

**Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology
Spring 2020, Long Paper Assignment #4**

Instructions: Write an argumentative paper on some topic relevant to our discussion of evolution and ethics in class. The paper should be between roughly 1200 and 1500 words. If you double space and have natural fonts and margins, this would be about 5-6 pages.

The paper must critically engage at least some assigned readings from the class. If you talk about a topic and one of our readings in class directly discusses that topic, you must discuss it. For example, if you claim that evolution shows that morality is an illusion and so there is no such thing as objective moral truth, you must engage Sober or Sterelny and Fraser's arguments to the contrary. If you argue that Moral Realism is true and evolution is in no way relevant, you should engage with Horn's argument that this would lead to skepticism. You may wish to read additional material that was not assigned, however, this is not necessary and not expected. But if you want to do that, I would be happy to help you find relevant readings.

Due Date: You should upload this paper into Blackboard before Sunday, April 5th 11:59pm. However, I will be extremely generous with late papers (=no penalty for late work). But for your own good, you should try to get homework done on time so you can start the next section of the class.

While I normally prefer to grade papers anonymously, I feel that this semester it is best if I am able to easily track who is turning in work when and grading anonymously slows this process down immensely. So please go ahead and put your name on your paper.

Grading: This paper will be worth 16 points (16% of your final grade).

References: All sources used in the writing of your paper must be properly referenced. Now that you are writing a longer paper dealing with issues discussed in multiple places in our class, it is more important to be careful in this regard. "Properly referenced" does not mean that there is any particular format that I care about, but it does mean that if you say "according to Sober" or have a formal or informal quote referring to something one of our authors wrote, I should be able to very easily find exactly what they did say. So page numbers are essential for example. And if you use the words of an author or even their direct ideas, you should say it is from them. To not say so is to imply they are your words and so this would constitute plagiarism.

Topic:

You may choose to write about any topic relevant to biology and ethics. The most natural thing to do (and probably the easiest) is to take two of our authors who disagree on some point, explain each of their views carefully, and then critically join in the debate by giving a further argument in favor of one of them and/or against one of them. For example, here are some natural topics:

- 1) Sober argues that moving from descriptive facts about how evolution works and even why we believe the things we do can never give us normative facts such as whether beliefs are justified. He calls this Hume's thesis. Ruse and Wilson seem to think that there is no important is/ought gap. Why do they think that? And who is right here?
- 2) Ruse and Wilson think that a lot of our moral judgments are influenced by natural selection. They talk about deep 'epigenetic rules'. Horn seems to think that this very fact

undermines our justification for believing them. Is Horn right here?

- 3) Sober distinguishes two kinds of altruism – biological and psychological. He thinks that evolution can lead to biological altruism (he thinks through group selection, Dawkins would say through **gene** selection) [oops! I previously said “group selection here for Dawkins as well. Dawkins would definitely not say that!]] and that separately, there is no reason to think that evolution would lead to us being psychological egoists and could instead lead to psychological altruism. Is he right here? [A good paper here can’t just be ‘yep, he is right.’ You have to either say he is wrong or engage with some kind of argument why he might be wrong. You can’t just repeat what an author says directly.
- 4) Sterelny and Fraser think that facts about morality are just facts about what would enhance social cooperation. Does that sound right? What else could they be? They also think that this shows that moral realism can be correct and that evolution would not undermine it. But Horn would disagree. Who is right here?
- 5) When comparing the evolutionary debunking argument of religion to that of morality, Sterelny and Fraser say this: “An evolutionary genealogy of religion really does debunk religion. But religion is a poor model of moral thinking. For the effect of religious belief on social behaviour depends on agents being unaware of religion’s evolved function. In contrast, while agents typically have at best a partial awareness of the evolved function of moral thinking, that awareness does not subvert its social effects.” – Is this right? If you realize the evolutionary adaptiveness of religious belief, does that undermine its effectiveness? Does realizing the adaptive benefits of moral beliefs NOT undermine their effectiveness?

If you are not sure if your chosen topic is relevant, ask me.