

PHIL343 Biomedical Ethics
Fall 2022, M-W-F 10:35-11:25
Currie Gymnasium 408/9

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All components of this course are in-person. This implies that lectures will not be recorded and that you are required to attend the lectures, conferences and group work in-person.

Course Description

This course will investigate a set of philosophical issues arising from the practice of health care and health care system. The course is divided into four parts.

- (1) Introduction to the philosophical methods of analysis through conventional topics in bioethics (weeks 1-2). Topics include non-therapeutic abortion, infanticide (after-birth abortion), physician-assisted suicide, prenatal screening, genetic enhancement, etc. The purpose of the first part is to understand the philosophical method of analysis in medical contexts.
- (2) Ethics in the allocation of health care resources in a population (weeks 3-8). We will focus on three fundamental questions concerning justice in health and health care: (1) What is health and how do we measure health benefit?; (2) When are health inequalities unjust?; (3) How can we meet health needs fairly under resource constraints? The purpose of the second section is to understand how a population's health care system should be evaluated.
- (3) Ethical issues arising from the pandemic response and preparedness (weeks 8-11).
- (4) Group research and presentation on the pandemic preparedness (weeks 11-14). The purpose of group research is to experience "mock ethics committee" in hospital or health policy unit. In the real situation of ethics committee, people with different expertise, cultural/religious background, and goals must agree to a set of recommendations on difficult problems in limited timeline. 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 problems.

By the end of this course, you will learn (a) the theoretical structure of ethical problems in medical practice, (b) how we reason when we allocate health and health care resources fairly and evaluate the quality of health care system, and (c) how we think philosophically about public policy in general and health care policy in particular.

Prerequisite

There is no official prerequisite for taking this course. However, since the course is a 300-level course in philosophy, it is absolutely necessary to have the intermediate level of analytical and writing skills in humanities. The instructor and teaching assistant will not coach you how to write academic essay. It is advisable that you take one or two 200 level courses in humanities before taking this course. In any case, we strongly recommend reading

- Jim Pryor's *Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper* (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>), and/or
- Vaughn and McIntosh, *Writing Philosophy: A Guide for Canadian Students* (OUP Canada, 2013), and/or
- consulting with McGill Writing Centre Tutorial Service (<https://www.mcgill.ca/mwc/tutorial-service>)

Format

There will be two lectures and one conference per week. Lectures meet Monday and Wednesday (and September 2 and 9) at Currie 408/9. The first lecture will be on August 31. Conferences meet Friday and start on September 17.

Textbook:

- Greg Bogner and Iwao Hirose. *The Ethics of Health Care Rationing, Second Edition*. Routledge (2022). [Available via McGill World Cat]
- Iwao Hirose. *The Ethics of Pandemics*. Routledge (2023). [Will be available via McGill World Cat]
- Articles posted on MyCourses

Supplementary books (recommended):

- John Harris. *The Value of Life*. Routledge (1985). [Published more than 30 years ago, but still important]
- Tom Beauchamp and James Childress. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics, Seventh Edition*. Oxford University Press (2012). [The most standard and comprehensive textbook for biomedical ethics course in medical school – less philosophical]
- Norman Daniels. *Just Health*. Cambridge University Press (2008). [The most important book on the normative foundations of health care system]
- Peter Ubel. *Pricing Life: Why It's Time for Health Care Rationing*. MIT Press (2001). [Introduction to health care rationing]
- Erik Nord. *Cost-Value Analysis in Health Care: Making Sense out of QALYs* Cambridge University Press (1999). [Advanced and seminal work by the eminent health economist]
- Paul Menzel. *Strong Medicine: Ethical Rationing of Health Care*. Oxford University Press (1990).
- Ben Bramble. *Pandemic Ethics: 8 Big Questions of COVID-19*. Bartleby Books (2020)

Readings

Please see the separate file for the *tentative* schedule of required readings. You are required to read the papers and chapters marked with [R] prior to the relevant class. The course instructor reserves the right to alter the schedule.

Requirements & assessments

In order to pass this course, you must complete (1) two essay assignments, (2) group research, and (3) final exam. If you fail to complete any one of these, you will receive “F”.

- 2 essay assignments (15pt x 2): max 30pt
- Group research: max 20pt
- Final exam: max 40pt
- Conference attendance and participation: max 10pt (attendance max 7pt, participation max 3pt; See the absence penalty policy below)

Essay assignments

Each response must be max 1,500 words (excluding references and end/footnotes) and submitted through the MyCourses assignment function. Late submission of essay assignments will be downgraded at a rate of 2pt per day on their final grade for the course (not 2% on the essay grade), 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 TA, cc-ing Professor Hirose.

Conference attendance & participation

Weekly conference attendance is mandatory. There will be two conference groups. Please sign up for one of them via Minerva before September 16. Conference is important part of this course because discussion plays 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 TA. The success of conference discussion depends on attendance, preparation and participation of students. Therefore, we take attendance and participation very seriously. There will be *disproportional* penalty on conference absences. [1 absence, 1pt reduction; 2 absences, 3pt reduction; 3 absences, 6pt reduction; and 4 or more absences, 10pt reduction] This means 4 or more conference absences will result in nil point for attendance and participation, regardless of the level of your participation in conference. The attendance grade (max 3pt) must be *earned* during conferences. This means that if you attend all conferences but remain passive in conference discussion, you will receive only 7pt.

Group work

Each group proposes and defends a set of recommendations on a specific topic. We will assess the depth, persuasiveness, coherence and originality of group presentations and the performance in Q&A section. Everyone in the same group will receive the same grade. However, when two or more students in your group judge that you did not make fair contribution to the group research, we will deduce 10pt from the given group research 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.