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21W.777 The Science Essay
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Homework #8

Due next class, Th 3/6

1) Skim Stephen Jay Gould's essay "A Division of Worms." [e-Reserves].

I suspect that Gould needs no introduction, but for the record he was a prolific and influential writer on topics relating to Darwin's theory of evolution. Gould, who passed away a few years ago, was a professor of geology and curator of paleontology at Harvard. This essay was one of his columns for *Natural History*. The column had run monthly since 1974 under the heading "This View of Life." Gould has called this essay one of his favorites in his series for *Natural History*. Why do you imagine Gould said that—what's at the intellectual and emotional heart of this piece?

2) READ our next set of essays, on the challenges of medical science—the challenges of combining a scientific approach and a humanistic one. They are:

- "The Patient Predator" by Kevin Patterson, an internist who practices on Vancouver Island. This article first appeared in *Mother Jones*, and was developed with encouragement and guidance from editor Clara Jeffrey over the course of a year.
- "Desperate Measures" by Atul Gawande. This essay first appeared in the *New Yorker*, and it was chosen for *both* of the annual collections of best science essays for 2005. Gawande, a surgeon, wrote a thoughtful, personal account of the way surgeons learn their craft in *Complications*. He continues to write on the topics of surgery, medical error and the best practices.

Before you read these essays (if possible)—think about your expectations of medicine, what it can and should do for you. How do *you* think about medical error? Also examine your attitudes toward public (vs. individual) health—is it on your radar? In what ways?

We will discuss your reactions to these essays in class—the questions and issues they raise for you—as well as the choices the writers have made. Be prepared to discuss what does/doesn't make these pieces of writing effective.

Also: Begin thinking about a topic for Essay 3. You'll have a choice of writing a biographically-oriented essay, or one in which you focus on social/cultural implications of a particular aspect of science or technology.