

## Historical Introduction to Developmental Anthropology

Anthropology traces its roots to ancient Greek historical and philosophical writings about human nature and the organization of human society. Anthropologists generally regard Herodotus, a Greek historian who lived in the 400s bc, as the first thinker to write widely on concepts that would later become central to anthropology. In the book *History*, Herodotus described the cultures of various peoples of the Persian Empire, which the Greeks conquered during the first half of the 400s bc. He referred to Greece as the dominant culture of the West and Persia as the dominant culture of the East. This type of division, between white people of European descent and other peoples, established the mode that most anthropological writing would later adopt. The Arab historian Ibn Khaldun, who lived in the 14th century ad, was another early writer of ideas relevant to anthropology. Khaldun examined the environmental, sociological, psychological, and economic factors that affected the development and the rise and fall of civilizations. Both Khaldun and Herodotus produced remarkably objective, analytic, ethnographic descriptions of the diverse cultures in the Mediterranean world, but they also often used secondhand information. During the Middle Ages (5th to 15th centuries ad) biblical scholars dominated European thinking on questions of human origins and cultural development. They treated these questions as issues of religious belief

## Lecture.2

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and promoted the idea that human existence and all of human diversity were the creations of God.

Beginning in the 15th century, European explorers looking for wealth in new lands provided vivid descriptions of the exotic cultures they encountered on their journeys in Asia, Africa, and what are now the Americas. But these explorers did not respect or know the languages of the peoples with whom they came in contact, and they made brief, unsystematic observations. The European Age of Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries marked the rise of scientific and rational philosophical thought. Enlightenment thinkers, such as Scottish-born David Hume, John Locke of England, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau of France, wrote a number of humanistic works on the nature of humankind. They based their work on philosophical reason rather than religious authority and asked important anthropological questions. Rousseau, for instance, wrote on the moral qualities of “primitive” societies and about human inequality. But most writers of the Enlightenment also lacked firsthand experience with non-Western cultures.