Darwinism and Philosophy

Hendley
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REQUIRED TEXTS:

Daniel Dennett, Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon (Viking, 2006).

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS: (subject to change)

W. A. 31 Introduction to the Course
M. S. 5 Labor Day - No Class
T. B. A. Darwin’s Dangerous Idea (PBS Documentary)

I. Can a Darwinian be a Christian?

M. S. 12 “Origins.” Ruse, Can a Darwinian be a Christian? (1-67 - especially with 1-48, you’ll want to consult the reading/study guide for more specific guidelines to the readings.)

W. S 14 Faith and Reason: Clashing? (Intelligent Design Creationism (IDC), ch. 6, Alvin Plantigna’s When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible.”)


W. S. 21 Faith and Reason: Cooperating? (IDC, ch. 8, Ernan McMullan’s “Plantinga's Defense of Special Creation”)

M. S. 26 Faith and Reason: Clashing? (IDC, ch. 9, Alvin Plantigna’s “Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability: A Reply to McMullin and Van Till”)

W. S. 28 “Humans.” (Ruse, ch. 4)

M. O. 3 “Naturalism.” (Ruse, ch. 5)

W. O. 5 “Freedom and Determinism.” (Ruse, ch. 12)

II. An Evolutionary Understanding of Morality

M. O. 10 De Waal’s Evolutionary Account of Morality (“Morally Evolved,” Primates and Philosophers, 3-58)
**COURSE GOALS:**

You will learn how to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of philosophical arguments presented in different texts by different authors. This will principally require you to develop a capacity to attend to the formal elements of those arguments that make a difference with respect to their validity. But it will also require you to be sensitive to different textual modes of expression and how that can affect the substantive content of the arguments being considered.

More specifically, you will learn to think critically about arguments concerning 1) the compatibility of evolution and Christianity, 2) the evolution of morality, 3) Darwinian explanations of human behavior, and 4) the evolution of religion.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Attendance. Read all assigned texts and attend class. If you need to miss a class you should discuss it with me ahead of time. Excessive and or unexcused absence will be taken into account in your course grade. Note, however, that each unexcused absence during Part V of the course will result in the loss of five points (half a letter grade) on your final grade.

2) Quizzes. There will be several very short quizzes on the readings given randomly throughout the course at the beginning of class. These quizzes will be designed simply to determine if you are doing the readings. As such, I will typically ask one very factual question about the text, something I believe anyone should have been able to get from their reading (in other words, nothing involving a careful understanding of difficult ideas - that’s the sort of thing we’ll be working through in class).

All together, the quizzes will count toward 10% of your grade. Everyone will start with a grade of 100 and retain that grade for each question correctly answered or lose 10 points for each question incorrectly answered (or missed because of absence or tardiness the day the quiz was given). I will, however, allow you to write a 4 page summary of the readings for class on a day in which you may have missed a quiz (either by incorrectly answering it or absence or tardiness) for any reason that will enable you to redeem the 10 lost points for two quizzes. In addition to this, you are always welcome to make up any quiz missed because of absence due to illness or some sort of personal emergency in the same manner. In order to redeem a missed quiz, the summary should be turned in by the next class period or, if this should be impossible (due to illness, perhaps) at the earliest possible time to be arranged with me. But, in the latter case, such arrangements should be made with me as soon as possible after the missed quiz, at the latest by the day of your return to class (in the case of absence due to illness).

3) Reflection Papers. You will need to write three papers reflecting on the readings we have discussed in class. Each should be at least 5 full pages in length. Each should deal with what you believe to be the most significant issue or related set of issues emerging from our readings, the one issue or related set of issues that, in your mind, is key to assessing the debate (though, for papers concerning our readings from Parts III and IV of the course your paper should not predominantly concern itself with a chapter you did a class presentation on). The first paper should deal with our readings from Part I of the class. The remaining two papers should be on our readings from two of the next three parts of the class (Part II, III, and IV). They are all due on the dates specified on the syllabus.

These papers will serve two purposes: 1) They will function as exams of sorts in which you will need to demonstrate your understanding of some portion of the material we have studied. One of the ways I will be assessing the paper is in terms of how accurately you explain the concepts and arguments from the readings. 2) They will also function as opportunities for you to come to your own tentative conclusions regarding some of the issues raised by the readings. I will be assessing this on the basis of how well you support your conclusions with reasons, either your own or those provided in the readings. I will also be looking for whether you respond to all of the relevant considerations that have been raised by the readings, lecture and class discussion.

Each reflection paper will be worth 10% of your grade.

