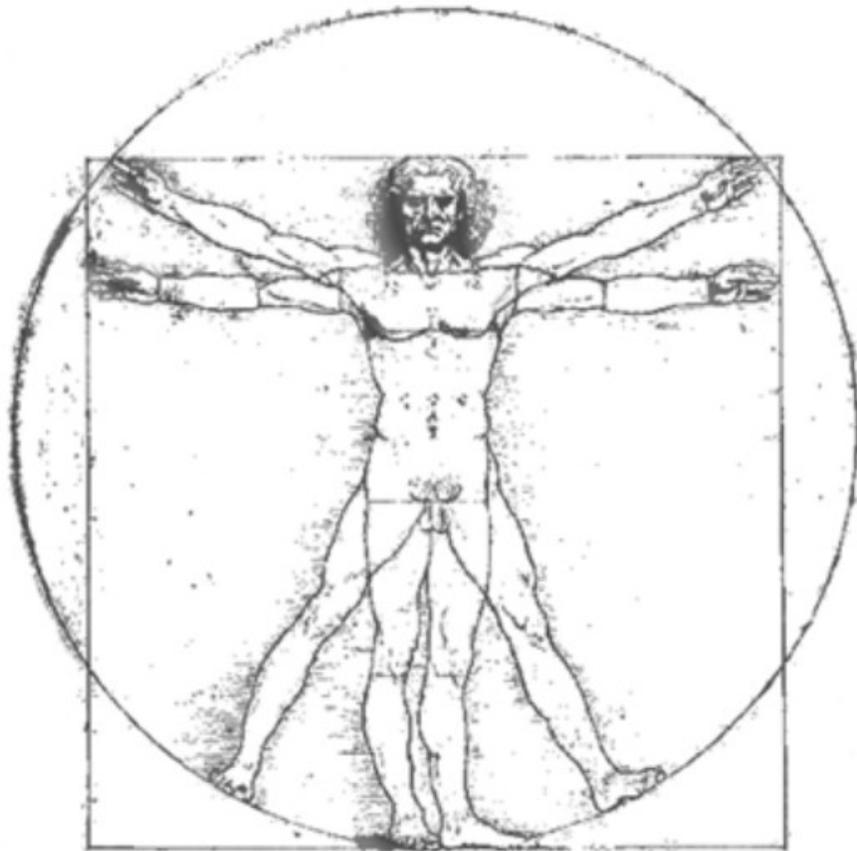




On Human Universals

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Introduction

A statistician's best friend is a large and relevant sample size. And why? Because principles derived from these large and relevant sample sizes can be banked on. Why is this important and how does this help us? By viewing our lives and decisions through a "three buckets" approach or lens, we can make better decisions more confidently. The three buckets are:

- Bucket 1 is the inorganic universe. It is 13.7b years old and is comprised of math, physics, energy, motion and flow, thermodynamics, alloying, compounding, chaos theory, etc.
- Bucket 2 is the biological universe. It is 3.5b years old and is comprised of genetics, competition, predators and prey, co-evolutionary niches, sustainability, etc
- Bucket 3 is the human universe, human nature. It is over 20,000 years old and is the most relevant of all. That's our story, that's who we are and is comprised of human universals, basic innate instincts, emotions, etc.

By its very construction, the Three Buckets approach avoids the prime cause of bad decision making in the first place:

1. Drawing assumptions from too small a sample size
2. Drawing assumptions from too narrow an area of specialization
3. Wanting the world to work the way we'd like it to behave rather than how it actually does
4. Caving to social pressure to conform to group behavior
5. Seeing patterns where no patterns really exist
6. Being blind to patterns present in massive time scales that dwarf our tiny life spans

This book squarely helps us better see and understand bucket number 3, human nature. The human universals described and discussed in this book will help us get a better understanding on human nature and how it impacts every one of us.

Summary

1. "This book is a reflection on human universals and what they imply. Some of the implications are far reaching. I conclude, for example, that what we know about universals places clear limits on the cultural relativism that anthropologists have developed and disseminated widely. David Hume characterized the study of human nature as a subject of "unspeakable importance." Evolutionary psychology, informed by the comparative study of the constant as well as the variable in human affairs, is one of the most important theoretical frameworks currently available to advance the study of human nature. I have no doubt about the importance of human nature, nor about the relevance of human universals in illuminating it; I can only hope that this book will convince others that the study of human universals should loom larger in the attempt to understand humanity and human affairs. This book explores a series of general questions about human universals. How many are there? What are the different kinds of universals? What is their importance? How can we be sure that something is a universal? How does one explain universals? What part do they play in the anthropological enterprise, or in understanding human affairs?"



