Mutual Aid in the Magdalenian

Sadie J. Testa-Secca

Masters of Arts Program in the Social Sciences,

Concentration in Anthropology

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Introduction

When reading the history of human rights, the story often begins with the Enlightenment, or perhaps the Second World War (Edelstein, 2018) (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). There might be mentions of antecedents historically, perhaps a nod to the Magna Carta or to Cyrus the Great's Achemidian decrees (Arden, 2015) (Hallman and Tsang, 2013). But conventionally, that is where the story begins. Everything else is just a prequel. There have been attempts to reevaluate this periodization, in both papers and books, examining everything from the Mongolian Empire's policy of religious freedom (Evaneseli, 2022) (Weatherford, 2012) to the Warriors Oath of the Mau Mau (Barnett and Njama, 1966) to the Medieval ideals that align with modern day conceptions of humanitarianism (Edelstein, 2018). There's also works that reexamine moments like the Enlightenment (Edelstein, 2018) (Graber, 2023) and the aftermath of World War Two (Moyn, 2015) themselves as important to the development of human rights. Beyond that, there's the myriad of literature that seeks to emphasis history through the point of view and contributions of marginalized people and groups who are so often left out of the narrative, creating a vision of the past that is more true to the people who actually lived in it, not just the ones who wrote about it, ensuring human history includes more of the human voices who experienced it (Kimmerer, 2020) (Ramirez, 2023) (Shetterly, 2016) (Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 2021) . But in all of these reevaluations, a crucial time period in human existence, the Paleolithic, is not often in focus. While books like *The Dawn of Everything: A New Theory of Human History* by David Graeber and David Wengrow and *Against the Grain: A History of the Earliest States* by James C. Scott do feature the Paleolithic in their explorations of the human past,

neither are largely focused on this particular era (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021) (Scott, 2013). That's not to say that no scholarship has been done about this time period. The Paleolithic has fascinated scholars and non-academic writers alike since the first archaeological evidence of the time period was discovered and recognized in the 19th century (Fagan, 2018) (Trigger, 2023). This time of saber toothed tigers and woolly mammoths, of bones, stone and fire, of cave paintings and cavemen has loomed large in the minds of many since (De Vore and Lee, 1968) (Fagan, 2018) (Le Guin, 1986). The Paleolithic has often taken the stage in the collective imagination as well-one need only look at works like *The Lost World* (1911) or 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) to see this (Doyle, 1911) (Kubrick and Clarke, 1968). These depictions often focus on a gritty and violent struggle for survival, where brutality is the key to success (Doyle, 1911) (Kubrick and Clarke, 1968) (TVTropes, 2025). The themes and imagery therein expressed set the tone for the expectations of what the Paleolithic is assumed to be by thegeneral public, though academia has been challenging the truth of this for decades. Marshall Sahlin's groundbreaking essay, "The Original Affluent Society" set the tone for works that would critically evaluate the preconceptions surrounding the Paleolithic. Sahlins posited that there are two ways for any society to attain affluence-through desiring much and producing much, or desiring less and producing what is needed with little excess (Sahlins, 1972). Based on ethnographic field work conducted with hunter gatherer groups, particularly in the Kalahari desert, Sahlins realized many forager societies had a different idea of affluence from what he anticipated. Seeing that this low level of desire and high level of personal freedom lead to a more affluent means of living, Sahlins would further propose that this was something found in Paleolithic hunter gatherers (Sahlins, 1972) (Sahlins, 1972). Sahlins would expand on the ideas explored in this essay in his 1972 book *Stone Age Economics*, which further explored the

socioeconomic concerns of the Paleolithic and Neolithic, and explicitly drew parallels to the modern people and social issues (Sahlins, 1972). Sahlins understood that the distant past of the Paleolithic was relevant to the lives of people in the present, to how we understand the notion of society itself, and to what extent people are able to exist free from oppressive conditions. By challenging the archetypal expectations of both Paleolithic and modern societies, Sahlins inverted the assumed view of progress and illuminated a way to appreciate ideals like "affluence" and "freedom" in the Paleolithic era. From this knowledge, Sahlins was able to have a more comprehensive analysis of such issues in his own time, bringing new insight to anthropology.

Additional works have been done to challenge the cliche assumptions projected onto the Paleolithic (Berman, 1999) (Le Guin, 1986). Some works like "Woman the Hunter" (Haas et al, 2020) "Female Vision in the Upper Paleolithic" (McCoid and McDermott, 1996) and "Magdalenian Children: Projectile Points, Portable Art and Playthings" (Langley, 2021) seek to tackle specific archetypes applied to the Paleolithic, looking at groups like women and children though taking a new lens to archaeological evidence. These studies have had much success in doing so, unveiling that: difference between the amount of male and female graves in the early Americas buried with projectile points was not statistically significant; that the Paleolithic Venus figurines might represent self portraits; and that projectile points might have been made, at least in part, by children, respectively (Haas et al, 2020) (Langley, 2021) (McCoid and McDermott, 1996).

