

Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology
Summer 2018
Third homework

This assignment is due on Monday, June 25th

I expect a serious, complex, thoughtful response for each of these three questions. Really, there are three mini-essay assignments. Each is worth 6 points. As a guide, I might expect that they will each be roughly 400-600 word answers.

1) Think about David Buller's claim that there is no such thing as "human nature." What does Buller take his fellow academics to mean when they talk about "human nature"? Do you think that E.O. Wilson would agree with Buller's characterization? If not, what do you think that Wilson does have in mind?

How could Wilson and/or Cosmides and Tooby respond to Buller's claim that there is no such thing as human nature? Do you think they would respond in the same way as each other? (This is surely related to whether you think that Wilson means the same thing as Cosmides and Tooby by "human nature." NOTE: The paper we read by Cosmides and Tooby doesn't mention "human nature" per se, but Buller has a number of quotes and a discussion of some of their other writing.

2) Ron Amundson argues that there is no such thing a human's "normal function" – or at least that biological theory can't ground any such idea. One natural thought is that normal functioning is related to normal human beings and normal human characteristics. One way to ground this would be what Buller calls (following Sober) "the natural state model." What is the natural state model and what does Buller think is wrong with it? Another way to define "normal functioning" would be to just say that a normal trait is one that some large percentage of the population shares (say at least 90%). Why does Amundson think that this definition won't work? Finally, what do you think we typically have in mind when we say that someone is disabled? Explain and defend your view.

3) Symons and Pinker both describe a number of differences between men and women that they attribute as due to biological factors (such as sexual arousal, pornography habits, mate choice, hobbies, career choices, etc.). Pick at least one of these supposed differences and carefully describe what the differences are supposed to be and what the author thinks the explanation for these differences are. Now critically evaluate their argument. Do you think they have properly interpreted the supposed differences? Is their explanation a good one? Can you think of other plausible or even better explanations?