

PHIL 3402N: Biomedical Ethics

Spring 2020

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Drop-In Time: Tuesdays, 4:30–6:00 pm and by appointment

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Lectures: Tuesdays, 6:00–8:50 pm

Markin Hall M1035

Description

This course will introduce students to some of the main topics in bioethics. These include informed consent, medical assistance in dying, abortion, and genetic engineering. We will look at theoretical questions for the first three weeks (e.g., what is death? what are the goals of medicine?) before turning to applied issues for the remainder of the course.

Requirements and Learning Objectives

At its core, philosophy consists of considering questions, thinking about possible solutions, and communicating one's ideas to others. In addition to your ability to communicate what others have written, this course is concerned with *your* ideas regarding the issues we will consider. This might be unlike your experience with other courses and subjects.

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

Instead, your main requirement for this course is easy to describe: you need to read the material, attend the lectures, and then, as Jeff McMahan, one of the philosophers we'll be reading in this course, says: "you just have to sit and think about it for a terribly long time as hard as you can." 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 the oral exam.

The learning objectives for this course include knowledge of ethical theory and the sorts of ethical issues that arise in medicine and scientific research. Another objective is the ability to think critically about the issues we will discuss. Understanding the ideas of others is important, but you must also engage with that content in a critical way by criticizing and defending the ideas of others while proposing your own. The third category is communication. Summarizing and explaining difficult arguments is a skill, as is the ability to develop arguments with coherent positions and reasonable supporting justification. The ability to do this both verbally and in writing is important for the field.

Grading

The first paper must be no longer than 1,500 words. The second paper must be no longer than 2,000 words. These are hard limits that include all body content and footnotes but not the title or bibliography. Papers that breach these limits will receive a deduction of one letter point (e.g., from a B to a B-). I'm not kidding!

Please use standard formatting: 1 inch (2.54 cm) margins with 12-point, Times New Roman (or another suitable serif) font. Late papers will be penalized one letter point per day (e.g., a paper submitted one day late will go from a B to a B-). I will post topics for each paper. If there's something you're interested in writing on that isn't included in my list, you may write on it with my permission. Papers will be submitted on Moodle and must be prepared for blind grading, which means that you must not include your name in the file name or the file itself.

The oral exam will take place during the third-last week of classes. You will be given four topics ahead of time. At the start of our one-on-one meeting, I will roll a four-sided die to determine the topic, and then we will have a 10-minute conversation about it. Notes, books, etc. are not permitted. The goal of the oral exam is to assess your knowledge of the content in a way that is much harder to do with writing. Because it's an unfamiliar format, students are sometimes anxious about it, but it has advantages for you. For example, when I'm grading a paper, I have to assign a grade based on what you've written, even if I'm not sure what you mean. In the oral exam, I can ask follow-up questions. I'll give more info on the exam in-class. NB: The one downside of this format is that it involves some coordination. I'll make a sign-up list of available times well ahead of time and we'll do our best to stay on schedule, but please leave some buffer time in case of delays.

For the final exam, you will be given approximate 25 short-answer questions and will have to answer 20. Any of the content from the syllabus or the lectures is testable.

Paper 1 (Due Thursday, February 13th)	20%
Oral Exam (Third-last week of classes)	20%
Paper 2 (Due Friday, April 3rd)	30%
Final Exam	30%

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence that students sometimes commit unintentionally. It is your responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. In particular, for this course, you are required to give a citation whenever you discuss someone else's work. This is true regardless of whether you directly quote the author or, alternatively, summarize the author's ideas in your own words. This course, and philosophy in general, has no agreed-upon style guide. You can use whichever method you prefer, so long as I can find the relevant passage. Most importantly, *you must provide page numbers*. Here are two examples:

Direct quotation: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit says "Like my cat, I often simply do what I want to do" (p. ix).

Summarization: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit describes how he often behaves like his cat by acting however he wants (p. ix).

If you are unsure how to properly cite something, consult the [Writing Centre](#) or me, the instructor. For more information on academic integrity, please consult the [Student Discipline Policy](#).

Contacting the Instructor

I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours, but please note that I have a full-time job that can require me to change my schedule very quickly. Drop-in time is your opportunity to chat with me one-on-one about course content, your papers, or anything else of philosophical relevance (so basically anything!). If you are unable to attend my drop-in time (right before class), we can usually arrange to meet another time either in person or via Skype, Google Hangouts, or some other medium.

