

## Sex and Death

Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:45  
Maguire 104

Bryce Huebner, 234 New North  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-3:30, and by appointment

*From a Darwinian perspective the continuity between lifeless matter on the one hand and living things and all their activities and products on the other can be glimpsed in outline and explored in detail, not just the strivings of animals and the efficient designs of plants, but human meanings and purposes: art and science itself, and even morality. When we can see all of our artifacts as fruits on the tree of life, we have achieved a unification of perspective that permits us to gauge both the similarities and differences between a spider web and the World Wide Web, a beaver dam and the Hoover Dam, a nightingale's nest and "Ode to a Nightingale." Darwin's unifying stroke was revolutionary not just in the breadth of its scope, but in the way it was achieved: in an important sense, it turned everything familiar upside down.*

~ Dan Dennett, *Darwin's Strange inversion of reasoning*

Our primary aim in this course is to examine the conceptual and empirical foundations of evolutionary theory, and to try to figure out what evolutionary theory can contribute to ongoing debates in philosophy. In the first part of the course, we will develop a foundation for exploring questions about the biological underpinnings of thought and behavior; we will be using the 'selfish gene' hypothesis as the scaffolding for approaching questions about adaptation, genetic determinism, and the nature/nurture controversy. With this foundation in hand, we will then attempt to determine just how plausible this hypothesis is, and to see what we can and cannot do with evolutionary theory.

### Required Texts:

Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press)  
Franz DeWaal, *The Age of Empathy* (Three Rivers Press)  
Sarah Hrdy, *The Woman that Never Evolved* (Harvard University Press)  
Elisabeth Lloyd, *The Case of the Female Orgasm* (Harvard University Press)  
Additional PDF documents, which are linked below

**Assignments:** Over the course of this semester, you will write three short papers (1000-1500 words; each worth 25% of your final grade); each of you will also take part in a group presentation during the final 4 weeks of the course (worth 10% of your grade; and graded collaboratively by the class); the remainder of your grade will depend on participation in class (15% of your grade). Everyone must write a paper on one argument from *The Selfish Gene* (**Due: 11 February**). To alleviate potential conflicts with other papers and exams, and to give you more options, you will then be able to choose the topic and due date of your second paper; you must either write a paper on gender biases in evolutionary theory (**Due: 6 March**), or a paper on the plausibility of the claim that we are compassionate by nature (**Due: 1 April**). Finally, everyone will write a final paper on one topic from the final session of the course (**Due: 9 May**)

**Late paper and make-up policy:** The deadlines for turning in your papers are firm. No extensions will be given unless you provide a documented and university sanctioned excuse. Late papers will automatically be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc) for each day that they are late.

**Grading Criteria for papers:** In general, a 'B+' paper 1) will provide a clear articulation of the claims that are being defended, 2) will be well organized, 3) will rely on clear evidence and arguments in support of these claims, and 4) will be stylistically clear—thereby presenting a clear and well structured argument. A 'B' grade will be weaker in one of these areas—but still satisfactory—and an 'A-' will excel in one of these areas. A 'C' grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in one or two of these categories; a 'D' grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in 3 or 4 categories or omits one altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for the truth of that thesis). An 'A' grade will only be awarded where a paper *excels* in each category, exhibiting a clear capacity for doing philosophy.

**Use of external resources:** To succeed in this course, you will need to learn how to read and reason carefully; you will also need to learn how to recover arguments from difficult texts. But you will not need to read anything beyond what has is assigned to do well in this class—indeed, seeking out sources of information on your own (e.g., Sparknotes and Wikipedia) can have deleterious effects on your performance given that these sources do not always offer a reliable reconstruction of the arguments that we will address. I can recommend further readings if you need them. That said, it is important to remember that the best way to develop the skills necessary for doing philosophy is through collaboration and discussion. Beyond trying to clarify your thoughts by asking questions and *thinking out-loud* in class, you may also want to get together in small groups to think through the issues that we are discussing outside of class; alternatively, you might want to discuss your thoughts on social networks. These are perfectly acceptable strategies for dealing with the issues we will discuss, and they may be helpful for developing an understanding of the texts we will read. People have very different styles of thinking and learning; and you should use whatever resources suit you best in order to develop the skills that you need for succeeding in this class.

