

ASEM 2420
Spring 2016

THE CULTURED APE

MW 2:00-3:50 P.M.
Sturm Hall 154

Instructor

Prof. Dean Saitta

Office Hours: TH 12:00-1:00; also by
appointment

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Course Description and Objectives

For all of the human species' evolutionary success and Space Age technological prowess we are in many ways still Stone Age people with minds, behavior patterns, and existential anxieties that aren't that different from those of our distant human ancestors. The course will ask you to reflect a bit on change and continuity in human evolutionary history, and the potentially lethal tension that the two have created.

The course emerges from an interdisciplinary encounter between anthropology, psychology, evolutionary biology, and environmental science. "Evolutionary Psychology" is a rapidly developing field of inquiry that sits on the boundary between, and draws inspiration from, each of these disciplines. The famous biologist E.O. Wilson, in his book *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, has described such fields as "borderland" and "hybrid" disciplines. Evolutionary Psychology deals with how contemporary human behavior is constrained by our heritage as evolved primates. It questions the standard social science and mainstream anthropological model of humans as "blank slates" who are primarily shaped by their social and cultural environments. In other words, Evolutionary Psychology views humans as "cultured apes."

The course will challenge you to take seriously our bio-psychological heritage as evolved apes. It will engage what Steven Pinker describes as the "hot button" issues of our time—including war, inter-personal violence, gender inequality, gay marriage, religious belief, and others—from an evolutionary perspective. We will explore how public policies relevant to the hot button issues of our time might be better developed from a position that is sensitive to humankind's status as an evolved species, a position that might be termed an "Evolutionary Pragmatics" that is also heavily informed by an Evolutionary *Anthropology*. Thus, the course not only draws on the interdisciplinary encounter noted above, but also extends discussion in a way that invades the territory of sociology, political science, economics, ethical philosophy, women's studies, and a number of other disciplines within the social sciences and humanities.

Course Requirements

You will be graded on:

- (1) Class attendance, preparedness, and participation, including completion of unannounced pop quizzes or “Freewrites” (20%).
- (2) Three Take-Home Writing Assignments:
 - a. Assignment #1 (15%)
 - b. Assignment #2 (15%)
 - c. Research Paper Prospectus (20%)
- (3) Final Research Paper (30%).

You are required to have all reading finished for the days assigned. You should come to class thoroughly prepared to discuss this material. You should be prepared to take pop quizzes on the reading and/or complete some other in-class assignments (“Freewrites”).

Required Texts:

Pinker, Steven. 2002. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. Viking.

This text will be supplemented with additional readings from the scientific and popular literature. These readings are available on the DU Portfolio Community site found at <http://portfolio.du.edu/culturedape/page/58461>. I reserve the right to add, delete, or substitute readings as we move through the quarter. I’ll be posting other course material on this page, all including all course handouts, assignments, and slide presentations.

COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Week</u>		<u>Topic</u>
1	Mar 21	What’s the Point of this Course? Alternative Visions of Human Nature. Distribute Assignment #1.
	Mar 23	Overview of Human Evolutionary History.
2	Mar 28	Meeting the Ancestors; Deconstructing Wilson. <u>Reading:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pinker, chapters 1 and 2.• Wilson, E.O. 1998. Resuming the Enlightenment Quest. <i>Wilson Quarterly</i>, Winter. Assignment #1 is Due.
	Mar 30	Unresolved Issues, Debates, and Research Challenges in the Study of Human Evolution. <u>Reading:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Barash, D. 2012. The Mysteries of Becoming Human. <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i>, June 18.
3	April 4	The Conceptual Basis of Evolutionary Psychology. <u>Reading:</u> Pinker, chapters 3, 4, and 5. Distribute Assignment #2.
	April 6	Primate Socioecology

- 4 April 11 **Chimpanzee Biology and “Culture”.**
Reading:
- Boesch, C. 2003. Is Culture a Golden Barrier Between Human and Chimpanzee? *Evolutionary Anthropology*, 12: 26-32.
- Rewrite of Assignment #1 is Due.**
- April 13 **What Does It Mean to be 98% Chimpanzee?**
Reading:
- Diamond, J. 1992. A Tale of Three Chimps. From *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*.
 - Marks, J., 98% Alike? 2000. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 12.
 - Sapolsky, R. 2006. The 2% Difference, *Discover Magazine*, April.
- Assignment #2 is due.**
- 5 Apr 18 **Biophobias: What’s to Fear from an Evolutionary View of Humankind?**
Reading:
- Pinker, chapters 6-11.
- April 20 **Loose Ends; Summary of Major Themes.**
- 6 April 25 **NO CLASS.**
- April 27 **How Different Are Men and Women?**
Reading:
- Pinker, chapter 18;
 - Diamond, J. 1992. The Evolution of Human Sexuality. From *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*.
 - McCaughey, M. 2008. Caveman Sex: How Evolutionary Psychology Pushes Sexist Stereotypes, *Alternet*, October 24.
- Rewrite of Assignment #2 is Due.**
- 7 May 2 **Are Humans Built for Monogamy?**
Reading:
- Barash, D. 2001. Deflating the Myth of Monogamy. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 20.
 - Fisher, H. 1987. The Four-Year Itch. *Natural History* (10).
- May 4 **Is Homosexuality Adaptive?**
Reading:
- Muscarella, F. 2000. The Evolution of Homoerotic Behavior in Humans. *Journal of Homosexuality* 40 (1).
- 8 May 9 **Are Women the Superior Sex? Should Women Go to War?**
Reading:
- Konner, M. 2015. The End of Male Supremacy. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 30.
 - Kalinowski, M. 2015. A Victory for Women at War. *New York Times*, December 4.
 - Pulley, J. 2015. Women in the Infantry? No Thanks. *Wall Street Journal*, September 14.

- May 11 **Could Rape be an Evolved Behavior?**
Reading:
- Thornhill, R. and C. Palmer. 2000. Why Men Rape. *The Sciences*, January-February
 - Coyne, J. 2000. Of Vice and Men. *New Republic*, April 3.
 - Tooby, J. and L. Cosmides. 2000. Letter to the *New Republic* responding to Coyne's critique.
- Research Paper Prospectus is Due.**
- 9 May 16 **Are Republicans and Democrats Born or Made?**
Reading:
- Pinker, chapter 16.
 - Tuschman, A. 2013 Can Your Genes Predict Whether You'll be a Conservative or a Liberal? *The Atlantic*, October 24.
- May 18 **Is the Cultured Ape Naturally Violent?**
Reading:
- Pinker, chapter 17.
 - Buss, D. 2005. Murder is in Our Blood. *Los Angeles Times*, May 20.
 - Barash, D. 2015. Why People Kill. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 8.
- 10 May 23 **Is the Cultured Ape Naturally Moral?**
Reading:
- Pinker, Chapter 15.
 - Smith, E. 2015. Is Human Morality a Product of Evolution? *The Atlantic*, December 2.
- May 25 **Evolution and Public Policy: Toward an Evolutionary Pragmatics.**
Reading:
- Barkow, J. 2003. Biology is Destiny Only if We Ignore It. *World Futures*, 59: 173-188.
- May 27 **Final Research Paper Is Due.**