

# Human Nature after Darwin

THEO 4848/POSC 4848, Fordham University

Spring 2013, W 8:30-11 a.m.

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## Introduction

For much of recorded history, philosophers, theologians, and scientists have assumed that God created human beings and endowed them with a distinct nature. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Darwin presented a powerful case that human beings emerged through evolution by natural selection. This scientific theory challenged long-held assumptions about human beings' place in the universe. Its implications are debated to this day in the overlapping terrain of theology, philosophy, and scientific naturalism.

The course begins by reviewing concepts of human nature before Darwin. In ancient philosophy, Epicurus and Lucretius envisioned a universe in which all things, including humans, are made of swerving atoms. Theologians St. Augustine and St. Aquinas offered Christian interpretations of the origin and purpose of human beings while drawing heavily on neo-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies. The midpoint of the semester focuses on Darwin: his historical context, his theological and philosophical commitments, and his theory of evolution by natural selection.

After the midterm, the course turns to debates about the origins, place and purpose of human beings in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This includes: (1) theological perspectives on the natural law tradition in light of Darwin and later scientific developments; (2) political theory debates about contemporary value pluralism and the significance of neuroscience; and (3) perspectives on the questions of human uniqueness and purpose from scientists working in genetics, molecular biology and chaos theory.

## Reading List

*The Epicurus Reader* (Hackett), ISBN-10: 0872202410

Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (Penguin), ISBN-10: 0140447962

Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford), ISBN-10: 0199537828

Aquinas, ed. Thomas Hibbs, *On Human Nature* (Hackett), ISBN-10: 0872204545  
 Darwin *On Evolution* (Hackett), ISBN-10: 0872202852  
 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Duke), ISBN-10: 0822346338  
 Connolly, *Neuropolitics* (Minnesota), ISBN-10: 081664022X  
 Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law* (Georgetown), ISBN-10: 0878407278  
 Boyd, *A Shared Morality* (Brazos), ISBN-10: 1587431629  
 Collins, *The Language of God* (Free Press), ISBN-10: 1416542744  
 Miller, *Only a Theory* (Penguin), ISBN-10: 0143115669  
 Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred* (Basic), ISBN-10: 0465018882  
 Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Open Humanities Press), ISBN-10: 1607852047

Please note: We will place many of the readings, particularly for the second half of the course, on reserve. But we encourage you to buy as many books as you can for your libraries.

### Course Requirements

1. Class participation. Students are expected to come to class on time and prepared to discuss the readings.
2. Class presentation and paper. On February 20 and May 1, students will present on one of the authors in the Templeton booklets that we will discuss. On the day you present, write a 5-page paper summarizing the author's answer to the question and drawing upon other books and articles that the authors have written.
3. Catalyst paper and discussion. For two classes, you will be assigned to an author. Write a 1-2 page response to a prompt that we will give you the class before. For that day, you will be expected to be an active participant in the class discussion.
4. Midterm. A week before the midterm, we will give you six synoptic questions. On the day of the exam, we will roll a die and select 2 questions. You'll have 1 hour to answer both questions. You may study in groups, but the exam is closed book.
5. Final. The final has the same format as the midterm.

### Grade Distribution

Class participation	10
Class presentation	10
Class presentation paper	10
First catalyst paper/discussion	10
Second catalyst paper/discussion	10
Midterm exam	20
Final exam	30

## Course Schedule

### 1. January 16 – Introduction to the Course

*The Epicurus Reader*, entire

### 2. January 23 – The Lucretian Swerve

*On the Nature of Things*, Synopsis and Books 1, 2, 3, 5

(\* Professor Brooke Holmes of Princeton University will join us)

### 3. January 30 – Classical Christian sources: Augustine and Aquinas [intensive reading]

Augustine

- *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book I, 7-14; 22-26; 34-65; 73-83
- Revisit *Confessions* Books II and X (presumes prior familiarity)

Aquinas (ed. Hibbs), *On Human Nature*, Introduction and Ch. 4 and 7

(\* Professor David Gushee of Mercer University will join us)

### 4. February 6 – Darwin in Context

Browne, *Darwin's Origin of Species: A Biography*, Introduction and Chapter 4

Stott, *Darwin's Ghosts*, Introduction

Hedley-Brooke, "Darwin and Victorian Christianity"

### 5. February 13 – Darwin

Darwin, *On Evolution*, Chapters 8, 10

### 6. February 20 – Student Presentations: *Does Evolution Explain Human Nature?*

### 7. February 27 – Midterm

### 8. March 6 – Naturalism and Christian Belief: Compatibilism and Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, Chapters 3 – 6, 10 (optional: 9)

Kenneth R. Miller, *Only a Theory*, Chapters 5, 6 and pp. 218-221.

### 9. March 21 – Natural Law I

Revisit Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.92-94

Cristina Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law*, Chapter 2, 8, and pp. 315 – 320

10. March 28 – Natural Law II

Craig Boyd, *A Shared Morality*, Chapters 1, 2 and 3

11. April 3 - Political Theory I

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Chapters 2, 4

9. April 10 – Political Theory II

William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics* , Chapter 1, 4

13. April 17 – A New Religion?

Stuart Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred*, Chapters 1, 5, 6, 13, 17-19

14. April 24 – A New Metaphysics?

Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 6

(\* Professor Levi Bryant of Collins College will join us)

15. May 1 – *Does Science Make Belief in God Obsolete?*

May 8 – Final Exam