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PHL 391.02: Special Topics - Darwin & Design

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– PHL 391 –
Darwin and Design
Spring 2013

Soazig Le Bihan

Syllabus

Course Description

Science has played a prominent role in challenging the notion that human beings hold a privileged place in a world, in particular, that it had been designed for their sake. Perhaps the most obvious example is the Copernican Revolution, which shattered the idea that our planet was the center of the universe. The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) may also be regarded as pivotal event, contributing to a revolutionary shift of thinking in the Western culture. Darwin's great work argues that current life on earth has evolved through modification of ancestral forms via natural selection. One important aspect of the "Darwinian revolution" is to have undermined the idea that nature and life, including human life, reflect the purpose or design of some intelligent, conscious agent.

In this course, we shall discuss both the intellectual origins and the influence of Darwin's ideas within our Western Culture. We shall discuss issues related to the Design Argument, the scientific method, social darwinism and the relationship between evolutionary theory and morality.

A typical class will start with a short lecture, followed by a general discussion. Class participation will constitute a substantial part of the grade. Students will typically be required to read about 50 pages a week. They will be required to maintain a journal whose weekly entries must concern the readings and the corresponding class discussion. Some classes will be devoted to debates. Students will be assigned one side of each debate. They will also be required to write an assessment paper for these debates, in which they will have to summarize the arguments on both sides, as well as the advantages and drawbacks for both sides. A comprehensive final exam will allow students to defend their own positions on one or two issues close to the ones covered in class.

Upon completing the course, it is expected that students will:

1. be knowledgeable about the historical origins and intellectual influence of Darwin's ideas as well as about the arguments on both sides of the common debates surrounding these ideas,
2. have evaluated and refined their own views on these difficult debates as well as be able to convey these views with clarity and circumspection;
3. have improved their critical thinking skills as well as their reading and writing skills.

Logistics and Assessment

Class meetings: TR – 9:40-11:00 – Social Science 340

Contact: Soazig Le Bihan (soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu), Office hours: Fridays, 2-4pm, LA 153

Course Website: <http://www.soaziglebihan.org/1301-PHL391.php>

Course grade components:

- Participation (Including Debates): 20 %
- Debate Assessment Papers: 10% each – 50 % total
- Final Exam: 30 %
- Reflection Journal: not graded but adequate weekly entries are necessary to pass the course

Class Attendance and Participation:

Students are expected to attend class meetings (that is to say, they are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class each week). They are allowed to miss 2 classes without penalty. After that, the penalty will be of 5% for each class missed (that is, half a letter grade). *Three late arrivals count as one absence.* If a student has to leave early, it is her or his responsibility to let the instructor know at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class.

Students are expected to give their full attention to the class. Cell phones or other means of communication should be silenced for the duration of class. They will be asked to leave if they are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, etc. *Three offenses of this type will count as one absence.*

That said, absences may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation will be required in such cases. Students also will be expected to work through the material covered during the classes they may have missed.

Participation will be graded along the following scale:

A range The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in class. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.

B range The student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to section well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows interest in other students' contributions.

C range The student meets the basic requirements of section participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion.

D range The student comes to class, but often unprepared. This student's contributions are often unrelated to the topic at hand, provide no insightful ideas, and do not facilitate discussion.

F range The student often does not come to class, or, if he or she does, he or she generally neither participates nor makes any insightful contributions related to the topic at hand.

Homework: Students will be assigned an average of 50 pages (sometimes less, sometimes more) of readings each week to be discussed in class. Each week, they will be required to write a paragraph in response to the readings and prepare at least 3 questions relating to the topic covered. The response paragraph and the questions should be written down in their Reflection Journal.

The Reflection Journal will not be graded, but adequate weekly entries are necessary to pass the course. Students will be expected to write at least one 1 page entry each week. Students should aim at writing entries that satisfy all the criteria below:

- (1) **Writing.** The student completes all journal entries. All entries are of appropriate length and utilize appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation.
- (2) **Focus and Organization.** Entries are well targeted on the topic at hand and well structured.
- (3) **Knowledge Gain.** Entries include specific insights the student has gained from the readings and/or class discussions.
- (4) **Connections.** Entries demonstrate the student's capacity to make connections between personal experience and new knowledge acquired in class.

Debate Assessment Papers: After each debate, students will be required to summarize the arguments on both sides of the debate, articulate the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments, and formulate their own view in an argumentative manner.

The Debate Assessment papers will be graded on the following scale:

A range: The student presents an accurate reconstruction of the problem and an accurate and charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to both sides of the debate. S/he presents an articulate analysis of these arguments, comparing the strengths and weaknesses on both sides. S/he expresses his or her own views in an argumentative manner. The argument is unified and coherent and the evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled. The paper is clear, well-written and proofread.

B range: The student presents a reasonable reconstruction of the problem, a charitable reconstruction of the arguments on both sides of the debate. Although the student presents an articulate and charitable analysis of the various arguments on both sides

of the debate, his or her presentation of these arguments consists in a juxtaposition of the views of both sides taken one after the other, instead of a comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses and drawbacks of these views. S/he expresses his or her own views in an argumentative manner. The argument is coherent and evidence is offered in support of the claims made. The paper is reasonably well-written and proofread.

