Philosophy 3380, Philosophy of Biology

This course is designed with two types of student in mind: biology students with an interest in the foundational questions underlying their discipline and philosophy students interested in how developments in biology impact traditional questions about humanity. The semester begins with an introduction to the principles of Darwinian theory with an emphasis on gene-centrism (i.e. the idea that evolutionary phenomena are best understood by thinking in terms of genetic interests.) We then consider three challenges to this approach: the possibility that selection occurs at levels above the gene, the problem of adaptationist reasoning, and the possible exception of culture. Later in the semester we will cover some contemporary issues in genetics and society. Specifically, we will consider the science and ethics of gene editing as a tool for human medicine, enhancement, and agriculture. Finally, we will consider the human practice of art and creativity, considering the hypothesis that it is an adaptation for acquiring mates. Grades will be based on reflection commentaries, participation in class, and two short essays.