The Paleolithic is often viewed as a sort of universal past of humanity-with that in mind, the implications of research done about this time are immense, since they will be seen as the precursors to modern behavior seen today. This paper, thus, seeks to build on the work of

previous scholarship, expanding the understanding of life in the Paleolithic, specifically the Magdalenian, and how it relates to modern ideas of human rights and humanitarianism via notions of cooperation, mutual aid and community.

Political Theory

Within the realm of political theory, the Paleolithic has often been appealed to as the basis of the ideaologies that guide certain political viewpoints(Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). This happens most clearly via the thought experiments surrounding the state of nature. The state of nature, what mankind was like before governments and civilization (or what 18th century Europeans defined as such) fascinated the political scholars of the Enlightenment and has not left the realm of political theory since (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021) (Spindler, 2013). When the Paleolithic is considered in political theory, it is often through this ideological prism that the period is explored.

This debate that still echoes throughout political philosophy and the social sciences was initially stoked by a few scholars from the Enlightenment (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). First described by Thomas Hobbes in his monumental works the Leviathan and De Cive (Hobbes, 1651), the image conjured by his writing is violent and harsh, “a war of every man against every man” (Hobbes, 1652). Famously, Hobbes decried life in the state of nature to be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1652).

While Hobbes began the Western tradition of depicting this natural state, he was far from the last. John Locke would describe the idea of “natural law” as occurring within the state of nature, that “no one ought to harm another in his life, liberty, and or property” (Locke, 1689a) and believed that these fundamental principles governed the earliest human life on the planet (Locke, 1689a). Locke’s ideas of the tabula rasa, that human beings are born as “blank slates”

that are then shaped by their environment and experiences also contributed to his ideas on the state of nature (Locke, 1689b), and, thus, on the origins of his theory of natural rights (life, liberty, and property). While Locke was far from inclusive by today's standards in administering who deserved those rights, and emphasize notions of property and alienination that were unlikely to exist in the Paleolithic, his theories nonetheless represent a significant shift away from the selfish and domineering people of Hobbes's vision, giving a counterpoint to the "nasty, brutish and short" picture that had previously dominated the theoretical stage (Hobbes, 1652) (Locke, 1689a).

Jean Jaque Rousseau would be the next major enlightenment philosopher to leave his mark on the debate surrounding the state of nature, overtly challenging Hobbes in his essay "Discourse on the Origins of Inequality" (Rousseau, 1754). Rousseau made the claim that Hobbes' ideas were based on people who had already experienced contemporary society and imagining what they would be like in some primordial past, not based off of an idea untouched by "modern" society and experiences (Rousseau, 1754). While the people of Hobbes' day might well act in violent and self-gratifying ways if given a chance to live free from society, people who had no concept of the modern world might very well be different. In fact, they *would* be different, Rousseau argued, having different values and having come into contact with various groups less often, they would be further less prone to conflict (Rousseau 1754). Rousseau goes further than Locke and claims that in this natural state, people experienced relative equality as well; inequality, he argues, is a cause of civil society, not a naturally occurring phenomenon (Ibid); "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains" (Rousseau, 1762). Additionally, private property and the ideals that support it conceptually are what he faults for containing the true

origin of inequalities between people (Rousseau, 1754) (Rousseau, 1764). Rousseau thus urges readers to imagine a more egalitarian Paleolithic as a distant but relevant origin for us all.

Much of the debate around the state of nature in political theory today goes back to these foundations (especially in the West, but even in academia more broadly) (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). Philosophers like Richard Nozick (Nozick, 1974) and John Rawls (Rawls, 1971) as well as social scientists like Rurtger Bergman (Bergman, 2020), Brian Hare (Hare and Woods, 2021) and Sarah Hrdy (Hrdy, 2009) have all built on the idea of the state of nature within their research. It occupies an important place in the theoretical consciousness, and has often formed the basis of many theories of political science and international relations (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021) (Spindler, 2013). In fact, many major theoretical perspectives like realism and neorealism, liberalism and neoliberalism, and constructivism, all incorporate perspectives on the state of nature and what that means for the affairs between human groups and states (Spindler, 2013).

