

PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY THE CORE



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TO OUR FAMILIES

PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY The Core

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PREFACE

This volume is titled *Physical Anthropology: The Core*. What does this mean? In our larger text, *Physical Anthropology*, now in its fifth edition, we attempt to cover the major topics that are encompassed in the discipline of physical anthropology. This is a difficult job, for physical anthropology includes a tremendous breadth of subject matter.

In 1992 the members of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists were surveyed as to their teaching and research specializations.¹ The list of significant interests is formidable and includes anatomy, cytogenetics, demography, dermatoglyphics, epidemiology, evolutionary theory, forensic anthropology, growth and development, health and nutrition, human adaptation, human genetics, human variation, kinesiology, molecular evolution, molecular genetics, osteology, paleoanthropology, paleopathology, population genetics, population biology, primate anatomy, primate behavior, primate ecology, primate evolution, sociobiology, and many others.

The principal challenge is, of course, to define those topics that make up the "core" of physical anthropology, the term "core" referring to the nucleus, the crux, the essence, the heart, of physical anthropology. We have decided to be pragmatic about the problem and select our topics in answer to the question: What are the primary topics that are most often taught in an introductory physical anthropology course, especially a course that is being offered as part of a liberal arts education? The results of such an evaluation can be seen by reading the Table of Contents.

Like our larger text, this core version continues to emphasize three themes. First, anthropology is a holistic discipline; physical anthropology cannot be totally separated from the general discipline of anthropology. Second, human beings, the focus of physical anthropology, are an integral part of nature. Our survival, like that of other living organisms, depends upon maintaining a balance with supporting environments. Third, since humans depend on learned behavior, our maintenance of a balance with nature can be strengthened by an understanding of our evolutionary past as well as the development of insights into the possible consequences of our behavior on our future evolution.

Physical Anthropology: The Core is significantly shorter than a full-length text. This makes the book useful in courses shorter than the traditional semester-long course and useful in courses that introduce more than one field of anthropology, such as physical anthropology/archaeology, where two short texts can be used. We also hope that the shorter length and lower price makes the book more reasonable to use with study guides, readers, workbooks, and so forth.

This text also incorporates a number of pedagogical devices that have emerged from over a combined 65 years of teaching and 40 years of writing texts. Each chapter is divided by headings into manageable segments and the three levels of headings can assist the student in outlining the material. A summary is found at the end of each major heading. All technical terms are bolded when they are first used, and their definitions can be found in the Glossary. Suggested Readings and Study Questions are found at the end of each chapter. The Appendix provides an illustrated introduction to skeletal

¹C. W. Wienker and K. A. Bennett, "Trends and Developments in Physical Anthropology, 1990-91," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 87 (1992), 383-393.

anatomy which can be used in association with several different chapters.

Based upon our teaching experience with lower division general education students we have tried to avoid complex technical explanations and to write in a clear, concise, and jargon-free manner at a level appropriate for this college population. The large number of figures and tables are designed to aid in explaining important concepts. Finally, the information contained in boxes are designed to provide students with interesting stories, information, and quotations to further expand on the topics discussed in the chapter.

This text is also accompanied by two supplements, one for the instructor and one for the student. The *Instructor's Manual Test File* provides the instructor with over 1000 exam questions, also available is exam-writing software, laboratory exercises, lists of films, videos, software, along with suppliers, plus sources of sup-

plies and equipment. For the student we have written a *Study Guide* to assist in the development of a mastery of the text material.

