

ASEM 2420
The Cultured Ape
Spring 2016

Assignment #2: The 2% Difference

Our overview of 6 million years of human evolutionary history—the study of *paleoanthropology*—suggests that human beings have been upright, *non-cultured* apes for about 98% of that time. It is also the case that human beings and chimpanzees share about 98% of their DNA in common. The articles by **Jared Diamond**, **Jonathan Marks**, and **Robert Sapolsky** (posted to the Course Portfolio site) allow us to consider whether comparative genetics mostly reinforces, or significantly challenges, the notion that *Homo sapiens* is usefully seen as a “Cultured Ape.” The article by **Christophe Boesch** is also relevant to this issue, with its comparison of human and chimp “cultures.”

Read these four articles and write a critical essay that answers the following questions:

1. What specific position do Diamond, Marks, and Sapolsky each take on the 2% difference? For whom is the fact most significant, and for whom is it least significant?
2. To what extent can the genetic comparison be used to confirm the conclusion of paleoanthropology? What difference does Boesch’s comparison of human and chimp “cultures” make to your consideration of this question?
3. *How much should we care* about the documented 2% genetic difference (or, 98% genetic similarity) as well as the documented cultural similarities/differences between humans and chimpanzees? What larger considerations (e.g., biodiversity preservation, human self-understanding) are at stake here?

Expected length is 5-6 double-spaced pages with 1 inch margins all around. Your essay should be typed using Times New Roman, 12 point font. Please number your manuscript pages!!

This assignment is due in class on Wednesday, April 13.