

HUMAN AND CULTURAL UNIVERSALS

Lecture 3

Clyde Kluckhohn:

Every human being is like all other human
beings

Every human being is like some other
human beings

Every human being is like no other human
beings

Human and Cultural Universals?

- Is there such a thing as a basic human nature?
- Are there any underlying core characteristics in humans which are universal and present in everyone?

YES!

- Important because spend rest of class looking at **differences**

What are they?

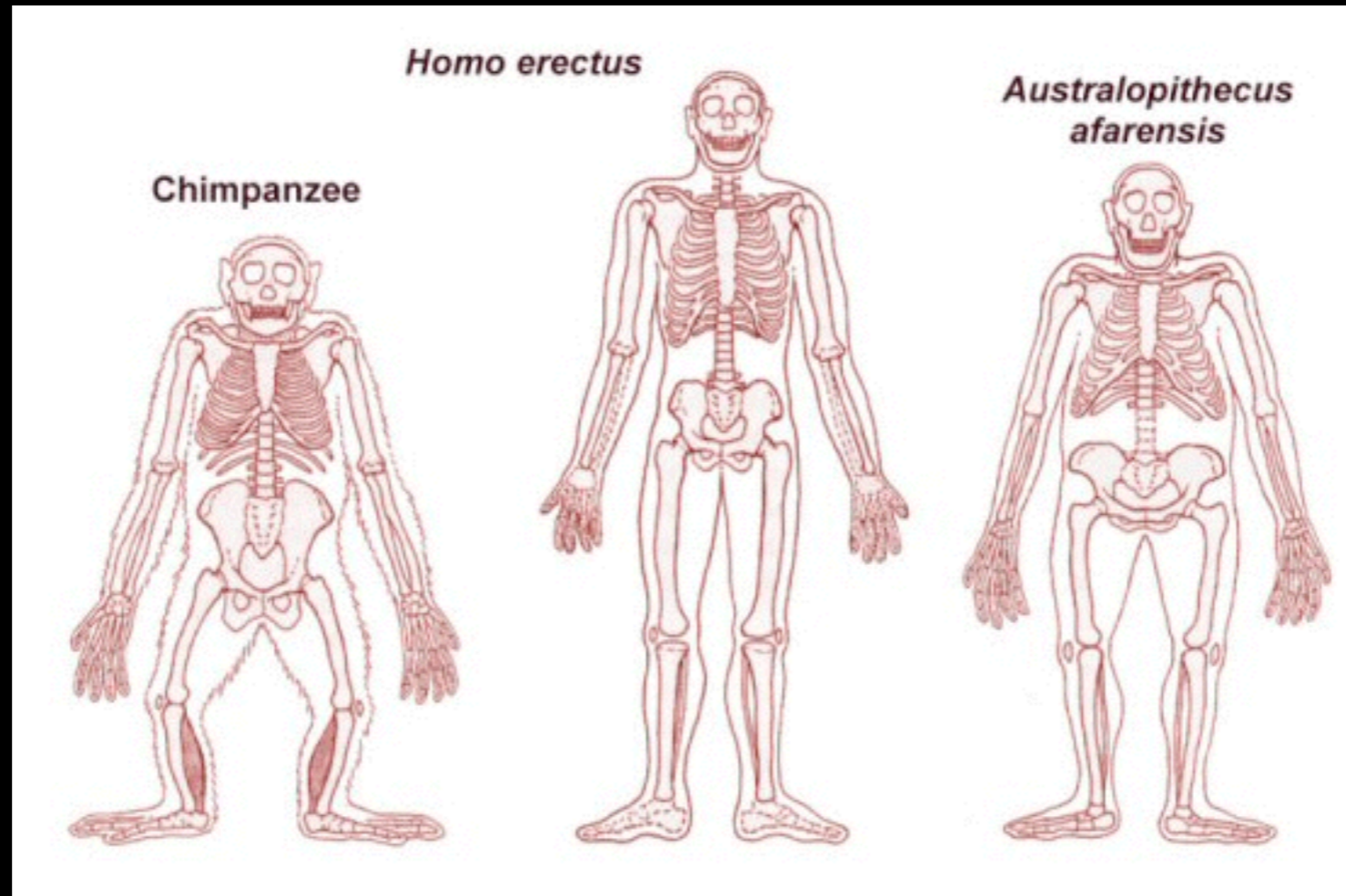
- biologically and behaviorally – a core of characteristics which is distinctly human.
- culturally – some aspects of culture are universal in spite of the many differences between groups.

