1-1-2009

CS 684 Bioethics: Evolution and Creation

James R. Thobaben

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Syllabus

Course: CS684 W1 (JA 2009)
Title: Bioethics: Evolution & Creation
Hours: 1.00
Published: Yes, on 11/06/2008
Prerequisites:

CS601
- or -
CS601†
† indicates this may be fulfilled as a co-requisite.

Department: Church in Society
Faculty: Dr. James Thobaben

Email: jim.thobaben@asburyseminary.edu
Office: AD
SPO: 800

Meetings:

On Tuesday, 01/20/2009 from 8:00a to 9:00p in AD302.

Maximum Registration: 20
Catalog Description: Students will examine the social and cultural interpretation of the creation/evolution debate, including its history and the theological implications. The ethical focus is on how believers should interact with secularists, as well as how they should discuss the issues within the community of faith.

Objectives:

1-hour Ethics Core Requirement Intensive

CS 684     BIOETHICS: Evolution & Creation
            James R. Thobaben, Ph.D., M.P.H.
            ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
20 January 2009  8:00 am - 9:00 pm (Friday)
Meeting Room: AD306 (tentative)

Office Location: AD 302
Office Phone: 858-2369       Home Phone 858-8058
e-mail: jim_thobaben @ asburyseminary.edu

Office Hours:  On sabbatical; meetings by appointment

PURPOSE:

To prepare students for ministry by training them to analyze and address the evolution/creation debate from a Christian perspective, while having basic knowledge of neo-Darwinian evolutionary thought. To develop ministers who are responsive to the needs, contexts, and insights of parishioners and members of the larger community. To enable ministers to equip their congregations for understanding their moral responsibility in decisions about n/Nature as God’s creation and humans as part of His created order.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able:
To demonstrate competence with various Biblical and Christian traditions about Creation.
To explain basic neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory.
To report on the history of the evolution/creation debates of the 19th - 21st centuries.
To demonstrate competence with various Biblical and Christian traditions in responding to moral issues arising from or explained using the evolution/creation debates.
To apply ethical analysis in developing responses to these issues at a congregational and/or institutional level.
To describe how various positions on the evolution/creation debate may or may not shape society.

As a second course in ethics, students will be able:
Students will be able:
To demonstrate competence with various Biblical and Christian traditions used in responding to selected moral issues.
To demonstrate competence with various ethical categories and frameworks used in responding to specific contemporary moral issues.
To demonstrate competence in utilizing social, cultural, and/or historical analysis in response to contemporary moral issues.
To apply ethical analysis in developing responses to moral issues at a congregational and/or institutional level.
To recognize the distinctive insights arising from particular social locations (these may include, but are not limited to, particularity arising from ethnic, gender, class, and geographic location).

This course is one of five 1-hour bioethics courses. The others examine:
• Biotechnologies (focusing on genetic alteration, abortion, stem cell research, etc.),
• Environmental ethics,
• Death & dying, and,
• Sickness and disability (along with the distribution of healthcare).

TEXTS:

• Collins, Francis, The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief
• Moreland, J.P. & Reynolds, J., editors Three Views on Creation and Evolution

ARTICLES:

• Best, Steven, "Common Natures, Shared Fates: Toward an Interspecies Alliance Politics" http://www.animalliberationfront.com/Philosophy/Debating/Steven%20Best%20articles%20on%20animal%20issues.html


• Goebel, Greg, "An Evolution Primer" http://www.vectorsite.net/tadarwinp.html (Also available is a fairly balanced representation of evolutionary theory with a toned-down discussion of the supposed religion-science conflict: An Introduction to Evolution http://www.vectorsite.net/tadarwin.html ; alternatively, students may read, Futuyma, Douglas J., Evolution, a college level textbook on evolutionary theory -- both of these works require some basic background in science).


Dembski, William "Design Inference" http://www.designinference.com/

• Preface to Paperback Edition of No Free Lunch. [posted 26Jun06] Five year after its publication, my book No Free Lunch is coming out in paperback. Here is the new
preface I was asked to write for it.

- Evolution as Alchemy. [posted 23Jun06] An essay on how prior metaphysical commitments account for the scientific community's overweening confidence in evolutionary theorizing. For the html version, go here.
- A Primer on Probability for Design Inferences. [28Sep05] The bare bones of what is needed to understand the probability behind Fisherian and Bayesian design inferences.

READ TWO (2) of the Dembski articles; several include very difficult mathematics -- simply wade through those sections.

NOTE: As is often the case with web-based resources - you may or may not find a given article at the site noted; you remain responsible for the reading even if the website changes or, if you absolutely cannot find one, you may substituted an equivalent from the web, but must submit the name and specific web address.

