

Sociology 499

Sociology and Darwinism

Spring 2004

COURSE SYLLABUS

I. *General Information*

Professor: Dr. Stephen Sanderson
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Office Hours: 11:30-1:00 TR, 11:00-1:00 Wed.

II. *Reading Materials*

1. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (abridged version of the 490-page original by Philip Appleman), 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002.
2. Mayr, *One Long Argument: Charles Darwin and the Genesis of Modern Evolutionary Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
3. Stephen K. Sanderson, *The Evolution of Human Sociality: A Darwinian Conflict Perspective*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
4. Course Packet (available at Pro-Packet).
5. A book of the student's choice from a list of 20.

III-A. *Course Content*

The concept of evolution is one of the great unifying concepts in modern thought. It is today one of the chief guiding principles of biological theory and research, and it plays a similarly critical role in modern biological anthropology, which devotes itself primarily to the study of human evolution. This course will use the concept of evolution to explore a fascinating approach to the study of human behavior and social life known as *sociobiology* (a very close cousin of which is

known as *evolutionary psychology*). Sociobiologists attempt to determine the extent to which the various features of human social life are shaped by underlying biological characteristics common to all humankind. It is an approach that has been applied to such diverse social phenomena as human sexuality, gender roles, family and marriage patterns, the incest taboo, parental behavior, crime, economic behavior, politics and war, ethnocentrism and nationalism, social inequality, the biochemistry of the human brain, religion, and human morality and ethics. Included among the adherents and practitioners of sociobiology are sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and other social scientists, so it is a very interdisciplinary approach.

The basic objective of this course is for students to acquire a good understanding of Darwinism and its offshoot, sociobiology. In the last decade or so there has been tremendous progress in these fields, and such closely allied ones as behavior genetics. It is rapidly becoming clear that human behavior has a strong biological foundation. In my view understanding the arguments and evidence of these fields is extremely important to the well-educated person.

Most sociologists reject sociobiology, in part or in whole, and thus within our discipline it is extremely controversial (psychologists and anthropologists are more accepting). Pursuing sociobiology can be career threatening. We need to understand why sociologists react in this way, and what sorts of explanations they prefer instead. Therefore, students will read and study a range of alternative sociological theories that either make no reference to human biology or are explicitly opposed to it. This will give students an opportunity to think for themselves about sociology and Darwinism, and to see what synthetic ideas they can come up with on their own (the professor has already done a certain amount of synthesizing on his own).

III-B. *Course Structure*

This course will be primarily a seminar-style course, but I will do some formal talking. I will start each class with some general remarks. This might take 5 minutes, or it might turn into a mini-lecture of 15-20 minutes. It depends on the situation and the topic, and whether or not I need to give some background information that you cannot get from the assigned readings. The idea is to give each class a proper launching, a sense of orientation.

I am a strong advocate of sociobiological principles and research evidence, which I have been studying closely for over a quarter of a century. This does not mean that I agree with all of it, but I do accept it in general. Sociobiology is, however, hardly a complete approach within the social sciences; by no means can it explain everything. For this reason I have developed a synthetic theory, which I call Darwinian conflict theory, that is laid out, along with the evidence for it, in my most recent book, which you will be reading for this class. So a good deal of nonsociobiology finds its way into my thinking, and sociobiology itself does not put all of the emphasis on biology. It stresses that biology interacts with a wide range of social conditions in producing actual behavior.

Please be assured that you can argue with me as much as you like, so long as you observe proper norms of civility and respect and the need of other students to have their say as well. **But you have to have a basis for your argument! It can't just be some sort of unsubstantiated**

personal opinion. You have to back it up with evidence or logic (or both). That's what I will be doing when I make my arguments, and any counterarguments made by you must meet the same standards. What I expect will happen is that a lot of students will agree with me, others will disagree with me, and yet others will be in the middle or undecided. What we should see in the course is a lot of debate – between both me and the students and among the students themselves. Let's not be shy; let's lay our views out candidly and speak freely. You will learn a lot regardless of your agreements or disagreements with me. I really love debate and controversy; unlike some people, I don't shy away from them, and I think they are among the best learning devices we have.