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Philip L. Stein
Bruce M. Rowe

CONTENTS

IN BRIEF

Preface	xiii
PROLOGUE	1
CHAPTER 1	
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION	5
CHAPTER 2	
HUMAN GENETICS	23
CHAPTER 3	
THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES	53
CHAPTER 4	
HUMAN ADAPTATIONS AND VARIATION	76
CHAPTER 5	
PEOPLE'S PLACE IN NATURE	108
CHAPTER 6	
COMPARATIVE STUDIES: ANATOMY AND GENETICS	141
CHAPTER 7	
THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF PRIMATES	169
CHAPTER 8	
THE RECORD OF THE PAST	198
CHAPTER 9	
THE EARLY PRIMATE FOSSIL RECORD	216
CHAPTER 10	
<i>AUSTRALOPITHECUS</i>	236
CHAPTER 11	
THE GENUS <i>HOMO</i>	260
CHAPTER 12	
<i>HOMO SAPIENS SAPIENS</i>	294
EPILOGUE	314
APPENDIX	
AN INTRODUCTION TO SKELETAL ANATOMY	321
Glossary	329
Credits	339
Index	343

CONTENTS

Preface xiii

PROLOGUE 1

- The Nature of Humankind 1
 - Culture: A Central Theme of Anthropology 2
 - To What Degree Is Human Behavior Biologically Determined? 3

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION 5

- Early Views on the Essence of Humans, Nature, and Time 5
 - Questioning the Old Ideas 5
 - Early Evolutionary Ideas 7
 - What Is the Age of the Earth? 8
 - Humans before Adam and Eve? 10
 - How Do Populations Change over Time? 10
 - Evolutionary Theory after Darwin 11
 - Summary 13
- The Nature of Science 13
 - The Many Aspects of Science 15
 - Scientific Thinking 15
 - Science as a Creative Process 16
 - Applying Scientific Thinking to Anthropological Problems 16
 - Science and Religion 16
 - Evolution versus Creationism 18
 - Summary 19
- What Is Anthropology? 20
 - The Branches of Anthropology 20
 - Physical Anthropology 20
 - Conclusion 22
- Study Questions 22
- Suggested Readings 22

*Box 1-1 A Lesson from History: Science, Religion, and Political
Intrigue—The Trial of Galileo 6*

Box 1-2 A Lesson from History: Social Darwinism 14

CHAPTER 2

HUMAN GENETICS 23

- The Study of Human Genetics 23
 - What Is a Trait? 23
 - The Effects of the Environment upon the Individual 24
 - Mendelian Genetics 24
 - Principle of Segregation 25

Principle of Independent Assortment	26
Inherited Medical Abnormalities	27
Deviations from the Mendelian Principles	30
Summary	30
The Genetics of the Cell	31
The Chromosomes	31
Cell Division	32
Chromosomal Abnormalities	34
Reexamining Mendelian Genetics	38
Linkage	39
Sex Linkage	40
Summary	41
The Molecular Basis of Heredity	41
Molecules of Life	41
The Nucleic Acids	43
The Genetic Code	44
Mitochondrial DNA	44
Protein Synthesis	45
Genetic Abnormalities as Mistakes in Proteins	47
What Is a Gene?	49
Blood-Type Systems	49
Summary	51
Study Questions	51
Suggested Readings	52
<i>Box 2-1 Did You Know? The Genetic Counselor</i>	30
<i>Box 2-2 A Lesson from History: Hemophilia and History</i>	42
<i>Box 2-3 A Contemporary Issue: Gene Therapy</i>	50
CHAPTER 3	
THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES	53
The Genetics of Populations	53
Genetic Equilibrium	54
Mutations	54
Effects of Small Population Size	55
Gene Flow	58
Nonrandom Mating	58
Differential Fertility Rates	60
Summary	60
Natural Selection	61
Variability of Populations	61
Environment, Habitat, and Niche	61
How Natural Selection Works	61
An Example of Natural Selection in a Nonhuman Population	62
Selection against Simple Dominant and Recessive Alleles	64
Natural Selection and the ABO Blood Types	64
Natural Selection and Sickle-Cell Anemia	65
Natural Selection and Social Behavior	67
Summary	68
The Origin of Species	68
The Evolution of Species	68
The Role of Geographical Isolation in the Origin of New Species	69

