



anthropology

what does it mean to be human?

FOURTH EDITION

Robert H. Lavenda | Emily A. Schultz

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In memory of Beatrice G. Schultz,
Violet H. Lavenda, George Lavenda,
and Henry W. Schultz

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Preface

This book emerged out of our increasing dissatisfaction with all the available general anthropology texts. We found that they either overwhelmed beginning students with detail and the sheer volume of material or provided overly brief introductions that failed to convey the richness of the field. We therefore set out to write a book that introduces this broad field concisely yet thoroughly, providing diverse perspectives and examples to foster not only an appreciation of anthropology but also a deeper engagement with it—one that helps students better understand themselves and the world around them. We (and our students) needed a general anthropology text that struck the right balance, fit into a 15-week semester, and came with a complete package of ancillary materials including quizzes, exams, suggested videos, and supplemental readings.

Throughout the process of writing the first edition and revising for subsequent editions, two central questions have guided our decisions on what material to include. First, what is the essential material that a balanced introduction to four-field anthropology must cover? Second, how much detail on any particular topic could we include without overwhelming beginning students? Most general anthropology textbooks are essentially cultural anthropology textbooks that have bulked up, but we decided to start anew and build a general anthropology text chapter by chapter. We address the central issues of the discipline, highlighting the controversies and commitments that shape contemporary anthropology and that make it interesting and exciting.

Approach

This book may be concise, but we cover the field effectively and in a way that we think is intellectually honest. **We take a question-oriented approach that illuminates major concepts for students and shows them the relevance of anthropology in today's world.** Structuring each chapter around an important question and its subquestions, we explore what it means to be human, incorporating answers from all four major subfields of anthropology—biological anthropology, archaeology, linguistic anthropology, and cultural anthropology—as

well as from applied anthropology. We have made every effort to provide a balanced perspective, both in the level of detail we present and in our coverage of the major subfields.

The questioning approach not only sparks curiosity but also orients students' reading and comprehension of each chapter, highlighting the concepts every student should take away from a general anthropology course. For example, students need to know about evolutionary theory, human variation, and the biological, social, and cultural critique of the concept of race, since knowledge in these areas is one of the great achievements of the discipline of anthropology. No other discipline (and possibly no other course) will teach about these matters the way anthropologists do. Students need to know about the fossil evidence for the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, which they are not likely to learn about elsewhere. Students need to know what archaeology can tell us about the human past, as well as what ethnography can teach us about social complexity and inequality. They need to know that culture isn't just the Festival of Nations and unusual foods and interesting traditional costumes. They need to know about language and the central role of learning in human development. They need to understand the wellsprings of human creativity and imagination. It is valuable for them to see the panoply of forms of human relatedness, and how people organize themselves. They need to know about globalization from the bottom up and not just the top down. They need to see how all the subfields of anthropology together can provide important, unique insights into all these topics and so many more and how anthropology can provide a vital foundation for their university education.

The world we face as anthropologists has changed dramatically in the last quarter century, and anthropology has changed, too. We have always felt it necessary to present students with a view of what contemporary anthropologists are doing; we therefore address the most current issues in the field and have thoroughly updated the text accordingly for this edition. Your students will take away from the book an appreciation of how these areas of specialization have developed over time and how they contribute to our understanding of the world in the twenty-first century.

Organization

Divided into 16 chapters and 4 modules, this book is the ideal length for one semester. After Chapter 1, which introduces the entire field, 6 chapters are devoted to biological anthropology and archaeology: evolutionary theory (Chapter 2); the primates (Chapter 3); the fossil record and human origins (Chapter 4); human variation (Chapter 5); the human past (Chapter 6); and the first farmers, cities, and states (Chapter 7). Topics in cultural and linguistic anthropology are covered in chapters on culture (Chapter 8); language (Chapter 9); symbolic practices (Chapter 10, covering play, art, myth, ritual, and religion); economics (Chapter 11); politics (Chapter 12); sex, gender, and sexuality (Chapter 13); forms of relatedness, including kinship, marriage, and friendship (Chapter 14); social inequality and human rights (Chapter 15, covering class, caste, race, ethnicity, and human rights and sovereignty); and the anthropology of medicine and health (Chapter 16). In addition, brief methodological modules after Chapters 1, 3, 8, and 9 discuss anthropology, science, and storytelling; dating methods for paleoanthropology and archaeology; ethnographic methods; and the components of language. Throughout the book, we pay special attention to issues of power and inequality in the contemporary world.

