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 **The Myth of Mind and**

 **Consciousness**

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**Stanley M. Wilkin: 2008**

 **BOOK 1.** **TIME, THOUGHT, SPACE.**

*‘How have we accomplished all that we have achieved? Unconsciously? Are we nothing but clever automatons with absurd after the fact pretensions to awareness, freedom, and conscious dominion over what we do? Is this the only resolution to this paradox to demote consciousness and dump it on the scrap heap? This is not just another esoteric debate without consequences. A demotion of consciousness to such status would involve a full acknowledgement of the implications of automaton theory down on the ground; that is, in daily life. Such a move would actually threaten the conceptual underpinnings of our civilization. It would suggest that we are, for the most part, preposterous illusory creatures who inhabit the cognitive underground along with the rest of creation while harbouring delusions of intellectual grandeur.’* **A Mind So Rare. The Evolution of Human Consciousness.’****Merlin Donald: 2001:26-27.**

Notions of mind have influenced modern perspectives perhaps more than any other

modern day concept. I do not intend here to treat the mind, the internal inorganic processes of the brain, as an established fact but as a construct, fashioned over many millenniums. Whole systems of thought, perspectives on the world, in fact a large part of how the present world is constructed, the ideas that inform that construction, are formed upon concepts of the mind. According to Bruno, *The Discovery Of The Mind,* the ancient Greeks were the first to articulate the notion of an individual mental state that was as integral to humans as our heart or our limbs. In this work, the human automaton, directed by the gods, is perceived as evolving, in and through the works of Homer, into individuals’ conscious of their Self and of their impact upon the world about them. In this, he may be mistaken. The Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh detailed evolution of Self many centuries before Homer, whether the poet was a man, woman or the end result of a literary fashion spread over centuries, ordered his manifold material on a distant age. A little later, Plato and other thinkers in the western world of the period, of which I include western Asia, distinguished between mind and matter. Buddhist thinkers discovered the mind at apparently the same time, developing it as part of contemplatives discourse on the nature of experience. Such coincidences may owe something to shared ideas, but probably owes far more too similar cultural development. A dependence upon the written word encouraged abstract debate (Ong, 1982). Much later in western thinking, Descartes separated the mind and the body, creating the dualism that lingers today, and also gave the mind in effect similar tangible properties to the body. Descartes’ theories, *‘I think therefore I am’,* linked the mind to human reasoning powers. Like Buddhist thinkers, who placed the mind within separate personality dynamics, it established the mind as a separate if inter-dependent entity that enjoyed an existence as tangible as the human form. Victorian thinkers such as Herbart and Freud viewed the mind as existing in a separate time and space to the body, existing in the day to day, except when phenomena, often driven by the libido or another natural force, occasioned recordable connections. Freud firmly secured the mind to human drives, providing it with an architecture which he located within each individual according to how the energies that resulted from the human drives manifested itself within each individual history. The prevailing commonplace view is that the mind is a constituent of human make-up which resides within the human brain but somehow exists apart from it, within its own topological time and space. In the present day, thinkers are now unable to accept adequate proof of other’s minds, nor that of their own. Each strand of proof is taken apart and proved to be constructed upon false evidence. The generally accepted attributes of mind, consciousness manifested in thought, memory, perception, will, for example, developed, perhaps in independent periods, over a substantial period of time. A number of these attributes developed as a direct consequence of technological developments.

I believe, and I hope here to demonstrate, that the mind is not an internal property or set of properties but is derivative of the world the group and/or individual inhabits. It has no real existence beyond or outside of the external world. In apparent contradiction of the above, I will further clarify my position. Although I have strongly stated my position I am not necessarily denying that human beings experience inner qualitative conscious states, which we assume provide evidence of a mind, but that by itself such a condition means little. It is likely that many specie experience such a phenomenon, such as dolphins and elephants for example.[[1]](#footnote-1) It may be of course that these states are illusory, the result, as I believe of long developed constructs. As, generally, the internal operations of the brain are lumped together, computational activities, implicitly linked to cultural developments, are conceived of as resulting from the same source as every other apparent mental activity. Internal qualitative conscious states appear to exist but are simply the result of reflexive perceptions of the environment based upon form and space and an accumulative notion of the individual’s relationship with the environment.