In the modern day, evolutionary theory has bolstered the idea of the state of nature as a rhetorical equivalent of the Paleolithic (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021), as an idea of a shared human past has been developed in many landmark studies in the social sciences (Gupta, 2020) (Tattersall, 2009). The Mitochondrial Eve theory explores the evidence for all humans alive today having a common female ancestor, traced by the mitochondrial DNA that is inherited by all people from a female parent (Gupta, 2020). The Out of Africa hypothesis, which has gained much traction and prominence since its initial conception, posits that Homo Sapiens as a species began in Africa and spread out across the world from there (Tattersall, 2009). The evidence for this theory has increased over the years, and, while not immune to criticism, is currently the leading theory for human origins (Tattersall, 2009). This supports the idea of the Paleolithic

broadly representing a collective human past, since it gives a common and singular origin for our most direct yet distinct ancestors. The same goes for the Mitochondrial Eve theory.

This idea of a universal past gives the Paleolithic a tendency to be seen as an era that can approximate studying the state of nature. For this reason, the political and philosophical implications the time period carries are immense, and often built on centuries of theories about this condition. Ideas of violent, ruthless cavemen echo Hobbes; images of creative, peaceful gatherers reflect Rousseau, with a myriad of other interpretations in between these perspectives (Le Guin, 1986). This is to say that all research on the Paleolithic is political, and cannot escape the implications of such. To add an idea like "human rights" to the study of the Paleolithic is simply to openly acknowledge and invite a reevaluation of these inescapable implications at the forefront of the era.

Scientific Perspectives

Ideas like mutual aid and cooperation predate the conceptualization of anything humanitarian in the modern sense. They are tied to both political and scientific theory. Mutual aid, first used in its modern sense by Peter Kropotkin in his social and anarchist writings of the 19th and 20th century, describes an arrangement of all for all and shared prosperity (Collins, 2023). Kropotkin was a noble by birth, a scientist by profession, and an anarchist by action. He conducted ethological and ethnographic studies on the Siberian plateaus, and his experiences in this furthered his perspective on cooperation (Dugatkin, 2013). Kropotkin noticed that, among animals and humans alike, "cooperation, not competition" (Dugatkin, 2013) allowed for survival in even the harshest conditions, and created a level of prosperity that, however meager or extravagant, would never be attainable by an individual alone (Kropotkin, 1902). This idea would drive the book-*Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*-, which Kropotkin wrote in 1902, and

filled with many zoological and anthropological examples of this practice in action (Kropotkin, 1902). Building on the traditions of evolutionary science from his native Russia and around the world, Kropotkin sought to illuminate the ways in which mutually beneficial behavior was an adaptation adopted to further survival in a multitude of species (Kropotkin, 1902). Kropotkin supported the theory of evolution by natural selection as proposed by Charles Darwin, and disagreed with many of the ways in which the theory had been interpreted and applied by scientists who came after Darwin (Kropotkin, 1902). While Darwin did not endorse a bloody and ruthless interpretation of evolutionary conflict, even outright denouncing it (Pereira et al, 2011), the legacy of those who did (such as Herbert Spencer) gave rise to a view of a violent process of evolution by natural selection (Gould, 1988) (Nickerson, 2005) (Pereira et al, 2011). This perspective, though challenged by scientists then and now (and again, by Darwin himself in his own work) has lingered on (Nickerson, 2005), and thus Kropotkin's writing on the subject has continued relevance.The idea of nature red in tooth and claw did not match up with what Kropotkin observed in his fieldwork-in fact, he noticed the opposite. While the environment that species lived in might well be harsh, violence was not the norm amongst animals themselves. In fact, many species worked in coordination with other members of their species. Darwin had written that "the fittest…are the ones who adapt" (Darwin, 1859) and Kropotkin took this further, proposing that cooperation amongst species was one such adaptation- one that led to much evolutionary success (Kropotkin, 1902). This process was also mirrored in many of the human groups he encountered as well, and Kropotkin found that communities cooperating towards survival often gave them the best chance at success, even better than what the Czarist regime could provide (Kropotkin, 1902). Kropotkin's ideas would influence scientists and anarchists alike, providing the groundwork for activists like Emma Goldman, Dorothy Day and

Emiliano Zapata, and scholars like Marshall Sahlins, David Graeber, Stephan J. Gould, Paulo Servigne, and Sarah Hrdy. Many of these researchers would study mutualism and altruism in humans and the biological world at large (Graeber, 2011) (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021) (Gould, 1988) (Gould, 1977) (Sahlins, 1972) (Sahlins, 1974) (Servigne, 2022) . The scientific theory of mutualism owes much to Kropotkin's research, as do many works about human cooperation, like "Survival of the Friendliest" and "Mothers and Others" (Hare and Woods, 2020) (Hrdy, 1999).

It is from this tradition of evaluative and inclusive history, science and critical insight that this paper draws. Mutual aid, in many respects, can be seen as a precursor to the ideals humanitarianism strives to attain, assisting those in need for the long term betterment of all.