Key Features

- **We take an explicitly global approach.** In this edition, we have eliminated a separate globalization chapter and have incorporated material on globalization throughout the book. We systematically point out the extent to which the current sociocultural situation of particular peoples has been shaped by their particular histories of contact with capitalism, and we highlight ways that the post-Cold War global spread of capitalism has drastically reshaped the local contexts in which people everywhere live their lives.
- **We incorporate current anthropological approaches to power and inequality throughout the text.** We explore how power is manifested in different human societies, how it permeates all aspects of social life, and how it is deployed, resisted, and transformed. We discuss issues of trauma, social suffering, and human rights.
- **Material on gender and feminist anthropology is featured both in its own chapter and throughout the text.** Discussions of gender are tightly woven into the fabric of the book, and include (for example) material on gender and feminist archaeology,

controversies over female genital cutting, supernumerary sexes and genders, varieties of human sexual practices, language and gender, gay marriage, women and colonialism, gender issues in Islam in Europe, Nuer women marriage, and contemporary forms of social inequality.

- **“In Their Own Words.”** New voices, including those of indigenous peoples, anthropologists, and nonanthropologists, are presented in the text in commentaries called “In Their Own Words.” These short commentaries provide alternative perspectives—always readable and sometimes controversial—on topics featured in the chapter where they appear.
- **“EthnoProfiles.”** These text inserts provide a consistent, brief information summary for each society discussed at length in the text. They emerged from our desire as teachers to supply our students with basic geographical, demographic, and political information about the peoples anthropologists have worked with. Each EthnoProfile also contains a map of the area in which the society is found. They are not intended to be a substitute for reading ethnographies, nor are they intended to reify or essentialize the “people” or “culture” in question. Their main purpose is simply to provide a consistent orientation for readers, though of course it is becoming more and more difficult to attach peoples to particular territories in an era of globalization. How does one calculate population numbers or draw a simple map to locate a global diaspora? How does one construct an EthnoProfile for overseas Chinese or trans-border Haitians? We don’t know how to answer these questions, which is why EthnoProfiles for those groups are not included in the textbook.
- **“Anthropology in Everyday Life.”** Following the suggestions of reviewers, we have provided selections on anthropology in practice throughout the text; topics include agricultural development, archaeology and community engagement, anthropology and advertising, Human Terrain Teams, and forensic anthropology and human rights, among others.
- **Additional learning aids.** Key terms are boldfaced in the text and defined in a running glossary on the page where they appear, in addition to in a glossary at the back of the text. Each chapter ends with a list of the key terms in alphabetical order with page references, a numbered chapter summary, review questions, and annotated suggested readings. Maps are featured extensively throughout the text.

- **Use of citations and quotations.** In our discussions, we have tried to avoid being omniscient narrators by making use of citations and quotations in order to indicate where anthropological ideas come from. In our view, even first-year students need to know that an academic discipline like anthropology is constructed by the work of many people; no one, especially not textbook authors, should attempt to impose a single voice on the field. We have avoided, as much as we could, predigested statements that students must take on faith. We try to give them the information that they need to see where particular conclusions come from. In our experience, students appreciate being taken seriously.
- **Supplemental chapter materials provide flexibility for instructors.** As we considered how to create a new book for this course, we realized we would have to omit material that you may want your students to know about or that might interest them. To offer you flexibility, we decided to include some of that material on the Companion Website (www.oup.com/us/lavenda). Each entry ranges in length from one or two paragraphs to about three pages and can easily be used either for lecture topics or as handouts. For example, if you'd like to stress the different routes that led to the rise of civilization, you could assign the reading about the rise of civilization in Mesopotamia to supplement the textbook's discussion of the rise of civilization in the Andes. If you're looking for more examples to illustrate ritual and cultural patterns in the United States, you could assign the selection on children's birthday parties in the United States. The bulk of the supplemental chapter material on the Instructor's website is linked to the cultural chapters, and many entries are additional ethnographic examples.

What's New in the Fourth Edition?

There are many changes, both large and small, in the fourth edition:

- Based on reviewers' suggestions, the chapter "What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Globalization" and Module 5, "Background to the Global Political Economy of the Twenty-First Century," have been incorporated into the text. The historical background in Module 5, while

important, is distant enough from the present that we believed it was preferable to devote more space in the text to current developments in the world. Similarly, the globalization processes described in earlier versions of the globalization chapter are no longer "new," but are becoming stabilized around the world, and they are now regularly acknowledged by all contemporary ethnographers in one way or another. But although the globalization chapter itself is gone, much of the material it contained has been fitted into earlier chapters in the book, where it now seems more appropriate. Places where this occurs are noted below.