Look at primate behavior
to discover human
universals – Chimps
share **98.7%** of our DNA

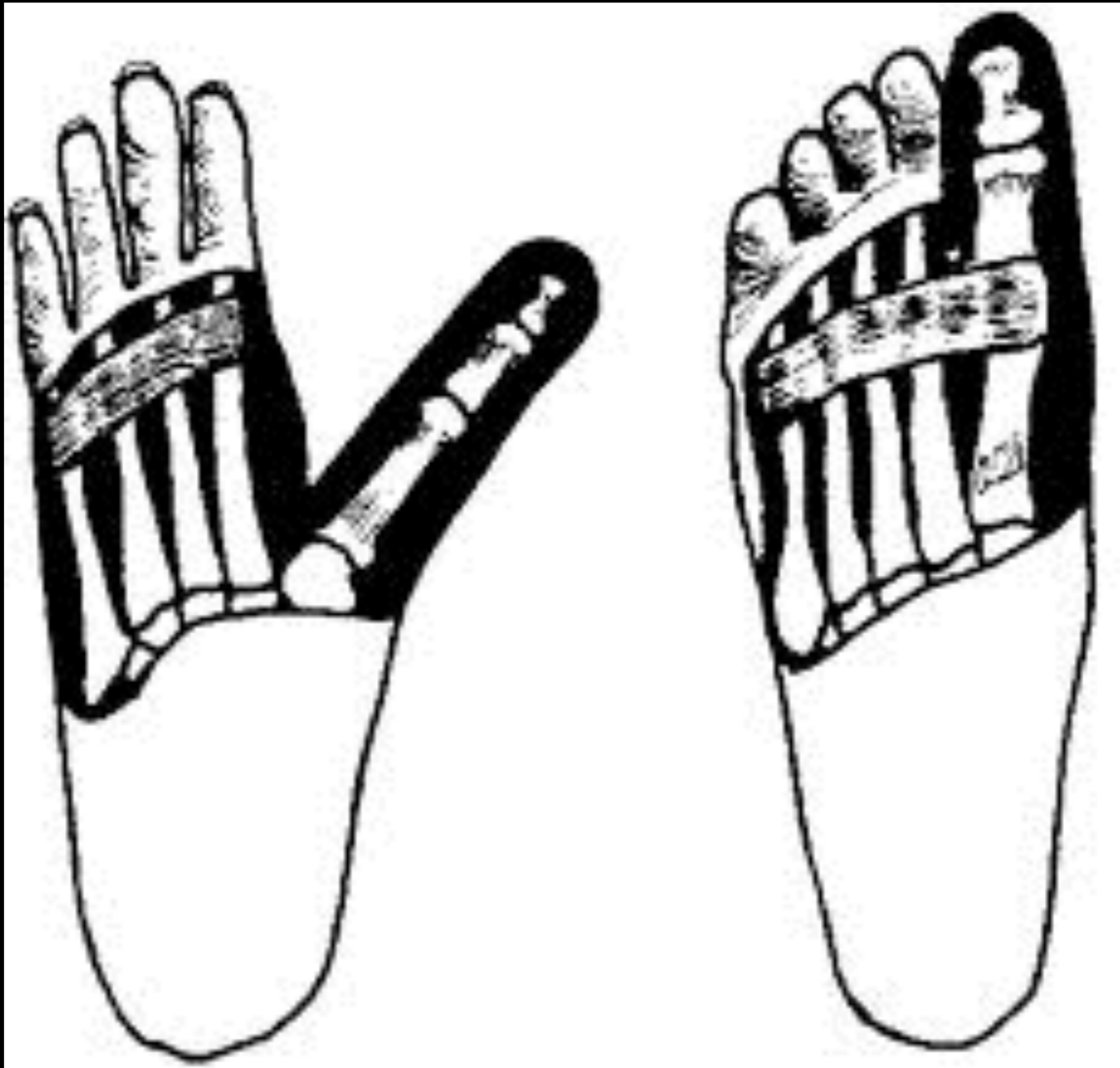
Physiological differences between Humans and other primates

