The Importance of Anthropology

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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The Relevance of Anthropology
What is anthropology and what can it do? The term anthropology comes from the Greek *anthropos* for “man, human” and *logos* for “study.” Anthropologists seek answers to an enormous variety of questions about humans. They are interested in both universals and differences in human populations. They want to discover when, where, and why humans appeared on the earth, how and why they have changed since then, and how and why modern human populations vary in their biological and cultural features. Anthropology has a practical side too. Applied and practicing anthropologists put anthropological methods, information, and results to use, in efforts to solve practical problems.

Defining anthropology as the study of human beings is not complete, however, for such a definition would appear to incorporate a whole catalog of disciplines: sociology, psychology, political science, economics, history, human biology, and perhaps even the humanistic disciplines of philosophy and literature. There must, then, be something unique about anthropology—a reason for its having developed as a separate discipline and for its having retained a separate identity over the last 100 years.

The Scope of Anthropology

Anthropologists are often thought of as individuals who travel to little-known corners of the world to study exotic peoples or who dig deep into the earth to uncover the fossil remains or the tools and pots of people who lived long ago. These views, though clearly stereotyped, do indicate how anthropology differs from other disciplines concerned with humans. Anthropology is broader in scope, both geographically and historically. Anthropology is concerned explicitly and directly with all varieties of people throughout the world, not just those close at hand. Anthropologists are also interested in people of all periods. Beginning with the immediate ancestors of humans, who lived a few million years ago, anthropology traces the development of humans until the present.

Anthropologists have not always been as global and comprehensive in their concerns as they are today. Traditionally, they concentrated on non-Western cultures and left the study of Western civilization to other disciplines. In recent years, however, this division of labor among the disciplines has begun to disappear. Now anthropologists work in their own and other complex societies.

What induces anthropologists to study humans so broadly? In part, they are motivated by the belief that any suggested generalization about human beings should be shown to apply to many times and places of human existence. If a generalization does not prove to apply widely, anthropologists are entitled or even obliged to be skeptical about it. The skeptical attitude, in the absence of persuasive evidence, is our best protection against accepting invalid ideas about humans.

For example, when American educators discovered in the 1960s that African American schoolchildren rarely drank milk, they assumed that lack of money or education was the cause. But evidence from anthropology suggested a different explanation. Anthropologists had known for years that people do not drink fresh milk in many parts of the world where milking animals are kept; rather, they sour it before they drink it, or they make it into cheese. Why they do so is now clear. Many people lack the enzyme lactase that is necessary for breaking down lactose, the sugar in milk. When such people drink regular milk, it actually interferes with digestion. Not only is the lactose in milk not digested, but other nutrients are less likely to be digested and nausea.

Another distinctive feature of anthropology is its holistic orientation of fact. Anthropologists are interested in the interrelations among various features of human experience, a point of view that is often not followed in other disciplines. Thus, when anthropologists study human exploitation, they also discuss the historical and political aspects of that exploitation.

In the past, anthropologists were often considered specialists in a limited geographic area. This was especially true in the United States. Today, however, anthropologists are as likely to specialize in a limited time period as in a limited geographic area. Anthropologists who study human evolution, for example, are as likely to study human groups of the past as they are to study groups of the present.

The Antisocial Implications of Anthropology

Thus far, we have discussed the characteristics of anthropology as a global discipline. But there is another side to anthropology. How, then, is anthropology's discipline different from the discipline of other social sciences?

Individuals who study anthropology have no special interest in the generalization of fact. Instead, they are mostly focused on understanding the relationships among the facts. They are not satisfied with granting and receiving statements or systems. They are not satisfied with money and other benefits. They are not satisfied with the human group to which they belong, and they are not satisfied with the ages.