- A new chapter on Sex, Gender, and Sexuality. This chapter brings together material that was previously integrated into different chapters and expands and updates it with new anthropological research and analysis documenting the varied ways in which people around the world are revising their understandings and practices involving sex, gender, and sexuality.
- Based on a suggestion from reviewers, we reordered the first five chapters. We agree that this new order moves more naturally from the general discussion of evolution, to primates, to the fossil record and human origins, and ends with microevolution and human variation in living populations. It also brings Module 2, "Dating Methods in Paleoanthropology and Archaeology" into a more logical position.
- Content in the first five chapters have been updated: Chapter 4 contains a new discussion of *Homo naledi* and Lomekwi 3 tools, as well as ancient DNA information about Kennewick Man/the Ancient One. Chapter 5 has further elaborated discussions of connections between development and evolution, including a new discussion of uses of DNA analysis to investigate what is being called "mestizo genomics."
- Chapter 8. "Why Is the Concept of Culture Important?" now concludes with the discussion of cultural imperialism, cultural hybridity, and cosmopolitanism that used to be in the globalization chapter. This further strengthens the discussion of Kiowa Christianity that was already present in Chapter 8. It also demonstrates clearly to students that thinking of "cultures" as separate, self-contained entities is no longer mainstream among cultural anthropologists.
- Module 3. "On Ethnographic Methods." This module now has a new, detailed discussion of ethics in anthropology.

- Chapter 9. “Why Is Understanding Human Language Important?” New material on the functions of language links the discussion of Hockett’s design features to Peircian distinctions between icons, indexes, and symbols. We offer a revised discussion of speech communities. The discussion of language ideology ends with new material about “raciolinguistics” that highlights how language has become a key index of racial identity in the contemporary globalized world, and how playing with varieties of language offers a way of simultaneously acknowledging and challenging racial hierarchies.
- Chapter 11. “Why Do Anthropologists Study Economic Relations?” This chapter contains a new ethnographic example illustrating the intertwining of different modes of exchange, including market exchange, among the Maisin people of Papua, New Guinea.
- Chapter 12. “How Do Anthropologists Study Political Relations?” This chapter has undergone a major renovation. The contributions of Foucault and Gramsci have been clarified. However, the most thoroughgoing revision is the incorporation of material on nations and nationalism from earlier editions of the book (from the old chapter on social inequality) and of material on how globalization affects the nation-state and citizenship (from the old chapter on globalization). These revisions make for a stronger, more contemporary discussion of a range of issues addressed by contemporary anthropologists who study politics.
- Chapter 13. “What Can Anthropology Teach Us about Sex, Gender, and Sexuality?” This new chapter now precedes Chapter 14. “Where Do Our Relatives Come from and Why Do They Matter?” Having these two chapters after the discussion of economics and politics provides an important context for discussion of the role of power and wealth in shaping human experiences of sex, gender, and sexuality, and other forms of relatedness.
- Chapter 15. “What Can Anthropology Tell Us about Social Inequality and Human Rights?” This is a revised version of what used to be the discussion of anthropological studies of social inequality in the contemporary world. The new version of this chapter still discusses class, caste, race, and ethnicity. But we now conclude the chapter with a discussion of anthropology, human rights, and sovereignty formerly located in the chapter on globalization.
- Chapter 16. “How Is Anthropology Applied in the Field of Medicine?” This is now the final chapter

in the text. It makes good sense to allow a chapter on applied anthropology to complete the discussion of the discipline. Also, by making the revisions described previously, the textbook still has only 16 chapters. The revised chapters are stronger, and the text remains workable for a semester-long course.

Supplements

- The free **Ancillary Resource Center** at www.oup-arc.com features (1) **Instructor Resources**, including guest editorials (brief essays by anthropologists written specifically for our text), PowerPoint-based slides for lectures, an image bank containing digital versions of all of the images from the text, a sample syllabus, assignments, in-class activities, film suggestions and related questions by chapter, critical-thinking questions, suggestions for class discussion, and helpful links; and (2) a **Computerized Test Bank**.
- A free **Companion Website** at www.oup.com/us/lavenda features Student Resources, including a study skills guide (filled with hints and suggestions on improving study skills, organizing information, writing exam essays, and taking multiple-choice exams), self-quizzes, interactive exercises, flashcards, detailed annotated lists of suggestions for further reading (beyond the lists provided in the text), and helpful links.

