

**Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology**  
**Summer 2020, Long Paper Assignment – homework 3**

**Instructions:** Write an argumentative paper on some topic relevant to our discussion of evolution and ethics in class. The paper should be between roughly 1000 and 1300 words. If you double space and have natural fonts and margins, this would be about 3-5 pages.

The paper must critically engage at least part of Singer's discussion in *The Expanding Circle*. But this leaves you with quite a lot of leeway as to exactly what you write about. Regardless of what you write about, you should show that you understand Singer's view (and possibly Dawkins or Wilson if you are discussing those figures) but you need not discuss any other figures or readings. 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 class on Monday, June 22nd.

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 put your name on your paper.

**Grading:** This paper will be worth 14 points (14% 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 Singer" 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 just take some controversial thing in ethics, describe how Singer talks about it, and critically engage with his discussion (so for example, if you disagree, say why). Here are some sample topics: (note that if you think a topic is trivial or you could discuss it in less than 500 words and have nothing left to say, then don't choose that topic).

- 1) What does the prisoner's dilemma have to do with ethics? Do you think that you SHOULD cooperate in such a game? What do you think the rational thing to do

- is? What do you think the moral thing to do is? Could these ever come apart?
- 2) Singer distinguishes between two kinds (or definitions) of altruism. How are they different? Do you think one is really what we have in mind by 'altruism'? Can evolution explain why we are altruistic in either or both of these senses? How?
  - 3) What does altruism actually have to do with morality? Are altruistic acts good? Are selfish acts bad? Does moral behavior require altruism? How is this related to the idea that it might be good for you to be moral?
  - 4) Is there really an important distinction between facts and values? Between normative and descriptive claims? Is and ought? What does this mean for how science (or biology) is relevant to ethics?
  - 5) In chapter 3, Singer suggests that while biology might be able to tell us whether some behavior is "natural", this doesn't really help with ethics because there isn't really much of a connection between what is natural (or unnatural) and what is ethically permissible. Is he right about this?
  - 6) In chapter 3, Singer suggests that while E.O. Wilson believes that biology (and evolution in particular) can help us get at the foundations of ethics by providing new ethical principles or maybe helping to decide between them or something, Singer thinks that this is just mistaken. But is it mistaken? Can biology (or science more generally) help to decide between ultimate moral principles?
  - 7) At the end of chapter 4, following along with the title of his book, Singer suggests that reason may allow us to make the jump to include animals as part of the 'in-group' of beings that we have moral obligations too (thus "Expanding the Circle"). Is this right? Do we have obligations to animals? In what ways? Can biology help us to answer this question?

There are many other things that you could write about. If you are not sure if your chosen topic is relevant, ask me.