Fields of Anthropology

Different areas of anthropology are primarily focused on different areas.
to be digested as well; in many cases, drinking milk will cause cramps, stomach gas, diarrhea, and nausea. Milk intolerance is common in adulthood among Asians, southern Europeans, Arabs and Jews, West Africans, North and South American native peoples, as well as African Americans. Because anthropologists are acquainted with human life in an enormous variety of geographic and historical settings, they are often able to correct mistaken beliefs about different groups of people.

The Holistic Approach

Another distinguishing feature of the discipline is its holistic, or multifaceted, approach to the study of human beings. Anthropologists study not only all varieties of people but many aspects of human experience. For example, when describing a group of people, an anthropologist might discuss the history of the area in which the people live, the physical environment, the organization of family life, the general features of their language, the group’s settlement patterns, political and economic systems, religion, and styles of art and dress.

In the past, individual anthropologists tried to cover as many subjects as possible. Today, as in many other disciplines, so much information has been accumulated that anthropologists tend to specialize. Thus, one anthropologist may investigate the physical characteristics of some of our prehistoric ancestors. Another may study the biological effect of the environment on a human population over time. Still another will concentrate on many customs of a particular group of people. Despite this specialization, however, the discipline of anthropology retains its holistic orientation in that its many different specialties, taken together, describe many aspects of human existence, both past and present.

The Anthropological Curiosity

Thus far, we have described anthropology as being broader in scope, both historically and geographically, and more holistic in approach than other disciplines concerned with human beings. But this statement again implies that anthropology is the all-inclusive human science. How, then, is anthropology really different from the other disciplines? We suggest that anthropology’s distinctiveness lies principally in the kind of curiosity it arouses.

Individuals may provide information to anthropologists, but the anthropological curiosity mostly focuses on the typical characteristics (traits, customs) of human groups and how to understand and explain them. For example, whereas economists take a monetary system for granted and study how it operates, anthropologists would ask how frequently monetary systems are found, why they vary, and why only some societies during the last few thousand years used money. This is not to imply that anthropologists are not interested in variation within human groups, but their focus is usually on typical characteristics of human groups—how and why populations and their characteristics have varied around the globe and throughout the ages.

Fields of Anthropology

Different anthropologists concentrate on different characteristics of societies. Some are concerned primarily with biological or physical characteristics of human populations; others are interested principally in what we call cultural characteristics. Hence, there are two broad classifications of
subject matter in anthropology: biological (physical) anthropology and cultural anthropology. Biological anthropology is one major field of anthropology. Cultural anthropology is divided into three major subfields: archaeology, linguistics, and ethnology. Ethnology, the study of recent cultures, is now usually referred to by the parent name, cultural anthropology (see Figure 1.1). Crosscutting these four fields is a fifth, applied or practicing anthropology.

**Biological Anthropology**

Biological (physical) anthropology, which deals with the biological or physical characteristics of humans, seeks to answer two distinct sets of questions. The first set is about the emergence of humans and their later evolution (this focus is called human paleontology or paleoanthropology). The second set is about how and why contemporary human populations vary biologically (this focus is called human variation).

To reconstruct human evolution, human paleontologists search for and study the buried, hardened remains or impressions—known as fossils—of humans, prehumans, and related animals. Paleontologists working in East Africa, for instance, have excavated the fossil remains of humanlike beings that lived more than 4 million years ago. These findings have suggested the approximate dates when our ancestors began to develop two-legged walking, very flexible hands, and a larger brain.

In attempting to clarify evolutionary relationships, human paleontologists may use not only the fossil record but also geological information on the succession of climates, environments, and plant and animal populations. Moreover, when reconstructing the past of humans, paleontologists are also interested in the behavior and evolution of our closest relatives among the mammals—the prosimians, monkeys, and apes, which, like ourselves, are members of the order of Primates. Anthropologists, psychologists, and biologists who specialize in the study of primates are called primatologists. The various species of primates are observed in the wild and in the laboratory. One especially popular subject of study is the chimpanzee, which bears a close resemblance to humans in behavior and physical appearance, has very similar genes, and is susceptible to many of the same diseases.