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Once again, we are amazed at how much time and effort reviewers put into their task. The many reviewers and survey respondents for this project have contributed significantly to both the shape and the details of the book. We hope they can see where we have taken their advice, and we would like them to know that we carefully thought through every suggestion, even the ones we decided we could not follow. So, our thanks to the reviewers for this edition:

Christa Abdul-Karim, University of Idaho
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Jason J. Gonzalez, University of Georgia
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Jaclyn McWhorter, Agnes Scott College
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Our sincere thanks also to our supplement author, Benjamin L. Augustyn of Miami Dade College, who created high-quality additional resources specifically for this text.

This book is dedicated to the memory of our parents. Relatedness remains important in human societies, and as we grow older, we better understand why. So we also recognize our children, Daniel and Rachel, whose lives have been bound up with our books in so many ways, not the least of which are our hopes that they and their generation will find something of value in the anthropological approach.

anthropology





1



What is anthropology?

This chapter introduces the field of anthropology. We look at what anthropology is and explore its different subfields. We touch on anthropology's key concept—culture—as well as its key research method—fieldwork. We conclude with a discussion of the ways anthropological insights are relevant in everyday life.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

What Is Anthropology?

What Is the Concept of Culture?

What Makes Anthropology a Cross-Disciplinary Discipline?

Biological Anthropology

Cultural Anthropology

Linguistic Anthropology

Archaeology

Applied Anthropology

Medical Anthropology

The Uses of Anthropology

Chapter Summary

For Review

Key Terms

Suggested Readings

In early 1976, the authors of this book traveled to northern Cameroon, in western Africa, to study social relations in the town of Guider, where we rented a small house. In the first weeks we lived there, we enjoyed spending the warm evenings of the dry season reading and writing in the glow of the house's brightest electric fixture, which illuminated a large, unscreened veranda. After a short time, however, the rains began, and with them appeared swarms of winged termites. These slow-moving insects with fat, two-inch abdomens were attracted to the light on the veranda, and we soon found ourselves spending more time swatting at them than reading or writing. One evening, in a fit of desperation, we rolled up old copies of the international edition of *Newsweek* and began an all-out assault, determined to rid the veranda of every single termite.

The rent we paid for this house included the services of a night watchman. As we launched our attack on the termites, the night watchman suddenly appeared beside the veranda carrying an empty powdered milk tin. When he asked if he could have the insects we had been killing, we were a bit taken aback but warmly invited him to help himself. He moved onto the veranda, quickly collected the corpses of fallen insects, and then joined us in going after those termites that were still airborne. Although we became skilled at thwacking the insects with our rolled-up magazines, our skills paled beside those of the night watchman, who simply snatched the termites out of the air with his hand, squeezed them gently, and dropped them into his rapidly filling tin can. The three of us managed to clear the air of insects—and fill his tin—in about 10 minutes. The night watchman thanked us and returned to his post, and we returned to our books.

The following evening, soon after we took up our usual places on the veranda, the watchman appeared at the steps bearing a tray with two covered dishes. He explained that his wife had prepared the food for us in exchange for our help in collecting termites. We accepted the food and carefully lifted the lids. One dish contained *nyiri*, a stiff paste made of red sorghum, a staple of the local diet. The other dish contained another pasty substance with a speckled, salt-and-pepper appearance, which we realized was termite paste prepared from the insects we had all killed the previous night.

The night watchman waited at the foot of the veranda steps, an expectant smile on his face. Clearly, he did not intend to leave until we tasted the food his wife had prepared. We looked at each other. We had never eaten insects before or considered them edible in the North American, middle-class diet we were used to. To be sure, “delicacies” like chocolate-covered ants exist, but such items are considered by most North Americans to be food fit only for eccentrics. However, we understood the importance of not insulting the night watchman and his wife, who were being so generous to us. We knew that insects were a favored food in many human societies and that eating them brought no ill effects (Figure 1.1). So we reached into the dish of *nyiri*, pulling off a small amount. We then used the ball of *nyiri* to scoop up a small portion of termite paste, brought the mixture to our mouths, ate, chewed, and swallowed. The watchman beamed, bid us goodnight, and returned to his post. We looked at each other in wonder. The sorghum paste had a grainy tang that was rather pleasant. The termite paste tasted mild, like chicken, not unpleasant at all.

FIGURE 1.1 Many people around the world eat insects. Here, a restaurant worker in Bangkok, Thailand, prepares grubs for cooking.



Not long afterward, we received a package from our family in the United States that contained, among other treats, a bag of commercial chocolate chip cookie mix. The kitchen of the house we were renting had an oven; eager to enjoy this quintessential North American treat, we baked the cookies, and offered them to one of our field assistants. He politely tasted the cookies, but declined a second serving with the explanation that they were just too sweet for him.

What Is Anthropology?

