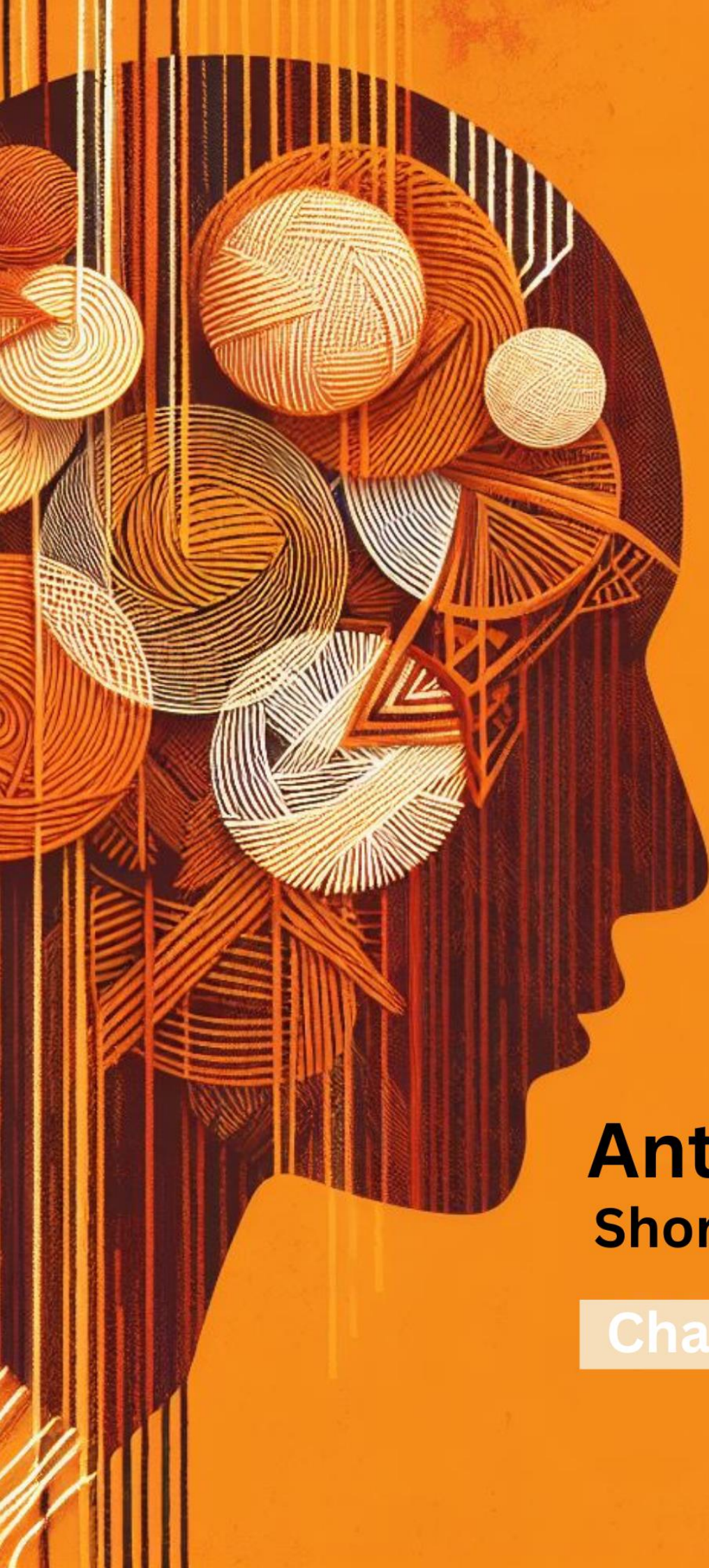




Anthropology

Short Note

Chapter 3

1st edition

CHAPTER THREE: Human Diversity, Culture Areas and Contact in Ethiopia

3.1 Human Beings & Being Human: What it is to be human?

- Anthropology studies humanity in its entirety, it is often called a **mirror of humanity**
- Anthropology helps human beings to look into themselves by searching for answers to questions that challenge us. Some of the **questions central to humanity and anthropology** are:
 - What are the **commonalities** among humans worldwide? (what does every human culture do?)
 - What are the **variations** among humans worldwide (what things do only some cultures do?)
 - Why do these **commonalities and variations** exist in the first place? (why aren't all human cultures the same?)
 - How does **humanity change through time**? (Is it still evolving, and if so, how?)
 - Where has **Humanity been**, and what can that show us about **where humanity is going**? (what can we learn about ourselves today, from the past?)
- In order to address these questions, we should rely on **key anthropological concepts** of comparative approach (cultural relativism) and evolution
 - ◆ **The comparative approach / Cultural relativism**
 - It entails that **cultures shouldn't be compared one another for the sake of saying one is better than the other**. Instead **cultures should be compared** in order to **understand how and why they differ and share commonalities** each other
 - ◆ **Evolution**
 - It allows us to the address the aforementioned fundamental questions regarding **our distant origin, current stage of growth, forms of adaptation, and predict future direction of development**
- In this respect, human biology and culture have evolved over millions of years and they will continue to evolve together
 - **Human biology affects human culture**; and similarly, **human culture affects human biology**
 - ✦ One example of this is that the **brain size of humans has become larger over millions of years of evolution**, and this is considered biological change
 - ✦ Whereas, the **change in human brain has brought cultural changes** in terms of increased intelligence, language and even the emergence of writing
 - ✦ The term **biocultural** describe the **dual nature of human evolution: both biological and cultural dimensions**

3.1.1 The biocultural animal?

- Humanity evolves both as a result of **biological factors** and **cultural factors**. For this reason, anthropologists call it **biocultural evolution**
 - **Culture** is the set of ideas that dictate how you see and act in the world
 - Although **humans survive by using both their biology and cultural information**, all other animals survive mainly through their biology and by relying on instinct rather than such cultural information.
 - ✦ For example, **cultural, not instinctual, information** tells you certain kinds of **wood are good for making a digging stick**
 - ✦ You don't know about different kinds of wood instinctually but because detailed information about the properties of different kinds of wood was passed on to your mind culturally — through some form of language — by your parent generation or your peers
- This difference may seem trivial, but it's actually very important
 - For example the **use of clothing (itself a cultural artifact) allows human bodies to survive in environments they wouldn't normally survive in**
- **Paleo-anthropologists** are concerned with **understanding how cultural, noncultural, and bio-cultural evolutionary factors shaped humanity** through time
