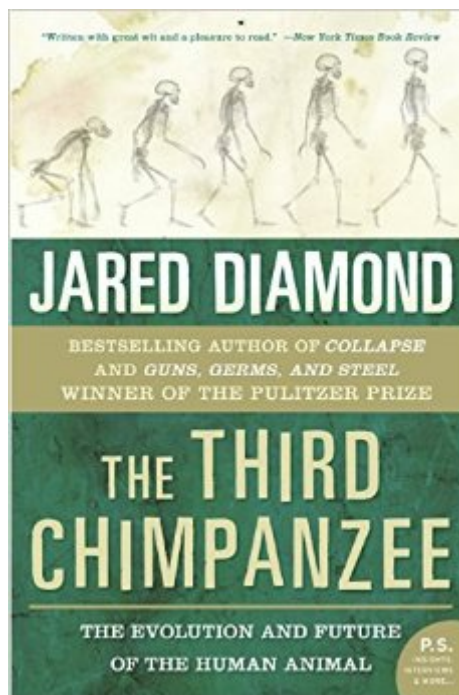


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The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution And Future Of The Human Animal (P.S.)



Synopsis

The Development of an Extraordinary Species We human beings share 98 percent of our genes with chimpanzees. Yet humans are the dominant species on the planet -- having founded civilizations and religions, developed intricate and diverse forms of communication, learned science, built cities, and created breathtaking works of art -- while chimps remain animals concerned primarily with the basic necessities of survival. What is it about that two percent difference in DNA that has created such a divergence between evolutionary cousins? In this fascinating, provocative, passionate, funny, endlessly entertaining work, renowned Pulitzer Prize-winning author and scientist Jared Diamond explores how the extraordinary human animal, in a remarkably short time, developed the capacity to rule the world . . . and the means to irrevocably destroy it.

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Customer Reviews

Since I teach evolutionary psychology in college, I try to keep up with "popular" expositions of human evolution--both because my (better) students will have read them and because some of them make for good teaching tools. The first ten chapters of this book rank, in my opinion, as probably the best single account of what we really do and do not know about human evolution. In these first ten chapters, Diamond gives us dispassionate surveys of dominant theories and available evidence. Here, it's not unusual for him to say something like, Here are the six dominant theories, here is the evidence that shows why four of them don't deserve serious consideration anymore in spite of their emotional or political appeal, and here are the relative scientific merits of the

remainder. In an arena beset by vicious ad hominem attacks and passionate ideological presentations of unproven theories, Diamond--in these first ten chapters--offers the student more concerned with truth than ideology a lovely account. Among the important points he makes in these first ten chapters: Our genetic propensities toward cooperation, care for no-longer-procreative elders, and (in the case of women) outliving reproductive capacity set the stage for the evolution of the human brain. Genes may be "selfish," but our genes' inclining us toward non-egoistic ways of life lie at the foundation of being human at all. This is a crucial point, consistent with the ethical views and habits of all civilizations other than those that foster "social Darwinism." That our humanity depends on the falsity of "social Darwinism" cannot be emphasized too greatly. Science supports the kind of other-oriented, community concern that all ethics, through all of human history--unlike allegedly "enlightened" egoism--codifies. (See also the wonderful anthology, "The Evolutionary Origins of Morality," Leonard D. Katz, editor.) Beginning in chapter eleven, the book becomes progressively more speculative, more of a presentation of Diamond's own theories, some about things outside his area of professional expertise--e.g., the effects of continental differences in flora, fauna, and climate on differential developments of civilizations. Here, we lose the critical comparative attitude of the first ten chapters. If you think carefully, you finish each of these latter chapters with a lot of, "Yes, but . . ." questions. Thus, in the first ten chapters, you rightly come away with confidence that you've acquired a fair understanding of the state-of-the-art in evolutionary studies. In the latter chapters, that simply isn't so. I agree with most of the political and ideological principles underlying Diamond's speculations, and I appreciate that--unlike many leading "lights" in studies of human evolution--he never resorts to name calling and acting as if those who differ are nefarious fools. But I wish he'd either stopped writing after ten chapters, or made the latter chapters more like the first ten. Each of these latter chapters is intelligent and interesting, and each deserves further consideration; but Diamond's shift in standards of assessment and style of presentation makes the second half of the book far less authoritative, and therefore makes the book as a whole something one can less enthusiastically recommend--or use in teaching.

Perused this book while shopping in a "brick & mortar bookstore. Having read *Guns, Germs & Steel* I was familiar with the author's strength - intelligent discourse in a very readable style. The *Third Chimpanzee*, like *GG&S*, requires some involvement on the part of the reader. About 70% of the time I felt like I was learning something new and the other 30% my brain was comparing Diamond's thoughts to personal experiences and formulating new perspectives. The topics, which could easily be boring are made interesting by Diamond's frequent linkages to modern reference points. The

book's chapters do not need to be read in order and in fact many were published as stand alone articles in Discover and Natural History Magazines. (This may be the secret to their readability.) Diamond does weave a progressive story through the book which culminates in a very thought provoking last chapter. I finished the book thinking, "so what am I going to do about these issues". The reader participation doesn't stop at the end of the book. Two weeks later and it's still percolating in my mind.

"The Third Chimpanzee," by Jared Diamond, is a fascinating study on how humans evolved, how separate they are from other animals, and if anything can be done to stop the global destruction they are causing today. Much of the text of this book illustrates just how much human behavior is controlled by genes; many of the behaviors which are regarded as immoral (adultery, for instance) are shown to give the person who behaves in this manner an evolutionary advantage. Partnered with describing how much of human behavior is genetically controlled is a clear, well documented argument that humans and their unique behavior (specifically culture) are not so unique in the animal kingdom. Almost every form of "unique" human behaviors, ranging from art to language to genocide, have been observed in other species of animals. Diamond makes the point that it is known that these behaviors are not unique to humans; humans just practice these behaviors to a greater degree than most other animal species. Diamond also traces the beginnings of the environmental problems that humans are facing today to the cro-magnon period of human history. Diamond makes the point that many of the large species of mammals, such as the woolly mammoth, were not killed off by the ice age. Rather, the mammoths were driven to extinction by early human hunting parties. Diamond points out with frightening clarity that environmental destruction is part of our evolutionary history based on our genes, a history which is still influencing us today. Finally, Diamond gives some thought to what can be done to reverse humanity's penchant for environmental destruction, and most importantly, if it is too late to save the earth. This book is thought-provoking, scientifically sound, and articulate, and a joy to read. Anybody who has any opinions on human evolution, human interaction, society, or the environment will find this book an intriguing and eye-opening experience. "The Third Chimpanzee" is a triumph of original scientific thought into the history and behavior of human beings

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