Paleolithic Archaeology and The Magdalenian Era

While the Paleolithic has had a long history in the realm of political theory and the hard sciences, this is far from the only academic perspective that lends focus to the era. The study of Paleolithic anthropology and archaeology in particular has a lengthy, detailed history. While evidence of life in the Paleolithic has been observed for centuries, with legendary items like thunderstone and Elfshot being tied to discoveries of what are now recognized to be prehistoric tools (Piper, 2022) (Trigger, 2023), it formally began in the 19th century alongside the development of archaeology and anthropology more generally, as sites like Cro Magnon were uncovered (Fagan, 2018) (Trigger, 2023). Discoveries of magnificent works of art, paintings of massive scale often on the walls of caves, would drive further interest in studying the era; the images of places like Altamira and Lascaux are ubiquitous to this day (Conkey et al, 1980) (Lefebvre et al, 2021). These artworks have given modern viewers many questions, (who made them? Why? What kind of lives did the artists live?), which have inspired further research (Bourdier, 2013) (Nowell and Van Gelder, 2020). This thesis considers whether the answer to

such questions can support prefigurations of humanitarianism by mutual aid and community in the Magdalenian.

Much like the understanding of the Paleolithic, anthropology and archaeology as disciplines have evolved since their formal beginnings in the 19th century. Processual and post-processual theories give the field a strong theoretical grounding to stand on when investigating the archaeological record, and techniques that give empirical results which can be interpreted to better understand specific sites and parts of the past more broadly (Paskey and Cisneros, 2020) (Trigger, 2023). Ethnography, bioarchaeology and experimental archaeology all feature their own methodologies which yield such insights as well. Behind this, archaeologists have used scientific advances in genetics and computer technology to explore both recently uncovered and long-known sites, remains and artifacts and obtain new information about the people and societies whose legacy they represent (Paskey and Cisneros, 2020) (Trigger, 2023). All of these developments have led to a more comprehensive archaeological understanding of the Paleolithic, and have inspired the research this paper builds upon, particularly the research on the Magdalenian, the specific part of the Paleolithic this paper will focus upon.

From some of the earliest archaeological investigations into the Stone Age sites of the Vezere Valley, differentiation in the periods of human occupation were apparent (Fagan, 2018). The Age of Reindeer, as it was first referred to as, was later called The Magdalenian after the cultural site of Le Madeline by Lartet and Christy (who also coined “Age of Reindeer”) (Fagan, 2018) (Trigger, 2023). It has been identified as taking place between approximately 17,000 BC to 12,000 BC (Fagan, 2018). It is more consistently defined than many other periods of the Paleolithic, which have more substantial variation (Clifford and Bahn, 2021). This relative consistency makes the Magdalenian an ideal time to study because the comparative abundance of

artifacts in the time period allows for a more in depth analysis, and a solid foundation of literature upon which interpretation can be based.

During the Magdalenian epoch, people continued living in a hunter-gatherer lifestyle as practiced in the preceding Paleolithic, engaging in seasonal migrations (Clifford and Bahn, 2021) (Maier, 2015). Fishing was also a documented source of subsistence, and rope production was practiced, as evidenced by the fossilized rope of Lascaux (Leori-Gourhan, 1980) (Robitaille et al, 2024). Needles were used to make warm clothing, and one engraving of a person from the Grotte d Glaboiu shows a jacket-type garment on the human form (Clifford and Bahn, 2021) (Don's Maps, 2025a). Other technology of the era is the atlatl or spear thrower; often lavishly carved with detailed figures and designs; multi faced microlith bladed points, which were added to a base spearhead; and what is likely drop spindles, also often engraved (Audouze and Cattain, 2014) (Langley, 2015) (Garrod, 1956).

A variety of animals from the land and sea alike dotted the landscape of the Magdalenian, from aurochs and reindeer to cave lions and hyenas to whales and seals (Cueto et al, 2016) (Pétillon, 2013) (Maier, 2015) (MacCurdy, 1924). Furthermore, the Magdalenian is an era in which the relationship between Homo sapiens and members of the canis family began to resemble an enduring dynamic to this day-the dog was domesticated by this time . The oldest dog burial is also found from this era, in the sites of Oberkassel (Janssens et al, 2018). Many of these animals featured not only in the world around the Magdalenians, but in the art they made.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of the Magdalenian epoch is the parietal art they made-caves and rocks decorated with a variety of paintings, engravings, sculptings and flutings that have amazed modern viewers and inspired much research (Fuentes, 2013) (Nowell and Van Gelder, 2020). From major sites like Altamira and Lascaux, to the myriad of smaller ones, like

Montespan, La Marche, El Castillo, and Holh Fehls, cave art is a main characteristic of the era (Bradi et al, 1968) . These artworks decorated their world. Combined with their mobile art, these works comprise the closest thing to a first person perspective account of the Magdalenian we have left from their era, a glimpse into how they saw the world and themselves.

