Philosophy 305: Biomedical Ethics

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

Your host: Prof. Michael P. Wolf
Office: 201 Humphrey House
Phone: 7-7077
E-mail: wolf@kzoo.edu

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.)

Copies of recent important articles are also available in Word and Text format. You will need to read these for discussion, so please click the links and download them.

Finally, I recommend a short book called How to Get the Most Out of Philosophy, available at Amazon.com. It is not required reading, but it contains a great deal of helpful advice for someone taking their first or second philosophy 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.

There will also be days that we set aside exclusively for discussion, on which your attendance and participation will be expected. There will inevitably be discussion on other days as well, but these will be occasions on which we do more in small groups, so your personal preparation for these classes is all the more important. Some written work - summaries of arguments, etc. - based on the day's discussions will be expected on these dates. I will combine all of these factors into a class discussion grade, and it will count for
10% of your final grade. I have not scheduled such a discussion period for the very last topic because I suspect K College's "Day of Gracious Living" will fall somewhere in there. We will work around that on the fly. Part of what I will look at in determining this is who contributes to the class discussion board, accessible through the College's web server. Follow the links for "Dr. Wolf's Board" and then look for the section devoted to this class. There will also be days set aside specifically for discussion where we will spend some time in smaller groups and then reconvene. Your attendance and participation will be expected on these days. Over the course of the quarter, you will also have to write two papers of about 2500-3000 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 35% 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.) The policy of the philosophy department on this matter is to automatically fail a student on any plagiarized assignment and to submit their names for discipline under the College’s Honor Code. 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 31): Introduction
Background Ideas

Core Concepts of Ethics - (Click here for study questions either in Word format or straight text.)

Class 2. (April 2): Core Concepts - Utilitarianism
Read chapter 1 from Mill's Utilitarianism and Beauchamp, pp. 1-33.

Class 3. (April 6): Core Concepts - Utilitarianism
Read chapter 2 from Mill's Utilitarianism and Beauchamp, pp. 1-33.

Class 4. (April 7): Core Concepts - Deontology
Read the following summary and Beauchamp, pp. 1-33.
(The following page of notes may also be helpful.)

Class 5. (April 9): Core Concepts - Deontology
Read the following summary and Beauchamp, pp. 1-33.
Also, read the material on the principles of bioethics at the University of Washington.

Read Book 1 from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Beauchamp, pp. 1-33.

Class 7. (April 14): CLASS DISCUSSION
Deontology vs. Consequentialism and Rules vs. Character

Informed Consent and Disclosure - (Click here for study questions either in Word format or straight text.)
Class 8. (April 16): Informed Consent
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 3.
Recommended: Section one, part two of EIMM.

Class 9. (April 18): Informed Consent
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 3.
Recommended: Emmanuel and Emmanuel “Four Models…” in EIMM.
(Recommended (but unfortunately not in our library or on my shelf) is *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on and Imperfect Science*. The book is a collection of essays, some more relevant than others, but it looks in detail at how doctors interact with their patients in providing care. Available at Amazon.)

Class 10. (April 21): Disclosure
Read selections from Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.
Recommended: Section Five, part one of EIMM.

Class 11. (April 23): Disclosure
Read selections from Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.

Class 12. (April 25): *Presentations on Informed Consent and Disclosure*
(Click here for additional web resources)

Genetics, Eugenics and Cloning - (Click here for study questions either in Word format or straight text.)

Class 13. (April 28): Selecting Genetic Characteristics
Read Beauchamp, chapter 7.
Recommended: Section four, part three of EIMM.

Class 14. (April 30): Selecting Genetic Characteristics
Read Beauchamp, chapter 7.

Class 15. (May 2): CLASS DISCUSSION
*Selecting characteristics*

Class 16. (May 6): Cloning
Read Beauchamp, chapter 8.

Class 17. (May 7): Cloning
Read Beauchamp, chapter 8.
Recommended: Kass “Preventing a Brave New World” in EIMM.

Class 18. (May 9): *Presentations on Genetic Issues*
(Click here for additional web resources)

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide - (Click here for study questions either in Word format or straight text.)

Class 19. (May 12): A Right to Die?
Read Beauchamp, chapter 4.
First Paper Due May 12 - Click here for topics
(Click here for additional web resources)

Class 20. (May 14): A Right to Die?
Read Beauchamp, chapter 4.
Recommended: Section three, part two of EIMM.

Class 21. (May 16): CLASS DISCUSSION
Is there a right to die?

Class 22. (May 19): Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
Read Beauchamp, chapter 4.
Recommended: Section three, part five of EIMM.

Class 23. (May 21): Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
Read Beauchamp, chapter 4.

Class 24. (May 23): Presentations on Euthanasia
(Click here for additional web resources)

May 26: No Class - Memorial Day Holiday

Social Justice and Health Care - (Click here for study questions either in Word format or straight text.)

Class 25. (May 28): Justice and Health Care
Read Beauchamp, chapter 2.
Recommended: Section two, part one of EIMM.

Class 26. (May 30): Justice and Health Care
Read Beauchamp, chapter 2.

Class 27. (June 2): The Ethics of Shifting Costs
Read Beauchamp, chapter 2.

Class 28. (June 4): Catch Up Day
(The “Day of Gracious Living” will fall somewhere in this quarter, usually towards the latter half, so we’ll leave a day open and adjust the schedule accordingly.)

Class 29. (June 6): Presentations on Justice Issues
(Click here for additional web resources)

Second Paper Due June 10 - Click here for topics
(Click here for additional web resources)