Key Takeaways

1. There are 5 central theses to this book:
 1. The first is that universals not only exist but are important to any broad conception of the task of anthropology. Among those anthropologists who have overcome their skepticism about the very existence of universals, some have argued that such universals as exist are not important. Insofar as their argument is not merely the expression of a value judgment, it is wrong
 2. Universals form a heterogeneous set. A great many, for example, seem to be inherent in human nature. Some are cultural conventions that have come to have universal distribution. Others fall under different headings
 3. The study of universals has been effectively tabooed as an unintended consequence of assumptions that have predominated in anthropology (and other social sciences) throughout much of this century. From 1915 to 1934 American anthropologists established three fundamental principles about the nature of culture: that culture is a distinct kind of phenomenon that cannot be reduced to others (in particular, not to biology or psychology), that culture (rather than our physical nature) is the fundamental determinant of human behavior, and that culture is largely arbitrary. This combination of assumptions made universals anomalous and very likely to be rare; to admit or dwell upon their existence raised troubling questions about anthropology's fundamental assumptions. These assumptions also led many anthropologists to conclude or argue that anthropology should be narrowed from the study of humanity to the study of culture
 4. Human biology *is* a key to understanding many human universals. It has long been assumed that insofar as universals exist it makes sense to think that they must in some rather direct fashion reflect human biology rather than human culture. Conflict as it may with the assumptions of the preceding paragraph, this assumption is correct, and its consequences must be incorporated into any currently acceptable understanding of the anthropological enterprise.
 5. Evolutionary psychology is a key to understanding many of the universals that are of greatest interest to anthropology. The feature of human biology most of interest to anthropology is the human mind. A theoretical understanding of the process that shaped the human mind, Darwinian selection, provides the most inclusive theoretical framework for the illumination of the human condition. If we assume that society and culture are products of human action, or that society and culture (including language) are evolved characteristics of humans, and that humans themselves are products of organic evolution, then evolutionary theory offers the only explanatory framework for universals that is potentially all-inclusive.
2. Why study human universals?
 1. Universals may be found in the individual, in society, in culture, and in language – though in many cases it is neither useful nor reasonable to consider these phenomenal realms in isolation from each other. At the level of the individual, universals may be found in every (normal) individual – or in every individual of a particular sex and/or age range – and can often be understood from the perspective of a single individual. Some emotions and their facial expressions are examples. Features that are thought to be straightforwardly anatomical or physiological are rarely if ever included in anthropological discussions of universals, so that universals at the level of the



individual are generally confined to patterns of action, thought, and feeling. Universals at this level must underlie social, cultural, and linguistic universals, since society, culture, and language ultimately have no source that excludes individuals and their capacities. Stated differently, all societies, cultures, and languages are the products of individuals and their interactions with each other and with their environments. To illustrate social universals, all societies are structured by statuses and roles and possess a division of labor. These phenomena lie near the core of the social realm, which consists in essence of social statuses and their relationships but also of the interrelationships between the individuals (who “inhabit” statuses). Although individuals are normally affected by them, anthropologists probably think of social universals most frequently as traits or complexes attached to and defining collectivities rather than individuals. But certain mental and behavioral mechanisms, present in all normal individuals, are undoubtedly also involved in human sociality. Since statuses are also cultural, and generally possess linguistic labels, social phenomena touch upon the individual at one end and culture and language at the other. Culture consists of the conventional patterns of thought, activity, and artifact that are passed on from generation to generation in a manner that is generally assumed to involve learning rather than specific genetic programming. Besides being transmitted “vertically” from generation to generation, culture may also be transmitted “horizontally” between individuals and collectivities.

2. Examples of culture are tools, kinship terminologies, and worldviews – which in each case may take distinct forms among peoples who are genetically indistinguishable.
3. Culture is divisible into “traits” (single items) and “complexes” (more or less integrated collections of traits) and typically is thought of as though it were attached to collectivities rather than isolated individuals. This emphasis of the individual stems not from an anthropological belief that individuals do not create culture but from the observation that any given individual receives more culture than he or she creates. Because so much culture is imposed upon rather than created by any particular individual, anthropologists (and others) often think of culture as a sort of supraindividual entity in itself, or as something dictated by that supraindividual identity called “society”
4. An important ingredient in some arguments for universality consists of providing a convincing explanation for the universal. When we can understand the conditions that produce a universal, and get a sense for the ubiquity of those conditions, we then more readily accept the universality of the trait or complex. Even if all methods of demonstrating the universality of a trait or complex have been employed, it bears repeating that universality has still not been proven. However, the likelihood that the phenomenon is at least a near-universal, and for that reason a significant part of human nature or the human condition, may then be very great. Most of the phenomena I discuss have not been demonstrated to be universal by all available means, and renewed or continued attempts at such demonstration are now in order
5. “Universals help delineate the nature of the human species as such. To do this...has been the principal scientific aim of anthropology.” – Goodenough
6. Universals exist, they are numerous, and they engage matters unquestionably of anthropological concern. Universals can be explained, and their ramified effects on human affairs can be traced. But universals comprise a heterogeneous set – cultural, social, linguistic, individual, unrestricted, implicational, etc. – a set that may defy any



single overarching explanation. If, however, a single source for universals had to be sought, human nature would be the place to look. Human nature is not, however, something that we can always ascertain directly. Thus by the same token that we may seek the explanations for universals in human nature, we may use universals, as Goodenough says, as guides in the search for human nature

