

PHIL S178: INTRODUCTION TO BIOETHICS

INSTRUCTOR: Matthew Leisinger (matthew.leisinger@yale.edu)

COURSE TIMES: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00-12:15

COURSE LOCATION: *TBD*

OFFICE HOURS: *TBD*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Bioethics is a branch of philosophy that examines the moral questions that we face in virtue of our biological existence. Is it ever morally acceptable for a doctor to help a patient to end her life or for a woman to seek an abortion? Ought we to use recent innovations in genetics to attempt to enhance the human species or to prevent infants from being born with certain genetic abnormalities? More generally, what is valuable about human life and what ethical responsibilities do we bear as a result? In this course, we will survey these and other questions in the field of bioethics. Students will learn how to engage with these questions from a philosophical perspective, formulating their own arguments and critically analyzing the arguments of others.

Disclaimer. In this course, we will be discussing a number of deeply sensitive issues. Students must be prepared to listen sympathetically to the views of others, to have their own views challenged, to engage in respectful discourse with people who may hold utterly different positions, and to think critically about topics that may make them very uncomfortable. It is the responsibility of every class participant to strive for both philosophical rigour and emotional sensitivity.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All readings for the course will be posted on the course website.

ASSESSMENT

Reading responses (40%)

Students will submit one reading response per week of no more than 500 words (approximately 1.5 double-spaced pages) each. While each student must submit all five reading responses, the response with the lowest grade will not count towards the student's final grade.

In each reading response, students must (1) summarize one of the main points in the reading and (2) respond critically to that point by, for example, raising a question or an objection. (Sample reading responses will be provided.) Reading responses are due by 10:00 pm the night before the class for which the reading has been assigned. Students should be prepared to discuss their reading responses in class.

Short papers (60%)

Students will write two short papers of no more than 1500 words (approximately 5 double-spaced pages) each. The first will be due at the end of Week 3 and the second will be due at the end of Week 5. Students are encouraged to discuss their papers with the instructor.

Attendance and participation

Students are expected to attend all classes. Unexcused absences will negatively affect grades. Strong participation – understood as participation that is respectful of other class participants and contributes to class discussion – will improve grades.

COURSE OUTLINE & TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Each meeting will be structured around the discussion of a number of assigned readings. These readings will be drawn from two main sources.

First, we will be discussing a number of philosophical texts. Many meetings may have only a single assigned philosophical text, allowing students to read it multiple times. A tentative schedule of these philosophical texts (subject to revision) is given below.

Second, because bioethics is a philosophical discipline that treats issues of widespread public concern, it is important that students learn not only how to engage in academic philosophical debate but also how to critically analyze and enter into the public discourse surrounding these topics. In some meetings, we may spend time discussing newspaper or magazine stories, some of which may have been published in the previous week. In our sixth meeting, we will be readings selections from Neil M. Gorsuch, the most recent nominee (at time of writing) for the U.S. Supreme Court. Students are encouraged to suggest other possible topics for discussion to the instructor.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| T July 4 | Introduction No readings |
| TH July 6 | Death Thomas Nagel, “Death” Frances M. Kamm, “Why is Death Bad?” Selections from Ronald Dworkin, <i>Life’s Dominion</i> |
| T July 11 | Abortion and the Right to Life Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” Selections from Bonnie Steinbock, “Why Most Abortions Are Not Wrong” |
| TH July 13 | Abortion and Women’s Rights Judith Jarvis Thompson, “A Defence of Abortion” |
| T July 18 | Abortion and Intrinsic Value Selections from Ronald Dworkin, <i>Life’s Dominion</i> |
| TH July 20 | Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Selections from Neil M. Gorsuch, <i>The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia</i> |
| <i>First paper due</i> | |
| T July 25 | Human Enhancement Michael J. Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection” Frances M. Kamm, “What Is and What Is Not Wrong With Enhancement?” |
| TH July 27 | Selecting Children S. Matthew Liao, “Selecting Children: The Ethics of Reproductive Genetic Engineering” |
| T Aug 1 | Bioethical Principles and Feminist Criticisms Tom L. Beauchamp, “The Four Principles Approach to Health Care Ethics” |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| | Selections from Susan Sherwin, <i>No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Healthcare</i> |
| TH Aug 3 | Conscientious Objection Julian Savulescu, "Conscientious Objection in Medicine" |
| <i>Final paper due</i> | |

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. One of the most severe violations of academic integrity is plagiarism, which is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own. Thus, if you use a source for a paper, you must acknowledge it. There is no reason to hide the fact that you have relied on others, for the very idea of writing in a university is to trace your participation in a conversation of scholars. Showing how your ideas derive from and comment on the ideas of others is one of the high achievements of mature academic writing. It would be a mistake to downplay this achievement in an attempt to suggest greater originality. What counts as a source and requires citation is a delicate matter. Some things are clear. For instance, anything derived from readings (including those found on-line), either from the syllabus or outside sources, must be cited. What is not clear is whether ideas presented in lecture, discussed in section, or derived from conversations with faculty, TAs, or other students must be cited. If you are unsure, consult with your instructor or TA. In general, it is better to err on the side of caution and cite sources too much rather than too little. Penalties for plagiarism are severe. Students caught plagiarizing can be subject to lowered or failing grades, as well as suspension or expulsion from the University. For more information, please consult Yale's Academic Integrity Policy: <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/writing-instructor-resources/addressing-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism>