

## PHIL\*3170 CRITICAL DEBATES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

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### **Brief Course Synopsis:**

Does evolution explain human nature? Recent developments in the biological sciences suggest that the answer is 'yes'. Evolutionary scientists identify certain social and ecological pressures that were confronted by human ancestors. Selection favoured any genetic difference that provided a behavioural advantage in these environments. Therefore, it is argued, human nature has been shaped by evolutionary processes. Emotional responses, mating strategies, economic decisions, the motivation for war - these are just a few examples of the traits that evolutionists purport to explain. This Darwinian approach to human nature has encountered both enthusiastic support and stern resistance. Some argue that evolutionary theory provides a unifying framework for the humanities; while others see it as overly deterministic, or even dangerous. This course will investigate these claims from a philosophical perspective. Special attention will be paid to foundational questions in evolutionary biology. For example, what does it mean to identify "a gene for" a given trait? If selection acts primarily on "selfish genes" why are humans often cooperative? When can an evolutionary hypothesis be considered bunk, and when should it be taken seriously?

Students will acquire a critical understanding of Darwinian theory, especially as it applies to human nature. Detailed familiarity with the biological sciences is not required. Student evaluation is based on several short reflection papers and a final essay.