



**The Exeter College Summer Programme
at Exeter College in the University of Oxford**

The History of Evolution

Course Description

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, set out in *The Origin of Species* (1859), is a cornerstone of modern science and one of the most deeply divisive ideas in history. In this course we'll explore the enduring power of evolutionary theory – and the protracted controversy it has provoked – by stepping back into Darwin's century, to examine the scientific, political and cultural currents that shaped his big idea.

In the nineteenth century Western ideas about life, the universe and everything were turned upside down. The Earth grew in age from a few thousand to hundreds of millions of years. Life was no longer the creation of a loving god but the result of a seemingly blind natural process. The Industrial Revolution replaced the seasonal rhythms of rural life with a harsher and more regimented attitude to time and work. And the long aftermath of the French Revolution offered a new and (to many observers) terrifying vision of violent transformation. In this course we'll tell the story of this remarkable century, and its lasting influence on our ideas of what it means to be human.

Amongst many other things, we'll discuss the relationship between Christianity and the emerging professional sciences; the discovery of geological deep time; changing ideas of human prehistory and racial difference; evolution before and after Darwin; eugenics as science and as politics; and debates over progress and degeneration in science, society and culture.

Through 12 lectures, 6 seminars, 4 tutorials and required reading students will gain a fuller understanding of the emergence of evolutionary theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its influence on science, society, politics and literature, and the wider world of industry, imperialism and revolution. The course will help you to hone your analytical skills, deepen your abilities in textual analysis, improve your confidence in academic debate, and develop your presentation skills. It will also give you a chance to write clearly and concisely about complex cultural and historical events, in the form of extended essays and examination answers.

The course is designed to be multidisciplinary and is suitable for students of all disciplines who have a strong interest in history. Those with an interest in crossing

disciplinary boundaries between the sciences and humanities may find this material particularly stimulating.

There are no prerequisites, and no previous knowledge of history is necessary, but some knowledge of historical methodology and/or Western history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be an advantage.

Teaching Methods and Assessment

- 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)
- 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)
- 4 x 1.25hr Tutorials (5hrs)

Twice weekly lectures will present the key phases of the topic under study in their specificity and their relationship to the central concerns of the course. Students will be expected to have completed the readings before the relevant lecture. A weekly seminar will focus in-depth study of lecture themes and provide opportunities for further discussion and to ask questions. In addition, students will be expected to give a short oral presentation on a text by Darwin or one of his contemporaries.

Final assessment: An essay of no more than 3,000 words (40%), a final three-hour written examination (40%), oral presentation (10%) and participation in seminar discussion (10%).

Lecture Schedule

1. Introduction: A World Made for Man
2. Deep Time and Geology
3. Deep Time and Human Prehistory
4. Romantic Science
5. Transformism and the Great Chain of Being
6. Darwin 1: Voyaging
7. Darwin 2: Writing
8. Competition or Co-Operation? The Meaning of Natural Selection
9. Forwards or Backwards? Progress and Degeneration
10. Industrial Time in Science and Society
11. Eugenics
12. Evolution, Science and Culture in 1900

Reading List

Suggested pre-arrival reading

- Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* [1859], Oxford World's Classics, 2008.

- Thomas Dixon, *Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science*, HarperCollins, 2008.
- Martin Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History: How it was Discovered and Why it Matters*, University of Chicago Press, 2014.