Another way in which the people of the Magdalenian can tell their tales in the absence of a written record is through their remains. There were a couple of practices for the preparation of the dead; we have found “bodies, bits and bones” from primary and secondary burials across the region (Orschiedt, 2018) (Orschiedt, 2013). Bioarchaeology and mortuary archaeology, with their respective foci on physical osteological remains and preparation and burial of the dead, are incredibly important to understand the Magdalenian (Buikstra, 2006) (Orschiedt, 2013). Given the amount of information about lifeways that can be gathered from these processes, both subfields can hold a wealth of knowledge about such a remote era.

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Methodology

Building on the foundation laid by previous works in relevant fields, this thesis employs a content analysis methodology to analyze previous studies of the Paleolithic and situate them with regards to ideas of humanitarianism and cooperation. While human rights in the form of written documentation would not be a feature of Paleolithic life (given that this is a pre literate era), the way in which people acted might align with the modern conception thereof, or prefigure it in the

human behavioral landscape. These are the examples this paper seeks to highlight, and emphasize the relevance of to modern day politics, in theory and in practice.

By looking for specific themes within the research, this paper will organize the results in a clear, detailed way. By seeking to emphasize studies that include not only archaeological remains, but emphasize the myriad of backgrounds which Paleolithic people likely had, a more holistic picture of the era, and the types of cooperation, coordination and inclusion that might have been practiced at the time can be better understood. Studies on gender and children in the Paleolithic have helped to paint a more representative picture of *all* the people who lived in this time. Highlighting the diverse identities people in the past had can showcase how the ideals of equality and inclusion that so often a company concepts of human rights can be anticipated and uncovered in an archaeological context . Illuminating the diversity people in the past had, not just the perspective archaeologists have sometimes projected onto them, is an important part of this field of science. It is particularly important to show the variation in people, and acknowledge that such differences existed at the time of the Magdalenian, as it has been virtually every society known within archaeology and anthropology. People have not always fit into well defined categories neatly and recognizing that this does not necessarily change, even when studying the deep past is important, and can help archaeologists to recognize the types of people who were included within communities in the past. Understanding the types of people this notion extended to can help further analyze where such collaboration might fall when compared to more modern ideas of humanitarianism.

Results

Through the reading of these articles, a few themes stood out with regards to the literature on the Magdalenian Paleolithic, and how it can be and has been understood through a more

humane perspective. The themes identified in the course of this research are: gender, children and interconnection.

A Note on Sources

Just as Jean M. Auel made the entry level to the study of prehistory more accessible for the public to explore through her historical fiction series “Earth’s Children”, so too has Don Hitchcock, amateur archaeologist and prehistorian, brought Paleolithic research into the vernacular (Kimmel, 2022) (Dons Maps, 2025). Initially seeking to compile information relating to the real world inspirations behind Auel’s writing, Hitchcock would further create a repository of information relating to the Paleolithic more broadly, often translating sources in the process (Don’s Maps, 2025). As this has led to his blog often being the only English language translation of many research papers on the Paleolithic, a few sources are cited from this website.

Gender

The idea of gender equality in the Paleolithic period is certainly one that challenges many preconceived notions (Berman, 1999) (Le Guin, 1986). Early anthropologists had a tendency to assume that rigid gender roles were a given in the past, but this was often a reflection of their own societal views than anything prehistoric (Fagan, 2018) (Trigger, 2023) . These notions haven’t gone unchallenged, and a view of the Paleolithic of having both gender equality and gender roles, with hunters and gatherers being sharply divided along gender lines but treated with equal standing in society, has become the most common academic view of the time (Clifford and Bahn, 2022). That being said, this still assumes a strong sense of gender roles and norms being present at the time, and is evidence to suggest that this may be the case (Clifford and Bahn, 2022). However, it is not set in stone-there is also evidence that gender roles might not have been as rigid as is often assumed of the time (Haas et al, 2020). Gender roles relate to the

ways in which systems developed and perpetuated by people impact those who live in them and the kinds of opportunities they can expect to see in their lifetimes as a result (Blackstone, 2003). This relates to ideas of community, cooperation and humanitarianism because it illustrates what in what capacity people in a given society will engage with those concepts and what roles they might play in a given scenario (Blackstone, 2003). For example, an ideal of women as caretakers might correspond to more involvement with caring for the young and elderly, the sick and injured and thus lead to women building community in that role as a result. An ideal of men as strong might lead to building community literally and metaphorically through physically demanding tasks and assisting those who are unable to carry out such activities. These two hypotheticals serve to show the ways in which gender can impact community and mutual aid, and thus by extension, prefiguration of humanitarian ideals. It is also worth noting that gender and gender roles are fluid, and can change even within a society and within an individual's life (Klembara, 2021), Furthermore, such variation might be recognized and even celebrated within a society, including those of the Paleolithic, and this ought not to go unacknowledged (Klembara, 2021).