The Role of Temporal Isolation in the Origin of New Species	69
Reproductive Isolating Mechanisms	70
Competition	71
Preadaptation	71
Specialization	71
The Tempo of Evolutionary Change	72
Adaptive Radiation	72
Extinction	74
Summary	74
Study Questions	75
Suggested Readings	75
<i>Box 3-1 Did You Know? Genetics and the Amish</i>	58
<i>Box 3-2 In Their Own Words: Charles Darwin</i>	62
<i>Box 3-3 Did You Know? Kin Selection</i>	67

CHAPTER 4

HUMAN ADAPTATIONS AND VARIATION	76
The Nature of Human Growth and Development	76
The Growth Process	76
The Growth of Bones	77
Puberty	79
The Adult Skeleton	81
Control of Growth and Development	82
The Secular Trend in Growth and Development	84
Summary	86
Human Adaptability: Adjustments and Adaptations	86
Behavioral Adjustments	86
Acclimatory Adjustments	87
Adaptation	88
Migration and Adaptation	90
Summary	91
The Distribution of Variability	92
Some Generalizations about Mammalian Variation	92
Clinical and Discontinuous Distributions	92
Distribution of Blood Types	93
Summary	95
The Classification of Human Groups	95
Current Anthropological Classifications of Human Variation	96
Geographical Races	96
The Genetic Relationships among Human Races	97
The Nature of Human Variation and Its Classification	103
The Concept of Human Races	105
Summary	107
Study Questions	107
Suggested Readings	107
<i>Box 4-1 A Contemporary Issue in Physical Anthropology: Gender, Sex, and Athletics</i>	83
<i>Box 4-2 Did You Know? Malnutrition</i>	85
<i>Box 4-3 In Their Own Words: Alice Brues</i>	106

CHAPTER 5

PEOPLE'S PLACE IN NATURE 108

Ordering the Living World 108

Carolus Linnaeus's Classification 108

The Basis of Modern Taxonomy 109

Determining Evolutionary Relationships 110

The Animal Kingdom 112

The Chordates 113

The Mammals 115

Classification of the Mammals 116

Summary 117

The Primate Order 117

Life in the Trees 118

The Senses 118

Primate Growth and Development 120

Summary 121

The Living Primates 121

The Prosimians 121

The Tarsiers 123

The Monkeys 125

The New World Monkeys 126

The Old World Monkeys 128

The Apes 131

The Hominids 135

Summary 136

Study Questions 140

Suggested Readings 140

Box 5-1 Did You Know? The Feet of Whales 111

Box 5-2 Did You Know? New Discoveries 129

Box 5-3 Did You Know? The Fate of Primates in the Modern World 135

CHAPTER 6

COMPARATIVE STUDIES: ANATOMY AND GENETICS 141

Comparative Anatomy of Locomotion and Manipulation 141

Locomotor Patterns among Primates 141

Comparative Anatomy of Primate Locomotion 143

The Anatomy of Erect Bipedalism 146

Comparative Anatomy of the Hand 147

Summary 148

Comparative Anatomy of the Skull 150

Position of the Head on the Spine 150

The Sense Organs 151

The Brain Case and the Brain 152

Primate Dentition 155

The Jaw 159

Summary 159

The Comparison of Genetic Material 160

The Comparative Study of Chromosomes 160

The Study of Protein Structure 163

Human-Ape Relationships 164

The Molecular Clock 166

Summary 167

Study Questions	168
Suggested Readings	168
<i>Box 6-1 Did You Know? Humans as Erect Bipedes</i>	149
<i>Box 6-2 In Their Own Words: Leslie Aiello and Christopher Dean</i>	148
<i>Box 6-3 Did You Know? Can Ancient Life Be Replicated?</i>	166