- Minor - largely due to our bipedalism.

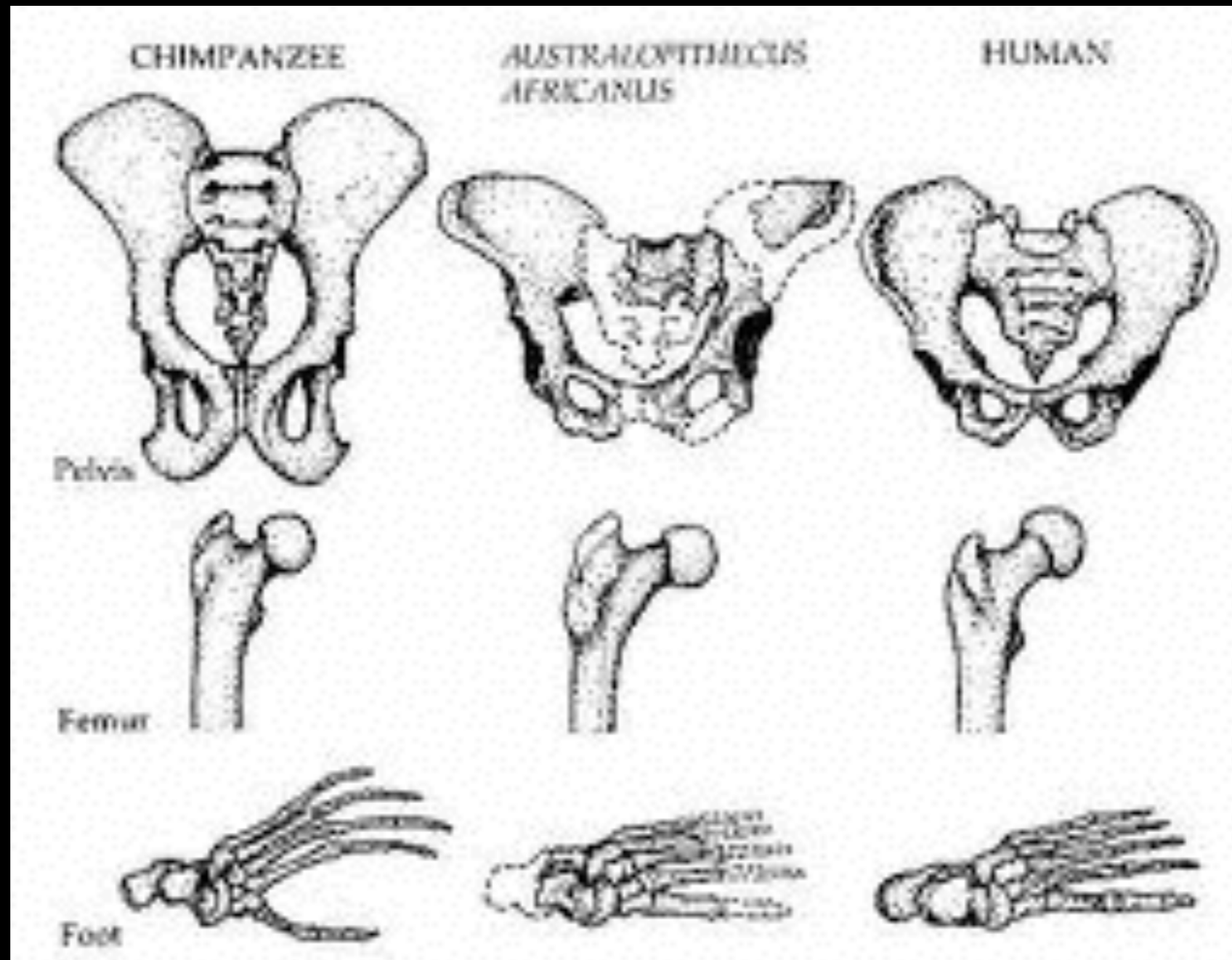
ARMS



FEET



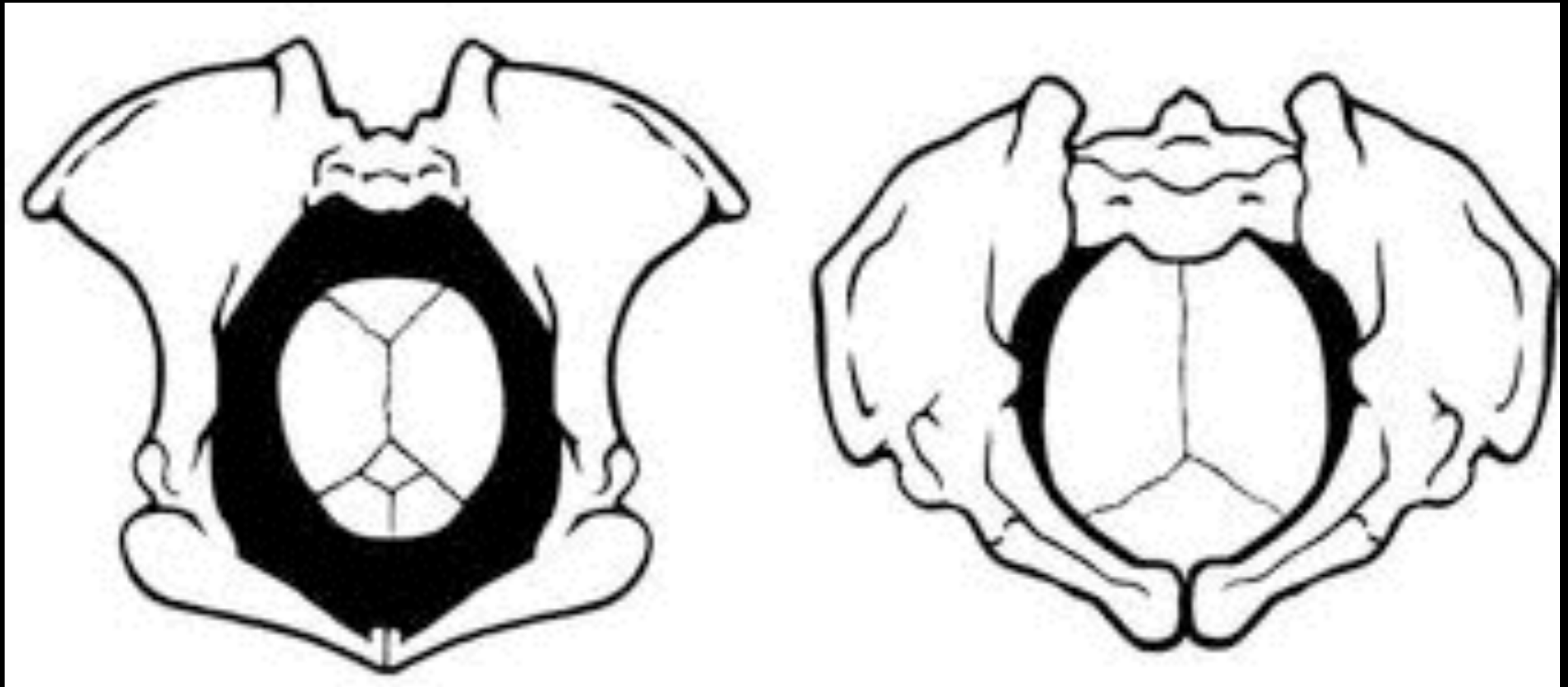
Pelvis and spine



hairless



Birth Canal





More sexual
dimorphism

Brain



Homo sapiens



Pan troglodytes

—

menopause



Behavioral differences between humans and other primates

- Difference in **degree NOT kind**
- New studies **minimize** the differences and **stress** the continuity
- Ex. Bonobos raised in a panhuman culture (Ted Talk)

List of traits that have been said to distinguish animals from people:

- Animals have no organized society
- Animals have no permanent families
- Animals cannot use, much less make tools
