

**UJ Blue Skies Seminar Series in Political and Social
Thought**

Thursday, 26th January

**"Idealism and
Evolution"**

Prof. David Boucher,

Professor of Political Philosophy and International Relations, Cardiff University, U.K.

Humanities Common Room, C-319, APK

Start: 4.30pm. All Welcome!

Abstract:

No manner of thinking so captured the imagination as the theory of evolution. It permeated every sphere of life and became the dominant mode of understanding and explanation not only in the sciences, but also in poetry, politics, philosophy and international relations. Its effect was 'revolutionary', similar to that of Copernicus, or Galileo. No one person popularized it more than Herbert Spencer. He more fully drew out its implications for society and ethics than Charles Darwin. Darwin and Spencer were frequently cited not as the originators of evolutionary theory, but as those most responsible for impressing it upon the popular consciousness. The Idealists intervened in the evolutionary debate in order to seize back the initiative and undermine the potential damage that the principle of 'the survival of the fittest' may do to the cause of alleviating the degradation consequent on the industrial revolution and migration of rural dwellers to the cities. Evolution was also used to defend the most insidious form of imperialism, in that it justified the right of the civilized nations to dominate the less civilised. This paper shows that the insidious naturalistic version of Darwinsim, was only one of competing versions. The alternatives did not naturalise humanity, but instead recognised its spirituality.

David Boucher has written widely on the history of political thought, political theory, international relations and popular culture. His books include, *Texts in Context* (1985), *The Social and Political Thought of R. G. Collingwood* (1989), *A Radical Hegelian: The Social and Political Thought of Henry Jones* (1991, with Andrew Vincent), *Political Theories of International Relations from Thucydides to the Present* (1996), *Idealism and Political Theory* (2001, with Andrew Vincent), *Poets of Rock and Roll: Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen* (2004), *The Limits of Ethics in International Relations* (2009), and *British Idealism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2011).