



# The Huma Way

**READINGS IN ANTHROPOLOGY**

**H. Russell Bernard**

THE  
HUMAN  
WAY

Readings in Anthropology

H. RUSSELL BERNARD

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# PREFACE

This book was compiled for undergraduate students and their instructors to read and enjoy. It grows out of my experience in teaching the introductory anthropology course steadily for nine years. The readings were selected to meet two criteria simultaneously: 1) they had to be innately interesting to the general reader; and 2) they had to be of real anthropological value within the traditional concerns of the discipline. The following data led me to select these criteria.

1. About 300 Ph.D.s were awarded in anthropology in 1971–1972. It takes an average of seven years beyond the B.A. to get a doctorate in anthropology, so the 1972 crop began sprouting between 1965 and 1966. They took their introductory course between 1962 and 1966. During that time at least 75,000 people a year took introductory anthropology. Because my classes hold 125 students each, on average I have to teach about two semesters before my courses become the foothold to a professional degree for one student. Bad odds, but one does have an obligation to provide the majors in the department with a solid foothold.

2. In 1962–1963 there were 746 bachelor's degrees awarded in anthropology. In 1966 there were 1,503. By 1973 there were over 5,000. At that rate, even if I put my energies into training the upper division majors, I'd still only be sending one out of seventeen on to the ultimate degree. Still terrible odds, but one does have an obligation to the profession and to science. Meanwhile, sixteen out of seventeen anthropology majors become homemakers, insurance repre-



sentatives, career military personnel, capitalists, and ski bums, among other things.

These facts have caused me to consider the purpose of introductory anthropology. I feel that anthropology is exciting and, at its best, fun to study. It is an excellent component of a general education. Furthermore, I believe that the rare anthropology major is not shortchanged by a breezy and fun introduction to his or her career. Quite the contrary.

I have organized the material very traditionally, according to the standard rubrics of ethnography. Section 1 reviews the general field of anthropology and begins with a charming piece on being human by Martson Bates. It sets the irreverent tone of anthropology in general, and puts the reader in the proper mood for the book. Then there follows a series of papers dealing with what anthropology is, how it is done, and who does it. One article, by Sr. Jesús Salinas, is printed here for the first time. It is a rare view of the tribe of anthropologists, written by one of the "natives" studied by anthropologists. I have also included in this section papers on the nature of culture and on the biosocial concept of race, two of the cornerstones of modern anthropological thought.

The other sections deal with language, economics, politics and law, the life cycle, religion, and culture change (including applied anthropology). I have specifically avoided articles dealing with the intricacies of kinship systems. Kinship is one of the most basic areas of human custom and is treated in several articles in the various sections. However, I have not found articles on kinship per se that meet the criterion of being innately interesting to the general reader. I think it will be clear throughout the volume, however, how important kinship is in the rationalization of human behavior. No attempt was made to treat American society and culture separately. Instead I assume that anthropology has long since come of age; the study of American culture is just another part of good traditional anthropology. However, I purposely juxtaposed pieces on American culture with corresponding pieces about non-Western peoples whenever possible. Different ideas about adolescence and beauty are seen in the descriptions of the Miss America pageant and the Alorese tooth-blackening ceremony. Customs concerning death, burial, and treatment of the aged are similarly juxtaposed. Therefore, the one area that gets more than its fair share of coverage is culture (and subcultures) in the United States.

Finally, no attempt is made to separate "social problems" from other aspects of ethnography. West Virginia snake-handling fundamentalists are a problem to the authorities who want to stop the sect; Custer was a problem for the Sioux; black children are a problem for white racist school teachers in the United States and vice versa; making the family budget balance during rampant inflation is a problem for most Americans; and finding scarce game during a drought is a problem for the Kalahari Bushmen. This book assumes that social problems are not the unique possession of "civilized" societies. They are simply one part of culture, and culture is what this book is about.

My debts are many. Carole Bernard and Kathy Palakoff read through the selections to offset my having lost touch with what nonanthropologists consider good reading. Their advice and counsel were invaluable. Ms. Palakoff suggested the title. John Lozier read the preface and introduction and offered sound collegial advice. Carol Wallace typed the manuscript; and Ken Scott of Macmillan has offered sound editorial advice all along. My thanks to all.

