Assignment: Theme – Topic – Thesis

Before you can write your final paper, or even your proposal for your final paper, you need to decide what you are going to write about and what thesis you are going to try to defend. This exercise aims to help you begin to sort through possible ideas.

The first requirement is that your paper will need to connect to the theme of the course. In our case this means that it must involve issues of evolutionary design. Look at the course description to remind yourself about what this involves. You should also look back to our readings and notes from lectures and discussions, and then think about the broad ideas that we have been considering. All this together should give you a good sense of the theme that your paper must address. Describe the theme of the course in one or two sentences.

Your next task is to consider possible topics that fall within the scope of our theme. Here, too, it may be helpful to look back to readings and class notes. One way to home in on possible topics is to think in terms of the questions posed in the course description. Another is to review your blogs, focusing on questions that arose for you as you thought about each day’s reading. There are dozens of topics that could appropriately connect to our theme. Topics are the specific areas or focused issues that you want to explore; they may often be expressed as questions. Think of at least three that you would find interesting to write about and list them as clearly and concisely as you can, no more than a sentence or two each.

Finally, you need to explore possible theses. A thesis is different from a topic in that it is requires taking a stand on some issue about the topic. It might, for example, be a possible answer to the question that you posed. A thesis is a proposition—a statement that could be true or false. Your paper will be your attempt to say why you think it is true. In the end, you will need to pick just one to write about, but you should expect to have to try out several before you find something that you will be happy with. A thesis is expressed not as a question but as a single declarative sentence. For each topic that you are considering, write out two or three possible theses about them that you might want to defend.

Due: Print out and bring to class for Wednesday, March 20.