I should perhaps add that sociobiology presupposes the validity of the Darwinian theory of evolution by natural selection, which is accepted by virtually all sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists. If, by chance, you happen to be a staunch critic of that, it will be hard for you to accept sociobiology or to view it objectively. In such a case this course may not be one for you. On the other hand, I can tell you that a couple of years ago I had a student who had very strong religious beliefs and thus had difficulty accepting Darwinism, but she nonetheless found sociobiology extremely persuasive. As a result, she was caught in a terrible (but nonetheless intellectually useful) inner conflict all semester. It was a challenging experience for her, to say the least.

IV. *Examinations*

There will be three exams. The first two will be take-home essay exams, whereas the final exam will be an objective exam covering the entire semester's work.

V. *Oral Presentation and Papers*

Students must complete both of the following assignments:

First assignment: You will select a book from the list below and use it as the basis for a 30-minute oral presentation and a 6,000-word thesis paper. The paper should be about half exposition, and half critical analysis. It will be due on the same day that you give your oral presentation. You cannot present 6,000 words in 30 minutes, so you will have to condense it for your talk (a good rule of thumb is that at an appropriate pace most people can present no more than 4,500 words in 30 minutes). You should condense it once, practice and time it, and then make adjustments as necessary. Don't speak too fast, but don't speak too slowly either. 30 minutes means not less than 25 minutes and not more than 35. You may either give your oral presentation with an outline and notes, or you may actually read it. But if you choose the latter, you must read it *in an interesting way*. Don't bore everyone with a monotone. After you give your talk, give the professor 5 multiple-choice questions that he may choose from for the final exam.

The books to choose from are:

1. Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape* (MIT Press, 2000)
2. Jon Entine, *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why we are Afraid to Talk About It* (Public Affairs, 1999)
3. Kevin MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy* (Praeger, 1994).
4. Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).
5. Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (Houghton Mifflin, 1996).
6. Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation* (Viking, 1996).
7. Joseph Lopreato and Timothy Crippen, *Crisis in Sociology: The Need for Darwin* (Transaction Books, 1999).
8. David M. Buss, *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy is as Necessary as Love and Sex* (Free Press, 2000).
9. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* (Pantheon Books, 1999).
10. Donald Symons, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).
11. Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature* (SUNY Press, 1998).
12. David C. Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences* (American Psychological Association, 1998).
13. Lionel Tiger, *The Decline of Males* (St. Martin's, 1999).
14. Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Homicide* (Aldine de Gruyter, 1988).
15. Pierre van den Berghe, *Human Family Systems: An Evolutionary View* (Waveland Press, 1979).
16. Tatu Vanhanen, *Ethnic Conflicts Explained by Ethnic Nepotism* (JAI Press, 1999).
17. Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (McGraw-Hill, 1991)
18. David C. Rowe, *The Limits of Family Influence: Genes, Experience, and Behavior* (Guilford Press, 1994).
19. Geoffrey F. Miller, *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature* (Doubleday, 2000)
20. Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (Basic Books, 2001)

Second assignment: Think carefully throughout the semester about the ideas of the course and your intellectual reaction to what is being said in the readings, discussions, and mini-lectures. Then write a 4,500-word thesis paper laying out your views on the strengths and weaknesses of the sociobiological approach to human behavior and human societies. This paper will be due near the end of the semester.

VI. *Grading*

The three exams each count 15% of your final grade. The oral presentation and critical paper on your book count 20% (10% each), your final paper counts 20%, and your class participation counts 15%. Class participation involves asking interesting prepared questions, asking interesting spontaneous questions, and making interesting observations in class. I'm looking for quality, not quantity, although there should be a certain minimal level of quantity.

I use the following grading scale: 85% and above = A; 75-84% = B; 65-74% = C; 50-64% = D; below 50% = F. This may seem unduly lenient, but the reason I use a lower scale than most professors is because I grade more rigorously than they do. Few students in my regular classes are able to make a final average of 90% or more.

