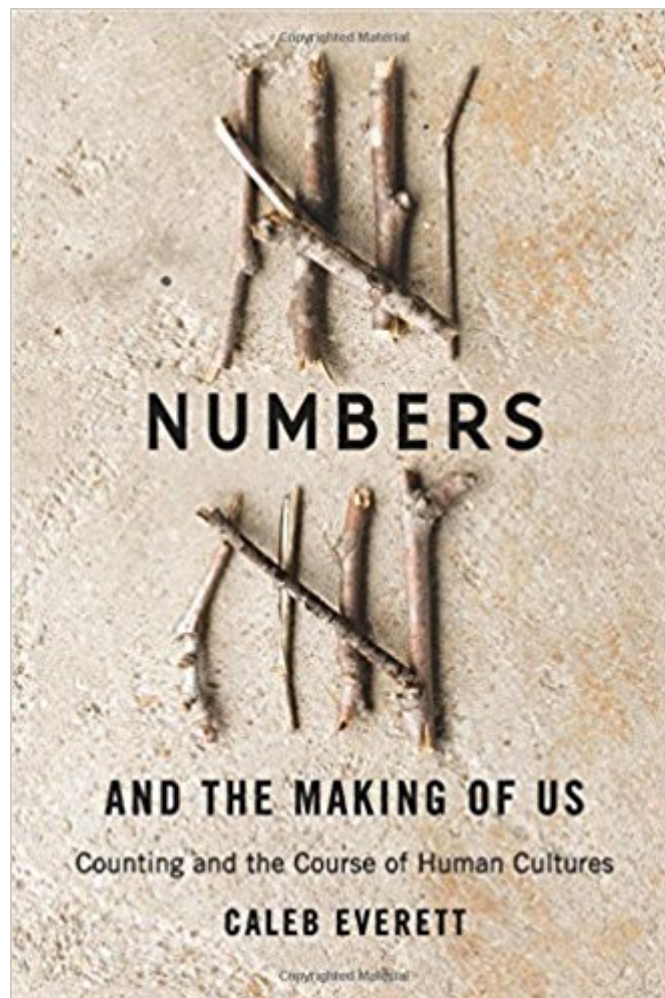




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# Numbers And The Making Of Us: Counting And The Course Of Human Cultures



## Synopsis

Carved into our past, woven into our present, numbers shape our perceptions of the world and of ourselves much more than we commonly think. *Numbers and the Making of Us* is a sweeping account of how numbers radically enhanced our species' cognitive capabilities and sparked a revolution in human culture. Caleb Everett brings new insights in psychology, anthropology, primatology, linguistics, and other disciplines to bear in explaining the myriad human behaviors and modes of thought numbers have made possible, from enabling us to conceptualize time in new ways to facilitating the development of writing, agriculture, and other advances of civilization. Number concepts are a human invention—a tool, much like the wheel, developed and refined over millennia. Numbers allow us to grasp quantities precisely, but they are not innate. Recent research confirms that most specific quantities are not perceived in the absence of a number system. In fact, without the use of numbers, we cannot precisely grasp quantities greater than three; our minds can only estimate beyond this surprisingly minuscule limit. Everett examines the various types of numbers that have developed in different societies, showing how most number systems derived from anatomical factors such as the number of fingers on each hand. He details fascinating work with indigenousians who demonstrate that, unlike language, numbers are not a universal human endowment. Yet without numbers, the world as we know it would not exist.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Caleb Everett provides a fascinating account of the development of human numeracy, from innate abilities to the complexities of agricultural and trading societies, all viewed against the general

background of human cultural evolution. He successfully draws together insights from linguistics, cognitive psychology, anthropology, and archaeology in a way that is accessible to the general reader as well as to specialists. He does not avoid controversy, making this a key contribution to a developing debate. (Bernard Comrie, University of California, Santa Barbara)