7. Laying a foundation for understanding human nature and, hence, the human mind is the single most important unfinished piece of business in the social sciences today. Undertaking this task, in which the study of universals has an important part to play, will not be easy.
3. Framework of Universals
 1. Clark Wissler's universal cultural scheme. This outline provided a framework for the collection and presentation of ethnographic reports because it would suit any and all societies. It was equivalent to the chapter headings and subdivisions of a standard ethnography and was therefore more a matter, he said, of "classification" than of "concrete trait-complexes"
 - i. Speech
 1. Languages, writing systems, etc.
 - ii. Material Traits
 1. Food habits
 2. Shelter
 3. Transportation and travel
 4. Dress
 5. Utensils, tools, etc.
 6. Weapons
 7. Occupations and industries
 - iii. Art, Carving, Painting, Drawing, Music, etc.
 - iv. Mythology and Scientific Knowledge
 - v. Religious Practices
 1. Ritualistic forms
 2. Treatment of the sick
 3. Treatment of dead
 - vi. Family and Social Systems
 1. The forms of marriage
 2. Methods of reckoning relationship
 3. Inheritance
 4. Social control
 5. Sports and games
 - vii. Property
 1. Real and personal
 2. Standards of value and exchange
 3. Trade
 - viii. Government
 1. Political forms
 2. Judicial and legal procedures
 - ix. War
 2. The various modes of explaining universals will be presented and illustrated under the following headings: (1) explaining a universal with a universal; (2) cultural



reflection or recognition of a biological fact; (3) logical extension from (usually biological) givens; (4) diffusions explanations that rest upon the great age of the trait and, usually, its great utility; (5) archoses; (6) conservation of energy; (7) the nature of the human organism, with emphasis on the brain; (8) evolutionary theory; (9) interspecific comparison; (10) ontogeny; and (11) partial explanations.

- i. Conservation of speech energy everywhere produces certain regularities in language, and these regularities qualify the notion that speech sounds and patterns are essentially arbitrary. There is of course much arbitrariness in language, but where the economy of energy can exert pressure without loss of communicative effectiveness, sound and sense come together. Because of the considerable scope of arbitrariness in language it is often thought of as cultural. Yet the process that shapes marking universals operates through human physiology: conservation of energy refers to the energy utilized by the human body. Marking, thus, can only be understood as an interaction between human biology and the cultural aspects of language. Moreover, economy of effort or energy is an evolutionary factor that almost certainly impinges on more than language; “economy and efficiency are universal characteristics of biological mechanisms”
 - ii. It is a “cognitive imperative” for humans to organize unexplained external stimuli into some sort of coherent cognitive matrix. Humans are everywhere driven to explain what they perceive; where these explanations are not objectively apparent, first causes in the form of supernatural entities are generated
4. Franz Boas
 1. Each culture has its own genius and should be judged in its own terms
 2. A student of Boas, AL Kroeber, is generally credited with perfecting the argument that culture is a level of phenomena – the “superorganic” – that cannot be explained by reducing it to lower levels
 3. Universals that were not carried by early man all over the world (through biology) may be interpreted as determined by human nature
 5. George Murdock
 1. Murdock went on to discuss humanity’s common “impulses” and “drives” as ingredients – but not the sole ingredients – in the production of universals
 6. Bronsilaw Malinowski
 1. He presented a list of universal institutional types in which seven principles of integration informed various institutional responses and each of these principles is itself a universal – each, at any rate, poses a universal problem. The principles were:
 - i. Reproduction
 - ii. Territoriality
 - iii. Physiology
 - iv. Voluntary association
 - v. Occupation and profession
 - vi. Rank and status
 - vii. Comprehensive (integration of the community).
 2. He also thought that any theory of culture has to start with the organic needs of man. These needs – in combination with the further “imperative needs” called spiritual,



economic, or social – provided the framework for a scientific theory of culture. The following “basic needs” give rise to the following cultural responses:

Basic Needs	Cultural Responses
Metabolism	Commissariat
Reproduction	Kinship
Bodily Comforts	Shelter
Safety	Protection
Movement	Activities
Growth	Training
Health	Hygiene