CHAPTER 7

THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF PRIMATES 169

Primate Social Behavior	169
Social Behavior of the Savanna Baboon	170
Social Behavior of the Gelada	174
Social Behavior of the Chimpanzee	176
Social Behavior of the Bonobo	178
Summary	179
Human Behavior in Perspective	179
The Human Band	179
Male-Female Relations	180
Humans, the Tool-Users and Tool-Makers	181
Humans as Hunters	182
Ideas on the Origins of Hominid Society	184
Summary	188
Communication	188
Methods of Primate Communication	189
Language	189
Symbolic Behavior in Chimpanzees	190
Skepticism over Ape-Language Studies	192
Summary	192
Are Humans Unique?	193
Intelligence in Nonhuman Primates	194
Protoculture	195
Summary	196
Study Questions	197
Suggested Readings	197
<i>Box 7-1 In Their Own Words: Robert A. Hinde</i>	170
<i>Box 7-2 In Their Own Words: Jane van Lawick-Goodall</i>	182
<i>Box 7-3 Did You Know? Body Shape and Sexual Arousal</i>	187
<i>Box 7-4 An Issue in Physical Anthropology: The Question of the Innateness and Uniqueness of Language</i>	193

CHAPTER 8

THE RECORD OF THE PAST	198
Fossils and Their Interpretation	198
Biases in the Fossil Record	199
Differential Preservation	202
What Can Fossils Tell Us?	202
Taxonomy and the Fossil Record	203
Summary	205
Measuring Time	206
Stratigraphy	206
Fluorine and Nitrogen Dating	208
Chronometric Dating Techniques	208
Radiometric Dating Techniques	209
The Geological Time Scale	212

Plate Tectonics	213
Summary	215
Study Questions	215
Suggested Readings	215
<i>Box 8-1 Did You Know? Intraspecific Variability</i>	201
<i>Box 8-2 In Their Own Words: Pat Shipman</i>	204
<i>Box 8-3 Did You Know? What Is a Billion?</i>	206
<i>Box 8-4 A Lesson from History: The Piltdown Skull</i>	209

CHAPTER 9

THE EARLY PRIMATE FOSSIL RECORD	216
Evolution of the Early Primates	216
The Earliest Primates	216
The Eocene Primates	217
The Evolution of Modern Prosimians and Tarsiers	219
Summary	221
Evolution of the Anthroidea	221
The Origins of the Anthroidea	221
Oligocene Anthropoids of the Fayum	222
The Evolution of the New World Monkeys	225
The Evolution of the Old World Monkeys	226
Summary	226
Evolution of the Hominoidea	227
Continents in Collision	227
The Fossil Hominoids	229
The Dryomorphs	229
The Ramamorphs	231
The Pliomorphs	232
The Origins of the Modern Hominoids	234
Summary	234
Study Questions	235
Suggested Readings	235
<i>Box 9-1 An Issue in Physical Anthropology: Purgatorius—Falling from Primate Grace</i>	218
<i>Box 9-2 Did You Know? Dentition and Diet</i>	220
<i>Box 9-3 Did You Know? What Gigantopithecus Had for Dinner</i>	233

CHAPTER 10

AUSTRALOPITHECUS	236
The Discoveries of <i>Australopithecus</i>	236
The South African <i>Australopithecines</i>	237
The East African <i>Australopithecines</i>	240
Summary	247
The <i>Australopithecines</i> : Interpretations of the Evidence	249
The <i>Australopithecine</i> Brain	249
<i>Australopithecine</i> Dentition	250
The <i>Australopithecine</i> Skull	251
The Postcranial Skeleton	254
Erect Bipedalism and the Brain	255
<i>Australopithecine</i> Tool Use	257
<i>Australopithecus</i> and the Species Problem	257
Summary	258
Study Questions	259