H. R. B.

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION 1

## 1 CULTURE IS HUMAN 16

ON BEING HUMAN – <i>Martson Bates</i>	18
CULTURE: HOW WE BEHAVE – <i>William Howells</i>	26
MIDDLE AGE MEETS THE KID GHETTO – <i>Vance Bourjaily</i>	34
A FOUR LETTER WORD THAT HURTS – <i>Morton H. Fried</i>	38

## 2 FIELD WORK 46

GETTING THERE – <i>Alan R. Beals</i>	47
A FIELD EXPERIENCE IN RETROSPECTION – <i>Elliot Liebow</i>	56
STRANGER AND FRIEND – <i>Hortense Powdermaker</i>	66
ON THE CLAN OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS – <i>Jesús Salinas</i>	71
REMINISCENCES OF A FIELD TRIP – <i>Robert Wauchope</i>	78
PILGRIMS ELUDE A PILGRIM-HUNTER – <i>Francis E. Wylie</i>	88

## 3 LANGUAGE 93

SOME TRAITS OF LANGUAGE – <i>Dwight Bolinger</i>	95
THE SONS OF HENGIST AND HORSA GET EMBARRASSED ABOUT GRAMMAR – <i>Charlton Laird</i>	102

GRAMMAR IS NOT A PIGEONHOLE DESK – <i>Charlton Laird</i>	106
HOW DIFFERENT CULTURES USE SPACE – <i>Edward T. Hall</i>	110
LANGUAGE CONFLICTS	121

## 4 ECONOMICS 129

EATING CHRISTMAS IN THE KALAHARI – <i>Richard Borshay Lee</i>	131
BAH, HUMBUG! – <i>Marvin Harris</i>	138
HOW TO BUY A HOUSE – <i>Lawrence Durrell</i>	141
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A PEASANT? – <i>Joseph Loproato</i>	155
THE CULTURE OF POVERTY – <i>Oscar Lewis</i>	163

## 5 POLITICS AND LAW 172

THE GIVER OF THE LAW – <i>Colin M. Turnbull</i>	174
THE MAN WHO KNOCKED AT THE WRONG WOMAN'S DOOR – <i>Hortense Powdermaker</i>	185
UNDER THE MOUNTAIN WALL – <i>Peter Matthiessen</i>	189
COURSE OF THE BLOOD FEUD – <i>Margaret Hasluck</i>	197
WHY MEN FIGHT – <i>Charles C. Moskos, Jr.</i>	202
THE FASHIONABLE VIEW OF MAN AS A NAKED APE IS: 1) AN INSULT TO APES    2) SIMPLISTIC    3) MALE-ORIENTED    4) RUBBISH – <i>David Pilbeam</i>	216

## 6 RELIGION 219

THE NATURE OF RELIGION – <i>William Howells</i>	221
PROFESSOR WIDJOJO GOES TO A KOKTEL PARTI – <i>Weston La Barre</i>	229
RELIGION AND THE GREEK PEASANTS – <i>Irwin Sanders</i>	233
GHOSTS AND WITCHES – <i>Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton</i>	240
MIDDLE AMERICA HAS ITS WOODSTOCK, TOO – <i>Jeff Greenfield</i>	245

## 7 THE LIFE CYCLE 252

FRENCH PARENTS TAKE THEIR CHILDREN TO THE PARK – <i>Martha Wolfenstein</i>	255
GOLDEN RULE DAYS: AMERICAN SCHOOLROOMS – <i>Jules</i> <i>Henry</i>	271
THE SIRIONO CHILDREN – <i>Allan Holmberg</i>	282
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD'S PERSONALITY – <i>Jules</i> <i>Henry</i>	290
THE WARRIOR DROPOUTS – <i>Rosalie Wax</i>	293
THERE SHE IS . . . MISS AMERICA – <i>Judith Martin</i>	302
ADOLESCENCE, MARRIAGE, AND SEX – <i>Cora Dubois</i>	305
MARRIAGE IN SICILY – <i>Charlotte Gower Chapman</i>	309
LIM A-POU: A WIFE AND A SISTER – <i>Margery Wolf</i>	315
MARRIAGE AS A WRETCHED INSTITUTION – <i>Mervyn</i> <i>Cadwallader</i>	324
SEX ANTAGONISM IN GUSSI SOCIETY – <i>Robert A. LeVine</i>	330
THE FUNERAL TRANSACTION – <i>Jessica Mitford</i>	335
BURIAL ON ALOR – <i>Cora Dubois</i>	345

