

, Room 331

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Office Hours: T-Th, 3:00 – 4:00 pm and by appointment

Standard economics treats preferences as given, but what if they have instead been shaped by natural selection? This concept opens up a variety of questions. Why do men tend to make riskier investments than women? Why are people impatient? What explains novelty seeking, habits, and addictions? Where does nepotism come from? We will apply evolutionary thought to such diverse topics as: violence; adolescent risk taking; sexual behavior; mating preferences; marriage and divorce; rearing and investing in children; extended families; trade and specialization; cooperation and conflict; cults and gangs; religion; interactions between genetic and cultural forces; social learning, including fads, fashion and imitative and herd behavior; behavioral finance; concerns for relative status; civic life; warfare and aggression; political revolutions and the psychology of cooperation, guilt, shame, spite and revenge.

Book:

, paperback reprint edition, by Robert Wright (Vintage Books, 1995).

Prerequisites: Microeconomic Theory and Econometrics.

Grading: The course grade is based on the following:

Class participation	10 percent
Assignments (5)	10 percent
Midterm (November 1, in class)	20 percent
Research paper (due December 3, 10:30 a.m.)	30 percent
Final exam (December 13, 9:00 a.m.)	30 percent

Reading: Unlike most economics texts, the required book contains mostly verbal arguments rather than equations and graphs. Most of the articles have the



\*Donald Cox, Bruce Hansen and Emmanuel Jimenez. 2004. "How Responsive are Private Transfers to Income? Evidence from a Laissez-faire Economy."

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Reading: *Biological forces act in concert with environmental influences; they can't be analyzed in a vacuum.*

William H. McNeill. 1997. "History Upside Down." . (A review of ).

Jeffrey D. Sachs, Andrew D. Mellinger and John L. Gallup. 2001. "The Geography of Poverty and Wealth."

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Reading: *Can having a hair-trigger temper actually facilitate rather than discourage trade? How about a guilty conscience? The term "emotion" often implies being out of control and irrational. But maybe emotions complement rather than work against our rational side.*

Michael Waldman. 1990. Review of  
by Robert Frank.

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Reading: *How many people can you keep track of? Does social media make a difference?*

\*Edward P. Lazear. 1999. "Culture and Language."

Nicholas Lemann. 2010. "Terrorism Studies: Social scientists do counterinsurgency."

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Reading: *How does "fake news" happen? What are the economic consequences of conformity?*

\*Sushil Bikhchandani, David Hirshleifer, and Ivo Welch. 1998. "Learning from the Behavior of Others: Conformity, Fads, and Informational Cascades."

George A. Akerlof, "Social Distance and Social Decisions." 1997.

Robinson Meyer. 2018. "The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News."

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Reading: *Why did pedophilia in the Catholic Church go unreported for so long, and also why the scandal broke so suddenly? (The same thing's happened with the #MeToo movement.) And what does these events have in common with political revolutions?*

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Reading: *Why do people procrastinate? Is it because of a quirk in their utility functions, or because of their upbringing?*

James Surowiecki. 2010. "Later: What does procrastination tell us about ourselves?"

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Reading: *How 'groupish' are humans?*

Jonathan Haidt. 2012. "Why Are We So Groupish?" Chapter 9 of

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August 28