4) Presentations. You will make three presentations to the class this term. For the first presentation, I will assign portions of the reading guide for you to cover in class, basically a set of questions to answer on the basis of our readings in Parts I and II. It will principally concern explaining key concepts or arguments that are being developed in the readings, though you should also take it as an opportunity to raise any critical questions which
you might have for the class to discuss. The time involved in your presentation will vary depending on the reading assigned, but 10 minutes or so will typically be about right.

The second presentation will be over a portion (usually a chapter) of Pinker or Dennett’s book. Unlike the first presentation, I will not assign a set of questions for you to address. As such, it will be up to you to decide what issues from the text to focus on as each reading will raise more issues than you could reasonably expect to cover in the time allotted (25 minutes in all: 10 for presentation, 15 reserved for class discussion). As with the first presentation, you should expect to explain key concepts or arguments developed in the readings as well as raise your own critical questions of the readings. But here the emphasis should be more on raising critical questions for discussion.

The third presentation will involve a presentation of your research paper (see # 6 below). Everyone’s paper will be due at the time of your presentation. There will be 25 minutes allotted to each presentation divided in half between your formal presentation of the main points and arguments of your paper (10-15 minutes) and a class discussion of your paper (10-15 minutes). The point of this presentation is to 1) share your ideas with the class, enabling us to discuss and explore them with you. But it is also to 2) learn from class feedback how you might improve your paper. Everyone will have the opportunity to revise their papers in the light of class discussion (see discussion of this point in # 6 below), so you should be candid with the class regarding what you believe the strengths and weaknesses of your paper to be. Hopefully, by discussing those weaknesses with the class, you can figure out a way to make your paper better!

I will be assessing each presentation on the basis of their 1) clarity and 2) organization. With the first and second presentations I will also be taking into account 3) their accuracy to the readings. With the second presentation, I will also be taking into account 4) the quality of your own critical engagement with the readings, the questions and issues you raise concerning the reading that are intended as a basis for class discussion. The main thing to keep in mind with all of your presentations in preparing for them is to just prepare for them. Make notes for yourself that you can refer to, for instance. Make an outline of your comments. Rehearse your presentation before coming to class. Above all, never come to class thinking you can just wing it. A copy of your outline for each presentation will be due to me at the time of the presentation.

Each presentation will be worth 10% of your course grade.

5) Research Paper Proposals: You will need to turn in a proposal for your research by the date stipulated on the calender. The purpose of the proposal is twofold: 1) to give me a chance to give you some feedback on your ideas before you get down to writing the paper and 2) to make sure you have some idea as to what you might want to do at least a week before it is due.

I will need to see the following information in your paper proposal: 1) a statement of your thesis, 2) an overview of the argument you plan to make to support your thesis and 3) a bibliography of the literature you plan on using explaining how you plan on using it in your paper. Though the paper proposal will not be graded (that is beside the point, it’s the final paper that should be evaluated, not your initial ideas!) they are required. If you fail to turn one in or turn in an inadequate one I will deduct up to one letter grade from the grade assigned to your final paper.

6) Research Paper. You will need to write a research paper on some issue related to the themes examined in the course. It should be at least 8 full pages in length. Calling it a “research” paper means it should be based not only in the readings we have undertaken and discussed in class, but also in additional scholarly readings we
have not done for the course. By “scholarly” readings I mean an essay from an academic journal or a book academic journal or book (not a magazine or newspaper article) written by someone with an advanced degree in the area being discussed. You will need to clear any literature you use through me and I’ll let you know, if you have any questions, whether a piece of literature is appropriate.

Everyone will also be required to present and discuss their papers in class in Part III of the course. Everyone’s paper will be due at the time of your presentation. Everyone will have the option of revising their papers in the light of the questions raised during class discussion of their paper. Should you take that option, your revised paper will be due one week after the presentation. If I do not receive a revised copy of your paper by that point I will read and grade the one you handed in at the time of your presentation. Though revising your paper is an option, I will look badly upon a paper that is handed in unrevised if there are substantial questions raised during your presentation of it which, if addressed, would have substantially improved the paper. If you have questions about whether you ought to revise your paper I would, of course, encourage you to discuss them with me.

*Your paper will count toward 30% of your course grade.*

**Content of Paper.** Your paper does not need to be on a topic we have not discussed in class (in fact, it should be on an issue which has some relevance to the broad theme of the class: philosophical questions raised by a Darwinian and, broadly, naturalistic understanding of life) but it should extend our consideration of any topic discussed in class substantially beyond what we were able to do in class with that topic. This is where your research is important. By finding additional readings of relevance to some issue examined in class you should be able to find different perspectives or questions to bring to bear to that issue.

