Philosophy 920 – Proseminar in Philosophy of Biology – Spring, 2012

Elliott Sober

Readings: We will read most of my book Did Darwin write the Origin Backwards? (Prometheus Books, 2011) and three chapters from my book with David Wilson, Unto Others (Harvard UP, 1998). Both are available at University Bookstore. The other readings will come from articles and book chapters that I’ll mostly make available as pdf’s.

Office hours: Wednesdays 1:15-3:30, or by appointment.

Course requirements: You should attend all seminar meetings and participate in seminar discussions. During the first half of the semester, you should write 4 short papers (2-3 pages, double spaced). These are due every other week by Monday at noon; they should be emailed to me. In each paper, you should describe and criticize an argument that is made in one of the readings assigned for the seminar meeting that will occur the following day. The schedule for handing in these short papers will be worked out at the first meeting of the seminar; nothing is due at the seminar’s first meeting. You also should write a long paper (15-20 pages), due at the end of the semester, on a topic that you consult with me about by April 11.

Week 1: What is Darwin’s theory?

Sober, DDWOB? Ch. 1, Ch. 5.1.

Weeks 2-3: Probabilities in Evolutionary Theory


Sober, DDWOB? 4.3, 5.3.

Weeks 4-5: Natural Selection, Drift, Causality


Weeks 6-7: Are There Laws of Evolution?


Sandra Mitchell (1996): “Pragmatic Laws” Philosophy of Science 64: S468-S479


Week 8: What does Selection Explain?


Week 9: Reductionism


**Week 10: Adaptationism**


**Weeks 11-12: Units of Selection**


Sober, *DDWOB*? Chapter 2.


Sober, *DDWOB*? Chapter 5.2.

**Weeks 13-14: Naturalism**


Sober, *DDWOB*? Chapter 4.

**Week 15: Wrap-Up**