## 8 APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY 348

THE MONKEY AND THE FISH – <i>Don Adams</i>	350
HEALING WAYS – <i>Lyle Saunders</i>	356
ABORTION AND DEPOPULATION ON A PACIFIC ISLAND – <i>David M. Schneider</i>	365
CHANDIGARH WAS PLANNED BY EXPERTS BUT SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG – <i>Brent C. Brolin</i>	376
PLIGHT OF THE IK AND KAIADILT: A CHILLING POSSIBLE END FOR MAN – <i>John B. Calhoun</i>	383

# INTRODUCTION

Anthropology is the study of human beings as biological and social animals through time and space. Anthropologists are interested in understanding human *anatomy* and how it got that way during the past 75 million years or so since the first monkey-like creatures, or early primates, appeared on earth. Anthropologists are also interested in human *behavior* and how it got that way during the past five million years or so since the first human-like animals, or Australopithecines, appeared. We are interested in the similarities and differences in the physical and social make-up of human beings today—all 3½ billion of them in all the nooks and crannies of this planet.

To be interested in all these things is a tall order, and it is not surprising that most anthropologists wind up specializing in one or two very specific areas of the study of people, such as blood groups, prehistoric cultures of the New World, kinship systems of Africa, and so on. What is surprising is that it took so long for scientists to develop all these interests and the skills needed to pursue them. There is no doubt that human beings have always been the most curious and fascinating object of study to other human beings. Philosophers, historians, and theologians have discussed the nature of the human beast for thousands of years. The application of the scientific method to the study of human creatures is relatively new.

Science began by looking at the stars, the furthest things in our universe. When science came down to earth it addressed itself to the nature of inanimate matter in the study of physics and chemistry. It was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that economics, political science, and sociology developed. Then, at the end of the nineteenth century, psychology and anthropology began in the first feeble scientific attempts to understand the human mind and the totality of the human condition. No doubt, 100 years from now (maybe even 10) our current efforts will appear feeble.

There seem to be two reasons for the general lateness of social science. First, a person is a very complicated thing to study. Science depends on measurement; but how do you measure the difference between a Christian and a Buddhist? How do you measure the way in which people learn to be, say, Hopi Indians or Italian Americans so that you can tell precisely what is unique and what is the same about the two learning experiences? A few generations ago there were no tools for measuring—no matter how inadequately—the behavior, the thinking, the values of human beings. Now that we've started, we see how thoroughly unsophisticated we are.

The second reason for the lateness of social science is that it's scary. The study of human anatomy, for example, serves to point out very painfully how weak we are. We don't run or swim or fly worth a darn; we have no claws or teeth to speak of; we have poor vision, poor lungs, terribly fragile sacroiliacs, and we don't live very long. We pride ourselves on overcoming these difficulties with logic and reason. It is undeniable that we have the best brains of any animal on earth right now. But we use our logical capacity to make wars as a way of demonstrating how strong we are. We poison ourselves with chemicals to show how well we can manufacture food. Somehow, the more we study about people the more we find out that our reason and logic are not total compensation for the physical puniness with which we live.

In addition to flashy exposés of our physical weakness, anthropology has not been kind to some cherished myths of Western civilization. During the last few decades anthropologists have marshalled impressive evidence that: 1) there are no primitive languages; all people speak highly complex tongues, with rigorous grammars at least as subtle as English; 2) there are not now, and there have never been, any "pure" races of people; 3) there are no human populations biologically superior to any other, either in physical structure or in mental capacities. As far as we can tell, all human groups have their share of idiots and geniuses; 4) the idea that economic growth can go on indefinitely is a fairly recent disease. For 99 per cent of all human history, primitive peoples lived in cooperation with their environment rather than as predators on it.

