

**THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS OF THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION**

Wednesday, 1:45-3:15 p.m.  
September 23 – November 11

John Parascandola (301-346-3760)  
[jparascandola@verizon.net](mailto:jparascandola@verizon.net)

**Course Syllabus**

Course Description

The theory of evolution is one of the foundation blocks of modern biological science. But evolution's reach extends far beyond biology. It has influenced social science, politics, religion, literature, philosophy, and other fields of knowledge. This course will begin with a look at the origins of Darwin's theory of evolution and the reaction to it, but will focus primarily on the broader impact of the theory on society, including issues of Social Darwinism, race, eugenics, creationism, and intelligent design, as well as a brief look at the theory's influence on the arts.

The course will involve Powerpoint lectures, readings, films and film clips, and group discussion. Reading assignments for each week, which range from about 15 to 25 pages, are shown on the course schedule below. All reading assignments will be posted as pdf files on the OLLI website with the exception of the article by Julia Voss in week 6, for which a link to the article on the internet is provided in the syllabus. To access the reading assignments on the OLLI website, click on Study Groups, then on Fall 2020 Handouts. This will bring up a list of courses. Search for this course (747) and there you will find links to the assigned readings. These are not arranged by week/date, but each reading is identified by author and an abbreviated title. **Please read each assignment in advance of the relevant class.** A list of suggested books for further reading is provided at the end of the syllabus for those who may wish to follow up on any of the course topics.

Instructor

John Parascandola has a PhD in the history of science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has served as a historian in the federal government and on the faculty of the Universities of Wisconsin and Maryland (where he taught a course on the history of biology). He is the author of several books and numerous articles and has taught five previous OLLI classes.

**Course Schedule**

Week 1 – September 23

Darwin's Theory of Evolution

**READING**

Edward J. Larson, *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), pp. 55-75 (Chapter 3, "On the Origins of Darwinism")

Week 2 – September 30

The Reaction to Darwin's Theory

READING

Edward J. Larson, "The Reception of Darwinism in the Nineteenth Century: A Three Part Story," *Science and Christian Belief* 21 (2009): 3-24

Week 3 – October 7

Social Darwinism

READING

Larson, *Evolution*, pp. 185-191 ("The Sprouting of Social Darwinism")

Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, Revised Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) pp. 201-204 ("Conclusion")

Week 4 – October 14

The Rise and Fall of Eugenics

READING

Adam Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), pp. 299-323 ("Conclusion")

Week 5 - October 21

Evolution and Race

READING

John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, "The Origins of Scientific Racism," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 50 (Winter, 2005/2006): 66-79

Week 6 – October 28

Evolution and the Arts

READING

John Holmes, "Darwinism in Literature," *The Literary Encyclopedia*. Volume [1.2.1.07](#): *English Writing and Culture of the Victorian Period, 1837-1901*, ed. by Gillian Fenwick and Grace Moore (7 pp.)

Julia Voss, "The Curatorial Turn in the Darwin Year 2009" <https://19.bbk.ac.uk/article/id/1513/print/>

## Week 7 – November 4

Evolution and Religion – The Scopes Trial

### READING

Larson, *Evolution*, pp. 201-218 (Chapter 9, “America’s Anti-Evolution Crusade”)

## Week 8 – November 11

Evolution and Religion – Creationism and Intelligent Design

### READING

John R. Cole, “Wielding the Wedge: Keeping Anti-Evolution Alive,” in *Scientists Confront Creationism: Intelligent Design and Beyond*, ed. by Andrew J. Petto and Laurie R. Godfrey (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), pp. 110-128

## **Suggested Additional Reading**

### Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and the Reaction to It

Edward J. Larson, *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory* (New York: Modern Library, 2006)

Peter Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)

Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin*, two volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995 and 2002)

Phillip Appleman, ed., *Darwin*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001) (A Norton Critical Edition of texts and commentary)

Ronald Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998)

Peter Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992)

Edward Larson, *Evolution’s Workshop: God and Science in the Galapagos Islands* (New York: Basic Books, 2001)

### Social Darwinism, Eugenics and Racism

Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955)

Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction Between Biological and Social Theory* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980)

Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Richard Weikart, *Social Darwinism: Evolution in German Socialist Thought from Marx to Bernstein* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998)

Diane Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity, 1865 to the Present* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1995)

Paul Lombardo, ed., *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011)

Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Use of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985)

Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

George Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

John Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971)

### Evolution and the Arts

George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

Anne-Julia Zwierlein, ed., *Unmapped Countries: Biological Visions in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture* (London: Anthem Press, 2005)

Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer, eds., *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2009)

Diana Donald and Jane Munro, eds., *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)

### Creationism and Intelligent Design

Edward Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997)

Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

Andrew J. Petto and Laurie R. Godfrey, eds., *Scientists Confront Creationism: Intelligent Design and Beyond* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007)

Eugenie Scott, *Evolution vs. Creationism: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009)