The ancients I believe had no construct of the mind, that is concepts of individual mental activity or qualitative conscious states. My exposition of culture will begin in Palaeolithic times. I will centre my arguments mainly on events within Europe because as yet there has been insufficient investigation of cultures of the time outside of Europe.

**Part I: Human Evolution.**

*‘…whether the capacity for experiencing consciously and for becoming a*

*self might not be acquired rather than inborn…’.* (**Dewart, 1989: Evolution**

**and Consciousness**.)

This first section will deal with the evolution of hominids and the emergence of *homo*

*sapiens sapiens*. Traditionally, paleaoanthropologists have, in their attempt

to understand human evolution, been concerned with the shape and size of hominid brain

cases and the stone artefacts developed by each hominid specie. Human evolution, was,

in the recent past, perceived of as just about the growth of intelligence. Now, we are less

certain about the nature of intelligence and whether it is enough by itself to ensure

technological innovation. With greater evidence of the past emerging, there has been

increasing concern with the social lives of ancient hominids, dwelling upon possible

interaction within the group as a brain-evolution catalyst. Infatuation with separate

hominid specie continues, each new hominid seen as furthering technology, an event in

the rise of *Homo Sapien* world domination*,* although accumulating evidence suggests that

innovation was an interspecie accomplishment.

Human behaviour is now thought to have a longer history than previously believed.

Wynn and Coolidge believe that the mental capacity for sophisticated behaviour

was present from 300, 000 BCE. Clive Gamble (2007) believes that tool-use goes far

back in history, is not exclusive to human specie, and archaeolanthropologists tend to,

perhaps mistakenly, identify too readily tool use with human species. Neanderthals,

notwithstanding their lack of culture, by some commentators, are now perceived of

as our equals and not the barely conscious brutes of less than fifty years ago. The process

remains one of defining human identity, not simply of gathering

evidence, no different in effect from paleoanthropologists’ initial motive. In this

process, struggle as they may against it, they attempt to exclude *homo sapiens* from the

surrounding world, a singular event rather than the object of many integrated events. For

my part, I intend to show, through our earliest relatives, the true nature of consciousness.

Consciousness is a continuously developing phenomenon, and perhaps does not have the

properties we ascribe to it, being a product of automatic behaviour. Recent research has

amply identified the changes wrought in the brain by intellectual pursuits, suggesting

possible further changes over time in the construction of the brain.

Although the argument of the book as a whole is diverse, in this section I propose to look at the nature of early modern humans, viewing when they emerged, and if they possessed the consciousness we profess to enjoy. Although this will be a brief survey, I will consider the views of acknowledged experts on the advantages of language to human advancement, and the possibility that early modern human types did not yet possess the attributes, or all of the attributes, commonly associated with the mind. I will briefly advance arguments on the possible construction of the human mind through the construction of objects, or those objects which carried symbolic properties.

**Theories.**

Recent archaeology has dated the first known modern day humans to c200,000

BCE. Therefore human beings inhabited the planet for approximately 160,000 years

without leaving a trace of themselves beyond their bones. What changed? Why after such

a long period of time did homo sapiensbegin the process of leaving discernible

traces of themselves on the landscape and begin altering the landscape itself?[[2]](#footnote-2) Some

commentators such as Jared Diamond[[3]](#footnote-3) propose that as human behaviour

appears to have changed c60, 000 BCE than human biology must also have changed,[[4]](#footnote-4) if so

than it must have changed many times since. Diamond has localised biological change to

ancient Europeans, who c40, 000 entered Europe from Africa. Others have argued that this

is unlikely to be true as somehow the hypothesised gene-change had to re-enter Africa,

and, also, was already evident in early Australians, who arrived on the Australian

continent c50, 000 BCE. Any gene-change logically occurred in Africa before human

dispersal. The subsequent difficulties, size and variety of carnivores, nature of the terrain,

availability of feed, each wandering group met probably stimulated a number of

responses, Europeans, as far as we are aware, were the only large colonising group that

encountered in the Neanderthal another powerful resident human species.