- Animals cannot use language
- Animal behavior is not learned

Family and society

- Sexuality - change cause of revolutionary changes in behavior
- Child raising - parent dependent childhood
- organized social groups - no communities, tribes or states.
- incest taboo - behavior regulated
- social nature - uniquely wired

Game called Prisoner's Dilemma

Cooperation triggered same
areas of the brain that respond
to desserts, pictures of pretty
faces, money & cocaine

(evolutionary advantage)



Tool making and tool use

Thus:

- Primates use tools - but not modified
- no standardization or functional differentiation
- no tradition, only directed to immediate task



Language

- all social animals have some sort of communication system - help coordinate activities
- language is based on symbols

To what **degree** can primates learn to use language?

- Viki 1952: After six years learned “mama” “papa” “up” and “cup” problem - vocal cords not like humans
- Washoe (Wa-Show) ASL, only used ASL in front of her - She acquired 100 signs by age 2 and could string 5 signs together “you me, go out, hurry”

- Koko – gorilla raised at Stanford University
 - Surpassed chimp vocabulary – regularly used 400 ASL signs



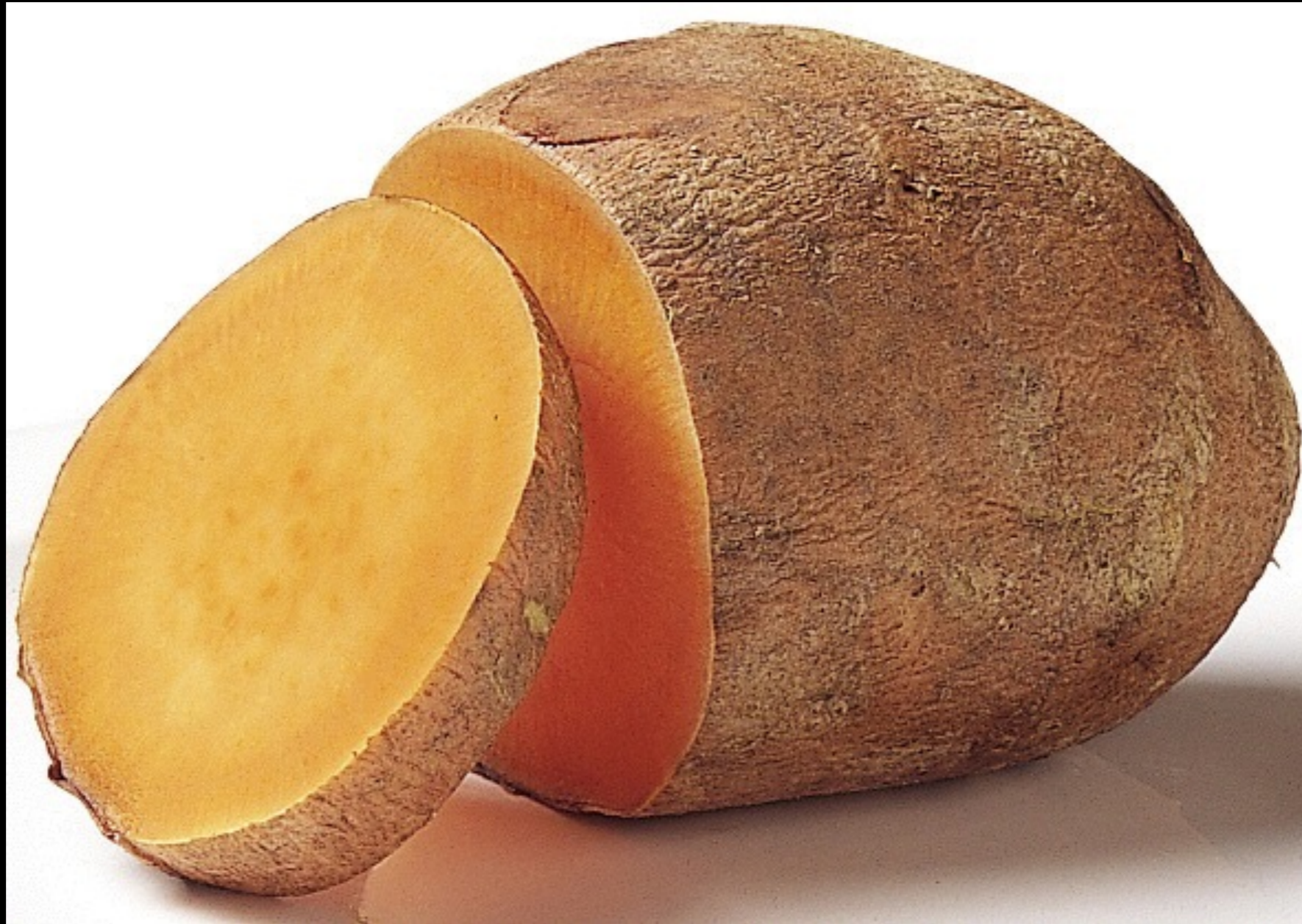
Kanzi, was the first ape to learn language (using a keyboard with lexigrams) in the same manner as children, through immersion

