Philosophy 640 – Evolution and Morality
Winter 2006. Mondays, 7:00-9:00 p.m., 2271 Angell Hall
Allan Gibbard  
gibbard@umich.edu  Thu. 3–3:30 and by appointment, AH 2187
Peter Railton  
prailton@umich.edu  Wed. 2–3:30
Chandra Sripada  
sripada@umich.edu  Mon. 6–7

Books and articles may be available as Electronic Journals [EJ], on Electronic Reserve [ER], on Tanner Library Reserve [TR], or in other ways. Links are provided below, but some of them may not work or may work only from the campus network, because of permissions problems.

Lecture series
Evolution and Culture Colloquium Series Talks (ECCS) are normally Fridays, 10:30-12:00 am, in 4448 East Hall (exceptions indicated). These are sponsored jointly by the Evolution and Human Adaptation Program (EHAP) and the Culture and Cognition Program.
The “Explore Evolution” Theme Semester Public Lecture Series (PLS) is normally on Wednesdays in chemistry 1800 (exceptions indicated).
For updates, see:
http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/ehap/current.htm

Syllabus (in progress)

Jan 9  – First meeting
Organizational matters. General introduction plus some basic concepts. Adaptation and functional explanation: general structure, typical explanadum, and some pitfalls and fallacies. How might evolution bear on moral questions, e.g., moral psychology, the content or character of moral language? What bearing does it not have? “Neo-Darwinian” picture of natural selection and the diversity of selection mechanisms. Propensities or conditional rules: interaction between genetic and environmental factors in the explanation of phenotypic characteristics and behaviors, and some pitfalls and fallacies. Some ideas: “modules” vs. capacities, strategies, exaptations, spandrels, redeployment. Some examples of evolutionary approaches to moral emotion, affect, or cognition.

Readings: (no required reading, but here is some background, which need not be in advance of the session)


**ECCS** Friday Jan 13, 10:30-12:00 am, in 4448 East Hall:
Douglas Medin, “Gamefish Culture: Intergroup Conflict and Environment”

**PLS** Friday Jan 13, 8 pm, Chemistry 1800:
Svante Paabo, Max-Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany
The quest for the genes that make us human

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**Jan 16** – No meeting, MLK Day

**ECCS** Friday, January 20th, 10:30 am, Rackham Amphitheater:
Frans de Waal, “Our Inner Ape: Human Nature as Seen by a Primatologist”, Rackham Amphitheatre

**Part I: Evolutionary mechanisms and models**

**Jan 23** – Pre-human morality

What sorts of observations have been made of behaviors in animals that might be interesting precursors to morality, i.e., proto-moral. Diversity of patterns of primate sociability – controversies and possible explanations. Forms of mating, bonding, signaling, hierarchy, daily life. Proto-moral emotions, communication, and social cognition.

**Readings:**


**PLS** Wednesday, January 25th, 7 pm, Chemistry 1800
Eugenie Scott, National Center for Science Education
Intelligent Design and the Creationism/Evolution Controversy

**ECCS** Friday, January 27, 10:30-12:00 am, in 4448 East Hall
Jesse Bering, “The Folk Psychology of Souls”

*under revision, version of 4/18/2006*
Jan 30 – Reciprocal altruism, evolutionary modeling and human psychology

The concept of an ESS and its uses and limits. Evolutionary modeling of strategies in the repeated Prisoner’s Dilemma. How might have reciprocal altruism, and social exchange more broadly, helped to shape human psychology?

Readings:


PLS Wednesday, February 1st, 7 pm, Chemistry 1800
David Pilbeam, Harvard University
Forty years of thinking about the origins of the human lineage

ECCS Feb 3, Friday, 10:30-12:00 am, in Rackham Amphitheatre:
Daniel Dennett, “Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon”

Feb 6 – Commitment, costly signaling and sexual selection

Possible evolutionary explanations of commitment and their strengths and weaknesses. The concept of a costly signal. How does sexual selection differ from other selective forces, and what distinctive contributions might it have made to human psychology?

Readings (in Tanner, and may be on Electronic Reserve):


PLS Wednesday, February 8th, 7 pm, Chemistry 1800
Richard Wrangham, Harvard University
Primate and human society

ECCS Feb 10, Friday, 10:30-12:00 am, in 4448 East Hall:

under revision, version of 4/18/2006
Feb 13 – Fairness and the social contract – models and critiques

How might evolution have shaped a “sense of fairness”? The notion of a mixed strategy. Criticisms of evolutionary modeling.

