

M. Critchley: The Evolution of Man's Capacity for Language. The Evolution of Man. (ed.) Sol Tax. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960. p.304.

Q19

The fashioning of elaborate tools, the use of fire and of clothing, and the evidence of ceremonial burials as well as religious or magical practices cannot be reconciled with a speechless state. Even the Negroid variant of Cro-Magnon civilization, known as the Grimaldi man, as well as the Eskimo-like Chancelate man, is no exception to these arguments. These fragmentary clues take the story of language back to the last Ice Age of late Paleolithic times, that is between 25,000 and 10,000 years B.C.....

Cultural evidence is more convincing than the morphological. The coexistence of eoliths in the way of sharpened flints and arrow-heads, and signs of the use of fire and the practice of cooking, all point to Neanderthal man's possessing a degree of conceptual and

symbolic thinking consistent with the possession of language, just as in the case of Cro-Magnon man. If this argument is admitted, then the story of language can be taken back to about 50,000 years B.C., that is, to the post-Acheulian Paleolithic period, or the last glacial era.

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L.S. Palmer believes, however, that Australopithecus was perhaps endowed with speech. He bases his opinion upon the anatomical characteristics of the mandible. The absence of a simian shelf and of diastema (or gap between the incisor and the canine) and the convergence angle of the teeth are all features which correspond with a hominoid morphological pattern. Whether this type of argument is sufficient to militate against such arguments as the small cranium and the lack of sure evidence of tool-making is very doubtful.

Recently it has been suggested that Australopithecus had the ability to make fire. If this is really the case, it should be taken as an additional piece of evidence to suggest that speech might have been within

its capacity. Obviously, the answer to the question awaits the production of further findings.

The date of Australopithecus is remote indeed - probably beyond the earliest Pleistocene era and back into the end of the Pliocene. This means anything from one to fifteen million years B.C.

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By such suggestive paleontological clues, we can refer the faculty of speech to a period at least as far back as 100,000 years B.C., that is, the middle Pleistocene period. On the evidence of the Javanese and Chinese skulls (P. soloensis and pekinensis) the date might even be relegated as far back as the early Pleistocene era, that is, perhaps 500,000 years B.C.

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Can it be, therefore, that a veritable Rubicon does exist between animals and man after all, as Professor Müller insisted when discussing the origins of language? Has a new factor been abruptly introduced into the evolutionary stream at some point between the Hominidea and the Hominidae, constituting a true "barrier"? Can it be that Darwin was in error when he regarded the differences between man and animals as differences merely in degree?

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When early man became endowed with reason and when to that mental accomplishment was added the power of speech, then the way lay open for the operation of conscious purpose (de Beer) or the psychosocial factor (J. Huxley). In this way there develops - again indirectly out of the beginnings of language - the beginnings of choice as to conduct. This also implies the power of doing harm as well as the power of doing good. So arise ethical and altruistic considerations.