Stephen Oppenheimer (2003), who has written several interesting books on this period,

believes that there was little difference in the intellectual capacity of many human species,

attempting to confront the separation of modern humans, based upon assumptions of

superiority, from their forebears, propagating the equality of Neanderthals, see above,

and asserting that differences were cultural. Although modern humans introduced blade

flint tools into Europe, they were no more efficient than the flake tools used by

Neanderthals. Neanderthals had the largest brains of any human species, but there is little

firm evidence that they were capable of symbolic thinking. Animal debris associated with

Neanderthals has been frequently found, but none have intentional markings or appear to

have been systematically employed for other uses (Mitchen). Although they appear to

have enjoyed extensive natural history intelligence, the absence of markings may indicate

an inability to carry conceptual maps of their environment. Suited to the harsh

environment of Ice-Age Europe and the Eurasia plains, Neanderthals may not have

easily adapted to other environments. Evidence that they buried their dead and put

offerings in graves for the afterlife remains unproven. Nevertheless, Neanderthals

survived admirably for approximately three hundred thousand

years, often inhabiting sites used by modern humans. In fact, when modern humans

arrived in Europe the technology of the two specie was virtually the same. Modern human

superiority, if it existed at all, could be found in the evident culture, the artwork and

musical instruments, discovered from the time of their arrival in Eastern Europe. This

probably allowed for modern humans, through the exchange of discrete messages

contained by artefacts, to identify with each other more easily and operate in larger,

extended groups.

Neanderthals may have lived and worked in very small groups, as little as ten, held

together by recognition. Unlike in modern human societies, of the Late Stone Age,

technology appears not to have structured mobility and hunting patterns. Neanderthals

took a passive approach to the acquisition of food and materials. As evidence of the

continuation of human culture from the time of *Homo Erectus*, insisting that the

differences between each species were small, Oppenheimer points to the early widespread

technique of beachcombing, neglecting to itemise the number of supposedly lesser

organisms that engaged in the same activity, still so engage, and did not subsequently

change the world they lived in.

A commonly held view amongst paleoanthropologists is that human symbolic behaviour

appeared with the arrival of anatomatically modern humans in Southern Africa, slowly

developed through the stimulation provided by exchange, (Renfrew, 2007) and happily

reached a kind of fruition in Europe 170 thousand years later. On the surface, this seems

unsatisfactory and contrary to what we know about the rapid cultural development of

modern human behaviour. Colin Renfrew has called the period between c200,000 BCE

and c100,000 the speciation period, involving the human genotype and new behaviour

culturally transmitted through the generations. Employing the term co-evolution,

advances in technology aided biological change. New behaviour was culturally

transmitted setting off brain evolution. Such a phase had he believes been fundamental in

change within human species for a million years. Although accorded legitimacy by

archaeoanthropologists, this view, used also to explain evolutionary developments within

the human group, is difficult to account for without discovering elements within human

brains that allow for perceptual/biological change. Stephen Mitchen recently provided the

theory of ‘mind modularity ’ to account for this phenomenon, whereby early hominid

brains were wired so that different tasks, speaking, tool production, etc, were undertaken

by different, separate modules in the brain. According to Mitchen, with the development

of language, the different modules of the brain began functioning together. Brain size, not

significantly different to ours, and the areas of the brain developed, indicate that many

cognitive faculties, by which I include memory, had not yet sufficiently evolved. The

development of episodic memory was surely crucial to the appearance of culture. The

difference between archaic human behaviour, immediately preceding

modern humans, and the behaviour of modern humans might nevertheless have been the

result of substantial changes in the way the brain works. Renfrew’s view by contrast can

be made to fit early periods of hominid brain expansion, occurring between 2 and 1.5

million years ago with the arrivals of *H. habilis* and  *H. erectus*. Tool making emerged,

but there is uncertainty as to whether the earliest tools should be assigned to the smaller

brained Australopithecus. It is imaginable that a phase of speciation occurred and may

have propelled hominids to larger brained homo erectus who developed hand axes. Tools,

especially those with a particular shape, grasping stones with an

edge or hand axes, are perceived as a fundamental part of our specie nature.

