

Phil 2890 – Final writing assignment

Assignment: Write an argumentative essay closely related to a topic we have discussed in class. This may be a single topic from the last portion of class or it may be a combination of multiple topics or even a paper that tries to unite themes throughout the course.

The paper should be between 2000 and 3000 words and there is no reason that it should be 3000. That is a maximum, but acceptable, length. There is no need to do any outside research or anything differently than you have done on previous papers though I do expect the quality will reflect the increased length allowance and your familiarity with more of the course material as is fitting a final paper.

This paper is due by midnight on the evening of Thursday, May 12th. You must email a copy of the paper to me (PDF or Word, or an easily readable text format) by that time. Ideally, you will come to office hours to talk with me about your paper or schedule an appointment to meet with me some other time though this is not a requirement.

The same writing standards apply on this paper as the previous paper. You should make an extra effort on this paper to deal a bit more fully with your topic, for example, make sure you carefully describe some serious objection to your view. This can be accomplished in many ways – for example, start by explaining an opposite view and giving a plausible argument for it. Then say what is wrong with the argument and argue for your own conclusion. Alternatively, present your view defended with some arguments and then consider a possible response. Then show that the response can be dealt with.

Below are some suggested paper topics. They are described so that it is perfectly reasonable to write a paper of the required length. You are welcome to write about other topics (closely related to the course). If you have a topic in mind but are not sure if it is appropriate or if it is too specific or general, please ask me about it. Similarly, if you are concerned that your new topic is too close to your first topic. What is fitness and what is the unit of selection are far enough apart. Reductionism and what is a gene are probably too close unless you have a very surprising take on it. It can't hurt to talk to me about your paper; it can hurt to write an inappropriate paper.

Suggested topics:

Are there any special problems with studying the evolution of human behavior that make sociobiology or evolutionary psychology doomed to fail?

Are there good ways of testing particular claims about whether behaviors such as homosexuality or rape are adaptations? What implications does your answer have for the larger research programs like evolutionary psychology?

Is there such a thing as human nature? What does it take to qualify as part of human nature?

Does the fact that our species has evolved bear at all on ethics? In what ways?

Can we make sense of the idea of progress in evolution? Are there any real trends and what explains these trends?

Does the evolution of biological altruism tell us anything about whether humans are naturally altruistic or cooperative? Does our “natural behavior” tell us anything about ethics?