3. Malinowski also posited “derived needs”. The analysis of culture consisted of showing the way the institutions peculiar to each society discharged the function of meeting each of the basic and derived needs. From Malinowski we get not so much a list of universals as a list of universal conditions for the existence of society and culture.
 - i. Production and reproduction of the means of production (economics)
 - ii. The codification and regulation of human behavior (social control)
 - iii. Renewal of the human material of each institution (education)
 - iv. An organization of authority and power (political organization)
7. Adaptation and some examples
 1. It is important to remember that no adaptation should be explained at any higher level than is absolutely necessary: in effect, this means at no level higher than the individual organism
 2. Adaptations may be either obligate or facultative.
 - i. Obligate – For example, the thickening of the skin on the soles of our feet that is already present at birth, and the thickening of the skin that can occur on many parts of the body when the skin is repeatedly exposed to friction (thus forming a callus).
 - ii. Facultative adaptation – analogous to an implicational universal, and it represents a complex sort of universal potential the manifestation of which is not universally present (genetically it is more complex to program a facultative than an obligate trait).
 - iii. The existence of phylogenetic facultative adaptations in humans renders obsolete the notion that if something varies it must be cultural. If it varies in a regular pattern, it may well not be cultural. This is a complication for anthropological analysis that has scarcely even been recognized
 3. Natural vs. Sexual Selection
 - i. Some particularly important adaptations result from sexual selection. Whereas natural selection reflects the fit of an organism to its environment in general, sexual selection specifically reflects fitness in obtaining mates. It has two forms: intersexual selection (often typified by female choice of males) and intersexual selection (often typified by the male-male competition for access to females). Features that render an organism fit to attract or obtain a mate – the gaudy feathers of the peacock, for example – may make no sense in terms of adjustment to the wider environment. Whereas natural selection



usually accounts for features common to a species, sexual selection often produces differences between the sexes of the same species.

4. Phylogenetic Adaptations
 - i. Heritable traits which are passed down from one generation to the next, predisposing a species to certain behaviors, traits, skills, etc.
 - ii. Among the most important clues to phylogenetic adaptation are the following:
 1. Unusual ease (or difficulty) in acquiring specific skills or knowledge
 2. A “critical period” for their acquisition
 3. Emotionally motivated actions that run counter to consciously held ideals
 4. Unusually intense preoccupation with certain topics
 5. Similar behavior among animals
 6. Universality itself, including implicational universality
 - iii. Triangular awareness in chimpanzees (the ability of individual A to calculate the interdependence of the three separate relationships composed by his relationships with individuals B and C and the relationship between B and C themselves) suggests that the same ability in us has phylogenetically deep roots and is therefore innate
 - iv. People are not a tabula rasa. Some things are easier to learn than others, and this could only reflect a structuring of the brain that existed before conditioning. The brain, therefore, was not as blank as behaviorism assumed. There is a key difference between learning and acquisition. Because learning often connotes learning theory, behavioristic associations, and social or cultural conditioning – all of which presume only very general mental mechanisms – the more neutral term, acquisition, has come into use to refer to actions or behaviors that develop in a manner suggesting some sort of specific genetic programming for them. But “learning” is a term which cannot be so easily thrown away and “learning by instinct” is used to describe behaviors that are phylogenetic adaptations and yet require some practice or imprinting experience in order to develop normally. Bird songs and human speech are some examples
5. A number of anthropologists have operated under the assumption that the human mind is, in effect, a fitness calculator: consciously or unconsciously it weighs the effects of various actions on various degrees of kin and then tends to choose those actions that promote fitness. Consequently, individual actions, and often the customs that presumably have their origin and reality in such actions, make sense as fitness-promoting strategies. In the course of their evolution, humans (and other species) did not face generalized problems, they faced specific problems. Consequently, what has evolved (disregarding effects, compromises, accidents, and the like) is a disparate collection of adaptations each separately selected because it contributed to fitness
6. Other factors being equal, the greater the sex difference in parental investment, the greater the other differences between the sexes (i.e., the greater the sexual dimorphism)
7. One of the fundamental assumptions of evolutionary psychology is that matters closely related to our survival and reproduction have a likelihood of engaging our emotions. Thus, although there might be little evidence of a general adaptation for an



aesthetic sense, a disparate collection of emotion-producing activities and entities may structure what we consider aesthetic. Surely the most notable of all examples of pleasure in the service of our reproductive interests is the sexual drive, particularly male orgasm. The imagery of reproduction – ranging from genitals and breasts through nude bodies and the infinite themes of love – is too pervasive to require documentation. Natural settings which would have been optimal habitats for our Pleistocene foraging ancestors are liked by all – lakes, rivers, cliffs, and savannahs, settings in which food, water, and protection were in optimal combination. *If there is anything that comes close to a generic aesthetic sense it might be an appreciation for skill.* Given our long dependence on manual skill to make tools, a sense of pleasure in seeing the products of skill – and in producing them – is not an unexpectable trait. Given the utility of verbal skills, the widespread appreciation of them is no less expectable. Although it argues that art results from an adaptive human proclivity for making special, which involves apprehending and creating an order different from the everyday