Schedule

Lecture 1: Introduction

- Podcast: "Doing the Right Thing in Health Care's Brave New World," *WBEZ Chicago*.

Lecture 2: Principles

- Canadian Medical Association, “Code of Ethics.”
- Tom Beauchamp and James Childress, “Principles of Biomedical Ethics,” excerpt.
- John Harris, “In Praise of Unprincipled Ethics,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 29:5 (2003): 303–306.

Lecture 3: Health, Death, and the Goals of Medicine

- Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, pp. 423–450.
- Leon Kass, “Regarding the End of Medicine and the Pursuit of Health,” *Public Interest* 40 (1975): 11–18.
- Christopher Boorse, “Goals of Medicine,” in *Naturalism in the Philosophy of Health*, E. Giroux (ed.).

Lecture 4: Truth-Telling and Privacy

- Brian Sisk et al., “The Truth about Truth-Telling in American Medicine: A Brief History,” *The Permanente Journal* 20:3 (2016): 215–219.
- Matthew Wynia, “Invoking Therapeutic Privilege,” *AMA Journal of Ethics* 6:2 (2004): 90–92.
- The Canadian Medical Protective Association, “When to Disclose Confidential Information.”
- Podcast: “In Defense of Ignorance,” *This American Life*.

Lecture 5: Informed Consent

- Sarah Conly, *Against Autonomy*, Chapter 1.
- Ruth Faden and Tom Beauchamp, *A History and Theory of Informed Consent*, Chapter 8.
- Podcast: “All the World’s a Stage—Including the Doctor’s Office,” *Hidden Brain*.

Lecture 6: Advance Directives and Substitute Decision-Making

- Rebecca Dresser, “Dworkin on Dementia: Elegant Theory, Questionable Policy,” *Hastings Center Report* 25:6 (1995): 32–38.
- Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, pp. 496–503.

Lecture 7: Physician-Assisted Death

- James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 292 (1975): 78–80.
- Daniel Callahan, “When Self-Determination Runs Amok,” *The Hastings Center Report* 22:2 (1992): 52–55.
- L.W. Sumner, *Physician-Assisted Death: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Chapters 3 and 4.
- *Carter v. Canada*, excerpt.

Lecture 8: Abortion

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defence of Abortion,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1:1 (1971): 47–66.
- Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” 86:4 (1989): 183–202.

Lecture 9: Research Ethics

- Benjamin Freedman, “Equipose and the Ethics of Clinical Research,” *New England Journal of Medicine* Jul 16, 317:3 (1987): 141–145.
- Steven Pinker, “The Moral Imperative for Bioethics,” *The Boston Globe*.
- Julian Savulescu, “Harm, Ethics Committees and the Gene Therapy Death,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 27 (2001): 148–150.
- Ben Sachs, “The Exceptional Ethics of the Investigator–Subject Relationship,” *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35:1 (2010): 64–80.
- Sui-Lee Wee and Paul Mozur, “China’s Genetic Research on Ethnic Minorities Sets Off Science Backlash,” *The New York Times* Dec. 4, 2019.
- Alexa Hagerty et al., “Retract Facial Feature Discovery for Ethnic Recognition.”

Lecture 10: Genetic Screening

- Jeff McMahan, “The Morality of Screening for Disability,” *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* Supplement 1 (2005): 129–132.
- Dena Davis, “Genetic Dilemmas and the Child’s Right to an Open Future,” *Hastings Center Report* 27:2 (1997): 7–15.

- Julian Savulescu, “Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children,” *Bioethics* 15:5–6 (2001): 413–426.
- Julian Quinones and Arijeta Lajka, “What Kind of Country Do You Want to Live In? Inside the Country Where Down Syndrome is Disappearing,” *CBS News*.

Lecture 11: Enhancement

- Michael Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection,” *The Atlantic* April (2004).
- Nick Bostrom and Rebecca Roache, “Ethical Issues in Human Enhancement,” in *New Waves in Applied Ethics*.
- Podcast: “Coming Up Short,” *This American Life*.

Lecture 12: Public Health

- Jason Brennan, “A Libertarian Case for Mandatory Vaccination,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 44:1 (2018): 71–74.
- Amy Friedman, “Payment for Living Organ Donation Should be Legalised,” *British Medical Journal* 333:7571 (2006): 746–748.
- Fritz Allhoff, “Should Alcoholics Be Deprioritized for Liver Transplantation?” *AMA Journal of Ethics* 7:9 (2005): 634–637.
- Podcast: “What Can Money Buy?” *Open Questions*.