

Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology
Spring 2018
Fifth short essay assignment

Please print your essay and bring it to class on Tuesday, April 17th. **ALSO** please make your essay anonymous by putting your R# at the top of the page and **NOT** your name.

You are to write roughly one to two pages (500-700 words) on something relevant to our readings in weeks 11 and 12 of class (behavioral genetics or social construction of kinds).

This is an argumentative paper. You must defend some particular thesis. A good paper is clear, easy to read, and provides good arguments for its conclusion. But exactly what you write about is quite open ended.

Here are some example topics or theses that you might discuss:

1) Sober argues that the concept of “the environment” is really important for understanding “nature vs. nurture” questions, but that when heritability studies compare genetic causes to environmental causes, the concept of the environment that is implicitly used is not exactly what we have in mind. What does he mean? Is he right? What do we really mean when we talk about something being caused by “the environment”?

2) Does it make sense to talk about “genes for obesity”? Or “genes for homosexuality”? Under what circumstances?

3) Should we care about whether a trait like IQ is heritable? Why or why not?

4) Jonathan Kaplan, a critic of human behavior genetics, once concluded a paper by saying “to reduce the prevalence and ameliorate the impact of violent, antisocial, and criminal behavior within societies, such people should treat biological research as, at best, intriguing distractions from the hard work ahead.” Is he right? Or can heritability studies on anti-social behaviors help us?

5) We know that both genes and the environment interact to cause any particular human traits. What does this mean for questions of free will and moral responsibility? You might be helped by thinking about a trait like homosexuality. Many people think that the extent to which this is genetically controlled matters a great deal for moral purposes. But does it? What about various kinds of criminal tendencies?

5) Do looping effects show that the things classified (like autism or multiple personality disorder) are real? Or that they are not real? Or does it depend on

something else? (what?)

6) Could there be laws about kinds like schizophrenia and depression if these are interactive kinds in the way that Hacking describes? If there are laws, are they changing over time?