Readings:


ECCS Feb 17, Friday, 10:30-12:00 am, in 4448 East Hall:
Tatiana Karafet, “Native Peoples of Siberia: Genetics, Language, and Archaeology”

Feb 20 – Norms, rituals and punishment

What are some limits of reciprocity-based explanations of moral behavior? What are norms and rituals, and how might they structure human social life? What is punishment, and what role does it play in supporting moral behavior? How do norms change and evolve over time?

Readings:


Feb 27 – “Spring” Break

under revision, version of 4/18/2006
Mar 6 – The role of groups – history and current theories

At what levels of organization does natural selection operate? What is “group selection”? Under what conditions might it have occurred? What are some models of the role that group behavior has played in evolutionary processes?

Readings:


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P.L.S. Wednesday, March 8, 7 pm, Chemistry 1800

W. Ford Doolittle, Dalhousie University

The Tree of Life: Is it really a web?

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Part II: Controversies in metaethics and moral psychology

Mar 13 – The role of emotions in moral judgment

Do moral judgments ultimately arise from one’s emotions and feelings or from processes of reasoning and rationality? How might evolutionary considerations shed light on this question? If emotions do in fact play a central role in moral judgment, what implications might this have for philosophical views concerning the nature of moral motivation and the meaning of moral terms?

Readings:

1. A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 36–45, 126–140. (On **CTOOL**S. On the Phil. 640 tab, click “Resources” at left, and then the folder “Articles”. Also on Tanner reserve.)


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Mar 20 – Altruism versus egoism

Does evolutionary theory predict that humans will invariably be selfish? Do humans ever in fact act with “genuine” altruistic motivation? What kind of arguments and evidence, both evolutionary and psychological, are relevant to this question?

Readings:


Mar 27 – Moral diversity and moral realism

What are some general models that have been proposed to analyze the diverse forms of normative regulation across human groups? Does the existence of cross-cultural diversity of this sort have implications for metaethical theory, and if so, what theories does it support or weigh against?

Readings:


3. Doris, John and Plakias, Alexandra (forthcoming). “How to argue about disagreement: Evaluative diversity and moral realism”. If the link doesn’t work, go to CTOOLS and in the Phil. 640 tab, click “Resources” at left; then click “Articles” to get link.

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April 3 – Evolution and Metaethics

Readings:


**PLS** Wednesday, April 5th, 7 pm, Chemistry 1800
*Peter Grant* and *Rosemary Grant*, Princeton University
Exploring evolution of Darwin’s Finches

**ECCS** Apr 7, Friday, 10:30-12:00 am, in 4448 East Hall:
Peter Richerson, “Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution”

April 10 – Psychopathy

What are some of the behavioral characteristics of psychopathic individuals, i.e. individuals who violate the rights of others without guilt or remorse? Are such individuals a product of biology or learning? How might evolutionary theory shed light on this question? What sorts of psychological deficits do psychopaths exhibit? What relevance might the existence of psychopathic individuals have for meta-ethical theory?

Readings:

ECCS Apr 14, Friday, 10:30-12:00 am, in 4448 East Hall: Rita Astuti, “Death and Ancestors in Madagascar: A Cognitive Developmental Approach”

Apr 17 – Additional topics in moral psychology

What is the role of empathetic simulation in moral behavior and moral development? Are guilt and shame universally present across human groups? How do guilt and shame differ from each other? How should we understand the various pathologies of belief and decision that undermine proper moral conduct, including self-deception and weakness of the will?

Readings (also assigned April 3, except for the new Sripada mss.):

2. C. Sripada, “Weakness of the will and the divided mind”, manuscript, in *CTOOLS*.
4. Railton, *outline of above*.

**PLS** Wednesday, April 19th, 7 pm, Chemistry 1800

Richard Lewontin, Harvard University

*Gene, organism and environment*

Apr 24 – Reprise and Implications

Return to the most general questions of moral theory and moral psychology. What bearings have we found evolutionary ways of thinking to have on these questions? What is the upshot, if any, for our own normative thought and practice?

Readings:

Apr 28 – Papers due.

Further reading – Some optional, some to go into syllabus for specific sessions.

Readings:


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