THE CULTURED APE

CORE THEME: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

MW 10:00-11:50 A.M.
Sturm Hall 154

Instructor
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Course Description and Objectives

This 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”. 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.

The course fits into the “Change and Continuity” theme of the Core Curriculum to the extent that, for all of our 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.

**Course Requirements**
You will be graded on:
(1) Class attendance, preparedness, and participation (10%).
(2) Midterm examination (30%).
(3) Three Take-Home Writing Assignments (10% each).
(3) Final Examination (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. You are also expected to take responsibility for your own
education. Part of this means bringing to class questions about the material and/or issues that you would
like to see further discussed.

**Required Texts:**

This text will be supplemented with additional readings from the scientific and popular literature. These
readings are available on my DU Portfolio Community site found at [http://portfolio.du.edu/dsaitta](http://portfolio.du.edu/dsaitta). Click on the “The Cultured Ape” tab. 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.

**Classroom Etiquette**
You are expected to adhere to basic standards of classroom etiquette. Life is complicated and we
understand that you may need to miss class on rare occasions. Regular absenteeism, however, is
disrespectful to your instructors and classmates. A five minute break half-way through class is provided
for you as a courtesy. Do not leave class at the break unless you have a compelling reason that you’ve
discussed with us beforehand. Of course, you are also expected to respect all aspects of the university’s
Honor Code.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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| 1    | Jan 5 | **What’s the Point of this Course?**  
Distribute Take-Home Assignment #1. |
|      | Jan 7 | **No Class.** Work on your first assignment! |
| 2    | Jan 12 | **Models for Understanding Human Behavior.**  
**An Overview of Human Evolutionary History.**  
Reading:  
• Pinker, chapters 1 and 2.  
• Wilson, E.O., Resuming the Enlightenment Quest. *Wilson Quarterly*,  
**Assignment #1 is Due.** |
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 14</td>
<td><strong>The Conceptual Basis of Evolutionary Psychology.</strong></td>
<td>- Pinker, chapters 3, 4, and 5.</td>
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<td>3 Jan 19</td>
<td><strong>No Class - Martin Luther King Holiday</strong></td>
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<td>Jan 21</td>
<td><strong>Do Chimps Have Culture?</strong></td>
<td>- Video: “The New Chimpanzees”</td>
<td>Distribute Take-Home Assignment #2.</td>
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<td>Video: “The Last Great Ape”</td>
<td>- Video: “The Last Great Ape”</td>
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<td>Jan 28</td>
<td><strong>What Does it Mean to be 98% Chimpanzee?</strong></td>
<td>- Reading: Marks, J., 98% Alike?, <em>Chronicle of Higher Education</em>, May 12, 2000.</td>
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<td>5 Feb 2</td>
<td><strong>Scientific and Cultural Responses to Evolutionary Psychology.</strong></td>
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<td>Biophobias: What’s to Fear from an Evolutionary View of Humankind?</td>
<td>- Assignment #2 is due.</td>
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<td>Video: “Why Sex?”</td>
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<td>6 Feb 9</td>
<td><strong>Loose Ends, Exam Review.</strong></td>
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<td>7 Feb 11</td>
<td><strong>MIDTERM EXAM</strong></td>
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<td>Feb 12</td>
<td><strong>Human Violence.</strong></td>
<td>- Reading: Pinker, chapter 17</td>
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<td><strong>Darwin’s Birthday! He’s 200 years old.</strong></td>
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<td>*February 12-13: “200 Years of Darwin” Conference, Metropolitan State College, Denver. Theme: “Are We Still Evolving?” FREE ADMISSION.</td>
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<td>8 Feb 16</td>
<td><strong>Human Sexuality.</strong></td>
<td>- Reading: Pinker, chapter 18;</td>
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Feb 18 Did Larry Summers Deserve to Lose His Job as President of Harvard for Comments He Made about Women in Science?  
Reading:  

Feb 23 Could Rape be an Evolved Behavior? Claims and Counter-claims.  
Reading:  
• Tooby, J. and L. Cosmides, Letter to the *New Republic* responding to Coyne’s critique.  
Assignment #3 is due.

Feb 25 Is Homosexuality Adaptive?  
Reading:  

Mar 2 Are Humans Built for Monogamy?  
Reading:  

Mar 4 Is the Cultured Ape Naturally Moral? If so, is Organized Religion Necessary?  
Reading:  
• Pinker, Chapter 15.  

Mar 9 Evolution and Public Policy: Toward an Evolutionary Pragmatics.  
Reading:  

Mar 11 Loose Ends; Exam Review

Mar 12 FINAL EXAM, 10-12:00, Sturm Hall 154.