Philosophy 305: Biomedical Ethics

Class meets Monday, Wednesday and Friday 1:15-2:30 in DE 200.

Your host: Prof. Michael P. Wolf
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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 9:00-11:00 and by appointment

Required Texts

(Some additional readings will be made available as reserves or photocopies in class.)

What Is This Course About?
It has been said that ethics and morality are the social institutions that set out to protect us when we are at our most vulnerable. Being in the hands of a doctor or other source of health care certainly fits this description. Most of us lack the knowledge and expertise to chart a course for ourselves, especially when our lives are quite literally at stake. The profusion of new technologies to sustain life beyond what we took to be its limits and to create life in ways we could never have foreseen has generated a novel set of philosophical problems surrounding the ethics of life, death and the medical care we receive between the ends of our lives. In this class we will address some of these issues, including euthanasia, genetic research and cloning and universal access to health care.

Assessment
Class participation is an important issue to me, especially in a small class like this. I expect you to come to class with the readings done and ready to discuss them. In order to get you involved in these ways and as an exercise in immersing yourself in the debates that motivated different philosophers to adopt the views they did, each student in this class will take part in a scheduled presentation. The presentation will involve offering a position relevant to some topic in the class, and defending it or challenging some opposing views. You will be expected to provide notes on what you expect to present a week in advance so that others who are presenting may see what is on the table. The level of preparation expected here is roughly the same as a five-page paper. Details of the format and topics will be made available as we progress. This will count for 20% of your final grade. Since the number of students in this class may make it prohibitive to have everyone make such a presentation, I will make provisions for some members of the class to prepare a five page paper on a topic of interest in recent medical news in lieu of such a presentation. Details are available online.

Over the course of the quarter, you will also have to write two papers of about 3000-3500 words, which works out to about 8-10 pages in Times 12-point double spaced with one-inch margins. The two assignments will correspond roughly with the two halves of the course. I will offer you a set of paper topics well in advance of the due date and you may choose from there. You may also suggest your own paper topic and write on it SO LONG AS YOU CLEAR THE TOPIC WITH ME FIRST. Each one of these papers will be worth 40% of your final grade. More information on the assignments and how to approach these papers will be available in class.

I should mention a few things in closing. First, you are of course bound by the honor code here and any form of plagiarism will be severely punished. (Speak to me or consult a student handbook if you are unsure what counts as plagiarism.) This does not mean that you cannot use another source, or discuss and consult with your classmates about your assignments. I permit you to do the former and strongly encourage you to do the
latter, so long as all the sources and classmates in question are properly cited in your paper. Finally, be forewarned that I reserve the right to lower the grades of papers given to me whose grammar and spelling do not meet college-level standards.

**A Tentative Syllabus**

**Class 1. (March 26):** Introduction
**Background Ideas**

**Class 2. (March 28):** Core Concepts - Utilitarianism
Read selections from Mill's *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 and 2) and Beauchamp, pp. 1-34.

**Class 3. (March 30):** NO CLASS

**Class 4. (April 2):** Core Concepts - Utilitarianism
Read selections from Mill's *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 and 2) and Beauchamp, pp. 1-34.

**Class 5. (April 4):** Core Concepts - Deontology
Read selections from Beauchamp, pp. 1-34.
(See the IEP on Duty and Deontology and the Categorical Imperative.)
(See the IEP site on Consequentialism site and the UWW site comparing Deontology and Consequentialism)

**Class 6. (April 6):** Core Concepts - Deontology
Read selections from Beauchamp, pp. 1-34.
(See the IEP on Duty and Deontology and the Categorical Imperative.)

**Class 7. (April 9):** Core Concepts - Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, pp. 1-34 and Book 1 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.
(See also the IEP site on Virtue Theory)

**Informed Consent**

**Class 8. (April 11):** Informed Consent
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 3.

**Class 9. (April 13):** Informed Consent
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 3.

**Class 10. (April 16):** Disclosure
Read selections from Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.

**Class 11. (April 18):** Disclosure
Read selections from Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.

**Class 12. (April 20):** Presentations on Informed Consent and Disclosure

**Genetics and Eugenics**

**Class 13. (April 23):** Selecting Genetic Characteristics
Read Beauchamp, chapter 9.

**Class 14. (April 25):** Selecting Genetic Characteristics
Read Beauchamp, chapter 9.
Class 15. (April 27): Selecting Genetic Characteristics
Read Beauchamp, chapter 9.

Class 16. (April 30): Cloning
Read Beauchamp, chapter 9 and reserved readings.

Class 17. (May 2): Cloning
Read Beauchamp, chapter 9 and reserve readings.

Class 18. (May 4): **Presentations on Genetic Issues**

Death and Euthanasia

Class 19. (May 7): A Right to Die?
Read Beauchamp, chapter 6.

*First Paper Due May 7 - Click here for topics*

Class 20. (May 9): A Right to Die?
Read Beauchamp, chapter 6.

Class 21. (May 11): Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
Read Beauchamp, chapter 7.

Class 22. (May 14): Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
Read Beauchamp, chapter 7.

Class 23. (May 16): Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
Read Beauchamp, chapter 7.

Class 24. (May 18): **Presentations on Euthanasia**

Is There a Right to Health Care?

Class 25. (May 21): Justice and Health Care
Read Beauchamp, chapter 10.

Class 26. (May 23): Justice and Health Care
Read Beauchamp, chapter 10.

Class 27. (May 25): The Ethics of Shifting Costs
Read Beauchamp, chapter 10.

Class 28. (May 30): The Ethics of Shifting Costs
Read Beauchamp, chapter 10.

Class 29. (June 1): **Presentations on Justice Issues**

*Second Paper Due June 4 - Click here for topics*