

Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology
Summer 2017
Final Take-Home Exam

Please write your essays and then upload them into Blackboard by Saturday, July 8th (by 5:00pm). **ALSO** Blackboard will completely anonymize these for me so don't put your name on it and also there is no reason to put your R# on it either (Blackboard will know who uploaded it when I enter the scores).

You are to answer exactly three of the following five questions. I expect about one page for each question (maybe 400-500 words each? I am not sure). The answer should be reflective of what we read in class (but of course the work will be your own thoughts).

1) Is it possible for a person's sex to actually change such that at one time it is correct to say that they are a male and at another time to say that they are female? How? Would sex reassignment surgery do it? Is it possible to change your race? Explain why or why not. Reflect on these cases and explain what you think is similar and different about sex and race in this regard.

2) For legal documents in the US race, is always a self-identification category. For example, the census is entirely self-reported. Texas birth certificates have the race of the mother and father on them, but it is up to the parents to fill them out (and no one officially or unofficially checks).

<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/chs/vstat/vs05/t44.shtm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/birth11-03final-acc.pdf>

But could someone actually be wrong about his or her race? Set aside cases of deception where a person just lies and imagine that they genuinely believe that the appropriate box to check is "white" (or whatever the case may be). Could they be wrong about this? What could make them wrong? If it mattered legally, how should the government determine the race of a person?

3) Some authors (for example, those behind the writing in the video we watched "Race: The Power of an Illusion") believe that race is real and that it is socially constructed. What exactly does this mean? Critically evaluate this view (what are some strengths and weaknesses of the view and ultimately give an argument that it is a good or a bad view).

4) Why exactly does Kwame Anthony Appiah think that biological races do not exist? What does he think they would be if they existed? Critically evaluate his central conclusion (i.e. is he right that biological races do not exist?)

5) Marcus Feldman and Richard Lewontin look at data by Noah Rosenberg and

others which shows that a human's ancestry can reliably be determined from genetic data and conclude that this does not mean that race is real. Quayshawn Spencer looks at exactly the same data and concludes that Rosenberg's work was basically grouping people into races. What exactly do these authors disagree on and why do they disagree? Who is right (and wrong) here?