

Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology
Spring 2020
First short essay assignment

Please print your essay and bring it to class on Tuesday, Feb 4th. **ALSO** please make your essay anonymous by putting your R# at the top of the page and **NOT** your name.

First, answer the following three questions in a few sentences each:

In the preface to the 1st edition of *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins says, “We are survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes.”

- 1) What does Dawkins mean by calling us “survival machines” and “robot vehicles”?
- 2) What does Dawkins mean by saying that we are “blindly programmed”? How do our genes control us?
- 3) Why does Dawkins call genes “selfish”?

Next, reflect on the first five chapters of *The Selfish Gene* and ask yourself whether you think that this is a helpful way to think about humans. In what sense is this sentence true or false? Does it reflect something true enough and important enough that we can learn a lot about ourselves by thinking about the history of our genes? Or perhaps we are so much more that it is seriously misleading or even straightforwardly false that we are survival machines built by our genes? Or some other alternative?

Answering this question should take perhaps 200-400 words.