**The Hominid trail.**

We now know that other animals, chimpanzees, monkeys and birds, make tools for

specific purposes, but none of the above are classified through such use. They are not

consistent in these habits. They are known for more substantial and entertaining

behavioural patterns. Apart from their hunting patterns, the use of tools is practically all

we know of *H. habilis* and *H. erectus*. They may have been, like the bonobo, excessively

concerned with sexual activity, or spent most of their energies, like male chimpanzees,

creating power bonds within the group. They may have been matriarchies, and only

coupled outside of the group. We have no idea. We only know they made tools, and

through that one occupation assign them minds. It is part of the process of defining our

specie nature based upon real or imagined, largely ideal, examples of cognitive capacity.

On this basis archaeologists have concluded they possessed operant

intelligence, a term taken from the theories of Jean Piaget, a child psychologist, indicating

a phase in child development.

With admirable fastidiousness, archaeoanthropologists call the archaeological remains

found at Olduvai Gorge attributed to *H. habilis* artefacts, reluctant to call them tools.

Nevertheless, they are often referred to as Oldowan flakes. Principally made from basalt

and quartzite, they come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The distinction appears to be

that these artefacts were used to shape other tools, thereby indicating marked intellectual

progression.

According to experts, *H. habilis* needed to recognise acute angles on the nodules, select a

striking platform, employ sufficient eye-to-hand coordination in order to obtain the

desired flake. Archaeologists tend to believe this indicates the emergence of technical

intelligence, not necessarily general intelligence, a response to life in general. A zoo

chimpanzee recently has been recorded shaping stone to create projectiles to throw at the

gaping humans surrounding his enclosure. The correct shape is chosen, its sides chipped

away. Whatever the level of intelligence such activity presupposes, estimations of animal

intelligence are normally based on their capacity to imitate human activity, exhibiting an

apparent multitude of skills. Hominid bodies, eyes locating impression through the arm’s

direction, precision accomplished through eye hand coordination, predicted their

inclination towards complex tool making, aided, but not determined by their developing

brain size. Mere increases in intelligence could have predicted other forms of complex

behaviour, difficult to estimate. Once a process is learned, it becomes a habit, hand and

eye working automatically as if to an unseen plan. This would account for the few

innovations apparent over many millennium. Intention and choice played little part after

an invention had caught on, probably incrementally. In order to succeed as

meat eaters they required sharp appendages of some kind or another. In this instance,

stone tools were an evolutionary statement. Equally, they

required weapons to compete with the large carnivores. With the weather drying, early

hominids survived in savannahs, without the survival strategies of their ape ancestors.

The propulsion provided by their arms was probably their only defence, haphazardly

picking up stones around them and throwing them at approaching carnivores. Obviously,

a group of similarly occupied hominids provided adequate protection, except from

ambush. Stones early became associated with hominids. Given that the movement

towards the creation of tool’s and weapons was not initiated cognitively, we have, in

human technology, a simulated evolutionary process.

While evolution modified hominid brains, hominid physiques and the evolutionary

demand for competitive weapons, not here teeth and claws but stone tools, created a

simulated evolutionary advantage. Hominid physiques/brains superseded evolution while

being driven by it. As a group, also, hominids enjoyed an advantage perhaps

incomprehensible for this intelligent chimpanzee, that of intense cultural transmission.

Such a capacity suggests an existing hominid trait, peculiar to hominids. A change of

behaviour is continually transmitted and, primarily through objects, becomes fixed.

