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 two or three issues 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: TBA
Contact: Soazig Le Bihan (soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu), Office hours: TBA, LA 153
Course Website: TBA

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

Tentative Schedule

Textbooks:
Hume, David, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

Other reading assignments will be made available for downloading online.

Week 1 Welcome, introductions, and discussion of course syllabus and course requirements.
Week 2 – The Bible and the Creation
Week 3 – Leibniz vs Voltaire: the best possible world?
Week 4 and 5 – Hume, Dialogues
Week 6 – Paley: Natural Theology – Debate 1
Week 7 – Darwin’s inspiration: Smith and Malthus
Week 8-10 – Darwin: The Origin of Species and The Descent of Man
Week 11 – Darwin and the scientific method – Debate 2
Week 12-13 – Intelligent Design – Debate 3
Week 14 – Competition, Cooperation, Social Darwinism – Debate 4
Week 15 – Sociobiolgy: Evolution and Morality – Debate 5
Week 16 – Final Exam
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/welcom_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.