8. Language

1. An inbuilt capacity to transfer information from one sensory mode to another not only is crucial to maintaining a unified conception of the world but may be part of the mental mechanism that generates and interprets metaphors. One of the most important areas of study in which the ontogeny of a universal is central is linguistics. Lenneberg and Chomsky, citing the ease or difficulty with which children acquire particular grammatical forms, which implies an innate deep structure of language – argue that we should think of language as analogous to an organ, little different in principle from the other organs of our body, in the sense that they come into being as the result of interaction between genes and environmental cues rather than as a result of simple “learning”. Humans normally “learn” their first language with such extraordinary ease that there is reason to suspect some kind of wiring in the brain for language acquisition (phylogenetic adaptation): at the right time of life (a “critical period”) it is brought into activity by quite minimal environmental stimuli. At other times – as many of us know from experience – language acquisition is a much more difficult and less successful matter. The regular forms in which deaf children spontaneously construct a communication system (in the absence of models) provides additional evidence of inbuilt wiring for language acquisition. Although the deep structure of language remains in many respects elusive and controversial, the age-delimited ontogeny of language is rarely if ever contested nowadays (a fact that was very much involved in the demise of associationist learning theory and the tabula rasa model of the brain that accompanied it)
2. From the viewpoint of theory, there are only two or three distinct alternatives to evolutionary theory. Diffusion is one alternative, and if archosaurs exist and are to be distinguished from diffusion, they comprise another. Cultural reflection or recognition of biological fact is the only remaining alternative that is not simply logical or methodological.
3. Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis – the categories of language shape perceptions of the world. The ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of a society, and insofar as each society has its own language the “worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds.” In other words, if the speakers of a given language have no terms for something, it is not a part of their thought or worldview



and in some sense is scarcely perceived. What our language does not classify, we don't see, don't readily see, or don't attend to.

4. Basic color terms evolve in a largely universal pattern

9. Reciprocity

1. Another solution to the puzzle entailed by the evolution of altruism is the idea of "reciprocal altruism". An altruistic behavior that is reciprocated has its cost canceled and hence does not pose a serious evolutionary dilemma. But in order for this kind of behavior to prevail – to be more than neutral in its consequences – it must have some benefit for its practitioners. Insofar as reciprocated behaviors create coalitions of reciprocators, who may by virtue of their coalition prevail over those who do not reciprocate, then reciprocity should be selected. As is true of kin selection, the idea of reciprocal altruism rings bells in the minds of at least some anthropologists since reciprocity has long been recognized as a universal cornerstone of morality, rational action, and group life – and has therefore been central to some of the most famous studies in the whole of anthropology. The strong moral feeling attached to reciprocity, and the assiduousness with which reciprocal action and reaction are watched also suggest some degree of innateness. The solidarity of kinsmen typically rests on both nepotism and reciprocity

i. *To me, one of the more powerful models which can be derived from the three buckets approach relates to reciprocity. In physics, Newton's Third Law of Motion describes the law of an equal and opposite reaction (mirrored reciprocation), in biology animals will reciprocate to good or bad treatment, and humans, of course, exhibit the same tendencies.*

10. Incest avoidance

1. The apparent universality, or near-universality, of the incest taboo perennially fascinates anthropologists and has given rise to numerous speculations about its origin and function. The principal point of agreement is probably that incest is in some way harmful, so that avoiding it confers some benefit. What the harm, what the benefit, and how the taboo or avoidance comes about are points of contention
2. There was also an assumption that animals – unlike humans – do mate incestuously, so that the human prohibition of incest was a distinctively cultural marker of humanity's separation from the animal world. It is now known that incest is rare among animals in the wild (domestic animals, whose breeding patterns have been altered by human interference, are another matter – *becoming unrooted from your natural state has downstream negative affects you can't predict*). Between human incest avoidance and the patterns of behavior among other animals there may thus be a continuity that was previously denied
3. Another assumption now known to be wrong was that the incest taboo was universal. But in a number of societies royalty were enjoined to commit incest (or, at any rate, to marry very close kin). And in some societies there are no obvious incest taboos in the sense of rules (and sanctioned rules especially) against it, only a notion that no one would commit incest anyway. Marriages of royal brothers and sisters are well attested in the historical record, but evidence that this led to actual incest is extremely limited. Arens suggests that the motive of royal brother-sister marriages was not reproductive at all: such marriages merely took royal sisters out of the marriage market and thereby prevented them from bearing offspring who might rival the king.