One way archaeologists can interpret gender in the Paleolithic is through the gendered and gender neutral depictions of the human form in art, especially in groups. While the Venus figurines have been often studied, especially the earlier examples from the Aurignacian and Gravettian periods (McCoid and McDermott, 1996) (Nesbitt, 2011), they are not the only example of human representation in Paleolithic art (Fuentes, 2013) (Joris, 2021). In the Magdalenian period, the Venus figurines evolved to a more stylized form, abstracted in a way that breaks with older traditions (Bosinski, 1970) (Soffer et al, 2000). This change can be seen across the region, showing a cultural shift in artistic preferences, and potentially representing a

shift towards a new conceptualization of womanhood or female beauty standards, and perhaps an expanded view of community as a result (Soffer et al, 2000).

Beyond these changes and continuities in the Venus Figurines, the gender neutral depictions of the human form in the Magdalenian are of great interest. These can be found at the sites of Grotte De Enlène, Grotte de la Vauche, Grotte au Sorcier, Le Madeline, and L'ABri Monin (Fritz and Tosello, 2012) (Fuentes, 2013) (Dons Maps, 2024) (Dons Maps, 2024) (Don's Maps, 2025). In addition to being unique in their lack of observable primary or secondary sexual characteristics-something once assumed to be commonplace in the time (Dons Maps, 2024)-they defying older expectations for showing the human form at all (Don's Maps 2025). While it is true that people were rarely depicted in Paleolithic paintings (Clifford and Bahn, 2022), they were nonetheless depicted in engravings and statues, of both partial and mobile forms (Don's Maps, 2025). In the Magdalenian, a new trend emerges, showing more than one human form in the same piece, something never before found in Paleolithic art from the Broader Mediterranean Region (Clifford and Bahn, 2022) (Don's Maps, 2025). These group images often feature gender neutral forms (Don's Maps, 2025). In fact, many are composed of such figures (Don's Maps, 2025). Images like the "Initiation" and the "Hunting Scene" show vast gender neutral groups engaging in activities often believed to be associated with men. Nonetheless, the art itself does not suggest this. The figures are identifiable as humans, and are shown carrying tools, but there is nothing that gives them a gendered presence (Don's Maps, 2025) (Fritz and Tosello, 2013). The idea of people depicted as a community, and a community without visible gendered differences, paints a stark contrast to more stereotypical tropes associated with the Paleolithic (Berman, 1999) (Milam, 2020). That this image isn't a modern one-it's from the Magdalenian-makes it all the more striking. Does this show how they thought of themselves-a

unified team unburdened by gender roles? We may never know, but artistic depictions aren't created in a vacuum (Jaitly and Sahu, 2023). These artistic choices were made for a reason, one which might be to illustrate cooperation, and which, intentionally or not, does reject rigid gender roles in the process (Blackstone, 2003) (Jaitly and Sahu, 2023). By keeping in mind prefigurations of human rights, these artworks take on new significance, showing the birth of community in Magdalenian art and defying stereotypical gendered depictions in the process. It is also worth noting these artworks are art mobile (Don's Maps, 2025) (Fritz and Tosello, 2011). They might have been made to be shared, moved around, exchanged, and thus helped build the community they depict. While this is just one interpretation of why the medium was selected for these artworks, it would follow the ideas of exchange in some gift economies (Hyde, 1983) (Mauss, 1925) (Sahlins, 1972)

Evidence from experimental archaeology also gives insight into potential equalities. In a 2023 study, "Atlatal use Equalizes Male and Female Projectile Weapon Velocity" (Bebber et al, 2023) participants were able to get consistently similar results, regardless of any physical, gender or sexual differences when using atlatals to throw spears (Bebber et al, 2023). This raises interesting questions about what it means to make and use tools that can be utilized equally effectively by people from different backgrounds. The study doesn't prove that this effect was the intent behind the design, but showing how such tools can function in such a capacity is important to understanding the ways they might have been used, and who they might have been used by, especially when taking into account the ubiquity of the atlatal during the Magdalenian (Brio et al, 2011) (Creanza et al, 2013). They are one of the most commonly found hunting items associated with this time period (Garrod, 1956) and are found at sites across the region (Garrod, 1956). Given the lack of concrete evidence for bow hunting in Magdalenian Europe (Clifford and

Bahn, 2022), it is assumed that spear hunting was the most common means of procuring food, meaning the atlatl would be an important tool to increase the productivity of these hunts (Creanza et al, 2013) (Clifford and Bahn, 2022). With all this in mind, it is noteworthy that the proliferation of atlatls could reflect accessibility within Magdalenian design. This might very well be intentional, and shows the verisimilitude of the atlatl as a tool. Gender neutral crowds being shown in hunting scenes in Magdalenian era artwork gives some credence to the idea of hunting not being exclusively associated with men during the period, and perhaps a less defined series of gender roles within their society. With the increase in opportunity that accompanies less defined gender roles, people would have less restrictions on how they could have engaged in acts of cooperation and mutual aid, building community and laying groundwork for humanitarian-type action in the process.

