



Gaining Control: How human behavior evolved

By Robert Aunger, Valerie Curtis

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'Gaining control' tells the story of how human behavioral capacities evolved from those of other animal species. Exploring what is known about the psychological capacities of other groups of animals, the authors reconstruct a fascinating history of our own mental evolution.

In the book, the authors see mental evolution as a series of steps in which new mechanisms for controlling behavior develop in different species - starting with early representatives of this kingdom, and leading to a species - us - that can engage in a large number of different types of behavioral control. Key to their argument is the idea that each of these steps -- from reflexes to instincts, drives, emotions, and cognitive planning - can be seen as a novel type of psychological adaptation in which information is 'inherited' by an animal from its own behavior through new forms of learning - a form of major evolutionary transition. Thus the mechanisms that result from these steps in increasingly complex behavioral control can also be seen as the fundamental building blocks of psychology. Such a perspective on behaviour has a number of implications for practitioners in fields ranging from experimental psychology to public health.

Short, provocative, and insightful, this book will be of great interest and use to evolutionary psychologists and biologists, anthropologists and the scientific community as a whole.

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Editorial Review

Review

One of the interesting aspects of this book is the way in which the authors define emotions not by the feelings that accompany them but by their behavioural purposes Dr Robert Hill, *The Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy*

About the Author

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Robert Aunger is Senior Lecturer in Evolutionary Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He has a PhD in biological anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and did post-doctoral work in psychology at the University of Chicago and King's College, Cambridge. He has published books on topics such as cultural evolution (with the Free Press and Oxford University Press), the evolution of behaviour (with Oxford University Press), and ethnographic methods (with Altamira Press). At LSHTM, he has been involved in health promotion, particularly the psychology of behaviour change, and developed tools for conducting formative research. He has implemented this work in projects in both Africa and Asia. He has also consulted for the World Bank, UNICEF, Unilever and Procter and Gamble.

Dr Val Curtis is Reader in Hygiene at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Director of the Hygiene Centre.

Trained as an engineer, epidemiologist and anthropologist, her research centres around sanitation and hygiene, in particular on the design of interventions to improve behaviour. She is co-founder of the Global Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap, which unites the marketing abilities of the private sector with the reach of the public sector and the science of academia in large-scale national handwashing programmes.

She teaches and consults on behaviour change with governments, international organisations and industry. She has published widely on hygiene, behaviour and disgust and her book: *Don't Look Don't Touch*, the Science behind Revulsion came out with OUP in September 2013.

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