

Human's Evolution

In the last ten thousand years, human society and behavior have evolved at a far more rapid pace than for any other animal. Moreover, this evolution in behavior has occurred through the process of passing on learned knowledge and has been accompanied by virtually no development in the human genetic makeup underlying behavior.

Although this would seem to highlight human beings as a particularly adaptive, and therefore successful, species, it also points out a potential danger: Human beings have drastically changed their natural and social environments faster than their genetically determined ability to adapt their behavior. In other words, we are genetically programmed to behave in a manner that is no longer appropriate to our environment. Furthermore, changes in the environment have often been followed by damaging developments-such as land, water, and air pollution, acid rain, global warming, nuclear contamination, and the eradication or near-extinction of many species of wildlife.

There is as yet no way for us to speed up our genetic evolution to contend with all the changes-and problems-we have caused in our environment. Our only hope for survival, therefore, lies in our ability to continue adjusting ourselves by learning to cope with our new surroundings. This means that we must learn to behave in ways that may seem to go against our "instincts," and it is one reason why the study of human behavior is a task of utmost importance for the survival of humanity.