This anecdote is not just about an encounter about our field assistant and us; it also illustrates some of the central elements of the anthropological experience. Anthropologists want to learn about as many different human ways of life as they can. The people they come to know are members of their own society or live on a different continent, in cities or in rural areas. Their ways of life may involve patterns of regular movement across international borders, or they may make permanent homes in the borderlands themselves. Archaeologists reconstruct ancient ways of life from traces left behind in the earth that are hundreds or thousands of years old; anthropologists who strive to reconstruct the origin of the human species itself make use of fossil remains that reach back millions of years into the past. Whatever the case may be, anthropologists are sometimes exposed to practices that startle them. However, as they take the risk of getting to know such ways of life better, they are often treated to the sweet discovery of familiarity. Still, the response of our field assistant to the chocolate chip cookies is a valuable reminder that encounters with the unfamiliar can also sometimes be “too sweet.” One of the strengths of anthropology comes precisely from unexpected insights that emerge from such encounters, when we and the people with whom we work discover that we can connect with one another in sometimes surprising ways, even though such connections may at times be awkward (Tsing 2005). In this book, we share aspects of the anthropological experience in the hope that you may come to find pleasure, insight, and self-recognition from an involvement with the unfamiliar.

Anthropology can be defined as the study of human nature, human society, and the human past (Greenwood and Stini 1977). It is a scholarly discipline that aims to describe in the broadest possible sense what it means to be human. Anthropologists are not alone in focusing their attention on human beings and their creations. Human biology, literature, art, history, linguistics, sociology, political science, economics—all these scholarly disciplines and many more—concentrate on one or another aspect of

human life. Anthropologists are convinced, however, that explanations of human activities will be superficial unless they acknowledge that human lives are always entangled in complex patterns of work and family, power and meaning.

What is distinctive about the way anthropologists study human life? As we shall see, anthropology is holistic, comparative, field based, and evolutionary. First, anthropology emphasizes that all aspects of human life intersect with one another in complex ways. They shape one another and become integrated with one another over time. Anthropology is thus the integrated, or *holistic*, study of human nature, human society, and the human past. This **holism** draws together anthropologists whose specializations might otherwise divide them. At the most inclusive level, we may thus think of anthropology as the integrated (or holistic) study of human nature, human society, and the human past. Holism has long been central to the anthropological perspective and remains the feature that draws together anthropologists whose specializations might otherwise divide them.

Second, in addition to being holistic, anthropology is a discipline interested in **comparison**. Generalizing about human nature, human society, and the human past requires evidence from the widest possible range of human societies. It is not enough, for example, to observe only our own social group, discover that we do not eat insects, and conclude that human beings as a species do not eat insects. When we compare human diets in different societies, we discover that insect eating is quite common and that our North American aversion to eating insects is nothing more than a dietary practice specific to our own society.

Third, anthropology is also a field-based discipline. That is, for almost all anthropologists, the actual practice of anthropology—its data collection—takes place away from the office and in direct contact with the people, the sites, or the animals that are of interest. Whether they are biological anthropologists studying chimpanzees in Tanzania, archaeologists excavating a site high in the Peruvian Andes, linguistic anthropologists learning an unwritten language in New Guinea, or cultural anthropologists studying ethnic identity in West Africa or small-town festivals in Minnesota, anthropologists are in direct

anthropology The study of human nature, human society, and the human past.

holism A characteristic of the anthropological perspective that describes, at the highest and most inclusive level, how anthropology tries to integrate all that is known about human beings and their activities.

comparison A characteristic of the anthropological perspective that requires anthropologists to consider similarities and differences in as wide a range of human societies as possible before generalizing about human nature, human society, or the human past.

contact with the sources of their data. For most anthropologists, the richness and complexity of this immersion in other patterns of life is one of our discipline's most distinctive features. Field research connects anthropologists directly with the lived experience of other people or other primates or to the material evidence of that experience that they have left behind. Academic anthropologists try to intersperse field research with the other tasks they perform as university professors. Other anthropologists—applied anthropologists—regularly spend most or all of their time carrying out field research. All anthropology begins with a specific group of people (or primates) and always comes back to them as well.

Finally, anthropologists try to come up with generalizations about what it means to be human that are valid across space and over time. Because anthropologists are interested in documenting and explaining change over time in the human past, **evolution** is at the core of the anthropological perspective. Anthropologists examine the *biological evolution* of the human species, which documents change over time in the physical features and life processes of human beings and their ancestors. Topics of interest include both human origins and genetic variation and inheritance in living human populations. If evolution is understood broadly as change over time, then human societies and cultures may also be understood to have evolved from prehistoric times to the present.