Suggested Readings 259

Box 10–1 *Did You Know? Naming Fossils* 239

Box 10–2 *In Their Own Words: Donald C. Johanson and
Maitland A. Edey* 246

Box 10–3 *Did You Know? Fossil “Rock”* 246

CHAPTER 11**THE GENUS *HOMO*** 260The Early *Homo* Fossil Record 260

Homo habilis 260

The Place of *H. habilis* in Hominid Evolution 261

Homo erectus 263

The Discoveries of *Homo erectus* 264

The Morphology of *Homo erectus* 268

New Dates and New Debates 271

Summary 271

Archaic *Homo Sapiens* 272

The Archaic *H. sapiens* from Africa 272

The Archaic *H. sapiens* from Asia and Europe 273

The Neandertals 274

Other Neandertals 279

Shanidar I and Paleopathology 279

Summary 279

The Culture of *Homo* 280

Interpreting the Archaeological Evidence 281

The Culture of Early *Homo* 281

The Culture of *Homo erectus* 284

Hunting, Scavenging, and Gathering 287

The Brain and Language in Prehistoric Populations 287

The Culture of the Neandertals 289

How Neandertals Behaved 290

Summary 291

Study Questions 292

Suggested Readings 292

Box 11–1 *In Their Own Words: Milford H. Wolpoff and A. Nkini* 264

Box 11–2 *A Lesson from History: The Disappearance of the
Zhoukoudian Fossils* 266

Box 11–3 *A Lesson from History: La Chapelle-aux-Saints* 275

CHAPTER 12***HOMO SAPIENS SAPIENS*** 294*Homo sapiens sapiens* 294

The Distribution of Early Modern *Homo sapiens* 294

The Anatomy of *H. sapiens sapiens* 296

Ideas on the Origins of Modern *Homo sapiens* 297

The Migrations of *H. sapiens sapiens* to Australia and the New
World 299

Summary 301

The Culture of *Homo sapiens* 302

The Culture of *Homo sapiens sapiens* 302

Human Relationship to the Environment 302

Art of the Upper Paleolithic 304

The Upper Paleolithic Cultures 305

Archaeology of the New World	306
Summary	307
Post-Pleistocene <i>Homo sapiens</i>	308
The Mesolithic	308
The Origins of Farming	309
The Neolithic	310
Civilization	310
Summary	311
Study Questions	312
Suggested Readings	312
<i>Box 12-1 In Their Own Words: Paul Mellars and Chris Stringer</i>	299
<i>Box 12-2 Did You Know? Teeth and Tongues: Native American Ancestry</i>	300
<i>Box 12-3 Did You Know? Lascaux</i>	306
EPILOGUE	314
Modern Issues in Ecology	314
Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Warfare	314
The Depletion of the Ozone Layer	314
Acid Rain	315
The Reduction of Biological Diversity	316
What Can We Say about the Future?	316
The Control of Population	316
Environmental Disasters	317
Learning from Our Mistakes	318
The Application of Anthropological Knowledge	318
Anthropology and You—A Personal Note to the Student	319
Suggested Readings	320
APPENDIX	321
AN INTRODUCTION TO SKELETAL ANATOMY	321
Skeletal Anatomy of Primates	321
The Postcranial Skeleton	321
The Skull	323
Suggested Readings	324
Glossary	329
Credits	339
Index	343

PROLOGUE

What is it to be human? This question has been satisfactorily answered for some, has puzzled others, and has tormented many. Plato defined people as “bipeds¹ without feathers,” an amusing image but also an early attempt at classifying people as animals. Mark Twain observed, “Man is the only animal that blushes—or needs to.” He recognized the human social consciousness, the ability to be embarrassed. An anonymous author wrote, “Man is the only animal that eats when he is not hungry, drinks when he is not thirsty, and makes love at all seasons.”

Physical anthropology is concerned with several fundamental questions, including: What is it to be human, what is the relationship of humans to the rest of the animal kingdom, how did humans evolve, and what is the nature of humankind? The attempt to solve these puzzles throws light on the even more intriguing question: What am I?

THE NATURE OF HUMANKIND

The children of the San society of South Africa are completely dependent upon their families for food. While they are very young, their mothers' milk is their primary source of nourishment. Later their fathers, uncles, and brothers will supply them with meat; their mothers, aunts, and sisters will supply them with wild plant foods. Not until the children are 14, perhaps much older, will they contribute to the group's subsistence.

