

Philosophy 2000

Final paper topics

Papers are to be submitted **by Dropbox by 12:00 noon on Monday, April 17th**.

1. Is evolution dominated by historical contingency?

In his article, "The evolution of life on earth," Stephen Jay Gould argues that the history of life on earth is dominated by historically contingent events. This fact, he claims, has important implications for the way that evolutionary biologists study their subject matter. In particular, he thinks that evolutionary biologists must "go beyond principles of evolutionary theory to a paleontological examination of the contingent pattern." In your paper, first identify an argument that Gould is defending in this essay. You must reconstruct the argument in premise-conclusion form. The rest of your essay should be an analysis of Gould's argument.

2. Can the balance of nature concept be rescued?

In her article, "The 'balance of nature' metaphor and equilibrium in population ecology," Kim Cuddington argues against a particular defense of the balance of nature concept. According to that defense, it is possible to rescue the concept of a balance of nature by defining it in terms of the mathematical notion of balanced equilibrium in population ecology. In your paper, first identify and reconstruct an argument that Cuddington is defending in this essay. You must reconstruct the argument in premise-conclusion form. The rest of your essay should be an analysis of Cuddington's argument.

3. Is our understanding of the genome misguided?

In her article, "If the genome isn't a God-like ghost in the machine, then what is it?" Marion Blute objects to some of the popular metaphors used to understand genomes. In particular, she is critical of the subtle ways in which the genome is ascribed a kind of intelligence. In your paper, first identify and reconstruct an argument that Blute is defending in this essay. You must reconstruct the argument in premise-conclusion form. The rest of your essay should be an analysis of Blute's argument.

4. Choose a topic of your own.

Students are encouraged to select their own topic. It can be on any subject that takes a philosophical perspective on some biological issue. I strongly suggest that students find a target article published on their subject of interest. Often the most efficient way to explore a topic is by finding someone whom has already taken a position on it. You need not agree with the article you select. In fact, it can be even more useful to find an author with whom you disagree, then to use them as a foil. My main requirement is that your paper should begin with an argument reconstruction, following the premise-conclusion format that we have been using in this course.