Anthropologists have long been interested in *cultural evolution*, which concerns change over time in beliefs, behaviors, and material objects that shape human development and social life. Early discussions of cultural evolution in anthropology emphasized a series of universal stages. However, this approach has been rejected by contemporary anthropologists who talk about cultural evolution, like William Durham (1991) and Robert Boyd (e.g., Richerson and Boyd 2006). Theoretical debates about culture change and about whether it ought to be called “cultural evolution” are very lively right now, not only in anthropology but also in related fields like evolutionary biology and developmental psychology. In the midst of this debate, one of anthropology's most important contributions to the study of human evolution remains the demonstration that biological evolution is not the same thing as cultural evolution. Distinction between the two remains important as

a way of demonstrating the fallacies and incoherence of arguments claiming that everything people do or think can be explained biologically, for example, in terms of “genes” or “race” or “sex.”

What Is the Concept of Culture?

A consequence of human evolution that had the most profound impact on human nature and human society was the emergence of **culture**, which can be defined as sets of learned behavior and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society together with the material artifacts and structures that human beings create and use. Our cultural heritage allows humans to adapt to and transform the world around us through our interactions with material structures and objects in the communities where we live, through the connections we form with other people and other living organisms, through the actions and skills of our individual bodies, and through the ideas and values of our minds. The cultural heritage of the human species is both meaningful and material, and it makes us unique among living creatures.

Human beings are more dependent than any other species on learning for survival because we have no instincts that automatically protect us and help us find food and shelter. Instead, we have come to use our large and complex brains to learn from other members of society what we need to know to survive. Learning is a primary focus of childhood, which is longer for humans than for any other species.

From the anthropological perspective, the concept of *culture* is central to explanations of why human beings are what they are and why they do what they do. Anthropologists are frequently able to show that members of a particular social group behave in a particular way *not* because the behavior was programmed by their genes, but because they observed other people and copied what they did. For example, North Americans typically do not eat insects, but this behavior is not the result of genetic programming. Rather, North Americans have been told as children that eating insects is disgusting, have never seen any of their friends or family eat insects, and do not eat insects themselves. As we discovered personally, however, insects can be eaten by North Americans with no ill effects. This difference in dietary behavior can be explained in terms of culture rather than biology.

However, to understand the power of culture, anthropologists must also know about human biology. Anthropologists in North America traditionally have been trained in both areas so that they can understand how

evolution A characteristic of the anthropological perspective that requires anthropologists to place their observations about human nature, human society, or the human past in a temporal framework that takes into consideration change over time.

culture Sets of learned behavior and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society together with the material artifacts and structures that human beings create and use. Human beings use culture to adapt to and transform the world in which they live.

living organisms work and become acquainted with comparative information about a wide range of human societies. As a result, they can better evaluate how biology and culture contribute to different forms of human behavior. Indeed, most anthropologists reject explanations of human behavior that force them to choose either biology or culture as the unique cause. Instead, they emphasize that human beings are **biocultural organisms**. Our biological makeup—our brain, nervous system, and anatomy—is the outcome of developmental processes to which our genes and cellular chemistry contribute in fundamental ways. It also makes us organisms capable of creating and using culture. Without these biological endowments, human culture as we know it would not exist. At the same time, our survival as biological organisms depends on learned ways of thinking and acting that help us find food, shelter, and mates and that teach us how to rear our children. Our biological endowment, rich as it is, does not provide us with instincts that would automatically take care of these survival needs. Human biology makes culture possible; human culture makes human biological survival possible.

To understand the power of culture, anthropologists are also paying increasing attention to **material culture** in the lives of biocultural human organisms. Many cultural anthropologists, including ourselves, have traditionally emphasized the way people's dealings with artifacts are shaped by the cultural meanings they attach to those artifacts. This emphasis has seemed particularly necessary in the face of the widespread assumptions in our own North American society that material objects have obvious functional meanings that are the same for everyone, everywhere. But cultural anthropologists have found repeatedly that the same object can mean different things to different people. Just consider the varied meanings attached to assault weapons or the "morning after pill" in the recent history of the United States.