Children

The presence of children in Magdalenian sites helps to paint a (more) complete picture of their lives and culture. Applying techniques like those discussed by Michelle Langley (Langley, 2017) (Langley, 2018) (Langley, 2020), archaeologists can be better prepared to find evidence of Magdalenian children, and thus of the broader community that the children were a part of. Children are particularly important to notions of community and mutual aid, because they require care from others to thrive (Hrdy, 2013). Many animal species give birth to juveniles who are able to quickly survive on their own (Hrdy, 2013) (Mukhopadhyay, 2025)-humans, however do not, and this fact necessitates efforts by the species to ensure that the relatively helpless young can survive (Hrdy, 2013) (Gibbon, 2008) (Rosenberg, 2021). Young people need assistance and guidance to be able to grow into adults who are able to function, thrive, and thus in turn raise the next generation (Hrdy, 2013). The reciprocal nature of this long-term relationship dynamic is

important to keep in mind as it holds potential to foster mutual aid and cooperation (Creanza et al, 2013) (Hrdy, 2013). Especially as methods for identifying the presence of children in the archaeological record have been improved and developed in recent years (Langley, 2020) (Nowell and Van Gelder, 2020) (Terashima, 2013), new discoveries and interpretations can help to shed light on the ways in which young people fit into the broader scheme of community and collaboration.

For example, in the 2020 article “Making Space to Play”, Langley details the ways in which children’s space can be understood in archaeological remains of structures and other human inhabited sites by following patterns established via cross-cultural analysis (Langley, 2020). She then applies this methodology to a Magdalenian encampment at Etoile, France, and identifies a place within the site which meets all of the aforementioned criteria (Langley, 2020). While acknowledging that this is one interpretation of the site, (Langley, 2020), Langley nonetheless highlights the plausibility of identifying a children’s space, one which would show that “the residues of this universal [play schema] behaviour are preserved in some way in at least some deep time contexts.” (Langley, 2020), showing significant comparability in Magdalenian and modern children (Langley, 2020). In another article published in 2020 "Entanglements:the Role of Finger Flutings in the Study of the Lived Lives of Upper Paleolithic Peoples", April Nowell and Leslie Van Gelder analyzed the finger flutings found in Magdalenian sites (Nowell and Van Gelder, 2020). One case in particular that is noteworthy is the example of the Rouffignac Cave, where there is evidence suggesting the creation of finger flutings by toddlers-flutings that are high enough off the ground to have been made by a group and not an individual (Nowell and Van Gelder, 2020) . The Gargas Cave also contains similar markings, with similar analytical results (Nowell and Van Gelder, 2020). This gives some insight into the

lives of Magdalenian children-they created works of art. Besides establishing a connection between the children and their art, this research also illustrates that the Magdalenian community that these children belonged to made the physical effort to assist them in the creation of artworks, ensuring they were included in at least this aspect of their society, and leaving behind a record of at least some instances of communal care and cooperation, without which these finger fluteings would be difficult to make. Given the evidence for potential child artisans making stone points, some Magdalenian projectile points were likely made by and for the youth (Langley 2013) (Langley, 2017). Other items, like stone sculptures, can be interpreted as children's toys, as Langley lays out in her research, citing examples of children's toys across time and space that bear many similarities to certain Paleolithic artifacts (Langley, 2013) (Langley, 2017) (Langley, 2020). This doesn't mean that all of these artifacts were toys or used by children, but it does mean it is a substantiated interpretation of the artifacts, and gives a new perspective to consider. Having some idea of childhood experiences in the Magdalenian helps to develop our understanding of the time period as a whole, and what kinds of community and mutual aid were present at the time.

Overall, this theme of children and their contributions illustrates another way in which the archaeology of the Magdalenian era highlights people and perspectives often overlooked in the broader conception of the Paleolithic, which has implications for ideas of humanitarian-type behavior in the time.

Interconnection

The Magdalenian was a time of interconnectness (Langley and Street, 2013) (Maier, 2013) (Schurch et al, 2013). Trade networks spanned from the Iberian coast up to the Pyrenees

mountains and through the Danube into Central Europe, definitely, with a possibility of connection into Eastern Europe and beyond (Eriksen, 2002) (Maier, 2013) (Petillon, 2013) (Stiner and Kuhn, 2013) (Schurch et al, 2015).

