

Syllabus, PHIL*3170

Critical Debates in the Philosophy of Science

Winter 2012

Instructor

Dr. Stefan Linquist

Office: MacKinnon (MACK) 358

Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 4:00-4:30 (or by appointment)

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Lecture

Tuesday & Thursday

2:30- 3:50

Rozanski 105

Course Description

Does evolution explain human nature? Recent developments in the biological sciences suggest that the answer is 'yes'. Evolutionary scientists identify certain social and ecological pressures that were confronted by human ancestors. Selection favored any genetic difference that provided a behavioural advantage in these environments. Therefore, it is argued, human nature has been shaped by evolutionary processes. Emotional responses, mating strategies, economic decisions, the motivation for war – these are just a few examples of the traits that evolutionists purport to explain. This Darwinian approach to human nature has encountered both enthusiastic support and stern resistance. Some argue that evolutionary theory provides a unifying framework for the humanities; while others see it as overly deterministic, or even dangerous. This course will investigate these claims from a philosophical perspective. Special attention will be paid to foundational questions in evolutionary biology. For example, what does it mean to identify “a gene for” a given trait? If selection acts primarily on “selfish genes” why are humans often cooperative? When can an evolutionary hypothesis be considered bunk, and when should it be taken seriously?

Course Objectives

- Students will acquire a critical understanding of the historically significant and contemporary applications of Darwinian theory human nature.
- Students will enhance their skills in philosophical writing and research.
- Students will, by the end of the course, be able to defend an informed position on the significance of evolutionary theory for the understanding of human nature.

Readings

All readings are available in pdf format on the course website:

www.biophilosophy.ca/Teaching/phil3170.html

Assessment

Weekly assignments 50%

Participation 10%

Research project/paper 40%

Part 1 - Historical debates about evolution and human nature

Week 1. Public perceptions of evolution and human nature.

10/01 Lecture on the basics of evolutionary theory.

12/01 Discuss mini-survey assignment on popular perceptions of human nature.

Week 2. Darwin on the evolution of the human intellect.

17/01 Lecture on the Darwin/Wallace debate over the evolution of mind.

Darwin, C. (1871) Ch.2 & 3 : "Comparison of the mental powers of man and the lower animals." (p. 34-47, 84-93, 97-106).

19/01 Discuss reading questions.

Week 3. The impact of Darwinism.

24/01 Lecture on social Darwinism and eugenics.

Diane Paul (2003), "Darwin, Social Darwinism and Eugenics." (p. 214-237).

26/01 Discuss assignment critiquing a contemporary review of Darwin's work.

Week 4. Instinct theory and the ethological approach to human nature.

31/01 Lecture on Lorenz's theory of behavioural evolution.

Lorenz, K. (1963), "Chapter 13: Ecce Homo!" from *On Aggression*. Methuen & Co. Ltd. (p.203-236).

02/01 Discuss reading questions on Lorenz.

Week 5. What killed instinct theory?

07/02 Lecture on some problems with the instinct concept.

Lehrman (1953), "A critique of Konrad Lorenz's theory of instinctive behaviour." *Quarterly Review of Biology*, 28(4): 337-363.

09/02 Discuss Lehrman assignment.

Week 6. The rise & fall of sociobiology.

14/02 Lecture on gene-centrism and adaptationism.

Wilson, E.O. (1975) "Man: From sociobiology to sociology." *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. (p. 227-235).

16/02 Discuss socio-biology assignment.

Sociobiology Study Group of Science for the People (1976), "Sociobiology – another biological determinism." *Bioscience*, 26(3).

Wilson, E.O. (1976), "Academic vigilantism and the political significance of socio-biology." *Bioscience*, 26(3). 187-190.

Part 2 – Contemporary debates about evolution and human nature.

Week 8. Evolutionary Psychology and the Renaissance of human nature studies.

28/02 Lecture on the three core assumptions of evolutionary psychology.

Pinker, S. (1999), "The blank slate, the noble savage and the ghost in the machine". The Tanner Lectures on Human Values.

01/03 Discussion of reading assignment

Lang, Sober & Strier (2002), "Are human beings part of the rest of nature?" *Biology and Philosophy* 17:

Week 9. Evolutionary moral psychology.

6/03 Lecture on the evolution of morality

Haidt, J., & Joseph, C. (2007), "The moral mind." In Stich et al In P. Carruthers, S. Laurence, and S. Stich (Eds.) *The Innate Mind, Vol. 3*. New York: Oxford, pp. (367-391).

08/03 Discuss moral psychology assignment.

Week 10. Comparative psychology and animal natures.

13/03 Lecture on the foundations of comparative psychology.

Boesch, C. (2007), "What makes us human (*Homo sapiens*)? The challenge of cognitive cross- species comparison." *J. of Comparative Psychology*, 121, 227–240.

15/03 Discussion of reading assignment

Tomasello, M. & Call, J. (2008) "Assessing the validity of ape-human comparisons: A reply to Boesch (2007)." *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 122, 449- 452.

Week 11: Species typicality and human nature.

20/03 Lecture on the evolutionary challenge to human nature.

Hull, D. (1986), "On human nature." PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association. 3-13.

22/ 03 Discussion of reading assignment

Machery, E. (2008), "A plea for human nature." *Philosophical Psychology*, 21: 321-329.

Week 12. Innateness

27/03 Lecture on the three factor theory of innateness.

Griffiths, P. (2002), "What is innateness?" *The Monist*, 85: 70-85.

29/03 Muhammad Ali Khalidi (2009), "Should We Eliminate the Innate?" Reply to Griffiths and Machery. *Philosophical Psychology* 22 (4):505 – 519.

E-mail Communication

As per University regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, ID#, and e-mail contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration:
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester **Winter 2012** courses, without academic penalty, is **Friday, March 9th**. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar:
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities which, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c14/c14-strightsrespon.shtml>

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs. It can be found at:
<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/>

If you find yourself in difficulty, contact the undergraduate advisor in your program, or the BA Counseling Office: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/baco/contact.shtml>