

PHIL343 Biomedical Ethics

Fall 2011, MWF 10:35-11:25

Currie Gymnasium 408/9

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Course Description

We will discuss philosophical issues arising from the practice of health care and the design of health care system. The course is divided into three parts. The first part is focused on ethical issues in the practice of health care, which physicians and health care workers encounter. Topics include abortion, physician-assisted suicide, prenatal screening, genetic engineering, informed consent, etc. The second part is devoted to the ethical foundations for assessing the features of health care system. We will focus on three fundamental questions concerning justice in health and health care: (1) Is health, and therefore health care and other factors that affect health, of special moral importance?; (2) When are health inequalities unjust?; (3) How can we meet health needs fairly under resource constraints? The third part is group research and presentation. The purpose of group research is to have a mock ethics committee experience in hospital or health policy unit. In real ethics committee, people with different expertise, cultural/religious background, and goals must agree to a set of recommendations for difficult ethical problems in a limited time line. Throughout the third part, I will invite you to put yourself in a position of health policy maker, health care administrator, and hospital director, who encounter difficult, complex, and highly ethical decision-making problems. By the end of this course, you will learn (a) the theoretical structure of ethical problems in medical practice and (b) how we allocate health and health care fairly.

A word of warning

This course is a 300-level course in philosophy. Although there is no prerequisite, we will assume the elementary level of analytical and writing skills in philosophy. Some non-Arts students and first-year students may find it difficult to keep up with abstract philosophical analysis and write philosophical essays. If you haven't studied philosophy, you may consider taking one of PHIL 230 (Introduction to Moral Philosophy), PHIL 237 (Contemporary Moral Issues), and PHIL 242 (Introduction to Feminist Theory) before this course. In any case, I strongly recommend reading Vaughn and McIntosh, *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students* (OUP Canada, 2009) before the course starts.

Format

There will be two lectures and one conference per week. Lectures meet Mondays and Wednesdays 10:35-11:25am at Currie Gymnasium 408/9. The first lecture is on September 7. Conferences meet Fridays, and start on September 9 (there is no lecture or conference on September 2). Conference attendance is mandatory.

Main text:

- Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer (eds.) *Bioethics: An Anthology*. Blackwell Publishing (2006). Available for purchase at the McGill Book Store.

Supplementary books (highly recommended):

- John Harris. *The Value of Life*. Routledge (1985). [Slightly dated, but still very useful]
- Tom Beauchamp and James Childress. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics. Sixth Edition*. Oxford University Press (2009). [Most standard textbook for pre-med students]
- Norman Daniels. *Just Health*. Cambridge University Press (2008). [the most important book on the normative foundations of health care system]
- Leonard Flick. *Just Caring*. Oxford University Press (2009). [focused on health care rationing]

Requirements and assessments

In order to pass this course, you must complete (1) midterm take-home exam, (2) group research presentation, and (3) final exam. Failure to complete any of these assessments will result in “F” in the final grade for the course.

- 5 assignments (4pt x 5): 20pt
- Mid-term take-home exam: 20pt
- Conference attendance and participation: 10pt
- Group research presentation: 10pt
- Final exam: 40pt

5 assignments

Each assignment must be max 300 words and submitted through Web CT assignment function. Web CT has the cut-off time and does not accept late submissions. **AVOID THE LAST-MINUTE SUBMISSION.**

Midterm take-home exam

Midterm exam should be max 2,000 words, and a hard-copy must be handed in conference on October 14. If you are unable to hand it in conference on October 14, you must submit it to your TA via email. Late submissions will be downgraded at a rate of 3 points per 24 hours on their grade for the course (not 3% on the essay part), including weekend/holiday days. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) *only when* requested before the exam is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor’s note documenting illness. Requests must be submitted to your TA.

