The Evolution of Mind and Morality: 19th-21st Centuries

Winter, 2007

Instructor: Robert J. Richards
Hist 35501, HiPSS 25901, Phil 24300/34300, Psyc 28200/38200, CHSS 35900

Course Assistants: P.-J. Benson and Aidan Gray

This lecture-discussion course will focus on theories of the evolution of mind and moral behavior. We will begin with Spencer and Darwin's conception of mental and moral evolution, and then jump to the last part of the 20th century, examining the development of sociobiology. The last part of the course will concentrate on the central feature of evolutionary psychology, as that new discipline has come to be known, and on contemporary theories of the evolution of ethical behavior and understanding.

I. Books for the course:

The following books for the course are in the Seminary Co-operative Bookstore:

Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (Princeton)

And as a recommended text (relevant parts are photocopied in course packet)

Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior* (Chicago)

There is a course packet, which will be for sale in the Fishbein Center (Social Sciences, 205): *Selected Readings in the Evolution of Mind and Morality*.

II. Course Requirements:

A. The texts for discussion must be thoroughly read, and everyone should be prepared to discuss the primary material. The recommended readings should also be examined, especially as aids for papers and discussion.

B. In the first half of the class, the instructor will provide short lectures to introduce topics drawn from the readings. In the second half of each class, discussion will be initiated from one page papers that all students must have produced for that class. These papers—no longer than one page—should state some problem or central aspect of the reading for that class and then take a pro or con position in respect to the material developed. These should not be summaries of the reading, but the articulation
of an important thesis contained therein and a critical stance in respect of that thesis. Undergraduate students should send the papers to the “drop box” on the Chalk site for the course; graduate students should send the papers to the instructor via email attachment. These papers should be sent by noon of the Monday before class. On these and all papers, you should make sure your name is on them and that you indicate whether you are an undergraduate or graduate student.

C. Two 8-10 page papers on the material of the course, the first due on February 6 and the second on March 9 (on this latter date, the papers should be turned in by noon to the Fishbein Center, Social Sciences Research Building, room 205).

III. Office hours: TT, 1:15-3:00 p.m. (and by appointment), Social Science Research 205.

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I. Introduction: Scope of the Considerations (Jan. 9)

II. Darwin and Huxley: Theory of Mind in Nature (Jan. 16)
   A. Texts for Discussion:
      2. T. H. Huxley, “On the hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and Its History” (1874). In Selected Readings in Theories of the Evolution of Mind and Morality.
   B. Recommended Reading:
      1. Richards, Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), chap. 5 (pp. 185-206) and chap. 6. In Selected Readings in the Evolution of Mind and Morality.

III. Spencer, Darwin, and Huxley: Evolution of Morality (Jan. 23)
   A. Texts for Discussion:
      1. Darwin, Descent of Man, chaps. 3 and 5.
In Selected Readings in the Evolution of Mind and Morality.
4. Recommend Reading: Richards, Darwin and the Emergence,” 
chaps. 5 (pp. 206-30), 7 (pp. 313-30). In Selected Readings in the 
Evolution of Mind and Morality.

IV. Sociobiology (Jan 30)
A. Text for Discussion:
1. Edward O. Wilson, Sociobiology: the New Synthesis (Cambridge: 
Harvard University Press, 1975), chaps. 1 and 27.
2. Sociobiology Study Group of Science for the People, 
“Sociobiology—Another Biological Determinism” (1976). In Selected Readings in the Evolution of Mind and Morality.
3. Edward O. Wilson, “Academic Vigilantism and the Political 
Significance of Sociobiology” (1976). In Selected Readings in 
Evolution of Mind and Morality.
B. Recommend Reading:
1. Richards, Darwin and the Emergence, chap. 11 (“Transformation of 
the Darwinian Image of Man in the Twentieth Century”). In 
Selected Readings in the Evolution of Mind and Morality.
2. Steven Pinker, The Blank Slate: the Modern Denial of Human 
Nature (New York: Viking, 2002), chap. 6 (“Political Scientists”). In 
Selected Readings in the Evolution of Mind and Morality.

V. Evolutionary Psychology: the Foundations (Feb. 6)
A. Texts for Discussion:
1. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “Conceptual Foundations of 
Evolutionary Psychology,” in David Buss (ed.), The Handbook of 


VI. Evolutionary Psychology: Mate Preferences and Attractiveness (Feb. 13)
A. Texts for Discussion:


VII. Evolutionary Psychology: Social Adaptations for Reasoning. (Feb. 20)
A. Texts for Discussion:

2. Evolutionary Cognitive Psychology---Also added.

VIII. General Evaluation of Evolutionary Psychology (Feb. 27)
A. Texts for Discussion:

IX. Evolutionary Ethics (March 6)
A. Texts for Discussion:


B. Recommend Reading:
