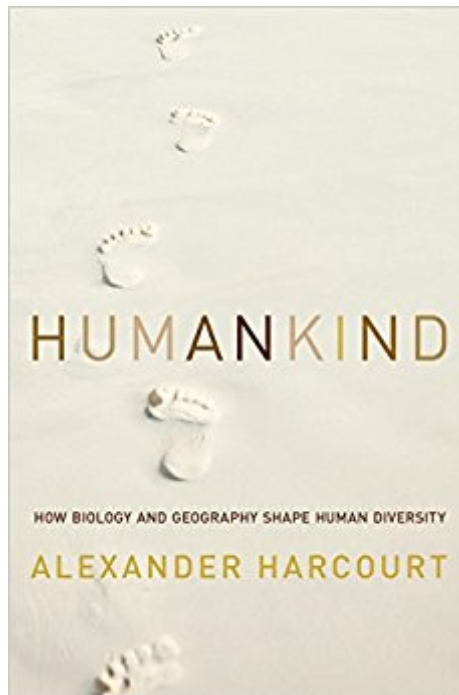




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# **Humankind: How Biology And Geography Shape Human Diversity**



## Synopsis

An innovative and illuminating look at how the evolution of the human species has been shaped by the world around us, from anatomy and physiology, to cultural diversity and population density. Where did the human species originate? Why are tropical peoples much more diverse than those at polar latitudes? Why can only Japanese peoples digest seaweed? How are darker skin, sunlight, and fertility related? Did Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens ever interbreed? In *Humankind*, U. C. Davis professor Alexander Harcourt answers these questions and more, as he explains how the expansion of the human species around the globe and our interaction with our environment explains much about why humans differ from one region of the world to another, not only biologically, but culturally. What effects have other species had on the distribution of humans around the world, and we, in turn, on their distribution? And how have human populations affected each other's geography, even existence? For the first time in a single book, Alexander Harcourt brings these topics together to help us understand why we are, what we are, where we are. It turns out that when one looks at humanity's expansion around the world, and in the biological explanations for our geographic diversity, we humans are often just another primate. Humanity's distribution around the world and the type of organism we are today has been shaped by the same biogeographical forces that shape other species.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Harcourt engages with the physical differences between human bodies and the cultural and

medical implications of them, addressing such topics as why skin tone varies from region to region or the biological basis of why certain populations have evolved to better digest milk, starches, or seaweed. Harcourt reminds readers that biological conceptions of race should not be confused with sociopolitical conceptions of it, and that there are good reasons to understand the *how* and *why* of our biological differences.

— Publishers Weekly  
 — “A remarkable achievement.” — Science (Praise for Alexander Harcourt)  
 — “As sweeping and engrossing as they come. Keeping the science of the subject front and center, Harcourt airs the major differences of scientific opinion about particular developments. Gripping and then some.” — Booklist (starred review)  
 — “A dense but lucid summary of everything you would want to know about human diversity. Homogenization is inevitable, but we are an extraordinarily varied species today, and Harcourt delivers an opinionated but always science-based account of how we got that way.” — Kirkus Reviews  
 — “Lucid, fascinating, compelling and comprehensive.” — The analysis of complex evolutionary forces that shape a society is superb.  
 — Wildlife Conservation Society  
 — “Reaches far beyond origin to offer a complex yet highly readable account of our evolution in relation to biology, geography, and culture. Harcourt presents a concise explanation of adaptations made by the human species allowing for survival on a global scale. Recommended for readers interested in evolutionary biology, biogeography, anthropology, and human origin; also for those who have enjoyed works by Jared Diamond.” — Library Journal  
 — “Harcourt bridges the gap between biology and anthropology. A valuable contribution.” — Quarterly Review of Biology

Alexander H. Harcourt is Professor Emeritus in the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Davis. He is the coauthor of *Gorilla Society* and *Human Biogeography* and co-editor of *Coalitions and Alliances in Humans and Other Animals*. He lives in Davis, California.

Explains a lot more than typical books on biological anthropology. The author's conclusions makes a lot of sense to the reader as the author takes you to a journey that leads to common sense mode of thinking.

Great read

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review. I liked this book. Author Alexander Harcourt applies the lessons of biogeography to the development of humankind. On the positive

side, the information is fascinating and covers the latest developments. In addition, Harcourt gives all sides of a story before stating his opinion, and he is very clear about what is an opinion vs. a fact. On the downside, Harcourt frequently gives too many details or examples which bogged down my progress through the book. And while I generally like personal anecdotes in science books, in this case, Harcourt's writing style made them less appealing. While I can recommend this book for people interested in this area, I found *Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari to be a more enjoyable read.

*Humankind* is a must read for anyone who is curious about his/her own human-ness. It is a scientific (i.e. well researched, based on the available facts) look at human beings and it is written for the non-scientist. Harcourt, himself, is a scientist (he has a PHD in Zoology) but in this book he is a detective of sorts. He explores what makes us who we are—how we are (genetics and geography) and he does it as a storyteller. Through anecdotes about his own exploration of the material, he also introduces the reader to the way scientists approach subjects, to the way information is gathered, to the way it is shared. And so the lay reader puts the book down knowing about the subjects covered but also has had a peek into the window of the scientific community. *Humankind* is a book all of us humans should read. It puts the individual in perspective.

A fascinating examination of how we (humankind) became who/what we are. Harcourt, professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of California, Davis, traces the journey of the human species out of Africa and describes the biological and geographical forces which have shaped the beast into what it is today in all its glorious variety. In the process he never shirks from noting differences of opinion or separating theory from established fact. His explanations of how environment, biology and even culture have shaped the differences between members of the same species across the world are lucid and backed by the latest scientific thought. Evolution is an ongoing process and more changes lie ahead. In an epilogue, while ending on an optimistic note, Harcourt warns we are not eternal. We are the surviving branch of a much larger tree of ancestors gone extinct. "Now in a world in which our technology allows exploitation on a massive scale," he writes, "that same greed makes us fat, and it makes us lethal—to ourselves as well as to the world."

A fascinating account of how the human journey from our ancestral home in Africa to every part of the globe shaped us into the kinds of people we are today. The author shows how our interaction with new physical and biological environments, including other species, influenced the

characteristics of those who survived, increased and multiplied. The obvious differences we see, and some not so obvious, in people from different geographic areas attest to this. The book draws on a wide range of research, much of it recent, as well as the travels and personal experience of the author. It is not only informative and thought provoking, but it is written in a reader-friendly style.

John J. Rooney, Ph.D. La Salle University

This a Great Book, Why, because it has answered so many questions about being human, It was so informative, just loved it.

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