlling the environment, our ancestors could have never imagined to what ends we would carry this emergent property of stellar byproducts structured in the form of brains. This control also allowed for an art explosion – according to Tattersall an element of existence central to ancient man. While the system we moderns created makes art alien and impractical – or worse, creates “modern art” – the past allowed our ancestors to explore this innately human characteristic. Gould’s punctuated equilibrium seems to apply here to human innovation as readily as it does to speciation – periods of abrupt development followed by periods of stasis.

Of utmost importance is Tattersall’s note on climate’s affect on the human trajectory. The coordination of climate change and human creative behavior may seem obvious (stated again some years later in Spencer Wells’, *Pandora’s Seed*) – e.g. if it’s suddenly colder, invent a coat. But we find, for example, that cave painting peaked with the last glacial maxima. Did selective pressures, including the loss of once available prey animals, expand the perception of art as magic over animals imaged? That is, did a natural ice age select for accelerating abstractions such as religion - the calling of powers to calm a changing world? (Given Neanderthal burials, the ice age was far from the first such hypothetical natural selection of behaviors.) Interestingly these paintings are composed of fewer large predators over time. Were the painters simply reporting the numbers – eliminated by climate change or human success in the competition game?

An excellent section on brain anatomy clarifies our biggest problem. The combination of onion-like layering and expansion of existent features to make up those layers, resulting in the untidy evolution of our brains built over early versions all the way back to common mammal, even reptilian-like ancestors. The sad news is that structure implies behavior. Our higher thought centers are mediated by sections in charge of our lowest functions – feeding, fighting, fleeing, sex. Is this why males so frequently compromise themselves for females against better judgments, rationalizing irrational acts, only to suffer their actions after hormones fade? Males of many species die in that contest. That fabulous machine in our skulls is also a mess and far from an ideal design. It makes us warlike, yet compassionate, lawyers, yet artists. We’re stuck with it and as Tattersall tells it, this, contrary to modern historians, is why history repeats itself.

Alex McManus says

This shelf is dedicated to some of the books that have influenced me as I wrote *Makers of Fire*. Some of these books did not necessarily influence the book directly, but in terms of general frameworks. Others offered particular ideas that ignited my imagination. *Makers of Fire: The Spirituality of Leading from the Future*

I took an online class with with Ian Tattersall, author of *Becoming Human*, on BandN University years ago with this book as the text.

My own worldview incorporates evolutionary thinking and that has always been a part of how I understand the world and read the biblical texts.

This book, along with others, started me on the path to the realization that, perhaps, we are still in the process of becoming human.

Jennifer Collins says

Tattersall's work is a fascinating exploration of human evolution and the separate species that led up to our own, as well as the true details which make us a unique species. Detailing anthropological discoveries from around the world, along with case studies and experiments related to primates and to psychology, Tattersall moves through the territory of human evolution in an engaging and approachable style. While some of the later chapters verge on being repetitive in some notes from the early broader chapters, and in some cases go into more detail than the average reader might prefer, the work as a whole is worthwhile and readable. Whether the material here is wholly new to readers or somewhat familiar, there's bound to be material here that is worth note and reflection for nearly any reader.

Recommended for any interested party.
