

Phil 2890 – Second writing assignment

Assignment: Write an argumentative essay closely related to a topic we have discussed in class. This may be a topic we talked about before the first paper was due, but it cannot be the same topic as the topic from your first paper. The paper should be between 1500 and 2200 words. This means that double-spacing with reasonable font and margins you should be aiming for 5-8 pages. And yes, the length does matter for grading purposes.

This paper is due by the beginning of class on Thursday, April 7th. 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:

Does the existence of altruistic traits show that selection must sometimes act at multiple levels?

What is an organism?

Is there a reason to recognize a special class of entities in nature – the “superorganisms”? Would ant colonies count? What about multispecies communities like the human body or a termite mound?

Is there any reason to prefer a single taxonomic classification system rather than a pluralist system? If so, what is the best taxonomic system?

Are birds reptiles?

Could a paraphyletic collection of populations constitute a species?

Do the worries about ranks (what is the difference between a class and a subclass really?) apply to the species rank as well? Or are special special?

Is adaptationism a particular claim which can be tested? If it is a methodology, how could we know if it is a good one?