The second major focus of biological anthropology, the study of human variation, investigates how and why contemporary human populations differ in biological or physical characteristics. All living people belong to one species, *Homo sapiens*, for all can successfully interbreed.
Yet, much varies among human populations. Investigators of human variation ask such questions as: Why are some peoples taller than others? How have human populations adapted physically to their environmental conditions? Are some peoples, such as Inuit, better equipped than other peoples to endure cold? Does darker skin color offer special protection against the tropical sun?

To understand better the biological variations observable among contemporary human populations, biological anthropologists use the principles, concepts, and techniques of at least three other disciplines: human genetics (the study of human traits that are inherited), population biology (the study of environmental effects on, and interaction with, population characteristics), and epidemiology (the study of how and why diseases affect different populations in different ways). Research on human variation, therefore, overlaps research in other fields.

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is concerned with how and why cultures vary or are similar in the past and present. But what is culture? We discuss the concept of culture more fully in the chapter on culture and culture change. Briefly, the term culture refers to the customary ways that a particular population or society thinks and behaves. The culture of a social group includes many things—from the language that people speak, the way children are brought up, the roles assigned to males and females, religious beliefs and practices, and preferences in music. Anthropologists are interested in all of these and other learned behaviors and ideas that have come to be widely shared or customary in the group. The three main branches of cultural anthropology are archaeology (the study of past cultures, primarily through their material remains), anthropological linguistics (the anthropological study of languages), and ethnology (the study of existing and recent cultures), now usually referred to by the parent name, cultural anthropology.
Archaeology
Archaeologists seek not only to reconstruct the daily life and customs of peoples who lived in the past but also to trace cultural changes and to offer possible explanations for those changes. This concern is similar to that of historians, but archaeologists reach much farther back in time. Historians deal only with societies that left written records and are therefore limited to the last 5,000 years of human history. Human societies, however, have existed for more than a million years, and only a small proportion in the last 5,000 years had writing. Lacking written records for study, archaeologists must try to reconstruct history from the remains of human cultures. Some of these remains are as grand as the Mayan temples discovered at Chichén Itzá in Yucatán, Mexico. More often, they are as ordinary as bits of broken pottery, stone tools, and garbage heaps.

To collect the data they need to understand how and why ways of life have changed through time in different parts of the world, archaeologists use techniques and findings borrowed from other disciplines, as well as what they can infer from anthropological studies of recent and contemporary cultures. For example, to guess where to dig for evidence of early toolmaking, archaeologists rely on geology to tell them where sites of early human occupation are likely to be found, because of erosion and uplifting, near the surface of the earth. To infer when agriculture first developed, archaeologists date the relevant excavated materials by a process originally developed by chemical scientists. To try to understand why cities first emerged, archaeologists may use information from historians, geographers, and others about how recent and contemporary cities are related economically and politically to their hinterlands. If we can discover what recent and contemporary cities have in common, we can speculate on why cities developed originally. Thus, archaeologists use information from the present and recent past in trying to understand the distant past.

Anthropological Linguistics
Anthropological linguistics is another branch of cultural anthropology. Linguistics, or the study of languages, is a somewhat older discipline than anthropology, but the early linguists concentrated on the study of languages that had been written for a long time—languages such as English that had been written for nearly a thousand years. Anthropological linguists began to do fieldwork in places where the language was not yet written. To do this, they learn the language so that they could study it.

Like biologists, linguists as well as cultural anthropologists try to trace the emergence of human societies. The study of the history of a language is called historical linguistics. The study of the languages of a society at a given time is called descriptive linguistics. The study of the way a language is used in a particular context is called sociolinguistics.

Like biological anthropology, which tries to understand the ways of life of contemporary peoples, anthropological linguistics is interested in understanding the ways of life of the past. This is true not simply for recent and contemporary languages but for all languages, for all the languages of the world. Because we do not always have the context in which a language is used, we do not always have the opportunity to verify a person's meaning. Instead, we have to rely on inferences about and hypotheses about the use of language, which are called sociolinguistics.
yet written. This meant that anthropologists could not consult a dictionary or grammar to help them learn the language. Instead, they first had to construct a dictionary and grammar. Then they could study the structure and history of the language.