All the same, innovative theories of materiality developed in fields called cyborg anthropology and science studies have provided cultural anthropologists with new ways of conceptualizing relations between persons and things, enabling new connections between work in cultural anthropology and archaeology, a field with long experience in dealing with, and thinking about, material culture (see Chapters 6 and 7). Other examples illustrating these new approaches will be found throughout this book. Many examples center on human experiences with new kinds of things—computers, cell phones, the Internet—that are increasingly central to the lives of people all over the world. For instance, persons who play online video games seem to join with the technology and the other players to form a seamless hybrid entity; or the technology that links us to friends on Facebook disappears from our awareness. This is a phenomenon that

anthropologist Daniel Miller calls *the humility of things*: "objects are important, not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but quite the opposite. It is often precisely because we do not see them" (2010, 50). The merging of persons and things is sometimes a source of pleasure, as when we do our holiday shopping on the Internet; but it can also be troubling when we realize that our web-surfing activities are being tracked by commercial web-bots or by government entities like the National Security Agency. For these and other reasons, we agree with Daniel Miller that "the best way to understand, convey, and appreciate our humanity is through attention to our fundamental materiality" (2010, 4). And this means taking material culture seriously.

What Makes Anthropology a Cross-Disciplinary Discipline?

Because of its diversity, anthropology does not easily fit into any of the standard academic classifications. The discipline is usually listed as a social science, but it spans the natural sciences and the humanities as well. What it is *not*, as we will see, is the study of the "exotic," the "primitive," or the "savage," terms that anthropologists reject. Figure 1.2 brings some order to the variety of interests found under the anthropological umbrella.

Traditionally, North American anthropology has been divided into four subfields: *biological anthropology*, *cultural anthropology*, *linguistic anthropology*, and *archaeology*. Because of their commitment to holism, many anthropology departments try to represent most or all of the subfields in their academic programs. However, universities in other parts of the world, such as Europe, usually do not bring all these specialties together. Many North American anthropologists, however, associate holistic four-field North American anthropology with the successful repudiation of nineteenth-century scientific racism by Franz Boas and other early twentieth-century anthropologists. They also value four-field anthropology as a protected "trading zone" within which anthropologists are encouraged to bring together fresh concepts and knowledge from a variety of research traditions. North American anthropologist Rena Lederman (2005), for example, has stressed that four-field anthropology does not insist on a single way of bringing the subfields together.

biocultural organisms Organisms (in this case, human beings) whose defining features are codetermined by biological and cultural factors.

material culture Objects created or shaped by human beings and given meaning by cultural practices.

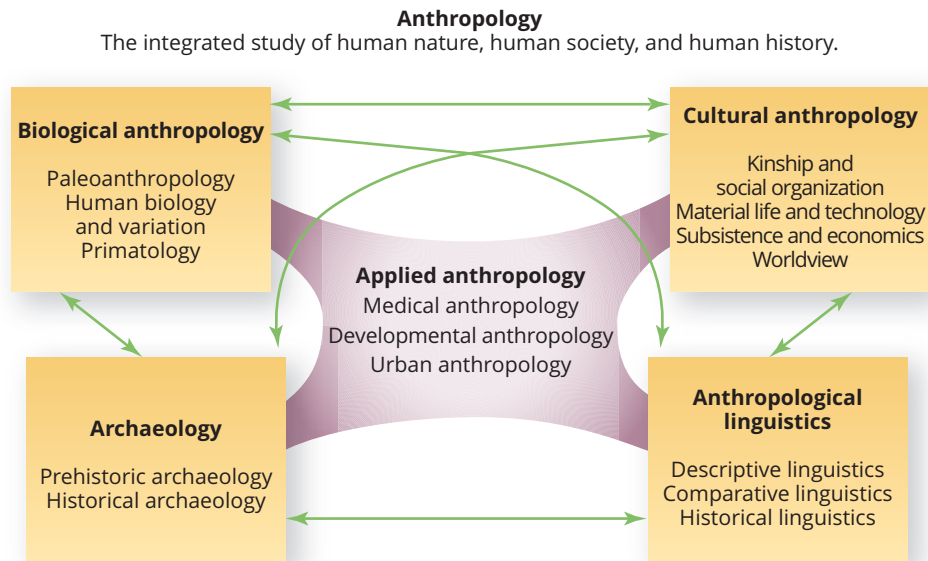


FIGURE 1.2 In the United States, anthropology is traditionally divided into four specialties: biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, anthropological linguistics, and archaeology. Applied anthropology draws on information provided by the other four specialties.

Anthropological holism is attractive even to those who were not trained in North America. British anthropologist Tim Ingold (1994), for example, argues, “The best anthropological writing is distinguished by its receptiveness to ideas springing from work in subjects far beyond its conventional boundaries, and by its ability to connect these ideas in ways that would not have occurred to their originators, who may be more enclosed in their particular disciplinary frameworks” (xvii). We share the views of Lederman and Ingold: trained in holistic, four-field anthropology, we continue to value the unique perspective it brings to the study of human nature, human society, and the human past. Indeed, as the organizers of a recent anthropological conference observed, “Even those who were the least persuaded that the traditional four-field organization of American anthropology was still viable (if it ever was) came away with a strong sense that the subfields had a great deal to say to one another and indeed needed one another” (McKinnon and Silverman 2005, viii).