The common element in all these findings is that they challenge the traditional thinking of Western civilization. And that's scary.

It would be wrong to give the impression that anthropology is, or has ever been, free of these biases. In fact, many scholars now concede that anthropology was the



handmaiden of Western colonialism and imperialism. The information collected by anthropologists was used by colonial administrators to more effectively exploit native populations around the world. To the extent that American Indians are colonized peoples, the same is still true in this country. However, it is safe to say that an awareness of ethical principles has recently become a major focus in anthropology. So things are changing.

With these changes, however, some things remain constant. Anthropology is still the study of humans, characterized by an enthusiastic interest in all the biological and social forms of this animal, in all time and throughout the world. On the biological side there is one major field, physical anthropology. Physical anthropologists are zoologists who happen to specialize in people. Paleozoologists study the bones and teeth of fossil creatures in order to piece together the evolution of some modern species. Some physical anthropologists study the paleozoology of *Homo sapiens*. However, because people are cultural animals (they use tools to survive instead of relying on their bodies), physical anthropologists have to take this into account. For example, it is probably no accident that 600,000 years ago the major transition from ape-man (*Australopithecus*) to almost-man (*Homo erectus*) was accompanied by the first taming of fire. The basic rule of population dynamics is the principle of adaptive radiation. This means that critters fill up their environment as fast as they can until the environment won't take any more of them. Fire allowed people to move from their original Eden in the tropics of East Africa and to occupy the northern hemisphere where glaciers had previously kept them out. As people moved into China and Europe men hunted the cold-adapted animals of the ice age, like the woolly mammoth. People became cold adapted, too. Not surprisingly, human jaws began to shrink and their teeth got daintier. (Cooking food makes tough teeth unnecessary.)

At the same time, the human cranium began to fill out, the forehead became more rounded (making more room for brains), and the brain became brainier. What happened to the human brain is very much like what we do to light bulbs in order to make them brighter. By winding up the wire into small circles, we get about one-half yard of filament into a two inch lamp. In brains this process is called "convolution."

Taming and making fire is a cultural invention; it led to a series of physical changes that made people more people-like. Among those changes was a more powerful cerebrum,

which led to more cultural inventions, and so on. This is called the *biocultural feedback effect* in evolution. It doesn't matter to paleozoologists who study elephants, but physical anthropologists have to worry about it. (We will return to this concept of biocultural feedback at the end of this chapter.)

Some physical anthropologists are interested in reconstructing human social evolution. They study non-human primates (apes and monkeys) in the field, watching them eat and sleep, fight and make love, searching for clues to the way we might once have been. They are also interested in culture because what they find tells us about the early pre-human condition and the physical, social, and psychological prerequisites for becoming human.

Finally, there are physical anthropologists who study neither old bones nor apes, but *Homo sapiens*. They describe the physical variation in this species, but more importantly they study the physical and cultural factors that cause those variations. For example, it is probable that people started out black. Melanin, a darkening agent in the skin, is a fine shield against ultraviolet sun rays, which are dangerous in the tropical latitudes where people were spawned. As the human moved northward, black skin might not have been very useful. The same ultraviolet rays stimulate the manufacture of vitamin D in the body and in northern latitudes lighter skin (less melanin) would have been an advantage.

Consider another physical factor in population variation called the *Bergmann effect*. We notice that, by-and-large, animals are round and short in the arctic, long and skinny at the equator. People sometimes exhibit this trait, too. Diet does not appear to be the cause of this body-shape phenomenon. Young Eskimos who migrate to Seattle and do not eat blubber continue to grow up with the classical short and round shape of Eskimo peoples.

The geometric shape that has the ratio of the greatest mass and the least surface area is a sphere. A long, thin plank has the most surface area and the least mass. A large body mass generates heat and a low surface area prevents the heat from escaping. The reverse is true of tall, thin people. Retention of body heat is obviously an advantage in the arctic, whereas loss of heat (a cooling effect) is just as obviously an advantage in the tropics. Cooking food *does not* cause teeth to become smaller; cold climate *does not* cause people to become short and round. But these environmental conditions constitute the circumstances under which genetic mutations will be advantageous or disadvantageous.