With their sisters safely married to themselves, nothing compelled kings to actually mate with them.

4. Westermarck argued that there is a remarkable lack of erotic feelings between persons who have been living closely together from childhood. Such persons, he noted, would typically be relatives. Incest avoidance, thus, was a natural tendency that resulted from childhood association. Incest was tabooed then for the same reason as was bestiality and parricide: not because we have a general tendency to commit them but because some individuals go awry in ways that shock general sentiments. The rules are for them. This can be considered a form of imprinting and is a phylogenetic adaptation to reduce the harmful effects of inbreeding. Though the information is scant, Shepherd finds that there is a combined 42% nonviable offspring from full-sibling or parent-child incest
5. There are three distinguishable ways to prevent incest: by prohibition (humans only), by prevention, and by inhibition. In the case of prevention, incest simply cannot occur because parents have died or siblings are widely dispersed. Inhibition, apparently brought about by imprinting or related processes, occurs when closely related and fertile individuals are in proximity but avoid mating with each other. Avoidance, via mechanisms of prevention or inhibition, is widely reported among many animal species so that parent-offspring or sibling incest among animals in the wild is apparently rare. Whatever the psychological costs may be to individuals, the study of actual cases of incest gives no obvious support to the assumption that society, or even the family, is necessarily threatened by incest.
6. One of the lessons we can learn from incest avoidance is the sobering reflection that an alleged universal that has exercised the anthropological imagination for over 100 years is still not explained to everyone's satisfaction. It is not even certain that the phenomenon is a universal. The incest taboo clearly is not universal, though it surely is a statistical universal and might be a near-universal. On the other hand, incest avoidance may be universal.

11. Anthropology

1. Anthropology is concerned with what humans are and what humans do, along with the problems of how humans got to be the way they are and came to do what they do. Phrased differently, anthropology is concerned with such broad topics as the human condition, human affairs, and (more controversially) human nature. The distinctively anthropological contribution to these concerns is its comparative perspective: anthropology pursues its subject matters among all peoples in all times and places, and even across species. When a comparative perspective is neither employed or necessary, other disciplines step in. On the other hand, anthropology freely calls upon those other disciplines to solve its problems. I will call the propositions in this paragraph first-level propositions these propositions have a significance that transcends their level in the hierarchy of propositions informing anthropology. These propositions are now controversial, and well they should be, for almost all are false or misleading
2. Behaviorism and the tabula rasa view of the world are dead in the water after studying these universals and phylogenetic traits passed down through the generations
3. People love feeling different than 'them' so anthropology tends to focus on differences rather than similarities



4. There are both innate and manifest universals. Universals are importantly distinguished as either emic or etic. In anthropology, “etic,” by analogy with phonetic analysis in linguistics, refers to analyses in terms of cross-culturally valid, scientific frameworks (universalistic frameworks). “Emic” by analogy with phonemic analysis, refers to the way the natives conceptualize things. Since many former universals were part of the environment in which human nature evolved, keeping them in mind will be particularly useful in any attempt to understand that human nature
5. Things that violate the deeply held systems of classification are often tabooed. In terms of the folk conceptions of the anthropology of the time (and of many anthropologists today), a cultural universal confounds the traits of the cultural and the biological: it is neither fish nor fowl. This by itself may explain some of the ambivalence of anthropologists have exhibited toward the study of human universals. Transcending the boundaries of nature and culture, universals were difficult to even think about. Lying in an anthropological limbo – Kroeber’s “no man’s land” – universals were not literally or consciously tabooed, but they weren’t embraced with much enthusiasm either

12. Religion

1. Unlike everyday empirical knowledge, religious beliefs develop not because of a disposition, but because of susceptibility. In other words, religion is not an adaptation – a biologically advantageous or necessary alternity, as Steiner would have it, but is a side effect of other adaptations. Some common spin offs of religion: swings and other means of achieving vertigo (whirling dervishes), deep-noted instruments, mind-altering drugs, presence of the serpent in religious thought and iconography

13. Status/Rank and History

1. I have hypothesized a contingent relationship between social rank and historical mindedness. When social rank is idealized as hereditary, myth will be the predominant mode of presenting the past. When social rank is idealized as achievable, history will be the predominant mode. This formulation in turn rested on certain assumptions about human nature, one of which is that hereditary rulers have a strong preference that their ancestors be flattered rather than criticized. Another is that practically no one has ancestors for whom only praise is due. Cross-cultural evidence supports this hypothesis.
2. I have found an apparently universal concern with rank and inequality, taking different forms in different conditions.
3. For the caste-organized societies, human nature was multiple in forms, there was no psychic unity of humanity (the result is a kind of racism or pseudospeciation). In the societies with open stratification, by contrast, the notion of the psychic unity of humanity was regularly hit upon. This complex interplay between, on the one hand, the way the world is (the human psyche is basically the same everywhere) and our ability to perceive it as such, in contrast to, on the other hand, the ways in which the world can be misconstrued (by positing racial conceptions of human nature) and why humans may misconstrue it, raises important questions about the relationships between culture, universals, and human nature
4. In sum, my attempt to explain variations in historical mindedness led to an exploration of the interplay between universals, human nature, the perception of human nature, and many facets of society and expressive culture. That experience is also part of what motivated this book



