

Philosophy 3334 Summer 2020
Reading questions #13
Due Mon, Jun 21th

1) Read Steven Pinker's "Why nature & nurture won't go away." What do you think people have in mind when they invoke the phrase "human nature"? Give a few examples of times that you or someone else might use that phrase. Does it refer to traits that are distinctly human and not found in other animals? Do the traits have to be 'natural'? (As opposed to what?) Do they have to be universal in humans? Or merely statistically common? Or could they be rare but still part of human nature? Or could some individual person's 'human nature' be different than another person's?

2) Pinker points out that scientific studies have found the following correlations: "Parents who spank have children who are more violent; authoritative parents (neither too permissive nor too punitive) have well-behaved children; parents who talk more to their children have children with better language skills." First, are any of these surprising to you? Do you agree that the natural explanation for these correlations is that the parents' behavior causes the child's behavior? What does Pinker mean by testing the hypothesis that these could be due to shared genes? Explain what that would mean. Finally, what is your guess in these three cases about the 'nature' vs. 'nurture' explanations? Which is right?

3) After reading the papers, come up with a question that you want answered or a topic that you would like to be discussed. This could be something that the chapters forced you to think about or it could be something that you thought was particularly confusing in the chapters.