Like biological anthropologists, linguists study changes that have taken place over time, as well as contemporary variation. Some anthropological linguists are concerned with the emergence of language and also with the divergence of languages over thousands of years. The study of how languages change over time and how they may be related is known as historical linguistics. Anthropological linguists are also interested in how contemporary languages differ, especially in their construction. This focus of linguistics is generally called descriptive (structural) linguistics. The study of how language is used in social contexts is called sociolinguistics.

In contrast with human paleontologists and archaeologists, who have physical remains to help them reconstruct change over time, historical linguists deal only with languages—and usually unwritten ones at that. (Remember that writing is only about 5,000 years old, and most languages since then have not been written.) Because unwritten languages must be heard to be studied, they do not leave any trace once speakers have died. Linguists interested in reconstructing the history of unwritten languages must begin in the present, with comparisons of contemporary languages. On the basis of these comparisons, they draw inferences about the kinds of change in language that may have occurred in the past and that may account for similarities and differences observed in the present. Historical linguists typically ask such questions as these: Did two or more contemporary languages diverge from a common ancestral language? If they are related, how far back in time did they begin to differ?

Unlike historical linguists, descriptive (or structural) linguists are typically concerned with discovering and recording the principles that determine how sounds and words are put together in speech. For example, a structural description of a particular language might tell us that the sounds $t$ and $k$ are interchangeable in a word without causing a difference in meaning. In American Samoa, one could say *Tutuila* or *Kukuiula* as the name of the largest island, and everyone, except perhaps newly arrived anthropologists who know little yet about the Samoan language, would understand that the same island was being mentioned.

Sociolinguists are interested in the social aspects of language, including what people speak about and how they interact conversationally, their attitudes toward speakers of other dialects or languages, and how people speak differently in different social contexts. In English, for example, we do not address everyone we meet in the same way: “Hi, Sandy” may be the customary way a person greets a friend. But we would probably feel uncomfortable addressing a doctor by a first name; instead, we would probably say, “Good morning, Dr. Brown.” Such variations in language use, which are determined by the social status of the people being addressed, are significant for sociolinguists.

Ethnology Ethnologists, usually called “cultural anthropologists” nowadays, try to understand how and why peoples today and in the recent past differ or are similar in their customary ways of thinking and acting. How and why do cultures develop and change? How does one aspect of culture affect others? The aim of ethnologists is largely the same as that of archaeologists. However, ethnologists generally use data collected through observation and interviews of living peoples. Archaeologists, on the other hand, must work with fragmentary remains of past cultures, on the basis of which they can only make inferences about the customs of prehistoric peoples.
One type of ethnologist, ethnographers, usually spend a year or so living with, talking to, and observing the people whose customs they are studying. This fieldwork provides the data for a detailed description (an ethnography) of customary behavior and thought. Ethnographers vary in the degree to which they strive for completeness in their coverage of cultural and social life. Earlier ethnographers tended to strive for holistic coverage; more recent ethnographers have tended to specialize or focus on narrower realms such as ritual healing or curing, interaction with the environment, effects of modernization or globalization, or gender issues. Ethnographies often go beyond description; they may address current anthropological issues or try to explain some aspect of culture.

Many cultures have undergone extensive change in the recent past so trying to understand what life was like in earlier times is important. Ethnographers can ask older people what life was like when they were young, and information about the past may be contained in historical documents usually not written by anthropologists. An ethnohistorian studies how the ways of life of a particular group of people have changed over time. Ethnohistorians investigate written documents such as missionary accounts, reports by traders and explorers, and government records to try to establish the cultural changes that have occurred. Unlike ethnographers, who rely mostly on their own observations and interviewing, ethnohistorians rely on the reports of others. Often, they must attempt to piece together and make sense of widely scattered, and even apparently contradictory, information. Thus, the ethnohistorian's research is very much like that of a historian, except that ethnohistorians are usually concerned with the history of a people who did not themselves leave written records.