14. Other

1. To know what we are really like, we must compare ourselves with others – and all these others with each other
2. Takes opposite view of cultural determinism where human nature no more than a constraint put upon us by civilization
3. Universals can't be so closely linked to biology that there is no room for the social or cultural perspectives (breathing, sex hardly mentioned)
4. Universals are sometimes stated in the negative. Thus it is said, for example, that no society is a matriarchy and that no society's music is composed of notes of equal length
 - i. **Nature and culture are two distinct phenomenal realms**
 - ii. **Nature manifests itself in instincts (which are fixed action patterns) and culture manifests itself in learned behavior**
 - iii. **Because human nature is the same everywhere, it is culture that explains differences between human populations**
 - iv. **Human universals are likely to reflect human nature**
 - v. **Except for its extraordinary capacity to absorb culture, the human mind is a largely blank slate**
 - vi. **Culture (because of 3 and 5) is the most important determinant of human affairs**
 - vii. **Explaining what people do in biological terms (in terms of nature instead of culture) is a reductionist fallacy (in extreme forms, explaining human affairs in any terms other than culture itself is reductionist fallacy)**
 - viii. **Being autonomous, culture has an arbitrary and highly variable character**
 - ix. **Universals (because of 5 and 8) are few (and unimportant?)**
5. Any social system, to survive, must conform to certain conditions. If we can define adequately one of these universal conditions, one to which all human societies must conform, we have a sociological law
6. Adequate self-knowledge requires a comprehension of both nature and history
7. Human cognition comprises two distinct elements: knowledge and ideology. Knowledge results from interaction with nature (from practical activities such as production and reproduction). The function of knowledge is utilitarian. Ideology results from social structure – especially “institutionalized hierarchy”. Bloch's notion of institutionalized hierarchy should probably be understood to mean hereditary hierarchy. The function of ideology is to rationalize or justify instituted inequality, a task that does not require universal validity. Knowledge, says Bloch, contains universally valid concepts, such as the durational conception of time that ethnosemanticists have found in language after language, and which is virtually essential to the conduct of public affairs. Knowledge reflects the world as it is. Ideology by contrast is relative, tending to be minimal where instituted hierarchy is minimal, and to be rich where institute hierarchy is great – as in Hindu, caste-organized India. Ideology does not need to reflect the world as it is, and often obscures its realities



15. The Universal People

1. What do all people, all societies, all cultures, and all languages have in common?

Below is a tentative list of universals exhibited by people all over the world

2. Language and Cognition

- Language employed to manipulate others, to misinform, mislead
- Language is translatable
- Language not a simply reflection of reality
- Language associated with prestige from proficient use of (poetry)
- Abstraction in speech and thought
- Antonyms, synonyms
- Logical notions of "and, not, opposite, equivalent, part/whole, general/particular, same"
- Binary cognitive distinctions
- Color terms: black and white (later comes red...)
- Classification of: age, behavioral propensities, body parts, colors, fauna, flora, inner states, kin, sex, space, tools, weather conditions
- Fears: childhood fears (loud noises, strangers), fears of death, ability to overcome fears, snakes
- Continua (ordering as cognitive pattern)
- Discrepancies between speech, thought, and action
- Figurative speech, metaphors
- Symbolism, symbolic speech
- Synesthetic metaphors
- Tabooed utterances
- Tabooed foods
- Special speech for special occasions
- Planning - for future, attempts to predict
- Units of time, cyclicality, measurement, diurnality, calendars
- Mental maps
- Past / present / future
- Concept of a person
- Phonemes
- Pronouns
- Proper names
- Semantic category - dimension, giving, location, motion, other physical properties, components, sex
- Commonly used words are shorter, infrequently used words are longer
- Taxonomy
- True / false distinguished
- Counting and numerals
- Grammar
- Baby talk
- Discrepancies between speech, thought, and action