Biological Anthropology

Since the nineteenth century, when anthropology was developing as an academic field, anthropologists have studied human beings as living organisms to discover

what makes us different from or similar to other animals. Early interest in these matters was a by-product of centuries of exploration. Western Europeans had found tremendous variation in the physical appearance of peoples around the world and had long tried to make sense of these differences. Some researchers developed a series of elaborate techniques to measure different observable features of human populations, including skin color, hair type, body type, and so forth, hoping to find scientific evidence that would allow them to classify all the peoples of the world into a set of unambiguous categories based on distinct sets of biological attributes. Such categories were called **rac**es, and many scientists were convinced that clear-cut criteria for racial classification would be discovered if careful measurements were made on enough people from a range of different populations.

European scientists first applied racial categories to the peoples of Europe itself, but their classifications soon included non-European peoples, who were coming under increasing political and economic domination by expanding European and European American capitalist societies. These peoples differed from “white” Europeans not only because of their darker skin color but also because of their unfamiliar languages and customs. In most cases, their technologies were also no match for the might of the West. In the early eighteenth century, the European biologist Carolus Linnaeus (Carl von Linné, 1707–1778) classified known human populations into four races (American, European, Asian, and Negro) based on skin color (reddish,

races Social groupings that allegedly reflect biological differences.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Anthropology as a Vocation

Listening to Voices

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For me, the anthropological calling has fundamentally to do with the inclination to hear voices. An important part of our vocation is “listening to voices,” and our methods are the procedures that best enable us to hear voices, to represent voices, to translate voices.

By listening carefully to others’ voices and by trying to give voice to these voices, we act to widen the horizons of human conviviality. If we had not achieved some fellow feeling by being there, by listening carefully and by negotiating in good faith, it would be the more difficult to give voice in a way that would widen the horizons of human conviviality. Be that as it may, the calling to

widen horizons and increase human conviviality seems a worthy calling—full of a very human optimism and good sense. Who would resist the proposition that more fellow feeling in the world is better than less, and that to extend the interlocutive in the world is better than to diminish it?

At the same time, there is a paradox here, one that demands of us a sense of proportion. Although the anthropologist is called to bring diverse people into intercommunication, he or she is also called to resist the homogenization that lies in mass communication. We are called by our very experience to celebrate the great variety of voices in the human chorus. The paradox is that we at once work to amplify the scale of intercommunication—and in effect contribute to homogenization—while at the same time we work to insist on the great variety of voices in communication. We must maintain here too a sense of proportion. We must recognize the point at which wider and wider cultural intercommunication can lead to dominant voices hidden in the homogenizing process. Human intercommunication has its uses and abuses.

Source: Fernandez 1990, 14–15.

white, yellow, and black, respectively). Linnaeus also connected racial membership with the mental and moral attributes of group members. Thus, he wrote, Europeans were “fickle, sanguine, blue-eyed, gentle, and governed by laws,” whereas Negroes were “choleric, obstinate, contented, and regulated by custom” and Asians were “grave, avaricious, dignified, and ruled by opinion” (Molnar 2001, 5–6).

In the nineteenth century, influential natural scientists such as Louis Agassiz, Samuel George Morton, Francis Galton, and Paul Broca assumed that biological races were real and that they could be ranked in a hierarchy. They then embarked on a program of scientific research (sometimes called *scientific racism*) that sought material evidence that would define racial boundaries and explain why the racial hierarchy existed. For instance, they ranked different populations of the world in terms of brain size; they found the brains of “white” Europeans and North Americans to be larger and saw the other races as representing varying grades of inferiority, with Africans ranked at the bottom (Gould 1996). These findings were used to justify the familiar social practices we now call **racism**: the systematic oppression of members of one or

more socially defined “races” by another socially defined “race” that is justified in terms of the supposed inherent biological superiority of the rulers and the supposed inherent biological inferiority of those they rule.

Biological or physical anthropology as a separate discipline had its origins in the work of scholars like these, whose training was in some other discipline, often medicine. Johann Blumenbach (1752–1840), for example, whom some have called the “father of physical anthropology,” was trained as a physician. Blumenbach identified five different races (Caucasoid, Mongoloid, American, Ethiopian, and Malayan), and his classification was influential in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Molnar 2001, 6). He and his contemporaries assumed that the races of “mankind” (as they would have said) were fixed and unchanging subdivisions of humanity.

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