Until they marry, children live in the camps of their parents, learning the rules by which they must live. In order to survive, they must listen well to the elders, who have experienced nature with its rewards and punishments.

The children grow and develop. They learn that it is the responsibility of the males to provide the camp with meat, and young boys develop hunting skill by playing games as well as by watching and listening to their fathers and uncles. The boys learn that it will be their

responsibility as adults to protect their groups from the wrongdoings of other groups. The children observe that females are the gatherers. Collecting roots, nuts, berries, stems, and leaves for the day's meal, the women supply the camp with the majority of its food.

Human life depends on technology. A San individual stripped of clothes, shelter, tools, and weapons has no chance in his or her world; it is a place where biological equipment alone is not sufficient for survival. Although humans do have inborn physical and behavioral adaptations, humans substitute spears for physical power, fire for fur; they use technological achievements to adjust to different environmental conditions.

Nevertheless, survival is only a part-time task. Humans take time to ponder the nature of the universe or their own nature. They paint pictures and dedicate them to their sacred spir-

¹A biped is an animal that walks upright on two legs.

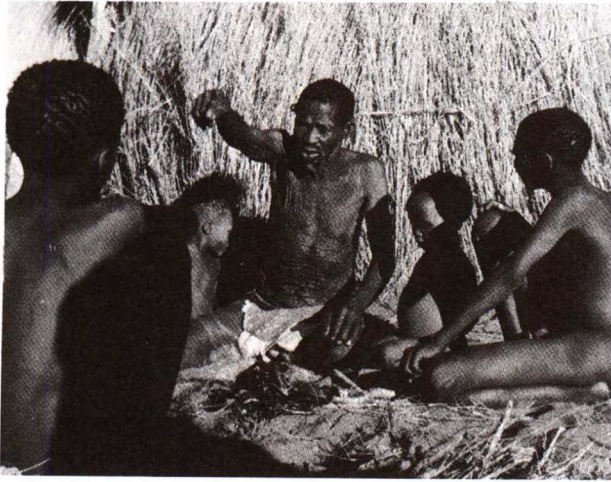


FIGURE P-1 *San family.* Human survival depends on the prolonged protection and tutelage of offspring. Family ties can last a lifetime.

its. Thoughts of awe, understanding, fear, and contentment occupy their minds, and their ideas are transmittable. Thoughts, through language, enter the minds of others, and there they incubate to new heights of development.

The lives of nonhuman animals are controlled primarily by genes. Nevertheless, many animals have been extremely successful in their adaptations to a variety of habitats. Humans, on the other hand, are primarily dependent on learned behavior. In fact, the emergence of the human species and its continuance are dependent upon what is called **culture**.

Culture: A Central Theme of Anthropology

Culture is one of those words that everyone uses but almost everyone uses differently. A person may say, "Those people belong to the Art Society; they certainly are cultured." To the anthropologist there is one thing culture is not, and that is a level of sophistication or formal education. Culture is not something that one person has and another does not.

Anthropologists have defined culture in hundreds of ways. Fortunately, most definitions have points in common, and these points are included in our definition. Culture is learned,

nonrandom, systematic behavior and knowledge that is transmitted from person to person and from generation to generation. Culture changes through time and is a main contributor to human adaptability.

Culture is learned; it is not biologically determined, coded by the hereditary material. When termites emerge from their pupae, workers, soldiers, and queens crawl away to their respective predetermined tasks. They are innately equipped to brave the hazards of their environment. Humans do not function in this manner. A baby abandoned at birth has *no* chance of surviving by itself. In fact, most 6- or 7-year-olds would probably perish if left to their own resources. Survival strategies, and other behaviors and thoughts, are learned from people such as parents, other relatives, teachers, peers, and friends.

Culture is patterned in two ways. First, culture is nonrandom behavior and knowledge; that is, specific actions or thoughts are usually the same in similar situations. For example, in Western societies when two people meet, they usually shake hands. A specific behavior pattern, such as shaking hands, in a particular situation, such as two people meeting, is called a **norm**. A norm is the most frequent behavior that the members of a group will show in a given situation.

