

Instructor: Andrew Reisner

Office: 933 Leacock

Office Hours: Mondays 9:45-10:45 and Tuesdays 10:30-11:30.

Email: [andrew.reisner@mcgill.ca](mailto:andrew.reisner@mcgill.ca)

Lecture Location and Time: EDUC 129, Mondays and Tuesdays 8:35-9:25.

### PHIL 343: Biomedical Ethics (Autumn 2013)

#### Synopsis

This course is designed both to prepare students for doing more advanced philosophical work in biomedical ethics and to serve as a reasonably detailed look at issues surrounding the creation and loss of life and personhood. The course begins by considering what it is to be a person and to what degree personhood (and continuous personal identity over time) may be ethically significant. This will provide the theoretical groundwork for a close look at ethical questions surrounding abortion and euthanasia.

We will move on to consider the ethical status of humans whose personhood may be considered compromised on many views of personhood. We will first consider adult individuals suffering from progressive dementias and then individuals of various ages who suffer from permanent and very serious cognitive impairments.

This latter set of inquiries pose significant philosophical challenges to views about the special ethical importance of humans, and in this context we will consider what the consequences of various ethical views about the treatment of severely cognitively impaired humans may be for the treatment of non-human animals.

The approach to material in this course is to treat biomedical ethical problems as special cases of other philosophical problems. There is a good deal of continuity in the progressive development of theoretical problems in ethics and the metaphysics of personal identity and personhood throughout the readings, as it is a central aim of this course to help students develop a clear understanding of the impossibility of giving a sensible theoretical treatment of biomedical ethical problem in isolation from basic theoretical philosophical research in ethics and metaphysics. **Thus, prospective students should note that considerable time will be spent on the theoretical philosophical issues required for analysing issues in biomedical ethics. This will include (at least) an in-depth look at the metaphysics of personal identity and at ethical theory, both normative and metaethical. This course is not a general survey of hot-button issues in biomedical ethics, but rather a course that develops the necessary foundations for doing serious theoretical research on biomedical ethical problems, especially those that concern the creation of new individuals and the loss of existing ones.**

While this course has no pre-requisites and is suitable for students new to philosophy, it is a 300 level course and contains sophisticated theoretical material. Students, regardless of their philosophical background, should be prepared to engage seriously with complex theoretical material. Students must keep up with readings and engage actively with them in order to have a successful educational experience in this course.

#### Course Requirements:

Assessment is by weekly reading quizzes, two essays and a take-home final. No supplemental work or extra credit will be offered. Attendance at conferences is optional, **but weekly reading quizzes, which may not be made up if missed, are given at conferences. Missed quizzes will receive a score of -1**

(i.e. you are penalized for not writing the quiz at all, as opposed merely to failing it). Lectures and conferences presuppose that students will have completed the reading each week prior to the first lecture. The lectures and conferences will be conducted in a manner that presupposes that students are prepared and have read carefully.

**Evaluation:**

There will be weekly reading quizzes (beginning with the first week of conferences), two essays and a take-home essay final. The first essay will be slightly shorter, and therefore worth less, than the second essay and final, with the latter two each being worth 30% of the final grade and the first essay being worth 25%. Quizzes are worth 15% of the final mark. The lowest quiz score may be dropped.

**Conferences:**

Conferences may be signed up for on Minerva.

**Required Texts:**

The two primary texts for this course are Jeff McMahan's *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life* and *The Animal Question* by Paola Cavalieri. Both will be available from Paragraphe Booksellers on rue McGill College. Information on additional required readings is available on in the detailed 'course schedule' section below.

**Academic Integrity:**

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/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information)

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity)).

**Please Note:**

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/ or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

and

*"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." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)*

*"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."*

### **Email, Laptop, and Electronics Policy:**

All emails must originate from students' McGill email account. Email and WebCT are the principal means of communication with the instructor in this course, and students are responsible for checking their McGill accounts and WebCT on a regular basis. Consequences arising from the failure on the part of students to do so is not the responsibility of the instructor.

Except by those students who have obtained a letter from the Office for Students with Disabilities, laptops, cellular phones, and other electronic devices may not be used during lecture or conference. Students violating this policy will be given a warning and then asked to leave the lecture or conference. Lectures may not be recorded under any circumstances and are the copyrighted property of the instructor.

### **Course materials:**

The copyright to all instructor-generated materials belongs to the instructor. Handout and other materials may not be copied without the instructors written consent. Likewise, lectures may not be recorded without written permission.

### **Course Schedule**

**NB Readings may be changed at the instructor's discretion. All changes will be announced at least one week in advance.**

Week 1 (03/09 & 05/09) Introductory lectures: course policies and approaches to the study of bioethics.

Readings: None

Week 2 (09/09 & 10/09) **NB** No lecture on Thursday. A brief introduction to philosophical ethics.

Readings: None assigned, but it is strongly recommended that you begin the next two weeks' reading: *The Ethics of Killing* (TEOK) pp. 3-39 & 39-88.

Week 3 (16/9 & 17/9) What makes a person a person? Part 1: The soul and human organisms.

Readings: TEOK pp. 3-39

**\*\*\*Conferences and Reading Quizzes Begin\*\*\***

Week 4 (23/9 & 24/9) What makes a person a person? Part 2: The psychological account and the embodied mind account.

Readings: TEOK pp 39-88

Week 5 (30/09 & 01/10) ) The embodied mind account con't (if necessary); Death and Killing: What's wrong with dying?

Readings TEOK pp. 95-117; John Broome *Ethics out of Economics*. Ch. 10

'Goodness is Reducible to Betterness: The Evil of Death is the Value of Life' pp. 162-17: CUP 1999.

Week 6 (07/10 & 08/10) Foetuses and Infants: Abortion and Infanticide. First essay assigned

Readings: TEOK pp.162-189 & 338-362; Michael Tooley, 'Abortion and Infanticide' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 37-65.

Week 7 (14/10 & 15/10) Harm to the unconceived and the interests of the mother.

Readings: Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'A defense of Abortion' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, (1971), Vol. 1, No. 1, pp 47-66; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, pp. 351-379. OUP: 1984 (the 1987 version is preferable).

Week 8 (21/10 & 22/10) Dying and Partial Being. First essay due.

Readings: TEOK pp. 423-455 & TBA.

Week 9 (28/10 & 29/10) Euthanasia and Physician Assisted Suicide

Readings: TEOK pp. 455-493.

Week 10 (04/11 & 05/11) Alzheimer's and Progressive Dementia

Readings: TEOK pp. 493-505; Agnieszka Jaworska 'Respecting the Margins of Agency: Alzheimer's Patients and the Capacity to Value' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 105-138.

Week 11 (11/11 & 12/11) The Severely Cognitively Disabled. Second essay assigned.

Readings: Jeff McMahan, 'Cognitive Disability, Misfortune, and Justice' in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, (1996), Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 3-35; Logi Gunnarson 'The Great Apes and the Severely Disabled: Moral Status and Thick Evaluative Concepts' in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, (2008), Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 305-326.

Week 12 (18/11 & 19/11) Assumptions in ethics: Equality and Moral Status

Readings: *The Animal Question (TAQ)*: Chs 1 & 2.

Week 13 (25/11 & 26/11) Animals and Humans: Speciesism, Welfare, and Killing. Second essay due.

Readings: TAW Ch. 4 & selections from Ch. 5 (pp. 87-105; 116-125)

Week 14 (2/12, 3/12) Animal Experimentation, Rights, and Challenges Arising for the Treatment of non-Paradigmatic Humans.

Readings: TAQ Ch. 6.