

Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology
Summer 2018
Fifth homework

This assignment is due by noon on Saturday, July 7th. You should email your assignment to me at joel.velasco@ttu.edu. There is no in-class final exam.

1) Essay on race and genetics (worth 9 points)

In addition to the papers we read and discussed in class, read “How genetics is changing our understanding of race” by David Reich (an editorial in the NY Times on March 23, 2018). A link to the article can be found in the ‘extras’ for this week on the course website (or direct link:
http://joelvelasco.net/teaching/3334/reich18-Genetics_race_1.pdf

Spencer and Reich believe that our current knowledge of human genetics shows us that race is biologically real. Write an argumentative essay arguing either that they are right or that they are wrong. Develop a clear conclusion and give clear reasons for your view. Be sure to seriously consider objections to your views – especially those that we have encountered in class. So for example, if you argue that race is not biologically real, what is wrong with Spencer and Reich’s arguments? If you defend the claim that race is real, what about Appiah’s claim that the history of race shows that races are essentially different in all sorts of important ways or Bolnick’s claim that while human genetic variation is real, there is no objective division of humans into races—for example, there could be 2, 3, 4, 10, 20, or even more genetic divisions? What about the “mismatch” objection between genetic divisions and self-reports of race? What about considerations that Mills brings up like known vs. unknown ancestry or subjective feelings of ‘fit’ into a racial group? You don’t have to address every one of these objections, but you have to consider at least one (or more) of them seriously.

2) Essay on human enhancement (worth 5 points)

Write a short, argumentative essay defending some theses having to do with human enhancement by technological means. Responding to the Kass or the Bostrom article that we read is the obvious thing to do, but essays on a closely related topic would be acceptable too (for example, on whether performance-enhancing drugs should be allowed in sports competitions).