C range: The student presents the topic of the debate without articulating a problem. S/he presents the arguments on both sides of the debate, their weaknesses and strengths, but does so either not quite accurately, or in an incomplete manner. S/he presents his or her own views but without the support of a coherent argument or relevant evidence. The paper is reasonably well-written and proofread.

D range: The student misconstrues the problem in a significant respect. Or s/he provides a rather poor summary of the arguments offered, and fails to provide any comparative analysis of these views.

F range: The student fails to provide a reconstruction of the problem or of the arguments offered on both sides of the debate. If there is a comparative analysis, it is largely irrelevant to the problem at hand.

Final Examination: The final examination will be comprehensive. Students will be asked to write an essay in which they will take side on one of the debates that will have been covered in class, or on a question that is close to it. The essay will be graded on the same scale as the Debate Assessment Papers.

Textbooks

Darwin, Charles, *Texts and Commentary (Appleman)*, A Norton Critical Edition, 3rd edition, ed. by Philip Appleman – referred to as DARWIN below

Monton, Bradley, *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design*, Broadview Press, 2009. – referred to as MONTON below

Other reading assignments will be made available for download online – referred to as (DOL) below

Tentative Schedule

Date and Time TBA The Bible and the Creation – Prof. Levtow, Religious Studies (make up for 3/28)

Week 1 – 1/29-31 – Welcome, introductions, syllabus.

The Beginning of Western Science – Reading: (DOL) LINDBERG

Week 2 – 2/5-7 – Voltaire: *Candide* – Reading: (DOL) VOLTAIRE

Week 3 – 2/12-14 – Hume, *Dialogues* – Reading: (DOL) HUME – *Debate 1*

Assessment Paper due on 2/16 at 5pm by email

Week 4 – 2/19-21 – Just Before Darwin – Reading: DARWIN Part III pp. 31-60 + (DOL) SMITH

Week 5 – 2/26-28 – Darwin: *The Origin of Species* – Reading: (DOL) MACFARLANE + DARWIN pp. 3-13, 23-30, 61-81, 285-87, 95 - 111

Week 6 – 3/5-7 – Darwin: *The Origin of Species* – Reading: DARWIN pp. 111-174

Week 7 – 3/12-14 – Darwin and the Scientific Method – Reading: DARWIN pp. 257-289 + (DOL) SOBER – *Debate 2*

Assessment Paper due on 3/16 at 5pm by email

Week 8 – 3/19-21 – Evolution after Darwin – Reading: DARWIN pp. 319-325, 344-355, 373-384 + (DOL) EVOLUTION NOW

Week 9 – 3/26-28 – Movie *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* – No class on 3/28

Week 10 – 4/2-4 – SPRING BREAK

Week 11-12 – 4/9-11-16-18 – Intelligent Design – Reading: MONTON Chap. 1-3 – Debate 3

Assessment Paper due on 4/20 at 5pm by email

Week 13 – 4/23-25 – Competition, Cooperation, Social Darwinism – Reading: DARWIN pp. 389-425 – Debate 4

Assessment Paper due on 4/27 at 5pm by email

Week 14 – 4/30 5/2 – Evolution and Morality – Reading: DARWIN pp. 481-525 + (DOL) SELIGMAN – Debate 5

Assessment Paper due on 5/4 at 5pm by email

Week 15 – 5/7-9 – Conclusion and Review

Week 16 – Final Exam – Monday, May 13, 8-10am

University Resources

Writing Center Students from all levels can take advantage of the writing center (LA 144, drop in or by appointment)

“The Writing Center exists to help all UM students improve their writing skills as they pursue their academic and professional goals. We provide free writing instruction through one-on-one tutoring, in-class workshops, and the Writing Assistant program.” (quoted from the writing center website)

The tutors will not write your paper for you, but they will teach you how to write better. For more information, go to the website: http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcome_about.htm

Students with Disabilities This course is accessible to and usable by otherwise qualified students with disabilities. If a student has a disability and wishes to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, it is of his or her responsibility to contact me privately to discuss the specific modifications s/he wishes to request. Students should be advised that I will request that they provide a letter from Disability Services for Students verifying their right to reasonable modifications.

If, as a student with a disability, you have not yet contacted Disability Services, located in Lommasson Center 154, please do so in order to verify your disability and to coordinate your reasonable modifications. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at www.umt.edu/dss/.

Academic Misconduct All students are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/documents/StudentConductCode1.pdf>), which embodies “the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, human rights, and responsible citizenship” (University of Montana Student Code of Conduct, p. 3).

Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be a student’s own. If a student plagiarizes, his or her assignment will receive a zero. S/he may fail the class altogether depending on the circumstances. Also, I will report the case to the Dean.

I will be glad to answer questions students may have about how to document sources properly. Anytime students borrow a phrase or sentence from someone, they have to quote it. Anytime students take an idea from someone, they have to cite your sources. To conduct research on a topic is at the core of academic work; to recognize the work of others is at the core of academic ethics.