Ethnographic and ethnohistorical research is very time-consuming, and it is rare for one person to study more than a few cultures. The cross-cultural researcher (who may be a cultural anthropologist or some other kind of social scientist) is interested in discovering general patterns about cultural traits—what is universal, what is variable, why traits vary, and what the consequences of the variability might be. Why, for example, is there more gender inequality in some societies than in others? Is family violence related to aggression in other areas of life? What are the effects of living in a very unpredictable environment? In testing possible answers to such questions, cross-cultural researchers use data from samples of cultures (usually described initially by ethnographers) to try to arrive at explanations or relationships that hold across cultures. Archaeologists may find the results of cross-cultural research useful for making inferences about the past, particularly if they can discover material indicators of cultural variation.

Because ethnologists may be interested in many aspects of customary behavior and thought—from economic behavior to political behavior to styles of art, music, and religion—ethnology overlaps with disciplines that concentrate on some particular aspect of human existence, such as sociology, psychology, economics, political science, art, music, and comparative religion. But the distinctive feature of cultural anthropology is its interest in how all these aspects of human existence vary from society to society, in all historical periods, and in all parts of the world.

Applied Anthropology

In the physical and biological sciences, it is well understood that technological breakthroughs like DNA splicing, spacecraft docking in outer space, and the development of miniscule computer chips could not have taken place without an enormous amount of basic research to uncover the laws of nature in the physical and biological worlds. If we did not understand fundamental principles, the technological achievements we are so proud of would not be possible. Researchers are often simply driven by curiosity, with no thought to where the research might lead, which is why such research is sometimes referred to as basic, fundamental, or applied, or practical. But the concern with making inferences about the relationships in any or all of these areas requires the application of large bodies of knowledge and the development of new theories and methods. C. W. Kintigh has written that "applied" research "usually employs science for its own sake, or for the sake of other sciences, whereas the study of the social sciences is concerned with making inferences about the relationships in one or more of these fields, and it requires a great deal of time and effort to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills."
research is sometimes called basic research. The same is true of the social sciences. If a researcher finds out that societies with combative sports tend to have more wars, it may lead to other inquiries about the relationships between one kind of aggression and another. The knowledge acquired may ultimately lead to discovering ways to correct social problems, such as family violence and war.

Whereas basic research may ultimately help to solve practical problems, applied research is more explicit in its practical goals. Today, more than half of all professional anthropologists are applied, or practicing, anthropologists. Applied (practicing) anthropology is explicit in its concern with making anthropological knowledge useful. Applied anthropologists may be trained in any or all of the subfields of anthropology. In contrast to basic researchers, who are almost always employed in colleges, universities, and museums, applied anthropologists are commonly employed in settings outside traditional academia, including government agencies, international development agencies, private consulting firms, businesses, public health organizations, medical schools, law offices, community development agencies, and charitable foundations.

When Anita Spring first did fieldwork in Zambia in the 1970s, she was not particularly interested in agriculture. Rather, medical anthropology was her interest. Her work focused on customary healing practices, particularly involving women and children. She was surprised at the end of the year when a delegation of women came to tell her that she didn't understand what it meant to be a woman. "To be a woman is to be a farmer," they said. She admits that it took her a while to pay attention to women as farmers, but then she began to participate in efforts to provide technical assistance to them. Like many others interested in women in development Spring realized that all too often development agents downplay women's contributions to agriculture.

How does one bring about change in male-centered attitudes and practices? One way is to document how much women actually contribute to agriculture. Beginning with the influential writing of Ester Boserup in Woman's Role in Economic Development (1970), scholars began to report that in Africa south of the Sahara, in the Caribbean, and in parts of Southeast Asia, women were the principal farmers or agricultural laborers. Moreover, as agriculture became more complex, it required more work time in the fields, so the women's contribution to agriculture increased. In addition, men increasingly went away to work, so women had to do much of what used to be men's work on the farms.