The paper should be expositional and critical. The expositional dimension of your paper should present and clarify the claim(s) made by the author(s) with which you are dealing and, especially, her/his arguments for that claim(s). It is essential in any good research paper to deal with what others have had to say about the issue you are considering and present it accurately and fairly. The critical dimension of your paper should move beyond presenting the claims others have made to responding to those claims, by critically evaluating the validity of the arguments made for that claim. In the critical dimension of your essay you should be assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the claims you are considering, with an eye toward formulating what you believe is the most reasonable position to take onto your issue. What you should be working toward is 1) the formulation of your own position with respect to the issues you deal with in your paper and 2) a defense of that position on the basis of your critical assessment of the author's arguments for the claims s/he makes on that issue. Your own position should, in other words, emerge as an implication of your critical assessment of the author's work. It should not emerge from thin air without justification. The point of a critical essay is to convince other people of your position on a topic. And the only way you can do that is by showing how it responds to the strengths and weaknesses of other positions that have been adopted by building on their strengths and overcoming their weaknesses.

It is also worth noting that you need not disagree with the author(s) you are considering in your essay. But even then you should not simply reproduce her/his work on an issue. There are always weaknesses to an author's work that need to be considered even if you are otherwise in complete agreement with an author's position. Conversely, if you disagree with your author there are always strengths to an author's work that need to be considered and taken into account in your own contrasting position.

**A Warning about the Use of “Secondary” Texts:** A secondary text is any text which presents the claims and arguments of someone else, either with an eye toward helping us understand that author’s ideas better or as a prelude to a critical assessment of that author’s ideas. Secondary texts can be very useful in helping you to understand aspects of an author’s work you are working with that you might find difficult and I would
encourage you to seek out such works for this reason. But you should never rely exclusively on what a secondary text says about someone’s ideas. You should always turn back to the author whose work is being discussed to verify that what the secondary text says is correct (because it is not that uncommon for a secondary source to simply be mistaken about what an author says or means to say - seriously, if you want to know what an author really says, you need to check the author!). In particular, you should never attribute a specific claim or argument to an author and then cite a secondary source as your reference. Any ideas attributed to an author need to be documented with a reference to that author’s own work.

Hints in Writing your Paper: An essay in philosophy is not that different from any other sort of essay, except you deal primarily with ideas and arguments rather than facts, characters, or plots. Rules which apply to writing any other essay apply here as well. For example,

1) When presenting your position, remember that no one is interested in what you think for its own sake. Your reader wants to know why we should accept your position as an implication of your evaluation of the position of your author. In other words, your essay should not be divided into two parts - 1) What the author believes and 2) What you believe - with no real connection between the two except, perhaps, that they both refer to the same issue. Your position should emerge as a reasoned response to the strengths and weaknesses of the claims and arguments of your author.

2) Document all references to your author's work with appropriate citations. Whenever you attribute a distinct claim or position to an author you should provide a citation to substantiate that reference. And citations should be specific, giving the specific page numbers in a text where the author’s elaboration of the position in question can be found. Quotations will also enhance your essay by allowing you to more accurately present your author's position on an issue. But your paper should be more than just a string of quotations. The essay should present your understanding (in your own words) of your author's positions, with quotations used only to illustrate and enhance the positions to which you are referring.

3) Make sure your writing style is clear. Don't introduce ideas without elaboration. Make sure your sentences make sense. Proofread your paper before handing it in.

Technical Specifications for your Papers: Your papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, using a standard sized font, allowing you to get 23 lines of text per page. Your margins are to be no more than 1 inch, top, bottom and sides. You are to place your name and title of the paper on a separate title page that is not counted in the length of the paper. You are to use endnotes for any substantial notes (beyond very brief bibliographical citations for quotations which may be in the body of the text) that are also not to be counted in the length of the paper. Citations may be of any form as long as they are clear enough to easily lead the reader to the source of the citation. You should refrain from using headers or footers unless you can use them and still get at least 23 lines of text per page.