VII. *My Educational Philosophy*

I am a rather old-fashioned, no-nonsense professor who expects his students to put forth a strong effort. For me, the most important purpose of education is to expand the powers of the mind and increase the amount of knowledge at your command. Becoming an educated person is hard work, but it is a terrific accomplishment. It is one of the most important things a person can do. Education is not simply about learning things you will need on a job. In fact, very little of what you learn in college has any direct relevance for that. Education is for life, not just for a job.

VIII. *A Few Course Rules*

- You have a strict obligation to be listening to whoever is doing the talking, whether it is the professor or one of your classmates. Everybody deserves the attention of others when they are trying to make a point. Don't be chatting with others when someone has the floor (and in this class, someone will always have the floor!).
- Be on time for class. I am a very punctual person and do not like lateness.
- Attendance is required. This should go without saying in a honors class, but I mention it nonetheless. You will lose points on your final grade for every unexcused absence. Naturally, if you have a good reason for missing – illness, family problem, IUP-sponsored event requiring your participation, etc. – I will give you an excused absence, but you must document it.

IX. *Course Outline and Reading Assignments*

<i>Class meeting</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Reading Assignment</i>
1-2	Course Introduction & Preparation	
3	Evolution I: Evolution Before Darwin	Course packet, pp. 3-5
	Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection	Course packet, pp. 6-13

		Darwin, <i>Origin</i> , pp. 27-121 Mayr, chs. 1-4 & 6
4	Evolution II: The Reception of Darwin's Theory, 1860-1940	Course packet, pp. 14-16 Mayr, chs. 5, 7, & 8
	Non-Darwinian Theories of Evolution, 1880-1930	Course packet, pp. 17-20
5	Evolution III: The Modern Evolutionary Synthesis, 1940-1970	Course packet, pp. 21-23 Mayr, ch. 9
	Current Controversies	Course packet, pp. 24-26 Mayr, ch. 10
	The Modern Creationist Challenge	Course packet, pp. 27-31
	Human Evolution	Course packet, pp. 32-38
6	Sociobiology: General Principles	Sanderson, <i>EHS</i> , ch. 8

7 Presentations on the following

- Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*.
- Joseph Lopreato and Timothy Crippen, *Crisis in Sociology: The Need for Darwin*.

8 Presentations on:

- Donald Brown, *Human Universals*
- Geoffrey F. Miller, *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*

9 Take-home Exam #1 distributed in sealed envelopes

Sociobiology and Sociology: A Unified Evolutionary Theory of Human Society	Sanderson, <i>EHS</i> , ch. 9
Types of Societies	Course packet , pp. 39-45

10 Presentations on the following:

- Donald Symons, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality*.
- David M. Buss, *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy is as Necessary as Love and Sex*.

11 Exam #1 due at beginning of class

Reproductive Behavior Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 10
Human Sexuality Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 11

12 Presentation on:

- Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape*.

13 Presentations on:

- David C. Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences*.
- Lionel Tiger, *The Decline of Males*.

14 Sex and Gender Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 12

15 Presentations on:

- Pierre van den Berghe, *Human Family Systems: An Evolutionary View*.
- Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection*.

16 Marriage, Family, and Kinship Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 13

17 Presentation on:

- Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation*.

18 Economic Behavior & Systems Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 14

19 Take-home Exam #2 distributed in sealed envelopes

Social Hierarchies Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 15

20 Presentation on:

- Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*

21 Exam #2 due at beginning of class

Politics and War Sanderson, *EHS*, ch. 16

22 Presentations on:

- Vanhanen, *Ethnic Conflicts Explained by Ethnic Nepotism*.
- Kevin MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy*.

23 **Ethnicity & Race** **Course packet, pp. 46-51**

24 Presentation on:

- Jon Entine, *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why we are Afraid to Talk About It.*

25 **Crime** **Course packet, pp. 52-57**

Presentation on:

- Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Homicide.*

26 **Religion**

Presentation on:

- Boyer, *Religion Explained*

27 **Ethical Considerations**

Behavior Genetics **Course packet, p. 58**

Presentations on:

- Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature.*
- Rowe, *The Limits of Family Influence*

28 **The Great Debate (students will divide into two groups, one favoring the Darwinian approach to social life and the other rejecting it or skeptical of it; they will debate for 90 minutes, with the professor only serving as a monitor or facilitator)**