



Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human

By Richard Wrangham

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In *Catching Fire*, one of the most ambitious arguments about human evolution since Darwin's *Descent of Man*, renowned primatologist Richard Wrangham makes the claim that learning to cook food was the hinge on which human evolution turned. Eating cooked food, he argues, enabled us to evolve our large brains, and cooking itself became a primary focus of human social activity?in short, cooking made us the social, intelligent, and sexual species we are today. Path-breaking and provocative, *Catching Fire* will fascinate anyone interested in our ancient origins?or in our modern eating habits.

"*Catching Fire* is convincing in argument and impressive in its explanatory power. A rich and important book." ?Michael Pollan, author of *In Defense of Food* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

"This is a daringly unorthodox book, and one that might just transform the way we understand ourselves." ?*Sunday Times* (UK)

"The ambition of Wrangham's theory gives it great appeal: Cooking is a powerful biological force and the universal activity around which the rest of human history?the households and tribes, the migrations and wars, the religion and science?arranged itself. But the added treat of the I-cook-therefore-I-am idea is the counterintuitive light it sheds on one of our most intense cultural preoccupations?living the right life by eating naturally." ?*Slate*

"An exhilarating book." ?*The Times* (UK)

"A cogent and compelling argument." ?*Washington Post*

"Absolutely fascinating." ?*Nigella Lawson*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Contrary to the dogmas of raw-foods enthusiasts, cooked cuisine was central to the biological and social evolution of humanity, argues this fascinating study. Harvard biological anthropologist Wrangham (*Demonic Males*) dates the breakthrough in human evolution to a moment 1.8 million years ago, when, he conjectures, our forebears tamed fire and began cooking. Starting with *Homo erectus*—who should perhaps be renamed *Homo gastronomicus*—these innovations drove anatomical and physiological changes that make us adapted to eating cooked food the way cows are adapted to eating grass. By making food more digestible and easier to extract energy from, Wrangham reasons, cooking enabled hominids' jaws, teeth and guts to shrink, freeing up calories to fuel their expanding brains. It also gave rise to pair bonding and table manners, and liberated mankind from the drudgery of chewing (while chaining womankind to the stove). Wrangham's lucid, accessible treatise ranges across nutritional science, paleontology and studies of ape behavior and hunter-gatherer societies; the result is a tour de force of natural history and a profound analysis of cooking's role in daily life. More than that, Wrangham offers a provocative take on evolution—suggesting that, rather than humans creating civilized technology, civilized technology created us. (*June*)
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Review

Publishers Weekly

"[A] fascinating study... Wrangham's lucid, accessible treatise ranges across nutritional science, Paleontology and studies of ape behavior and hunter-gatherer societies; the result is a tour de force of natural history and a profound analysis of cooking's role in daily life."

Publishers Weekly, starred review

"[A] fascinating study... Wrangham's lucid, accessible treatise ranges across nutritional science, paleontology and studies of ape behavior and hunter-gatherer societies; the result is a tour de force of natural history and a profound analysis of cooking's role in daily life."

Kirkus Reviews

"An innovative argument that cooked food led to the rise of modern *Homo sapiens*.... Experts will debate Wrangham's thesis, but most readers will be convinced by this lucid, simulating foray into popular anthropology."

The Harvard Brain

"With clear and engaging prose, *Catching Fire* addresses a key and enduring scientific issue central to the quest to understand our species. It offers new insights for anyone interested in human evolution, history, anthropology, nutrition, and for everyone interested in food."

Edward O. Wilson, Harvard University

"In this thoroughly researched and marvelously well written book, Richard Wrangham has convincingly supplied a missing piece in the evolutionary origin of humanity."

Matt Ridley, author of *Genome* and *The Agile Gene*

"Cooking completely transformed the human race, allowing us to live on the ground, develop bigger brains and smaller mouths, and invent specialized sex roles. This notion is surprising, fresh and, in the hands of

Richard Wrangham, utterly persuasive. He brings to bear evidence from chimpanzees, fossils, food labs, and dieticians. Big, new ideas do not come along often in evolution these days, but this is one."

Steven Raichlen, author of *The Barbecue Bible* and *How to Grill*; host of *Primal Grill*

"A book of startling originality and breathtaking erudition. Drawing on disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, biology, chemistry, physics, literature, nutrition, and cooking, Richard Wrangham addresses two simple but very profound questions: How did we evolve from Australopithecus to Homo sapiens, and what makes us human? The answer can be found at your barbecue grill and I dare say it will surprise you..."

Michael Pollan, author of *In Defense of Food* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

"*Catching Fire* is convincing in argument and impressive in its explanatory power. A rich and important book."

Seed Magazine

"...makes a convincing case for the importance of cooking in the human diet, finding a connection between our need to eat cooked food in order to survive and our preference for soft foods. The popularity of Wonderbread, the digestion of actual lumps of meat, and the dangers of indulging our taste buds all feature in this expository romp through our gustatory evolution."

Discover Magazine

"...fascinating..."

The New York Times

"'Catching Fire' is a plain-spoken and thoroughly gripping scientific essay that presents nothing less than a new theory of human evolution...one that Darwin (among others) simply missed."

Slate.com

"Brilliant... a fantastically weird way of looking at evolutionary change."

The San Francisco Chronicle

"As new angles go, it's pretty much unbeatable."

The Washington Post

"Wrangham draws together previous studies and theories from disciplines as diverse as anthropology, biology, chemistry, sociology and literature into a cogent and compelling argument."

Texas Observer

"Wrangham's attention to the most subtle of behaviors keeps the reader enrapt...a compelling picture, and one that I now contemplate every time I turn on my stove."

Providence Journal

"Richard Wrangham presents this thesis in a concise, cogent, and accessible way."

The New York Times Book Review

"A new theory of human evolution – 'the cooking hypothesis' – is related in plain-spoken, gripping language."

About the Author

Richard Wrangham is the Ruth Moore Professor of Biological Anthropology at Harvard University. He is

coauthor of *Demonic Males*, and has been featured on NPR and in the Boston Globe, New Scientist, and Scientific American. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Norman Eiland:

The particular book *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* will bring one to the new experience of reading some sort of book. The author style to explain the idea is very unique. In case you try to find new book to learn, this book very suitable to you. The book *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* is much recommended to you to study. You can also get the e-book from your official web site, so you can more easily to read the book.

John Masterson:

Your reading sixth sense will not betray you actually, why because this *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* book written by well-known writer who really knows well how to make book that can be understand by anyone who have read the book. Written inside good manner for you, dripping every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your hunger then you still doubt *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* as good book not simply by the cover but also by content. This is one book that can break don't judge book by its handle, so do you still needing yet another sixth sense to pick this particular!? Oh come on your reading sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to an additional sixth sense.

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