Second, culture is patterned in the sense that it is systematic; that is, one aspect of behavior or thought is related to all others. Taken together, they form a **system**. A system is a collection of parts that are interrelated so that a change in any one part brings about specifiable changes in the others. In eastern Europe, for example, the change from a communistic government to a more democratic one has had repercussions on educational, economic, moral, and social elements of society. In addition, a group's cultural traditions and the way in which its members relate to each other reflect certain underlying principles about the basic characteristics of people and nature.

Culture is transmittable; it spreads. Information is learned, stored in the cortex of the brain, interpreted, and then transmitted to other people. Knowledge builds on information from past generations. In societies with writing, each generation can continue to influence future generations indefinitely. A particular culture is the

result, therefore, of its history as well as its present state. Although there is now evidence that certain nonhuman animals also possess some ability to pass on acquired behavior, in none of these has this ability evolved to the same degree as in humans.

Over time nonhuman animals usually adapt to changing environments through changes in their physical form. Humans usually adjust to a change in environment with changes in behavior or knowledge (including beliefs, values, and customs).

Of course, physical changes have been important in human evolution, and they account for why we no longer look like our distant ancestors. The size and proportions of the human body and the size and structure of the brain have changed over time. These changes have led to the freeing of the arms and hands from locomotor functions and the evolution of a brain capable of mental functioning at a higher level than other animals.

Such changes allow for today's cultural potential. Humans can sometimes substitute cultural innovation for biological alteration. If you were to transplant a group of temperate-zone nonhuman animals to an arctic environment, they might all die. On the other hand, those who were somewhat different from the average, possibly by having more fur, might survive. If you put people into the same environment, however, they might make systematic changes in their culture that lead to appropriate technological and social innovations. They might build an igloo, start a fire, or even kill a polar bear to make a coat.

The human biological potential for culture allows people to adjust to environments through culture as well as biology. This is one reason why the human species is so widely dispersed. Physical features do not need to change in order for humans to move into a new environment. Instead, human biological potentials allow for behavioral flexibility that results in an enormous range of adjustments.

To What Degree Is Human Behavior Biologically Determined?

There is no debate that the human *potential* for learned behavior is inherited. Walt Disney

aside, you cannot teach a mouse to be a person: a mouse possesses a mouse nature, a cat has a cat nature, and a cow has a cow nature. Likewise, humans possess a biologically determined human nature. This does not mean that humans, mice, cats, and cows are unrelated; there is biological continuity between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom. Through the process of evolution, we share an ancestry with all living things.

Most scientists would agree with the above statements. However, there is still a great deal of debate over the inheritance of specific behaviors. Researchers question why all societies have some system of marriage, prohibit sexual relationships between certain categories of individuals (mother and son, for instance), divide labor on the basis of age and sex, decorate their faces, and so on. Is it because of biological destiny? Or is biology not involved? On an even more specific level, do people differ from each other in terms of aggression, shyness, sexual preference, group loyalty, manic-depressive behavior, altruism, and other individual traits because of inheritance?

Some investigators, called **sociobiologists**, see a biological basis for both human universals and many individual behaviors. They hypothesize that behaviors, like physical characteristics, evolve through natural selection, a process that increases the proportion of individuals with beneficial adaptations.

Many anthropologists are not convinced of a biological basis either for behaviors found in all cultures or for more specific types of behavior. They say that human universals can be explained by practical, social, and economic forces. For instance, mother-son incest would be socially disruptive to the family unit, irrespective of the society in which it occurred. This type of mother-son relationship would displace the role of the husband-father.

Billy cannot sit still in class like Maria does. Many anthropologists and sociologists attribute individual differences in personality mainly to differences in agents of socialization and environment. They would believe that the differences in Billy's and Maria's behavior are simply the result of having different parents, friends, teachers, and other social factors such as birth order or exposure to television, as well as the socioeconomic environment.