In his journey through the millennia of human evolution, from the forests of Asia to the deserts of Australia, ever in search of a better understanding of human diversity, Caleb Everett presents a breathtaking narrative of how the human species developed one of its most distinct cognitive and linguistic achievements: to count and to use concepts of quantity to expand and enrich a wide range of cultural activities. (Bernd Heine, University of Cologne)

Everett buttresses his argument with an impressive array of studies from different fields. It all adds up to a powerful and convincing case for Mr. Everett's main thesis: that numbers are neither natural nor innate to humans but are a creation of the human mind, a cognitive invention that has altered forever how we see and distinguish quantities. His argument that numbers played a crucial role in the development of agriculture and the complex societies it supported is equally persuasive. (Amir Alexander Wall Street Journal 2017-04-07)

A fascinating book. (James Ryerson New York Times Book Review 2017-05-07)

Fascinating. [This is bold, heady stuff] The breadth of research Everett covers is impressive, and allows him to develop a narrative that is both global and compelling. He is as much at home describing the niceties of experimental work in cognitive science as he is discussing arcane tribal rituals and the technical details of grammar. It is often poignant, and makes a virtue of the author's experiences with some of the indigenous peoples he describes, based on a childhood following his missionary parents—in particular his famous father, Daniel Everett—into the jungle. Numbers is eye-opening, even eye-popping. And it makes a powerful case for language, as a cultural invention, being central to the making of us. (Vyvyan Evans New Scientist 2017-05-03)

Caleb Everett is an Andrew Carnegie Fellow and Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Miami.

The discourse on Numbers and the Making of us has as much to do with our current worship of the ultimate Number--money, and thereafter religion, as it does with our past development into clans, tribes, societies and civilizations. Excellent read.

Interesting concepts and global surveys of cultures and history. But the author beat his points to death with excessive repetition and self-reference, so it read (unnecessarily so) like a thesis paper.

Very interesting read about the history of numbers. Had no idea how complex it all was. But don't let the title scare you. It was a very enjoyable book regardless of your background.

Our mathematics instructor is loving this book, and says it will give him new and exciting things to speak of during lectures.

This book is outstanding in many ways. It is a first-class history of numbers in human societies. It is an outstanding anthropological study of the use of numbers. It is a cognitive science exploration of numerical cognition. Everett argues that numbers are not innate but rather an important human discovery that transforms the way we think about the world. He looks at anumerate societies, like the Pirahas, and societies with complex number systems, such as is found in Cambodia where, arguably, the graphic representation and discovery of zero first occurred. He discusses an 11,000 year old antler found in the ocean off of Florida that may be the oldest calendar ever found. A rare book by a brilliant new scholar, an inaugural Andrew Carnegie Fellow.

I guarantee it. This book will make you think about numbers in a whole new way. Appealing to both a general and an academic audience, *Numbers and the Making of Us* breaches the intellectual boundaries that hamper interdisciplinary exchanges. Anthropology. The humanities and language arts. Mathematics. Biology. Teachers and professors at the high school and college level could have great fun using Everett's insights to expose their students to the exciting ways in which language, culture, biology, and numbers have worked together to shape the species closest to most of their hearts. One of the many things that makes the book so much fun is its ability to open our eyes to the basis of counting systems that literally are as plain as the hand in front of our face. At least they are once Everett gets us to stop and think about it. And he is such a skilled and entertaining writer that he makes it fun to stop and think. His expertise as a linguist gives him the authority to contrast and compare the ways in which numbers function in a variety of cultural and linguistic traditions. Put this book in any instructor's hand. Provide the classroom, and I guarantee that students will look up from their cell phones and engage in lively debate. I want to be there when it happens. Now that I've read the book, I'm dying to discuss it with others. This is a book that invites one to think and play with questions that have not yet been fully answered. And in a world too often defined by Google searches, what could be more fun than that?

Just what I had in mind. Arrived very quickly. I look forward to getting to be proficient with this exciting and (to me) new product.

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