

Spring, 2011: Philosophy 2890

Philosophy of Biology

Professor Joel Velasco

Class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:10-11:25 in 253 Malott

Course Website: <http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/jdv55/teaching/2890/>

Description:

This course will examine a range of philosophical questions that arise within the study of evolutionary biology. We'll discuss questions concerning fitness, the units of selection, systematics, and adaptationism. We'll then look at Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology with an eye toward thinking about humans and human nature. We will then consider what connection, if any, there is between evolution and ethics. Finally, we'll consider the nature of the history of life and whether there is any sense to be made of progress in evolution and to what extent the history of life is radically contingent.

Requirements:

Attendance in class and participation in discussion are required and will affect your grade. In addition to class presentations there will be one short paper, one medium-length paper, and one longer final paper.

Office hours:

My office hours are Mon 11:00-12:00 and Thur 3:00-4:00, or by appointment, in 228 Goldwin Smith Hall.

Books available at the university bookstore:

Kim Sterelny and Paul Griffiths, *Sex and Death: An Introduction to Philosophy of Biology*, University of Chicago Press, 1999

Tentative List of Topics:

What is Evolutionary Theory?

The Gene's Eye View of Evolution

Evolution and Altruism

What is an organism

What is a species

Adaptationism

Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology

Evolutionary Psychology and Sex

Human Nature

Evolution and Ethics

Progress and Contingency in the History of Life