Best of Last Week—Lingering effects of Neanderthal DNA, teaching robots to clean, a cure for high blood pressure

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Credit: Wu et al

It was an interesting week for the biological sciences, as a team of botanists at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences reported that wine grapes have a high deleterious genetic burden. Using machine learning, they found evidence for a single domestication event of a grapevine going back more than 2,000 years. Also, a team with members from across the U.S. found <u>lingering effects of Neanderthal DNA in</u> <u>modern humans</u>, such as impacts on the immune and metabolic systems, and also development. And a team at Harvard University's Department of Earth & Planetary Sciences and the Origins of Life Initiative developed two models to create <u>a synthetic species without biochemistry</u> while operating according to Darwinian evolutionary principles.

In technology news, a team of AI researchers at TU Delft and the Swiss technical university EPFL <u>used ChatGPT to design a useful robot</u> capable of harvesting tomatoes. And a team of chemical engineers at Umeå University developed a novel electrolysis method that may soon lead to the production of cheap hydrogen—a method that still uses hydrogen and water. A combined team of roboticists from Princeton University and Stanford University found a way to teach robots to tidy up a living space based on user preferences. And a team with members from across China demonstrated a modular, continuous robot based on origami-folded tubes.

In other news, a team of medical scientists at the University of Queensland found that many viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 can, at times, instigate activity in the brain, leading to <u>cells fusing together</u>, which can cause chronic neurological problems. Also, a team of anthropologists, evolutionists and biological scientists from University College London explored <u>the evolutionary origins and advantages of</u> <u>masturbation</u> among members of the animal kingdom and found that in many cases, it serves a useful purpose. And finally, an international team of medical scientists found <u>the cause of a common type of high blood</u> <u>pressure</u>, and also a cure. They found it originated in a tiny benign nodule.

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