

Dr. Lane DesAutels

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Office hours: 11:00-12:00, M/W
2:00-3:00, T/Th
12:00-1:00, F
(and by appointment)

Class time: F: 11:00-12:20
Location: Popplewell 115G

Course Description

This course will explore contemporary topics in philosophy of biology. We will explore such questions such as: Can philosophy help us grasp what a gene is? An organism? A species? How about biomedical concepts like disease? Disability? Or normality? What are the ethics of genetically modifying humans? How about creating designer babies? What are the philosophical implications of Darwinian evolution? Does evolution conflict with religion?

Objectives

By completing this course, students should gain significantly greater abilities to:

- I. Carefully engage in close reading of demanding texts
- II. Produce a precise and carefully structured piece of writing
- III. Participate in reasoned discussion of difficult topics
- IV. Employ modern deductive logic in their philosophic work, and
- V. Develop and defend their own philosophical positions and engage in sustained and critical reflection on their own values and beliefs

Required Texts

There are no required textbooks for this class. Assigned readings will be uploaded onto Canvas by at least one week prior to when they are assigned.

Course Requirements

- (1) One 7-10 page research paper on a topic to be decided in consultation with the professor.
- (2) Class attendance and meaningful class participation, based in part on assigned reading, is expected.

Grading Breakdown

Final grade calculation: 75% research paper, 25% for class participation.

Grading Scale:

A= 90% -100%; B= 80% -89%; C=70%-79%; D= 60% -69%; F=59% and below

Attendance: University Statement

“Missouri Western State University has the expectation that students should be active participants in their coursework. Regular class attendance is considered a key element of participation and an essential part of the educational experience.” (MWSU Student Handbook)

Attendance: Course Statement

Attendance is not strictly mandatory in this class. However, your participation in class discussions as well as your in-class quiz grade contribute significantly to your overall course grade.

Classroom Behavior Guidelines

Please arrive on time and leave only after the class is over. Please do not talk to your neighbor during class. Turn off and put away all cell phones and message devices. Laptops may NOT be used during lecture (unless proper documentation is provided from the Accessibility Resource Center).

Academic Honesty, Due Process, and Grade Appeal

Academic dishonesty is defined in the Student Code of Conduct as engaging in acts which include (but not limited to):

- a) Falsifying documents or academic records;
- b) Any activity that violates the University’s Academic Honesty Policy including (but not limited to) any instance of plagiarism, cheating, seeking credit for another’s work, using any electronic device to either improperly store information for an exam or to transmit portions of questions or answers to other students, or allowing another student to take your exam for you.

For more details concerning Departmental Grade Appeal Procedure, see “GRADE APPEAL PROCEDURE MATERIALS” which is filed in Popplewell 115.

Students with Disabilities

Students seeking accommodations must first provide documentation of needed accommodations to the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) located in Eder Hall, Suite 203. Once accommodations have been approved by the ARC, students are responsible for notifying their instructors of those accommodations. This should be done within the first two weeks of classes. Accommodations are not retroactive.

Pregnancy

Missouri Western State University does not discriminate against any student on the basis of pregnancy, parenting or related conditions. Absences due to medical conditions relating to pregnancy, and recovery from pregnancy, will be excused for as long as deemed medically necessary by a student's doctor. Students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work. Pregnant or parenting students needing assistance should contact the Title IX Coordinator, Adam McGowan at 816-271-4432 in Blum Student Union 228.

A Note on Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct

Consistent with its mission, Missouri Western seeks to assure all community members learn and work in a welcoming and inclusive environment. Title VII, Title IX, and University policy prohibit harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. Missouri Western encourages anyone experiencing harassment, discrimination or sexual misconduct to talk to someone from the Campus and Local Resources list found in the University Policies and Procedures (<https://www.missouriwestern.edu/studentaffairs/wp.../handbook.pdf>) about what happened so they can get the support they need and Missouri Western can respond appropriately.

There are both confidential and non-confidential resources and reporting options available to you. Missouri Western is legally obligated to respond to reports of sexual misconduct, and therefore we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of a report, unless made to a confidential resource. Responses may vary from support services to formal investigations. As a faculty member, I am required to report incidents of sexual misconduct and thus cannot guarantee confidentiality. I must provide our Title IX coordinator with relevant details such as the names of those involved in the incident. For more information about policies and resources or reporting options, please visit the following website: <https://www.missouriwestern.edu/titleix/sexual-misconduct-policy/>

Students have received information via email regarding training regarding Title IX. Student employees may have additional required training. Please follow the link in the email sent to your MWSU student account to complete the training. Students who do not complete the training will receive a hold on their account, prohibiting future semester enrollment until the training is complete. These training courses will ensure that all students are appropriately educated about these important regulations.

