

Bioethics

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Description

Bioethics is a branch of applied ethics that investigates ethical issues related to medicine and biology. Whereas many ethical issues have remained constant for centuries, advances in technology and scientific knowledge make new bioethical issues arise frequently. The goal of this course is to investigate some of these issues, as well as some possible positions regarding them. Topics include euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, abortion, autonomous choice in healthcare, genetic engineering, and public health issues such as paternalism (e.g., taxing junk food).

Thinking about ethical issues required some understanding of moral theories. Some ethicists believe that finding the correct moral theory takes care of much of the work of applied ethics; we then merely have to apply the theory to the ethical issue to get the correct answer. In contrast, ethicists who focus on applied issues are more likely to accept that each issue has specific characteristics that cannot be distilled into a theory. For them, considering each issue in turn is the best strategy. This course leans toward the latter option—investigating each issue in turn—but it begins by looking at some moral theories that will recur throughout the course.

Requirements

At its core, philosophy consists of considering questions, thinking about possible solutions, and communicating one's ideas to others. This course is concerned with *your* ideas regarding the issues we will consider, not merely your ability to communicate what others have written. This makes philosophy different from many other subjects.

Some students find this refreshing. There is no need, e.g., to spend long hours in the library (or on the internet) reading books and articles so that your papers have lengthy bibliographies. In fact, you are strongly discouraged from consulting material outside of the course.

In contrast to lots of research, your main requirement for this course is easy to describe: you need to spend lots of time *thinking*. Doing well in this course requires demonstration that you have put considerable effort into the topics we will be considering. Philosophy

progresses by communicating ideas to others, so once you have thought about these questions, the next step is to communicate your thoughts in a clear way. This is the purpose of the papers and tutorial participation.

Grading

Each essay must be around 1,500 words, which is approximately 4–5 pages. Please use standard formatting: 1 inch (2.54cm) margins with 12-point, Times New Roman (or another suitable serif) font. You are strongly discouraged from consulting non-course material for your papers. Additional submission details will be provided in tutorials. Late papers will not be accepted without a justified reason and appropriate documentation.

Tutorial participation includes arriving on time having done the readings, attended the lectures, and thought about the topics. Attendance is necessary but not sufficient for doing well in tutorials—you must participate.

Paper 1 (Due at the end of the second week)	30%
Paper 2 (Due at the end of the fifth week)	30%
Final Exam	30%
Tutorial Participation	10%

Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Ethics

- Shelly Kagan, “Consequentialism,” from *Normative Ethics*, pp. 59–69.
- Bernard Williams, “Consequentialism and Integrity,” from *Utilitarianism: For and Against*.
- Immanuel Kant, “The Categorical Imperative”.
- Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, chapter 9.

Week 2: Abortion

- John Noonan, “An Almost Absolute Value in History,” from *The Morality of Abortion*.
- Mary Anne Warren, “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion,” *The Monist* 57:4 (1973): 43–61.
- Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defence of Abortion,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1:1 (1971): 47–66.

- Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” *Why Abortion is Immoral* 86:4 (1989): 183–202.

Week 3: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide

- James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 292 (1975): 78–80.
- Dan Brock, “Voluntary Active Euthanasia,” *The Hastings Center Report* 22:2 (1992): 10–22.
- Daniel Callahan, “When Self-Determination Runs Amok,” *The Hastings Center Report* 22:2 (1992): 52–55.
- Leon Kass, “Is There a Right to Die?” *The Hastings Center Report* 23:1 (1993): 34–43.
- Susan Wolf, “Gender, Feminism, and Death: Physician-Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia,” Excerpt.

Week 4: Autonomy and Lying

- Mack Lipkin, “On Telling Patients the Truth,” *Newsweek* 4 June (1979): 13.
- Jennifer Jackson, “Telling the Truth,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 17 (1991): 5–9.
- David Archard, “Informed Consent: Autonomy and Self-Ownership,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 25:1 (2008): 19–34.

Week 5: Genetic Engineering

- Dan Brock, “Genetic Engineering,” from *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, Chapter 26.
- Walter Glannon, “Genetic Enhancement,” from *Biomedical Ethics*: 601–606.
- Michael Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection,” *The Atlantic* April (2004).

Week 6: Alternative Medicine and Public Health

- David Freedman, “The Triumph of New-Age Medicine,” *The Atlantic* June (2011).
- Sunstein and Thaler, *Nudge* pp. 177–200.
- David Freedman, “How Junk Food Can End Obesity,” *The Atlantic* June (2013).