primate linguistic ability:

- swearing : “dirty monkeys,” “dirty cat”
- joking & telling lies: pile of excrement, what? “dirty, dirty”, whose? trainer’s name
- trying to teach others: children, a cat

- productivity = new expressions: “drink fruit,” “water bird,” “finger bracelet,” “rock cookie”
- displacement: (1) expressed sorrow for having bitten the trainer 3 days before; (2) “later” for things she doesn’t want to do

Project Nim



Learning: Instinct vs.
learning

Japanese Macaques on Kosima Island in Japan (1952)

- Forest & mountains only
- sweet potatoes on beach
- after year Imo started washing
- brook then sea
- tradition passed on from mothers to children

- 1st young (M&F) 5 years later 80% of 2-7 yrs washed
- Older more conservative – only 18%, all females
- wheat
- Imo threw handfuls into sea
- tradition spread the same way

Chimps are better than humans at strategic decision making (based on opponent's previous moves)

- Scientific American (Sep. 2nd 2014)
- Chimps v.s humans playing strategic games - choosing squares on a touch screen
- **learn** from other person's moves then guess where they will move next
- chimps superior memory and perception

- Chimps are aggressive and status-hungry within their hierarchical societies - use strategy to become alpha male
- 20 billion vs. 6 billion neurons in the cortex = good for language
- humans gave up perception and memory for language?

Conclude:

- some primates almost culture, but there is still a difference – but one of degree NOT kind
- Humans are the only species that depends on language, learning, tools and forms of flexible social organization. They are the only species for which culture is the essence of survival.

human biological universals

- walk on two legs
- long period of infant dependency
- year-round (rather than seasonal) sexuality
- a complex brain that allows us to use symbols, languages, and tools

human cultural universals:

- life in groups
- family
- food sharing
- incest taboo & exogamy

Cultural universals
found in the 6,000 or
so human cultures

<http://condor.depaul.edu/mfiddler/hyphen/humunivers.htm>

Tonight's reading:

- Gladwell, Chapter 7