Conference attendance and participation

Weekly conference attendance is requirement for this course. Conference is important part of this course because discussion plays the fundamental role in philosophy. In conference, you put forward your own arguments, and your arguments will be cross-examined by your classmates under the supervision of TAs. The success of conference discussion depends on the attendance and participation of students. Therefore, we take attendance and participation seriously. TAs will take attendance. If you miss two or more conferences, there will be a *disproportional* penalty.

Group research presentation

We will assess the depth, persuasiveness, coherence and originality of group presentations and the performance in Q&A section (presentation 12 min, Q&A 10 min). Everyone in the same group will receive the same grade.

Final exam

Examination will take place on the date that the University sets.

The University requires that the following notices appear on every syllabus:

- McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).
- In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Tentative Schedule ([R] indicates “required reading”)

Sep 5: [Labour day, no class]

Sep 7: Introduction to ethics:

- [R] “Introduction” (Kuhse and Singer (eds.) *Bioethics*, hereafter B)

Sep 9: Conference 1

Sep 12 Beginning of life I:

- [R] Thomson “A defense of abortion” (B-3)
- Tooley “Abortion and infanticide” (B-2)

Sep 14 Beginning of life II:

- [R] Parfit “Rights, interests, and possible people” (B-10)
- [R] Asch “Prenatal diagnosis and selective abortion” (B-12)
- Chadwick/Levitt “Genetic technology” (B-13)

Sep 16: Conference 2 [assignment 1]

Sep 19: Genetic engineering I:

- [R] Glover “Questions about some uses...” (B-18)
- Tooley “The moral status of the cloning...” (B-17)

Sep 20: Genetic engineering II:

- [R] Resnik “The moral significance of the therapy-enhancement...” (B-20)
- [R] Newson/Williamson “Should we undertake...” (B-21)

Sep 23: Conference 3

Sep 26: End of life I

- [R] Grisez/Boyle “The morality of killing” (B-27)
- [R] Rachels “Active and passive euthanasia” (B-28)
- [R] Kuhse “Why killing is not always worse” (B-30)
- Callahan “When self-determination run amok” (B-40)

Sep 28: End of life II

- [R] Hare “The abnormal child” (B-33)
- [R] Singer “Is the sanctity of life ethics terminally ill?” (B-36)

Sep 30: Conference 4 [assignment 2]

Oct 3: Informed consent

- [R] Veatch “Abandoning informed consent” (B-73)

Oct 5: Essay writing

Oct 7: Conference 5

Oct 10: No class [Thanksgiving day]

Oct 12: Organ donation

- [R] Radcliffe-Richards et al “The case for allowing kidney sales” (B-52)
- [R] Harris “The survival lottery” (B-53)

Oct 14: Conference 5 [Midterm essay due]

Oct 17: QALYs

- [R] Lockwood “Quality of life and resource allocation” (B-48)

- “What is a QALY?” & “Implementing QALYs” (Web CT)

Oct 19: Disability discrimination

- [R] Singer et al “Double jeopardy...” (Web CT)
- [R] Harris “Double jeopardy...” (Web CT)

Oct 21: Conference 6

Oct 24: Age discrimination I:

- [R] Harris “The value of life” (B-46)
- [R] Veatch “How age should matter...” (B-47)

Oct 26: Age discrimination II:

- [R] Daniels “A lifespan approach to health care” (B-49)

Oct 28: Conference 7 [assignment 3]

Oct 31: Social determinants of health I

- Daniels et al “Why justice is good for our health” (Web CT)

Nov 2: Social determinants of health II

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Nov 4: Conference 8

Nov 7: Global burden of disease I

- [R] WHO “Global burden of disease” (Web CT)

Nov 9: Global burden of disease II

- [R] Pogge “The health impact fund” (Web CT)

Nov 11: Conference 9 [assignment 4]

Nov 14: Group research

Nov 16: Group research

Nov 18 Conference 10

Nov 21 Group research

Nov 23 Group research

Nov 25 Conference 11

Nov 28 Group presentations [Group presentation slides due]

Nov 30 Group presentations

Dec 2 Conference 12

Dec 5: Group presentations

Dec 6: Group presentations [assignment 5]