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## The Systematics of *Homo*

Bernard Wood and Mark Collard (Review Article, 2 Apr., p. [65](#)) propose taking the habiline species ([1](#)) out of the genus *Homo* and placing them in a broadly defined australopithecine group. There are good reasons to do this. I made the same taxonomic assessment in the second edition of *Paleoanthropology* ([2](#)), where the chapter dealing with the habilines is entitled "Homo-like Australopithecines."

Moving the habilines to *Australopithecus* adds to the uncertainty and confusion of australopithecine phylogenetics, a group marked by an undue amount of parallel evolution ([3](#)). At the same time, it might be expected to clarify and simplify the systematics of *Homo*. But instead, the authors present a bewildering array of *Homo* species. This is not the majority interpretation of Pleistocene human evolution. Many paleoanthropologists continue to accept the traditional view of a geographically dispersed polytypic species, *Homo erectus*, evolving into a geographically dispersed polytypic species, *Homo sapiens*. Others take a phylogenetic approach, defining the unbroken human lineage as a single evolutionary species. Taxonomically, this means that there is but one species of *Homo*, *Homo sapiens* ([4](#)), which is the only interpretation that accounts for both species-wide evolutionary trends and the persistence of different regional features in what would otherwise have to be arbitrarily defined successive species. A network of genic exchanges, perhaps promoted by exogamy rules, provides a framework in which to promote geographic differentiation by isolation-by-distance, differentiation that also reflects adaptive variation and is tempered by historic differences, while advantageous features may spread throughout the species range ([5](#)). This multiregional interpretation is increasingly well supported by analyses of some nuclear DNA sequences, which reveal coalescence time estimates with ranges of uncertainty that extend to the beginning of the Pleistocene, if not earlier ([6](#), [7](#)), and provide evidence of population subdivision that greatly precedes any skeletal or archaeological evidence of modernity ([7](#)).

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### **Response**

**Wolpoff's** substantive criticism of our paper is that we recognized far more species of *Homo* than are compatible with the "majority interpretation of Pleistocene human evolution." In response, we should like to point out that we never actually claimed that our interpretation is the majority one. Rather, we made it clear (in the second column of page [65](#)) that there are two schools of thought regarding the number of species of *Homo*, and that we were deliberately opting for the more speciose of the taxonomies favored by these schools. We suggested that there were theoretical and practical reasons for recognizing multiple *Homo* species, and cited a paper by Tattersall in which those reasons are explained. In short, **Wolpoff** may disagree with our taxonomy and reject our reasons for choosing it, but he cannot say that we presented a misleading account of current views on specific diversity in *Homo*.

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