 - **Humanity** stands for the human species, a **group of life forms with the following characteristics**:
 - ✦ **Bipedalism** (walking on two legs);
 - ✦ Relatively **small teeth** for primates of our size;
 - ✦ Relatively **large brains** for primates of our size;
 - ✦ **Using modern language** to communicate ideas; and
 - ✦ Using **complex sets of ideas called culture** to survive.
 - The term **humanity** can be applied to **modern humans** (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) as well as some of our **most recent ancestors**, placed more generally in *Homo sapiens*, without the subspecies (the second sapiens) suffix

3.2 Origin of the Modern Human Species: *Homo sapiens sapiens*

3.2.1 Cosmologies Vs. Evolutionally and Paleo-anthropological Explanations

- One of the major questions anthropologists grapple with is the origins of humankind
 - The **fossil record preserves evidence of past life on Earth, tracing a progression of simple one celled organisms to increasingly diverse forms**
- Theories concerning the evolution of life date back to the ancient Greeks, but **it was only during the 19th century that the first comprehensive theories of evolution were developed**

- They were made possible through discoveries in many different areas. The acceptance of evolutionary theory is based on research in many fields
- Indeed, the **value of evolutionary theory** is its utility as a **unifying explanation for a wide variety of phenomena**

3.2.1.1 Cosmologies and Human Origins

- The **most profound questions** are the ones that perplex us the most. **Where did we come from? Why are we here? What is our place in the universe?** These questions have been shared by many people throughout history
- **Cosmologies** are **conceptual frameworks that present the universe (the *cosmos*) as an orderly system**
 - They often include answers to these basic questions about human origins and the place of human kind in the universe, usually considered the most sacred of all cosmological conceptions
 - Cosmologies account for the ways in which **supernatural beings or forces formed human beings and the planet we live on**
 - ✦ For example In the tradition of Taoism, male and female principles known as *yin* and *yang* are the spiritual and material sources for the origins of humans and other living forms

Western Traditions of Origins

- In **Western cultural traditions**, the **ancient Greeks had various mythological explanations for human origins**
 - One early view was Zeus ordering Pyrrha, the inventor of fire, to throw stones behind his back, which in turn became men and women
- Later Greek views considered **bio-logical evolution**. The **Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus** attempted to understand the origin and the existence of the world without reference to mythology
 - He argued that **life originated in the sea and that humans initially were fishlike, eventually moving onto dry land and evolving in to mammals.**
- The **most important cosmological tradition affecting Western views of creation** is **recounted in the biblical Book of Genesis**, which is found in Greek texts dating back to the 3rd century BC.
 - This Judaic tradition **describes how God created the cosmos**. It begins with “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” and **describes how creation took six days**
 - Later, as Christianity spread throughout Europe, **this tradition became the dominant cosmological explanation of human origins**

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