In the 1980s, Spring designed and directed the Women in Agricultural Development Project in Malawi, funded by the Office of Women in the U.S. Agency for International Development. Rather than focusing just on women, the project aimed to collect data on both female and male agriculturalists and how development agents treated them. The project did more than collect information; mini-projects were set up and evaluated so that successful training techniques could be passed on to development agents in other regions. Spring points out that the success of the program was due not just to the design of the project. Much of the success depended on the interest and willingness of Malawi itself to change. It didn't hurt that the United Nations and other donor organizations increasingly focused attention on women. It takes the efforts of many to bring about change. Increasingly, applied anthropologists like Anita Spring are involved in these efforts from beginning to end, from the design stage to implementation and evaluation.

Sources: Spring 1995, 2000b.
Forensic anthropology is one kind of applied anthropology. Kathy Reichs is a forensic anthropologist working in a medical examiner's office.

Biological anthropologists may be called upon to give forensic evidence in court, or they may work in public health, or they may design clothes and equipment to fit human anatomy. Archaeologists may be involved in preserving and exhibiting artifacts for museums and in doing contract work to find and preserve cultural sites that might be damaged by construction or excavation. Linguists may work in bilingual educational training programs or may work on ways to improve communication. Ethnologists may work in a wide variety of applied projects ranging from community development, urban planning, health care, and agricultural improvement to personnel and organizational management and assessment of the impact of change programs on people's lives. We discuss applied anthropology in many of the boxes and more fully in the last part of this book, "Using Anthropology."

The Relevance of Anthropology

The idea that it is impossible to account for human behavior scientifically, either because our actions and beliefs are too individualistic and complex or because human beings are understandable only in otherworldly terms, is a self-fulfilling notion. We cannot discover general principles explaining human behavior if we neither believe such principles exist nor bother to look for them. People who do not believe that there can be general principles of human behavior will be reinforced by their finding none. If we are to increase our understanding of human beings, we first have to believe it is possible to do so.

If we aim to understand humans, it is essential that we study humans in all times and places. We must study ancient humans and modern humans. We must study their cultures and their biology. How else can we understand what is true of humans generally or how they are capable of varying? If we study just our own society, we may come up only with explanations that are culture-bound, not general or applicable to most or all humans. Anthropology is useful, then, to the degree that it contributes to our understanding of human beings everywhere.

In addition, anthropology is relevant because it helps us avoid misunderstandings between peoples. If we can understand why other groups are different from ourselves, we might have less reason to condemn them for behavior that appears strange to us. We may then come to realize that many differences between peoples are products of physical and cultural adaptations.
to different environments. For example, someone who first finds out about the San as they lived in the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa in the 1950s might assume that the San were “backward.” The San wore little clothing, had few possessions, lived in meager shelters, and enjoyed none of our technological niceties like radio and computers. But let us reflect on how a typical North American community might react if it awoke to find itself in an environment similar to that in which the San lived. The people would find that the arid land makes both agriculture and animal husbandry impossible, and they might have to think about adopting a nomadic existence. They might then discard many of their material possessions so that they could travel easily, to take advantage of changing water and food supplies. Because of the extreme heat and the lack of extra water for laundry, they might find it more practical to be almost naked than to wear clothes. They would undoubtedly find it impossible to build elaborate homes. For social security, they might start to share the food brought into the group. Thus, if they survived at all, they might end up looking and acting far more like the San looked than like typical North Americans.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected or globalized, the importance of understanding and trying to respect cultural and physical differences becomes more and more important. Minor misunderstandings can escalate quickly into more serious problems. Even when powerful countries think they are being helpful, they may convey that other countries are inferior. They may also unknowingly promote behaviors that are not in the best interest of the people they are trying to help. At the extreme, misunderstandings can lead to violent confrontations. In today’s world, going to war with modern weapons of mass destruction can kill more people than ever before.

