

Biological perspectives on social behavior have been a source of public controversy since at least the “Sociobiology Debate” of the mid 1970s. Nowadays “Darwinizing Culture” has become prominent and it is this latter phenomenon that this course specifically seeks to address. However, it is no longer a straightforward issue of dismissing evolutionary approaches as sociologically and politically incorrect given that Darwinian perspectives today are themselves often sociological in character and may even be intertwined with liberal/left political views. Not infrequently obscured in the exchanges between opposing viewpoints are ways in which biological and sociological approaches may complement, supplement or even converge with one another. In this context, our concerns in this class are: 1) to examine a series of intriguing ideas spawned by evolutionary thinking; 2) to focus on several domains of human culture: morality and religion, gender norms and standards of beauty as well as literature or film from a Darwinian vantage point.

Darwinians seldom speak with one voice about human culture and social behavior. In some sense, the real “Darwin Wars” are waged among those committed to an evolutionary perspective but who nonetheless disagree about *how far* this logic should be extended to account for human society and culture. Some arguments are compelling, others controversial or provocative. Despite claims to scientific status, conclusions grounded in evolutionary theory often represent an interplay of theory and interpretation, of logic and intuitive insight, of empirical evidence *as well as* social commitments. It is the intersection of these dimensions that forms the space which we will explore and attempt to navigate over the course of the semester.

Course Requirements:

Class Attendance/Participation and 3 Papers as follows:

Paper #1 on Morality or Religion	(40%)	due October 9
Paper #2 on Sexual Attraction or Beauty	(40%)	due November 13
Paper #3 on Literature or Film	(20%)	due December 15

Required Books:

Matt Ridley, The Origins of Virtue
David Sloan Wilson, Darwin’s Cathedral
Pascal Boyer, Religion Explained
Nancy Etcoff, Survival of the Prettiest
Geoffrey Miller, The Mating Mind
Susan Blackmore, The Meme Machine
Gottschall & Wilson, The Literary Animal

Other Assigned Reading (distributed in class) includes:

“Introducing Mind, Culture & Biology” Parts I, II, and III + selected articles

Course Outline and Reading Assignments:

Sept. 1 **Overview and Orienting Framework**

Darwinian Approaches to Morality and Religion

Sept. 8 **From Selfish Genes to Cooperation**

Read: “Introducing MCB” Part I

 Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (Chapters 5-13 required)

 Jack Hirshleifer, “Good Genes” (Review of Ridley’s book)

Recommended: Herb Gintis, “Why Do We Cooperate?”

Sept. 15 **The Reproductive Dividends of Good Samaritanism**

Read: Richard Alexander, Excerpt from *The Biology of Moral Systems* (Chapter 2+) -- distributed in class along with

 Roger Lewin, “Evolution’s New Heretics” and

 Wilson and Sober, “Reintroducing Group Selection to the Behavioral Sciences” (pp. 598-606 required).

Sept. 22 **From Darwin to Durkheim and Back**

Read: “Introducing MCB” Part II (Levels of Selection);

 David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin’s Cathedral* (Intro;

 Chapter 1 (pp. 5-28; 40-46); Chapter 2 (47-66; 79-85);

 Chapters 3, 4, & 5. [Chapters 6 & 7 are Recommended].

Sept. 29 **Religion and the “Mental Basements” of the Human Mind**

Read: Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained* [selected chapters]

Recommended: Robert Wright, “The Evolution of Despair”

Paper #1 on this material is due Monday, October 9 at 12 noon.

Sexual Selection: Mating Preferences and Beauty

Oct. 6 **What Women Want; What Men Want**

Read: “Introducing MCB” Part III (Sexual Selection, Sexual Politics)

 David M. Buss, *Challenges of Sex & Mating* (distributed)

 Robert Wright, “Our Cheating Hearts”

 Natalie Angier, “Men, Women, Sex & Darwin”

Oct. 13 **Mirror, Mirror....**
Read: Nancy Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest*

Fall Break [October 14-22]

Oct. 27 **Evolutionary Feminism**
Read: Barbara Smuts, “The Evolutionary Origins of Patriarchy”
Sarah Hrdy, “Raising Darwin’s Consciousness” and
Mother Nature (Chapters One and Two)

Nov. 3 **Breasts, Buttocks, Mind and Penis**
Read: Geoffrey Miller, *The Mating Mind* [selected chapters].

Paper #2 on Sexual Attraction or Beauty due November 13.

The Arts: Literature & Film

Nov. 10 **Memetics**
Read: Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* [selected chapters]

Nov. 17 **Darwinian Literary Theory**
Read: Robert Storey, “Pugnacious Preface”
Joseph Carroll, “Organism, Environment, Literature”
Ian McEwan, “Literature, Science & Human Nature” in
Gottschall and Wilson, eds. *The Literary Animal*

Nov. 24 **Thanksgiving**

Dec. 1 **Literature & Film: Jane Austen; A.S. Byatt**
Read: Joseph Carroll, “Human Nature and Literary Meaning: ... with
a Critique of *Pride & Prejudice*” and
Kruger, et al, “Proper Hero Dads and Dark Hero Cads” in
Gottschall & Wilson
Film Clips: *Pride and Prejudice*; *Sense and Sensibility*
Film Clips: *Angels and Insects* [view copy on reserve prior to class]

Dec. 8 **Film**
Film Clips: *Beautiful Girls* [view copy on reserve prior to class]

Wrapping things up

Dec. 15 *Final paper on Memes, Literature or Film is due*

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12:00 - 1:30 pm
Thursday 11:00 am - 1:00 pm
or by appointment

Additional Material Assigned and Distributed in Class during the semesters includes:

- “Introducing Mind, Culture & Biology” Parts I, II, and III.
- “Excerpts” from *The Biology of Moral Systems* (Richard Alexander)
- “Evolution’s New Heretics” (Roger Lewin)
- “Reintroducing Group Selection...” (D.S. Wilson and Elliott Sober)
- “The Evolution of Despair” (Robert Wright)

- “Our Cheating Hearts” (Robert Wright)
- “Men, Women, Sex & Darwin” (Natalie Angier)
- “The Evolutionary Origins of Patriarchy” (Barbara Smuts)
- “Raising Darwin’s Consciousness” (Sarah Hrdy)
- Mother Nature* (Chapters One and Two) (Sarah Hrdy)

- “Organism, Environment, Literature” (Joseph Carroll)
- “Pugnacious Preface” (Robert Storey)
- “Evolutionary Biological Issues in Edith Wharton’s *The Children*” (Judith Saunders)

"Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with the Office of Disability and Support Services. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course which have been approved by the Office of Disability and Support Services, as indicated in your DSS accommodation letter."