

Philosophy 2330: Science and Society  
Spring 2018  
Sixth (and last) short essay assignment

Please print your essay and bring it to class on Tuesday, May 1st. **ALSO** please make your essay anonymous by putting your R# at the top of the page and **NOT** your name.

You are to write roughly one to two pages (500-700 words) on something relevant to Levy's chapter 5 (genetics and ethics) or relevant to anything from Wilson's book *Consilience*.

This is an argumentative paper. You must defend some particular thesis. A good paper is clear, easy to read, and provides good arguments for its conclusion. But exactly what you write about is quite open ended.

Here are some example topics or theses that you might discuss:

- 1) Does it make sense to talk about "genes for obesity"? Or "genes for homosexuality"? Under what circumstances?
- 2) Should we care about whether a trait like IQ is heritable? Why or why not?
- 3) Jonathan Kaplan, a critic of human behavioral genetics, once concluded a paper by saying "to reduce the prevalence and ameliorate the impact of violent, antisocial, and criminal behavior within societies, such people should treat biological research as, at best, intriguing distractions from the hard work ahead." Is he right? Or can heritability studies on anti-social behaviors help us?
- 4) We know that both genes and the environment interact to cause any particular human traits. Roughly speaking, Levy thinks that this means that genetics causes no *special* problems for free will or moral responsibility but that the empirical question of the effectiveness of environmental changes to influence our behaviors does have social and political implications. Is he right? How should biology inform these kinds of debates? – You might be helped by thinking about a trait like homosexuality. Many people think that the extent to which this is genetically controlled matters a great deal for moral purposes. But does it? What about various kinds of criminal tendencies? Or some kind of general intelligence?
- 5) Do you accept Levy's argument that his "radical" view of human nature is superior to what he calls the "conservative" view? Is there a third (better) option?