

# PHL 281: Bioethics

## Course Information:

**Instructor:** Jeremy Davis  
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**Lecture:** Time TBA; Room TBA  
**Tutorials:** Time TBA; Room TBA  
**Office Hour:** TBA  
**TAs:** TBA

### **Overview:**

This course is an introductory survey to the ethical issues that arise in the domains of health care, medicine, and biomedical research, as well as other related areas. While the issues to be discussed throughout the term will often have clear practical implications, the approach to the subject matter of this course will be primarily at a rather *abstract* or *theoretical* level. That is, the questions we will be asking—e.g., “*Is abortion morally permissible?*”; “*How ought we to understand the idea of autonomy?*”—are situated at a deeper level of inquiry than those that may be of more use to policy-makers and HCPs, for example.

This course will assume no prior training in philosophy or ethics; however, students unfamiliar with general philosophical methodology are urged to make use of the wealth of resources available online for guidance. Moreover, no background in science is necessary.

### **Course Text:**

*Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, Beauchamp and Childress

(I don't have the older edition of this book, so I haven't verified whether or not it will have all the relevant sections. Proceed with caution if you choose to buy an older edition.)

## Evaluation:

<b>Argument Analysis (Date: TBA)</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Essay (1500 words)</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Final</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Tutorials</b>	<b>10%</b>

### **Argument Analysis:**

The argument analysis assignment is a very short essay in which you will explain the structure of a particular argument. The task is to show that you understand how to read a philosophical argument, extract the core thesis, and isolate the various premises.

*\*A word of caution about the Argument Analysis:* By design, midterm assignments are held before the drop deadline so that students will have a sense of how they are doing in the course, which is particularly useful when deciding whether or not to drop the

course. However, please be aware that doing well on the midterm is no guarantee that you will do well on other evaluations. In particular, it is not uncommon for students to perform well on the midterm and perform poorly (whether by comparison or absolutely) on the essay. (This is especially true of students who are not used to writing philosophical essays.)

**Essay:**

You will write a 1500-word essay—due date TBA—on one of a select few topics. Each topic will require that you incorporate one of the optional readings listed on the syllabus, which will not be discussed explicitly in lecture or tutorials. Your essay should (i) demonstrate that you understand the relevant arguments, (ii) argue for a particular view or stance on the issue, and (iii) defend it against possible objections. We will discuss in greater detail how to go about doing this at the appropriate point in the term.

**Final:**

Your final will consist of two essays. Students will have some choice in the essay questions. Details will be discussed later in the term.

**Tutorials:**

Whereas essays allow you to demonstrate your ability to *write* philosophy, tutorials offer an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to *discuss* philosophy. Moreover, as you can see, your tutorial grade is a non-trivial percentage of your overall grade. As such, your attendance and participation in tutorials are essential to your success in the course. You are required to come to all tutorial meetings prepared to discuss the readings, as well as to go in greater depth into the topics for that week.

## Course Policies:

**Email:**

All emails should be directed to the course instructor, rather than the TAs. Emails will be answered within two business days. Emails should either concern administrative matters about which you are unclear, or else *very brief* philosophical questions. Longer philosophical discussions or questions ought to be addressed in class, in office hours, either with the instructor or your TA, or in tutorials.

**Technology:**

You are *not permitted* to use your cell phones during lecture or tutorials. This is very distracting to your fellow students as well as to your instructor and TAs. You are *strongly discouraged* from using your laptop in lecture and tutorials. In my view, the value on balance of using a laptop during lecture is typically outweighed by the disvalue of the potential (and often actual) distraction that it causes. (Note that this is not a blanket prohibition on computers. I realize that many students will, for one reason or another, require the use of a computer during lecture. Any students who misuse technology during lecture or tutorials may be asked to leave, or marks may be deducted.)

# Course Schedule & Readings:

## INTRODUCTION

This section of the course will introduce bioethics as a subfield of philosophy. We will discuss some of the basics of ethical theory, as well as how philosophers go about making claims, providing defense, and responding to objections.