The theme of "interconnection " in the Paleolithic is incredibly important. The idea of violent interactions as defining the early stages of humanity is something prevalent in many depictions of the stone age (Le Guin, 1986). The idea of interconnected trade is less often associated with the period. Nonetheless, it is well substantiated from the archaeological record that such interactions did occur (Alvarez-Fernandez et al, 2021) (Lefebvre et al, 2021) (Maier, 2015) (Stiner and Kuhn, 2013). It is worth noting that trade does not inherently equate to peaceful or constructive relationships-a look at the history of trade and colonialism shows that in grim detail (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). But trade does show that people interacted, and that they built networks which spanned vast distances, something that is often underestimated when conceiving of the Paleolithic past. The aggregation sites of Lascaux and Altamira are the most important examples in terms of centralized internal efforts to connect via this network (Conkey et al, 1980). Through the archaeological record, researchers have been able to determine these two sites functioned as "aggregation sites" due to their evidence for large repeated seasonal occupations (Conkey et al, 1980). Altamira and Lascaux are two locals for which such activity can be reasonably supported through archaeological evidence-there may be more we are unaware of. But even with these recognizable two, the fact that any sites were repeatedly used for gatherings shows an intentionality to the connection between people at this point in time, and how that intentionality was a part of their relationship to these sites.

Additionally, the value placed on the trade items can be seen in their use by skilled craftsmen, and selection for grave goods (Audouze and Cattin, 2011) (Dobres, 2001) (Wisher,

2021). Oftentimes, local stone material would be used for novices, as identified through lithic reconstructions of debitage from tool creation sites (Audouze and Cattin, 2011). This far in the archaeological record, only skilled craftsmen used non-local stone, which shows an attitude of respect towards the material, and, directly or indirectly, the networks which made the procurement of such resources possible (Erickson, 2002) (Rigaud et al, 2022) (Schurch et al, 2015). Additionally, the use of items gained in trade (such as animal teeth and shells) in burials, shows that these items were used by individuals for a type of personalization in the decoration of their bodies, and that this was important enough to continue after death (Rigaud et al, 2022) (Wisher, 2019) (Wisher, 2021).

While this might not be surprising, it does stand in sharp contrast to the limited connection stereotypically presumed to exist in the Paleolithic. Historically trade has been used as a source of division and exploitation, as well as a source of commonality and mutually beneficial relations (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). It does, however, show an awareness of groups beyond one's own, a desire to communicate and to share goods with these external populations. This is especially clear in the use of painted caves as aggregation sites (Conkey et al, 1980), whose imagery still functions as the closest thing to a first person account of the time, and was almost certainly interpreted as a type of intelligible communication by the Magdalenians. The people who gathered at these aggregation sites can be seen as a precursor to the more modern concept of diplomacy (as efforts to physically bring people together from different geographic locations) (Splinger, 2013) thus implicitly supporting community in this era. It grounds the Magdalenians as living in a world where they knew they weren't alone, something that these disparate yet connected sites illustrate. By showing that community and connection have been important to people since at least the Magdalenian, this theme highlights the ways in

which people have maintained connections across geographic distance. While this evidence doesn't mean they were always peaceful, it does mean they were not isolationists, and shows that items obtained from these far off places were given value (Audouze and Cattin, 2011) (Wisher, 2019). This has implications for international relations as well-if such long distance interactions have been part of our past, and part of our survival, as far back as the Magdalenian, this type of cooperation and coordination is given a much longer history with deeper roots in survival adaptations than is often assumed in popular history and political theory alike (Spindler, 2013).

Conclusion

The pieces explored in this content analysis provide a counterpoint to the mainstream idea of a brutal and violent Paleolithic. While they are not the only research being conducted on this era, they represent a shift away from the perception of the "Stone Age" that has persisted from the first discoveries of artifacts of this time (Fagan, 2018) to even earlier ideas of the "state of nature" (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). Given the relevance of these ideas to political theory and the people who make decisions based on these theories, they maintain an important position in terms of the influence they hold over soft and hard power alike. To challenge these ideas presents a challenge to these types of power, and to the behaviors these assumptions of the Paleolithic are used to justify in the present. It is easy to accept injustice and cruelty if that is "how people always were." But archaeologically, we can tell that is not how people have always been. The Magdalenians might not be a fully Utopian society, but they were far more in line with modern conceptions of humanitarianism that they often believed to be, and more in line those ideals than many people are in the present. While there are limitations to this study, in particular the focus on a specific time and region, it nonetheless highlights a trend of research that is noteworthy. If

the Magdalenians acted in community-based and even proto-humanitarian type ways, why shouldn't modern people do the same?

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