

Paper Assignment

Articulate and defend what you find to be the most promising argument or line of argument from those presented in the readings or in class for a position on one of the following questions. One way of defending a position is to show how to answer what you take to be a particularly serious objection to the argument. Even if you do not adopt this approach, it is useful to keep in mind who it is that needs to be convinced (that is, who doesn't automatically agree with the position you take).

1. Is natural selection the main cause of evolution, as Darwin and the evolutionary synthesis maintained, or do other factors (drift, development) also important factors in evolution? (Although you may discuss Darwin, make sure you do discuss the evolutionary synthesis and responses to it).
2. At what level(s) of organization (genes, organisms, groups, species, etc.) does natural selection work?
3. Did Darwin purge biology of teleology (functional explanations) or give rise to a viable and useful new form of teleology?
4. Is pursuit of mechanistic explanation (of a biological phenomenon such as circadian rhythms) inherently a reductionistic project or can it also embrace a holistic (vitalist?) perspective?

This is to be a paper, which is different from an answer to an exam question. You set the problem and specific thesis of your paper and address it. The question you address may depart from the ones posed above as long as the paper ends up with a good thesis. If you have a question as to whether the argument you choose to defend might drift too far from the questions posed above, ask me. Your paper should have a thesis that you articulate and defend through the paper. Don't assume your reader will figure out what you are doing and how the things you say fit together—make it clear. And remember that a title is your first opportunity to direct your reader's attention to what you are doing in the paper.

The overall evaluation of your paper will reflect both how well you do what you set out to do, and how ambitious your project is. But be aware of the page limit—this is to be a short paper, 3-5 pages double-spaced (900 to 1500 words). Do not get so ambitious that you need 10-20 pages to do what you set out to do. Typically, you will be better off narrowing your focus and developing the discussion in detail rather than pursuing a very broad issue superficially.

Write your paper for an intelligent audience, but do not assume that they have been in this class or read what you have read. That is, you need to explain the relevant material to your audience, not just make an allusion and assume they will understand. You may ask others to read your paper and give feedback, but the writing is to be your own.

If possible, please submit it electronically to the following email address (papers@mechanism.ucsd.edu) in MS Word or .rtf format. Please be sure that you do not have any computer viruses before submitting (I hope you don't have any other kind either). Otherwise, you may submit hardcopy to my mailbox. It is due by Noon on Wednesday, November 23 (note, this is not a class day). Especially if you work on one of the first three questions, you are encouraged to turn in your paper earlier. If you do so, I will try to grade and return it early as well.