EXPECTATIONS:
Bioethics: Creation and Evolution is a SEMESTER course. Students should read ALL of the material before the class begins. The exam is given several days after the class meetings end and the final paper is due three weeks after. Do not try to cram all the reading into the week of classes.

Written Work: 6 - 7 page term paper. Term paper options #1 does not require approval of topic; #2 does. Make sure the paper includes a "fair" consideration of all major positions and a clear assertion of the position you hold. The papers should include moral reasoning explicitly intended for the Christian community, as well as arguments that would be coherent in a highly secularized setting. Do not focus on counseling issues, but on social and cultural factors and on moral reasoning.

#1 What is the moral significance of the creation / evolution debate to the civil society?  
#2 Open topic, but must focus on ethics, not counseling or pastoral care AND must clear the topic with professor.

All written work must be typed with 12 point type, one inch margins on all four sides, and true double spacing. Do not include substantial quotes from Scripture; use citations. Written material will be evaluated for reasoning, referencing, and for structure and grammar. All references must be noted properly; include page numbers or download information, when appropriate. Follow page limit requirements. Required length of paper does not include reference or title pages. In accordance with ATS policy, all written work must use inclusive language when reference is made to human beings (male and female). This provides for both greater inclusion and greater precision.

Papers are graded anonymously. Each paper should include a title page with the student's name and birthday (in the month/day form; the year is not necessary). All subsequent pages should include only the birthday number, written in the top right
Papers are due at 9:00 am on Monday 27 JAN 2009 at Dr. Thobaben's office in Wilmore. There will be a penalty for late papers commensurate with the degree of lateness and the adequacy of the excuse. Papers from persons who live more than 50 miles from the Wilmore campus may be sent electronically (this DOES NOT include persons who leave the campus for the remainder of J-Term but live near-by; such students may submit a paper electronically by the deadline to indicate completion, but still must provide a hard copy mailed on the same day.

Final Examination: A one-hour, in-class final. Part of the exam will be an objective examination over concepts in medical ethics and part will be a response to a case study. The exam time will be decided in class. As with the papers, the exam will be graded anonymously. If necessary, the exam may be taken off-campus with a proctor present throughout; the process for this will be discussed on the first day of class.

Participation: Students are required to complete all assigned readings. Acknowledgement of completion will be sought the last day of class. Failure to complete readings on time may result in a lowering of the final grade, as will poor attendance for class. The deduction for low participation and/or late or incomplete reading of assigned material will be up to 10% against the final grade (a full letter grade reduction).

FINAL GRADE:
Examination 40% Date: determined by class, but BEFORE end of J-Term.
Term Paper 60% Date: 26 JAN 2009 Time: 9 am
Class Participation Deduction if lacking
Reading Deduction if lacking

Grade Range: Work for the class will be evaluated at a graduate/professional school level.
A (93-100) = Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives.
  A- (90-92) =
  B+ (87-89) =
  B (83-86) = Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives
  B- (80-82) =
  C+ (77-79) =
  C (73-76) = Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives
  C- (70-72) =
  D+ (67-69) =
  D (63-66) = Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives
  D- (60-62) =
  F (> 60) = Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives

COURSE SCHEDULE
BASIC CONCEPTS

- Basic concepts in ethics (a review)
- What is life?
- What is n/Nature?
- What are species?

GOD THE CREATOR

- Old Testament descriptions of Creation
- New Testament uses
- The early Church

COSMOLOGIES

- Geocentricism: Ptolemy, Medieval Christianity
- Heliocentrism: Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler
- Geology: Hutton & Lyell
- Contemporary Scientific Cosmologies

EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

- Lamarck & Genetic Modification to Need
- Pre-19th century Christian understandings
- Darwin's argument

  - Mechanisms
  - Implications
  - Strengths & weaknesses as science

    - Scientific modifications of Darwinian evolutionary theory

- Mendel & Neo-Darwinism
- Classification of Life
- Eras of Evolutionary History
- Punctuation v. Gradualism

POLITICS, CULTURE & THE CREATIONIST/EVOLUTIONIST ARGUMENT

- Social Darwinism and Christian service
- Fundamentalist / Modernist controversy
- Current arguments

- 6-day
- 6 day with periodicity
- 6 epochs
- Intelligent Design & Theistic Evolution
• Current legal status

CURRENT MORAL CONCERNS:

• Creating Evolutionary Change: Non-human
  o Monocultures
  o "Kudzu Effect" (Invasive Species)
  o Chimeras
  o Safety of foods
  o Pollution control
  o Patenting life

• Creating Evolutionary Change: Human
  • What about political activism?
  • What can/should a local congregation do?

CONCLUSION:

• Theological implications of evolution
  • Evangelical understandings of "creation" at the end of modernity

Students are well-served if they have retained a general understanding of (at least) high school algebra, geometry, and biology