Guidelines for Internet Research: Anyone can publish anything at all on the internet. As such, the most prudent attitude to take toward the documents you find there is to assume they are worthless unless you have good reason to believe otherwise. For this class, there are two types of acceptable literature to use in writing your papers that you may be able to find on the internet: 1) a document that is merely an electronic version of an article published in a scholarly publication such as an academic journal. In this case, you should provide a citation to the textual publication just as you would if you had found it in the library. If the web version does not provide page numbers which correspond with the original text enabling you to cite specific pages, you should find the original text in the library or through inter-library loan. 2) Documents that have been posted by someone with expertise in the topic of the document. Say, for example, you find an essay on a topic of interest that has been posted by a scholar teaching at a University. It should be a relatively easy matter to document the
author’s position at her/his institution and, in this way, document her/his expertise in the matter. Any citation of
an internet reference that is not an electronic duplication of an article which has already appeared in a scholarly
publication should have a brief list of the author’s credentials, sufficient to document her/his expertise in the
matter. It might look something like this: “Heath Miller, “Evolutionary Explanations of Human Behavior: a
Conceptually Confused Enterprise,” http://www.harvard.edu/~hmiller/evoexplain.html. Miller is Associate
Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh. This is a paper he presented at the Eastern Division
Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, December, 2008.”

Course Grade: Your final course grade will be determined as follows: 10% for the quizzes, 10% for each
presentation, 10% for each reflection paper, and 30% for the research paper.

I use the college’s grading scale with 90-100 for A, 80-89 for B, 70-79 for C, 60-69 for D and 0-59 for F.
Pluses and minuses (as in B+, B, B-) will be given in the following way: minuses for a score in the bottom 3
points for that grade (e.g., 80-82 = B-), an unqualified grade for a score in the middle 4 points for that grade
(e.g., 83-86 = B), pluses for a score in the top 3 points for that grade (e.g., 87-89 = B+).

TURNING IN ASSIGNMENTS: All assignments are to be turned in personally by the student at the time it is
due. Unless prior arrangements have been made I will not accept any assignments turned in by e-mail. If
circumstances prevent you from turning in an assignment personally and e-mail is the only feasible way to do it,
you may contact me ahead of time and seek permission to do so. If I approve, the you are responsible for
insuring that I have received it. You can verify my receipt of your assignment by looking for a reply from me
informing you that I have received it. You should save this reply to verify my receipt of the assignment in case
there is any question about it. If you do not receive such a reply, I did not receive it and it is the student’s
responsibility to determine what the problem is and rectify it. Any student who has not successfully turned in an
assignment and when informed of this exclaims, “But I e-mailed that to you!” will be immediately placed in
stocks and publically humiliated for using the high tech version of “the dog ate my homework” excuse
(seriously, if I claim I didn’t get it and you don’t have a copy of my e-mail verifying receipt, then the
assignment was never turned in and you will not receive any credit for it).

LATE or MISSED ASSIGNMENTS: All work should be done by the time and date specified in class or on the
syllabus. I will not consider giving unpunished extensions except in the case of illness or some sort of personal
emergency. To inquire about an unpunished extension for these sorts of circumstances, you should speak with
me ahead of the time the work is due or, in the case of emergencies, as soon as possible (if you have a wreck on
the way to turn in a paper, call me right after you call the police!). In the case of presentations, I cannot give
extensions since we need to cover the material assigned for a presentation on the day it is assigned. In the case
of being unable to make a presentation on the date assigned in class due to illness or some sort of personal
emergency (discussed with me, of course, ahead of time or, as soon as possible) I will consider assigning
another presentation or some other additional alternate work. If I do not approve doing another presentation or
additional work to make up for the missed presentation, you will earn a grade of zero for that assignment. In the
case of papers which are turned in late without an unpunished extension, the grade will be penalized 10 points
if it is turned in less than 1 day (to be precise, 24 hours) late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 1 day
but less than 2 days late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 2 days but less than 3 days late, 10 more
points if it is more than 3 days but less than 4 days late, 10 more points if it more than 4 days but less than 5
days late. A paper turned in more than 5 days late will receive a grade of zero. It is the student’s responsibility
to make appropriate arrangements for turning in late papers. You should discuss your plans with me ASAP to
make sure I approve of it. If you do not discuss your plans with me and, for instance, simply slip a late paper
under the door of my office, I will count it as turned in on the date and time I find it in my office, not the date
and time you turned it in.
CONTACTING ME: When I am not in my office, I can be contacted by e-mailing me at shendley@bsc.edu. You are also welcome to call me at my office number (4793) and leave a message, but I am much less likely to get this sort of message in a timely manner. With e-mail, you should typically get a response from me in a day and sometimes in just an hour or so.

Though you are always welcome to leave a message for me on voice mail or e-mail, this should not be used as a substitute for contacting me personally regarding any problems that may arise with meeting your course responsibilities. I will always need to discuss these sorts of problems with you, personally, as soon as possible.

HONOR CODE: The honor code applies to all work done in this class. A violation of the honor code on any work done for this class will result in a grade of F for the course.