

Nicholas Thurmond

Who stands tallest?

Man, upright and tall,
Stands above his fellow apes.
Hands that write and hold,
A child once, for many years. Development,
So skills can grow, malleable mind can learn
And thrive. A cerebrum great, larger than an ape
Or any other. Tall and wise, but arrogant.
Are you unique? Perhaps,
but none should say above the rest.
You fight and cheat like animals,
And apes have thumbs as well.
Chimpanzees can walk as well,
Almost as tall to boot.
Ah, so tools you say,
Wrenches, rockets, guns and knives,
Machines to help and harm. In this
you stand above the rest. But
time will tell the tallest.

“Who stands tallest?” Is both a metaphor for evolutionary superiority and the literal advantage of height bipedalism provides. It references humans’ ability to walk upright and the notion that many humans hold that we are the superior species on planet Earth.

“Hands that write and hold” references humans’ unique dexterity and ability to use tools.

“A child once, for many years...” Humans have a uniquely long developmental period as well as a long lifespan. This allows for the development of complex skills and education.

The cerebrum is the part of the brain that is dedicated to complex thoughts and creativity. This biological development is supposedly what makes humans so much more intelligent than other animals.

“...but none should say above the rest.” Humans may be unique in many ways, but they tend to make the false assumption that their uniqueness makes them somehow “superior” to other animals. Which is true in a purely subjective sense, but there are many examples of animals outclassing humans. Hawks have better eyesight, cats better reflexes, gorillas are incredibly strong and are known to stretch car tires like rubber bands. The next few lines refer to instances of apes having qualities that humans like to think are exclusive to them.

“...machines to help and harm. In this you stand above the rest.” Perhaps humanity's most unique trait is the development of complex technology. Though humans are not subjectively superior, our ability to make up for our own weaknesses with technology is astounding. Humans have obtained such incredible control over their habitats that they place animals that would otherwise hunt them for food in *cages*. We have also countered predators of different kinds through antibiotics and vaccines. Humans, as it stands, have no natural predators besides the infrequent pandemic.

“But time will tell the tallest.” Humans, and specifically human civilization, are relatively new in the history of evolution on Earth. Though we mostly hold power over apes in our time, apes have survived millions of years of evolution, whilst hominids have only been around for the past 4.4 million years ago (by current estimates). And the only surviving species of hominid is humanity. The age of human civilization is estimated to be about 5,000 years ago. That is a BLINK in evolutionary history. Whether or not humans will be as successful as apes is something only time can determine. As global issues stand, extinction could be much closer than we think. It may not be man in the end who “stands tallest.”