

SH24 Darwin in Philosophy

Lecturer/Course Convenor: Dr J. Chandler

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 10-11am @ Department of Philosophy, Room 307

Office Telephone (ext.): 8222

E-mail: J DOT Chandler AT philosophy DOT arts DOT gla DOT ac DOT uk

1. Overview

‘Darwin’s idea is a universal solvent, capable of cutting right to the heart of everything in sight.’
(Dennett, D. [1995]: *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*. NY: Simon & Schuster, p521)

Since its inception in the 19th century, Darwin’s theory of evolution has been seen by many a naturalistically-minded philosopher as having profound repercussions on issues lying way beyond the traditional remit of the biological sciences. As Dennett’s rather hyperbolic assertion demonstrates, the enthusiasm of old still resonates today.

Nearly 150 years after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, this module provides an overview of a number of contemporary evolutionary approaches to various philosophical questions. After introducing the student to the basics of contemporary Darwinian thought and some associated philosophical issues, the course moves on to consider, in turn, a number of evolutionary perspectives on the philosophy of mind, ethics and epistemology. Amongst other topics, we will be covering the following questions:

- What is the evidence for evolution?
- What does evolution explain?
- Does the biological data provide a case for creationism?
- Can we provide an account of the content of mental representations in terms of biological function?
- To what extent can we expect evolution to have equipped us with reliable cognitive mechanisms?
- Can Darwinism explain the prevalence of altruistic behaviour?
- Does evolutionary theory show that ethical judgments are useful falsities?

2. Aims & Outcomes

This module aims to provide an overview of the impact of evolutionary thinking in contemporary analytic philosophy.

By the end of this course, students should have acquired:

- a basic understanding of the fundamentals of contemporary evolutionary biology and of some of the philosophical issues that it raises.
- (i) a familiarity with some of the principal ways in which evolutionary theory has been brought to bear on various debates in the philosophy of mind, ethics and epistemology, as well as (ii) an awareness of the potential difficulties involved.

3. Teaching methods

The course will consist of 18 x 1-hour lectures + 4 x 1-hour seminars.

4. Assessment

Assessment will involve a formal essay (details TBA) + examination (details TBA).

5. Time & Location

Lectures will take place twice a week in Term 1 in the Caird room (Dept. of Philosophy): Mondays 2-3pm & Wednesdays 2-3pm.

6. Schedule & Reading (optional reading is marked with a '*')

L1: Admin & Overview

- No reading

L2: 'Chance'

- Skyrms, B. [2000] *Choice and Chance*. Wadsworth Publishing. Chapter 6 'The Probability Calculus'
- Humphreys, P. [1998]: 'Interpretations of Probability', in E. Craig (ed.) the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. Available online at www.rep.routledge.com/article/q084. *

L3: 'Chance' (ctd.)

- No reading

L4: Evolution by Natural Selection

- Sober, E. [2005]: *Philosophy of Biology*. Oxford: OUP. Ch 1 'What is Evolutionary Theory?' (skipping sections 1.4, 1.6 and 1.7).
- Lewens, T. [2007] *Darwin*. London: Routledge. Chapter 1 'Life' (for a brief bio of Darwin) *

L5: Evolution by Natural Selection(ctd.)

- Sober, E. [2005]: *Philosophy of Biology*. Oxford: OUP. Ch 3 'Fitness', (skipping section 3.7).

L6: Intelligent Design

- Sober, E. [2004]: 'The Design Argument', in W. Mann (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell.

L7: Intelligent Design (ctd.) + Evolution & Philosophy of Mind

- Behe, M. [2001]: 'Molecular Machines', in R. Pennock (ed.) *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics*. Camb. Mass.: MIT Press.
- Sarkar, S. [2007]: *Doubting Darwin*. London: Blackwell. Ch6 'Complexity is Complicated'. *

L8: *Evolution & Philosophy of Mind (ctd.)*

- Whyte, J.T. [1990]: 'Success Semantics', *Analysis* 50: 149-157.

L9: *Evolution & Philosophy of Mind (ctd.)*

- Papineau, D [1993]: *Philosophical Naturalism*. Oxford: Blackwell. Ch3, skipping sections 3.3, 3.5, 3.9 and 3.10.

L10: *Evolution & Philosophy of Mind (ctd.)*

- Bigelow, J. and R. Pargetter [1987]: 'Functions', *The Journal of Philosophy* 84(4): 181-196.

L11: *Evolution & Philosophy of Mind (ctd.)*

- Mitchell, S.D. [1998]: 'Function, Fitness and Disposition', in C. Allen, M. Bekoff and G. Lauder (eds.) *Nature's Purposes: Analyses of Function and Design in Biology*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 395-415

L12: *Evolution & Philosophy of Mind (ctd.) + Evolution & Epistemology*

- No reading

L13: *Evolution & Epistemology (ctd.)*

- Plantinga, A. [1988]: 'Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function', *Philosophical Perspectives Vol 2: Epistemology*. Pp 1-50.
- Plantinga, A. [1993]: *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chs 1 & 2. *

L14: *Evolution & Epistemology (ctd.)*

- No reading

L15: *Evolution & Epistemology (ctd.)*

- Plantinga, A. [2002]: 'Introduction', in J. Beilby (ed.) *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Plantinga, A. [1993] *Warrant & Proper Function*. Oxford: OUP. Ch12 'Is Naturalism Irrational?' (same as above, but slightly more detailed) *

L16: *Evolution & Epistemology (ctd.)*

- Fitelson, B. & E. Sober [2001]: 'Plantinga's Probability Arguments against Evolutionary Naturalism', in R. T. Pennock (ed.) *Intelligent Design Creationism and its Critics*. Camb. Mass. MIT Press.
- Ramsey, W. [2002]: 'Naturalism Defended', in J. Beilby (ed.) *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.*

L17: *Evolution & Ethics*

- Kitcher, P. [1994]: 'Four Ways of "Biologizing" Ethics', in E. Sober (ed.), *Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology*. Cambridge, MIT press. (a reply to Ruse and Wilson)

- Sober, E. [1992]: 'The Evolution of Altruism: Cost, Correlation and Benefit'. *Biology and Philosophy* 7, 177-187 *

L18: Evolution & Ethics (ctd.)

- Sober, E. [1998]: 'Prospects for an Evolutionary Ethics', in *Ethical Theory*, Louis P. Pojman (ed.), Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, Ca.
- Ruse, M. & E.O. Wilson [1986]: 'Moral Philosophy as Applied Science', *Philosophy* 61, pp. 173-192, also in E. Sober (ed.), *Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology*. Cambridge, MIT press (an important and controversial piece, discussed by Sober)
- Lewens, T. [2007]: *Darwin*. London: Routledge. Ch 6 'Ethics' (a very introductory overview) *