

Philosophy 3334: Philosophy of Biology
Summer 2017
Sixth short essay assignment

Please print your essay and bring it to class on Wednesday, July 5th. **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 broadly within the topic of sex, gender, and biology.

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.

If you like following prompts, here are some choices for you:

1) Assume that we have separate competitive categories for men and women in some sporting events – say for swimming at the Olympics or for boxing in privately run matches. How should we determine who can compete in the women’s category? Does it depend on what kind of competition we are looking at? (Say it is chess vs. boxing). Does it depend on social and cultural factors? Or is this a biological question? Looking at particular cases might help you to think about this question (e.g. look up Mack Beggs or Maria Patiño).

2) Do you think that sex is a real category in humans? What makes someone male or female? Is it possible to be both or neither?

3) On pages 346-350 of *The Blank Slate*, Steven Pinker lists a number of different kinds of evidence that differences between men and women are “more than genitalia deep.” Is there anything on this list that you object to? What conclusions should we draw from it?

4) Pinker says that he is in favor of equity feminism which, “opposes sex discrimination and other forms of unfairness to women.” Presumably he is also opposed to discrimination against men. On the other hand, he thinks that there are biological and psychological differences between men and women and that men and women have different natures. So what kind of equality is actually required? Is it okay to have certain bathrooms that are only open to people of one sex? Should women have to register for the draft? Be allowed to serve in combat positions? Is it okay for laws or judges to favor women as caregivers for children? These differences have all been justified on the basis of biological and psychological differences. Are they morally acceptable?