### **Class 1: WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT BIOETHICS**

*Readings:*

- Steven Pinker, “The Moral Imperative for Bioethics” *Boston Globe*, August 2015
- Susan Dwyer, “The Moral Naïveté of Ethics By Numbers” *Al Jazeera*, August 2015
- Beauchamp & Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (Chs. 1 & 3)

*\*Students unfamiliar with the basics of ethical theory are advised to read Beauchamp & Childress, Ch. 9*

## SECTION I: DECISION-MAKING & RESPONSIBILITIES

This section of the course concerns some of the background philosophical concepts that are fundamental to nearly all debates in bioethics (and indeed, much of ethical theory more generally). Some questions to consider include: How should we understand concepts such as ‘informed consent’, ‘autonomy’, and ‘competence’, and how are these ideas related? What rights do patients have, and what responsibilities do they have to those close to them? What responsibilities do HCPs have to their patients? Is it ever permissible to break doctor-patient confidentiality?

### **Class 2: CONSENT, AUTONOMY, & COMPETENCE**

*Readings:*

- Beauchamp & Childress, Ch. 4
- Buchanan & Brock, “Standards of Competence”
- O’Neill, “Autonomy, Individuality, and Consent”

*Optional:*

- S. Buss, “Valuing Autonomy and Respecting Persons”
- C. Misak, “Patient Autonomy and ICU Psychosis”

### **Classes 3-4: RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES: PATIENTS AND PHYSICIANS**

*Readings:*

- Beauchamp & Childress, Ch. 8
- J. Hardwig, “What About the Family?”
- Mappes & Zembaty, “Patient Choices, Family Interests, and Physician Obligations”
- J. Jackson, “Telling the Truth”

*Optional:*

- H.M. Evans, “Do Patients Have Duties?” (5 pg)
- P. Benn, “Medicine, Lies, and Deceptions”

*Argument Analysis Assignment Due.*

## SECTION II: ISSUES AT THE MARGINS OF LIFE

This section of the course will look at issues concerning human fetuses, human embryos, and end-of-life care and decisions. Some questions to be asked include: When, if ever, is abortion morally

permissible? Is euthanasia—or, indeed, any form of suicide—morally permissible? What are the ethical issues that arise from experimenting with human embryos?

**Class 5-6: ABORTION**

*Readings:*  
–J. Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”  
–D. Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”  
–R. Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion”

*Optional:*  
–E. Harman “Creation Ethics”  
–N. Davis, “Abortion and Self Defense”

**Class 7: INFANTICIDE**

–P. Singer, “Life and Death Decisions for Disabled Infants” from *Practical Ethics* (p. 181-191)

*Optional:* –S. Uniacke, “Peter Singer and Non-voluntary Euthanasia”

**Class 8: EUTHANASIA**

*Readings:*  
–J. Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia”  
–R. Dworkin, “Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers’ Brief”  
–D. Velleman, “Is There A Right to Self-Termination?”  
–R.G. Frey, “Suicide and Self-Inflicted Death”

*Optional:*  
–F. Kamm, “Problems with ‘Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers’ Brief”  
–F. Kamm, “Some Arguments by Velleman Concerning Suicide and Assisted Suicide”  
–P. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, chapter 7  
–*How to Die in Oregon* [film]

*Essay due (concerning topics from weeks 1-8)*

**SECTION III: RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND MEDICAL JUSTICE**

This section of the course will investigate a few other specific issues in bioethics—namely, those surrounding resource allocation and the donation and sale of bodily organs and body parts. Some questions to be asked include: Do individuals have a moral right to health care? Is it ever permissible to sell one’s bodily organs (e.g. kidneys) or fluids (e.g. blood)? The final week of the course, we will discuss some of the policy implications of the ethical discussions throughout the semester.

**Class 9: MEDICAL RESOURCE ALLOCATION**

*Readings:*  
–P. Singer, “Why We Must Ration Health Care”  
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/19/magazine/19healthcare-t.html>)  
–Beauchamp & Childress, Ch. 7  
–G. Sreenivasan, “Health Care and Equality of Opportunity” (10 pg.)  
–Callahan, “Allocating Resources to the Elderly”  
–J. Hardwig, “Is There a Duty to Die?”

**Class 10: DONATION AND SALE OF BODY PARTS**

*Readings:*  
–J. Savulescu, “Is the Sale of Body Parts Wrong?”  
–C. Fabre, “Justice and the Coercive Taking of Cadaveric Organs”  
–S Wilkinson & E Garrard, “Bodily Integrity and the Sale of Human Organs”

*Optional:* –D. Satz, “Ethical Issues in the Supply and Demand of Human Kidneys”

**Class 11: EUGENICS & ENHANCEMENT**

*Readings:*  
–M. Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection”  
–F. Kamm, “What Is and Is Not Wrong with Enhancement?”

**Class 12: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY; REVIEW OF COURSE MATERIAL**

*Readings:* –*No readings assigned*