Phil 309B: Darwin · Take-Home Exam 3

Due: 9:00 am, 5/19

Instructions: You need to answer three questions. You need to answer at least one question from Section I and one question from Section II. Additionally, you must choose your questions so that you answer one (**M**) question, one (**E**) question, and one (**R**) question.

Section I

1. (**M**) On p. 364 Dennett writes:

   > "The gene-centered perspective is valuable precisely because it handles the "exceptional" cases in which the good of the organism counts for nothing, and shows how the "normal" circumstance is a derivative and exceptioned regularity, not a truth of pure reason, as it seemed to be from the old perspective.
   >
   > The prospects for meme theory become interesting only when we look at the exceptions, the circumstances under which there is a pulling apart of the two perspectives."

   Explain the analogy that Dennett is drawing between a gene-centered perspective on biological evolution and a meme-centered perspective on the evolution of ideas. What are the "exceptional" cases in each situation, and what makes them exceptional? In what sense do these perspectives "handle" such cases? Finally, is Dennett's analogy apt?

2. (**E**) Consider the following argument:

   1 Religious beliefs were selected for survival.

   2 There is no correlation between survival value for religious beliefs and religious facts.

   _____

   C1 Thus, our religious beliefs were selected for something not correlated with truth.

   First, explain what can be said in favor of each premise of this argument. Then, explain why and how White thinks that a religious believer could *reasonably* reject such an argument. Is White right about this? Explain.

3. (**E**) Suppose that someone claims that true altruism is incompatible with the theory of evolution by natural selection. First, clarify such a claim by distinguishing different things such a claim might mean. Then, present and explain what you take to be the strongest response to such a claim

4. (**R**) In his book *Rocks of Ages*, Gould writes the following:

   > "But if science and religion wage constant battle for the same turf, then Darwin should have become hostile and dismissive toward religion, and cynical about life in general. He should have wielded evolution as a bludgeon against false comfort and cruel deception in a world filled with the deaths of children and other heart-wrenching tragedies of no conceivable moral meaning. But Darwin took no such position." (p. 34)

It sounds as though Gould is giving an argument here. Extract the argument, being clear about what the conclusion is, and what the premises are. Then evaluate this argument. Is it convincing? Why or why not?

Section II

5. (**M**) Whitmeyer argues against Dennett's idea that a science of memes will be important in explaining features of human culture and behavior. Explain this dispute and the alternative view that Whitmeyer thinks does better. Use quotes to back up your claims. Then, present and evaluate Sterelny's argument against a view like Whitmeyer's and in favor of an approach to explaining features of human culture and behavior by appealing to memes. (Note: It will be important to be clear how each writer is understanding the concept of a *meme*.

6. (**E**) Explain how one could argue that the evolutionary story about our moral intuitions could show that our moral beliefs are unjustfied. Then explain White's example of Adam's Party and what it is supposed to show with respect to such an argument. Is this example successful? Why or why not?

7. (**R**) As clearly as possible, explain what you take to be Gould's NOMA thesis. Be sure to support your claim that this is Gould's thesis. Then, evaluate this thesis, presenting and considering what you take to be the strongest objection against it. Be especially clear how your objection is an objection to the particular NOMA thesis you take Gould to be defending.