**Academic honesty:** Keeping this in mind, when it comes time to write your papers, you must use the skills that you have developed by thinking through the relevant issues on your own. You have all signed the Georgetown University Honor pledge and have agreed to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of the pledge, and I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty. The Honor Code applies to all of the relevant aspects of this course and it is the responsibility of every student in this class to inform herself or himself of the relevant principles and to abide by them throughout the semester. Of course, the key to avoiding any dire consequences is to think for yourself, and do your own work on the papers.

**The writing center:** The writing center provides one-on-one assistance at various stages of the writing process. All writers, even the most accomplished, can benefit from their assistance on

issues as diverse as topic development, organization, and general strategies for revising. To make an appointment, see <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu>.

**Accommodations for students with disabilities:** If you are on record with the university as requiring special accommodations for the in-class exams, please stop by my office and let me know in confidence within the first two weeks of the semester. If you find, during the course of the semester, that special accommodations are required, please bring me the relevant documentation from the university as soon as possible.

**Anonymous Grading:** Your papers will be submitted for anonymous grading, with no identifying information other than your GUID#. *If you include additional identifying information, your work will not be graded.* There is a wealth of psychological data suggesting that subtle, often implicit prejudices can influence the evaluation of a paper merely on the basis of a person's name. My hope, in adopting an anonymous grading strategy, is to guarantee as far as possible that grading is carried out in a way that is fair and reasonable. Given that your name will never appear on your exams, this means that every exam will be graded on the basis of the words that are on the page, focusing on the clarity and accuracy of the presentation and the strength of the evidence that you present for the claims that you make.

**Appealing a grade:** You are welcome to appeal any grade that you do not feel accurately represents the work that you have done. However, all appeals for reevaluation must be made in writing, and must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade; appeals must be made no more than two weeks after your paper is returned. We will do our best to return papers promptly; out of fairness, you will do your best to make any appeals for re-evaluation in a timely manner. NB: the agreement to re-evaluate can result in three distinct outcomes: 1) raising the grade; 2) lowering the grade; or, 3) making no change to the grade. A re-evaluation is no guarantee of a better grade and can even result in a lower grade if you do not offer a compelling case for raising your grade.

**Mind your manners:** Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions we will be discussing may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But I will only be able to do this if each of you helps to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

## Tentative Course Schedule

	9 Jan	Introduction to the class
The selfish gene	14-16 Jan	Dawkins, <i>The selfish gene</i> (Chapters 1-5)
	21-23 Jan	Dawkins, <i>The selfish gene</i> (Chapters 6-9)
	28-30 Jan	Dawkins, <i>The selfish gene</i> (Finish the book)
	4 Feb	Dobbs, "Why it's time to lay the selfish gene to rest" Berreby, "Want to make hunter-gatherers irrational?"
<b>6 Feb No class – Professor Huebner is at the SSPP</b>		
Does the neo-Darwinian synthesis ignore women?	11 Feb	Hrdy, The woman that never evolved (Chapters 1-3)
	18-20 Feb	Hrdy, The woman that never evolved (Chapters 1-3, cont'd; Chapter 6)
	25-27 Feb	Hrdy, The woman that never evolved (Chapter 8) Lloyd, The Case of the Female Orgasm (Chapters 3-4)
	4-6 March	Lloyd, The Case of the Female Orgasm (Chapters 5 & 7)
<b>7-17 March Spring Break</b>		
The limits of adaptation?	18 March	Lloyd, The Case of the Female Orgasm (Chapter 8) Haworth, "Why have young people in japan stopped having sex?" (optional)
	20 March	Savulescu, "Genetic Enhancement"
How selfish are we? The limits of evolutionary explanation	25-27 March	DeWaal, <i>The age of empathy</i> (Chapters 2-4)
	1-3 April	DeWaal, the age of empathy (Chapters 5-6)
	8-10 April	Amundson & Taira, "Our lives and Ideologies" Bauman & Murray, "Deaf studies in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century" Burke, "Armchairs and Stares"
	15 April	Fausto-Sterling, "How to build a man" Julia Serano, "Intrinsic inclinations" & "Pathological science"
	<b>16-21 April</b>	<b>Easter Break</b>