**The appearance of mind does not mean that one exists.**

Archaeology, by focussing upon flint artefacts, has traditionally presented the view that

emerging humanness is understood through material manipulation. Although there

appears to have been a degree of chance in the manufacture of flint tools and weapons,

evident from 2.5 million years ago, based upon co-operation, where one individual chips

the flint and a second individual selects from the ensuring flakes, such efforts are

considered evidence of cognitive processes (Hiscock, 2004). Oppenheimer (2003)

believes the creation of flint points, which may have involved chance, is the true

intellectual revolution in human history, occurring long before the emergence of modern

humans. Nevertheless, unlike the chimpanzee, our specie-nature, of both mind and body,

determined hominid technical progress, which may have initiated increased brain

development. The movement of human arms suggests the natural employment of impact,

not only to shape tools but in the killing of fauna, and the subsequent treatment of flesh.

Picking up and picking at objects is perhaps natural to us. Using stone tools, as we shall

see, gave hominids extra power, added to their often limited prowess. It is part of our

specie-nature, no more distinguished perhaps than the often seemingly complex hunting

strategies of lions. But, see above, the automatic nature of learned practices probably

dominated throughout human history.

The appearance of mind in others, does not mean it exists, or that it

existed as it apparently does in modern humans (Ryle, ‘*Concepts of Mind*’). Although this

may be the case, it is probable that at some stage *H. habilis* and its hominid successers

began to view life differently. They may have perceived relationships between things,

Between each other, that was not obvious to their predecessors.

Gradually enhanced perception, along with a number of feelings we may never know

about, would perhaps have led to seeking better means of defence from the carnivores

who appear to have preyed on early hominids. Hominid evolution may have been the

result of survival amongst and competition through the exploration of unusual methods

of defence and of hunting with the many species of large carnivore of the period. The

above hypothesis is not a resurrection in another form of the old rejected belief in hunting

as the catalyst for hominid brain growth. Although the idea that we evolved our large

brains, with the supposed distinctions which go with large brains, through the problem-

solving nature of hunting has merit, although it begs the question of why other carnivores

have not developed similar traits, it places the responsibility for human evolution on the

males of our specie. The need to learn how to hunt as a group, offered as a reason for the

extended childhoods humans enjoy (Diamond, 1991), again places human development

mainly with the male gender. Although of all the apes we sustain group co-operation

within the hunt much longer than chimpanzees, our nearest rivals (A History of

Language, Fischer: 1999, 36), we are no more capable or

successful than the pack animals, such as dogs, wolves, or even lions. The automaton

natures of such animals are rarely ably disputed. In such animals solutions can be

transmitted down the generations, but the repertoire is limited, and animals appear unable

to innovate more appropriate strategies. Squid are known to build shelters from stones

 and rocks on the seabed, but so far have not been observed using stones and rocks for

other purposes. It is specie-centred for commentators from Diamond to Oppenheimer to

claim consciousness for many humans who exhibited similar behaviour. Plausibly,

extended childhoods may originally have been an aberration within an isolated group, an

exaggeration of tendencies within previous human species, and from the need to protect

children came all the social and cultural propensities we regard as evidence of modern

 human behaviour.

Mental capacity, by this hypothesis, becomes something of a happy accident. Logically,

the conceptual energy required to develop proactive defensive strategies against the large

cats that roamed much of the world, would more feasibly have altered early hominid

perceptions, and thereby greatly formed hominid cognitive direction. Defence would have

required co-operation by the group involving intimidation, profit and gain strategies,

attack methods, and the aggressive utilisation of prepared or picked up tools. Employing

tools in the dual role of weapons also requires significant perceptual change that is deeply

connected to our specie nature, our capacity to throw, lunge and impact.

Early hominids were probably mainly scavengers, therefore at frequent risk from large

carnivores. It is likely that hominid groups were subject to decimation by the larger

carnivores, presenting no clear defensive strategies. Even present day lions, slightly

smaller than their predecessors, are, when humans intrude into their territory, capable of

breaking into homes and killing everyone there. In 19th century East Africa, two lions

killed over a short period a hundred unarmed rail workers. The early hominids were

probably hunted by leopards, cheetahs, sabre-tooth (Megantereon), false sabre tooth

(Dinofelis), wild dogs, hyenas, and the extinct hunting hyenas, as well as lions. Unlike

herd animals, hominids could not rely on speed and numbers. In the main, climbing up

trees presented only the occasional refuge. Early hominids may therefore have developed

inter-group communication to warn of the vicinity of carnivores, employing primitive

forms of language, a greater understanding of the natural world to detect the presence of

carnivores, developing strategies to create diversion or co-operation for effective attack.