2. Society

- Personal names
- Family or household
- Kin groups
- Kinship statuses



- Peer groups not based on family
- Group living
- In-group distinguished from out-group(s)
- In-group biases in favor of out-groups
- Actions under self-control distinguished from those not under control
- Affection expressed and felt
- Age grades/statuses/terms
- Attachment
- Anticipation
- Ambivalence
- Crying
- Law: rights and obligations, rules of membership
- Moral sentiments
- Distinguishing from right and wrong, good and bad
- Promise/oath
- Prestige, economic, social inequalities
- Statuses and roles - ascribed and achieved, distinguished from individuals, status on other than sex, age, or kinship bases
- Leaders – *people admire, or profess to admire, generosity, and this is particularly desired in a leader. No leader of the UP has complete power lodged in himself alone. UP leaders go beyond the limits of UP reason and morality.*
- Adjusting to environment
- Habituation
- De facto oligarchy - Since the UP never have complete democracy, and never have complete autocracy, they always have a de facto oligarchy
- Property
- Coalitions
- Collective identities
- Conflict
- Cooperative labor
- Gender roles
- Males on average travel greater distances over lifetime
- Marriage
- Husband older than wife on average
- Copulation conducted in privacy
- Incest prevention or avoidance, incest between mother and son unthinkable or tabooed
- Collective decision making
- Etiquette
- Inheritance rules
- Generosity admired, gift giving (stinginess disapproved of)
- Redress of wrongs, sanctions
- Sexual jealousy
- Sexual violence
- Shame
- Territoriality



- Triangular awareness (assessing relationships among the self and two other people, see *Chimpanzee Politics*)
- Some forms of proscribed violence
- Visiting
- Trade
- Coyness display
- Childcare
- Critical learning periods
- Customary greetings
- Culture, cultural variability, cultural vs. nature distinction
- Daily routines
- Directions
- Division of labor by age, sex
- Dreams, dream interpretation
- Dominance / submission
- Empathy
- Envy
- Explanations
- Ethnocentrism
- Pride
- Facial expressions: anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, surprise, masking/modifying of true emotion
- Fairness
- Figurative speech
- Females do more direct childcare
- Folklore
- Food preferences, food sharing
- Gestures
- Gossip
- Government
- Hope
- Hospitality
- Hygiene
- Insulting
- Institutions (organized co-activities)
- Intention
- Interpreting Behavior
- Imagery
- Jokes
- Judging others
- Law - rights and obligations, rules of membership
- Likes / dislikes
- Making comparisons
- Males - dominate public/political realm, engage in more coalitional violence, more aggressive, more prone to lethal violence, more prone to theft, travel greater distances over their lifetime
- Manipulate social relations
- Meal times



- Materialism
 - Memory
 - Normal distinguished from abnormal states
 - Oedipus complex
 - Overestimating objectivity of thought
 - Rape
 - Pain and seeking avoidance of
 - Private inner life
 - Practice to improve skills
 - Psychological defense mechanisms
 - Reciprocity - reciprocal exchange (of goods, of labor, of services), negative reciprocity (revenge, retaliation, vengeance)
 - Right-handedness as population norm
 - Risk-taking
 - Role and personality seen as a dynamic interrelationship (departures from role can be explained in terms of individual personality)
 - Sex differences in spatial cognition and behavior, terminology is fundamentally binary
 - Sex statuses
 - Sexual attraction, jealousy, modesty, regulation (incest prevention), focus of interest
 - Self - distinguished from other, neither wholly passive nor wholly autonomous, as subject and object, self is responsible
 - Self-image - awareness of (and concern for what others think), manipulation of self-image, wanting to have a positive self-image
 - Shame
 - Social structure
 - Socialization - from senior to junior kin
 - Sweets preferred
 - Turn taking
 - Weaning
 - World view
3. Myth, ritual and aesthetics
- Belief in the supernatural / religion
 - Beliefs about fortune / misfortune
 - Magical thinking - to increase life, to sustain life, to win love
 - Use of magic to increase life and win love
 - Beliefs about death
 - Beliefs about disease
 - Divination
 - Attempts to control weather
 - Dream interpretation
 - Beliefs and narratives
 - Proverbs, sayings
 - Poetry/rhetoric
 - Healing practices, medicine
 - Childbirth customs
 - Rites of passage, succession



- Music, rhythm, dance, melody, children's music, related to dance, related to religious activity, seen as an art, vocal, repetition, variation
 - Play - to perfect skills
 - Toys, playthings
 - Death rituals, mourning
 - Feasting
 - Body adornment
 - Hairstyles
 - Art, non-bodily decorative art
 - Mood or consciousness-altering techniques and/or substances
4. Technology
- Shelter
 - Control of fire
 - Tools, tool making, tool dependency, tools for cutting, tools to make tools, culturally patterned, permanent tools, tools for pounding
 - Weapons, spear
 - Containers
 - Cooking
 - Lever
 - Cordage
 - Toys, playthings
 - Weaving



Newton's Third Law of Motion: **Interaction**

For **every action**, there is an **equal** and **opposite reaction**.

- *In all interactions*
- *Regardless of mass or size*