Knowledge of our past may bring both a feeling of humility and a sense of accomplishment. If we are to attempt to deal with the problems of our world, we must be aware of our vulnerability so that we do not think that problems will solve themselves. But we also have to think enough of our accomplishments to believe that we can find solutions to problems. Much of the trouble we get into may be a result of feelings of self-importance and invulnerability—in short, our lack of humility. Knowing something about our evolutionary past may help us to understand and accept
our place in the biological world. Just as for any other form of life, there is no guarantee that any particular human population, or even the entire human species, will perpetuate itself indefinitely. The earth changes, the environment changes, and humanity itself changes. What survives and flourishes in the present might not do so in the future.

Yet, our vulnerability should not make us feel powerless. We have many reasons to feel confident about the future. Consider what we have accomplished so far. By means of tools and weapons fashioned from sticks and stones, we were able to hunt animals larger and more powerful than ourselves. We discovered how to make fire, and we learned to use it to keep ourselves warm and to cook our food. As we domesticated plants and animals, we gained greater control over our food supply and were able to establish more permanent settlements. We mined and smelted ores to fashion more durable tools. We built cities and irrigation systems, monuments and ships. We made it possible to travel from one continent to another in a single day. We conquered some illnesses and prolonged human life.

In short, human beings and their cultures have changed considerably over the course of history. Human populations have often been able to adapt to changing circumstances. Let us hope that humans continue to adapt to the challenges of the present and future.

**Study and Review on myanthrolab.com**

**Summary**

1. Anthropology is literally the study of human beings. It differs from other disciplines concerned with people in that anthropology is: (a) concerned with humans in all places of the world and it traces human evolution and cultural development from millions of years ago to the present day; (b) holistic, that is, studies all aspects of peoples’ experiences; and (c) concerned with identifying and explaining typical characteristics (traits, customs) of particular human populations.

2. Biological (physical) anthropology, one of the major fields of anthropology, studies the emergence of humans and their later physical evolution (human paleontology) and how and why contemporary human populations vary biologically (human variation).

3. Cultural anthropology has three subfields: archaeology, anthropological linguistics, and ethnology (now usually referred to by the parent name, cultural anthropology). All the subfields deal with aspects of human culture, that is, with the customary ways of thinking and behaving of particular societies.

4. Archaeologists seek to reconstruct and explain the daily life and customs of prehistoric peoples from the remains of human cultures.

5. Anthropological linguists are concerned with the emergence of language and with the divergence of languages over time (historical linguistics) as well as how contemporary languages differ, both in construction (descriptive or structural linguistics) and in actual speech (sociolinguistics).

6. The ethnologist (now often called a cultural anthropologist) seeks to understand how and why peoples of today and the recent past differ in their customary ways of thinking and acting. There are three major types of cultural anthropologists: ethnographers, ethnohistorians, and cross-cultural researchers.
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CHAPTER 1  The Importance of Anthropology

7. In all four major subdisciplines of anthropology, there are applied anthropologists, people who apply anthropological knowledge to achieve more practical goals.

8. By showing us why other people are the way they are, both culturally and physically, anthropology may make us more tolerant. Knowledge of our past may bring us both a feeling of humility and a sense of accomplishment.

Glossary Terms

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Critical Questions

1. Why study anthropology? What are its goals and how is it useful?

2. How does anthropology differ from other fields of study you've encountered that deal with humans? (Compare with psychology, sociology, political science, history, or biology, among others.)

3. What did you think anthropology was about before you read this chapter? Did your ideas change? Why or why not?

Read the Original Source on myanthrolab.com

Read the chapter by Terence E. Hays, "From Ethnographer to Comparativist and Back Again," on MyAnthroLab, and answer the following questions.

1. Many researchers find that their interests change when they go to the field. What did Hays start out studying? What did he get more interested in?

2. Explain why Hays thinks that you need both ethnography and comparison.