Classroom Recording Policy

The course materials that I author, including, but not limited to, PowerPoint slides, Panopto recordings, Canvas screen shots, class hand-outs, web-based and social media content, and course syllabi, are my intellectual property and are protected by copyright law. Students in the course may download and make copies of my course materials for the course student's own use.

Students are not allowed to record course proceedings, publicly reproduce or distribute these materials or enable others to do so without my express written consent. Failure to comply with this direction may constitute a violation of the Student Code of Conduct as outlined in the Student Handbook and result in disciplinary action by the University.

Inclement Weather and Illness Policy

In the event that the instructor is unable to make it to a scheduled class session, you will be notified through your university email account, when possible. The email will contain instructions for what you are to do in lieu of coming to class that day.

Make-Up Exam Policy

Two days each semester will be provided for make-up quizzes and tests: one before mid-term grades, the other prior to final exams. Contact the instructor before the scheduled test date or as soon as possible after the test about the prospect of a make-up. Make-up tests will be given solely at the discretion of the instructor. Depending on the circumstances, the instructor may require documentation explaining why the student missed a scheduled test date. As a rule, only one make-up per student per semester will be allowed. Remember, a make-up is a privilege, not a right.

Meeting Basic Needs

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students, 226 Blum Student Union, for a list of resources and support. <https://www.missouriwestern.edu/studentaffairs/>

You can also contact Shana Meyer, Vice President for Student Affairs, slmeyer@missouriwestern.edu

The Campus Cupboard is a free resource with pantry and hygiene items, located at 214 Blum Student Union. The pantry is typically open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-4 pm and by appointment. You can stop by the Vice President for Student Affairs Office, Blum 228, to contact the Dean of Students with questions or concerns. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable your professor to connect you with the resources you need.

Schedule of Readings/Assignments (*Subject to Change*)

Week 1 (1/17)

- Required Reading
 - o Darwin, C. (1859) *On the Origin of Species*, (Facsimile of the First Ed), Chapters 1-2

Week 2 (1/24)

- Required Reading
 - o Darwin, C. (1859) *On the Origin of Species*, (Facsimile of the First Ed), Chapters 3-4

Week 3 (1/31)

- Required Reading
 - o Sober, E. (2009). "Did Darwin Write the Origin Backwards?" *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 106: 10048-10055.

Week 4 (2/7)

- Required Reading
 - o Fodor, J. A. (2010). *What Darwin Got Wrong*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (part 1)

Week 5 (2/14)

- Required Reading
 - o Fodor, J. A. (2010). *What Darwin Got Wrong*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (part 2)

Week 6 (2/21)

- Required Reading
 - o Sober, E. (2010). "Natural Selection, Causality, and Laws: What Fodor and piatelli-palmarini Got Wrong." *Philosophy of Science* 77 (4):594-607.

Week 7 (2/28)

- Required Reading
 - o Sober, E. and Orzack, S. (2003). "Common Ancestry and Natural Selection." *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 54: 423-437

Week 8 (3/6)

- Required Reading
 - o Sober, E. (2001). "The Two Faces of Fitness." In R. Singh, D. Paul, C. Krimbas, and J. Beatty (eds.), *Thinking about Evolution: Historical, Philosophical, and Political Perspectives*. Cambridge UP, vol. 2, pp. 309-321

Week 9 (3/13) SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (3/20)

- Required Reading
 - o Beatty, J. (1995). "The Evolutionary Contingency Thesis." In G. Wolters and J. Lennox (eds.), *Concepts, Theories, and Rationality in the Biological Sciences*, 45-81.

Week 11 (3/27)

- Required Reading
 - o Sober, E. (1997). "Two Outbreaks of Lawlessness in Recent Philosophy of Biology" *Philosophy of Science* 64 (Proceedings), pp. S458-S467.
 - o DesAutels, L. (2010) "Sober and Elgin on Laws of Biology: A Critique." *Biology and Philosophy* 25:249-256.

******* 1st draft of Research Paper due to me by 11:59 pm (4/2) *******

Week 12 (4/3)

- Required Reading
 - o Sober, E. (2015). "The ABCs of Probability and the Basics of Bayesianism." from E. Sober, *Ockham's Razors – A User's Manual*, Cambridge University Press.

Week 13 (4/10)

- Required Reading
 - o Velasco, J. D. (2013). "Philosophy and Phylogenetics". *Philosophy Compass* 8 (10):990-998.

Week 14 (4/17)

- Required Reading
 - o Steel, M. and Penny, D. (2000), "Parsimony, Likelihood and the Role of Models in Molecular Phylogenetics," *Molecular Biology and Evolution* 17: 839- 850;

Week 15 (4/24)

- Required Reading
 - o Quinn, A. (forthcoming). "Phylogenetic Inference to the Best Explanation and the Bad Lot Argument," *Synthese*:1-15.

******* Final draft of Research Paper due to me by 11:59 pm (4/26)**