



Constancy and Change in Human Development

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How malleable is human nature? Can an individual really change in meaningful ways? Or, are there immutable limits on the possibilities of human growth set in place by the genes and by the early experiences of childhood? These are questions which touch our deepest political and personal concerns; and they have long been a matter of fierce debate in the behavioral sciences.

Constancy and Change in Human Development takes a thorough inventory of the growing body of research which now bears upon these questions. Editors Brim and Kagan have assembled an outstanding group of specialists in human growth and commissioned them to assess questions of change and continuity in physical, mental, and emotional development throughout the life span. Beginning with three general chapters which place the ideas of continuity and discontinuity in historical and philosophical perspective, the book moves across a broad spectrum of developmental issues, ranging from the basic adaptability of the human central nervous system to the effects of social institutions which seek to promote individual change. There are chapters on physical growth, health, cognitive development, personality, social attitudes and beliefs, occupational careers, psychosis, and criminal behavior. Throughout these chapters, the recurring question is whether development can be seen as a continuous process in which early stages reliably predict subsequent events, or whether instead there are sharp discontinuities which render individual development essentially unpredictable. The variety and richness of the answers to this question provide a summary of human development which is unparalleled in any other single volume.

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