Although the stone tools made by *H. habilis* could, if required, be employed for defence,

wooden weapons, of which evidence has been lost, more capable of inflicting fatal

wounds, may have been devised. As *H. habilis* speciated,adjusted its brain to its

environment, carnivores may have increasingly lost the profit/loss motivation and

hominids assumed the position in the general hierarchy of wild dogs or hyeanas. In

evolutionary terms, hominids without predictive capability, unable

to detect the closeness of a carnivore would most likely be killed and consumed while

more intelligent, that is those able to both observe and correlate observations, would

survive.

Eventually, the larger brained hominids would predominate within the many different

groups. While this process is reasonable, and fits acknowledged evolutionary patterns, the

possible change in behaviour from survivors to equals of the large carnivores needs

further understanding. The relationship of early hominids to the environment perhaps

altered their perceptions. Increasing brain size altered perceptions, although this is not

evident in the archaeological remains, and, by so doing, more use made of greater mental

potential. At some point, perhaps as a result of larger brains, hominids understood how to

damage, frighten and kill the plains’ aggressors.

The emergence of other hominid specie, first *H. ergastus,* perhaps simply a larger version

of *H. habilis, H. erectus* appearedwith a larger brain case, involved

the production of the hand axe and also the colonisation of much of the Old World.

Some commentators believe that *H. erectus* evolved in Asia from *H. ergaster.*

Recent discoveries of later forms of *H. habilis* in the Caucasus have led to claims that *H.*

*erectus* evolved in Europe but probably many different local developments occurred

throughout the old world which are placed under either *H. egaster* or *H. erectus.*

Indications are that early humans moved out of Africa far earlier than believed.

The hand axe represented a considerable intellectual leap forward. The procedure, known

as bifacial knapping as two sides receive similar working, requires several steps. The

stone nodule to be worked was chosen with care, checked for size and fracture dynamics.

The shape of the hand axe was first crudely determined with a stone hammer and then

shaped with a hammer of wood or bone. Flakes were removed from each side in turn until

the striking edge was thin and sharp. Symmetry was an important outcome for the

makers.

Tools increasingly acquired aesthetic qualities, which has to be considered a feature of

human's specie-nature. They had a fixed idea of what shape they wanted from the original

nodule. The same process and design was undertaken for almost a million years. In order

to achieve the same form from different nodules, each with different fracture points, each

knapper exploits their individual knowledge, utilizing planning and continuously

visualising the final effect. Rote learning cannot account for an accomplishment

performed for so long, over such a large area. Only in southeast Asia have hand axes not

been found, probably because bamboo was used instead. Yet, there is no evidence that

these mental skills were used for much else. Although Renfrew determines that this

technique was achieved through mimesis, imitating others through the generations, it was

more than that. The combination of knowledge and dexterity cannot hide the automatic

nature of the process, a task constantly repeated with a small window of vision, but also it

appears like automatic behaviour functioning within a paradigm, an idea vocalised

through the manipulation of form. The symmetry was undertaken to achieve a balance,

thereby enforcing the effects of any strike delivered by the sweep of an arm. It added to

the hominid appendage. In approximately the same time-period, stone cleavers appeared,

better for quickly dissecting carcases, but once again good for use as a weapon. At this

stage, hominids were competing with the large carnivores, employing a made weapon

temporarily attached to an arm, combining weight, sharpness, striking power and form.

1. ‘The Mystery of Consciousness,’ John. R. Searle, 1997: 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Marking landscape with paint or incisions is a way of altering it. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ‘The Rise And Fall Of The Third Chimpanzee’, 1991. Diamond’s belief in the acquisition of vocal cords and of course language by humans at this time is not justified by the evidence. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richard Klein. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)