PHIL 305: Biomedical Ethics  
Spring 2006  
Syllabus

MW 10:00 – 11:35; F 10:00 – 10:40  
UL 306

Instructor: Dr. Ashley McDowell  
Office: Humphrey House 202  
Office phone: 337-7077  
email: mcdowell@kzoo.edu or ashley.mcdowell@gmail.com  
Office hours: MTWF 1:30 – 2:30; and by appointment, except on Thursdays (unless there is an emergency)

Note on Moodle: this course website will include at least some useful information – go to http://moodle.kzoo.edu/moodle/ and find our course, and get yourself logged on.

Note on email: I will be sending mail to the class alias, which only knows your K email address. Make sure your K email is forwarded to whatever email account you use regularly, if it’s something else.

Teaching Assistant: Sharat Reddy  
email: Sharat.Reddy02@kzoo.edu  
Office hours: TBA, by appointment

Texts and readings  
Tom Beauchamp & LeRoy Walters, Contemporary Issues in Bioethics, 6th ed. (“B&W”)  
Anthony Weston, A Practical Companion to Ethics, 3rd ed. (“Weston”)  
Readings on reserve as announced

What this course is about

This is a course in applied ethics, which is the study of how ethical thinking can be used in real-life situations and issues. In this case, we will be exploring the ethics of biomedical issues. Those issues could include euthanasia, abortion, informed consent, allocating medical resources, and treating impaired infants. What is the morally right thing to do in various biomedical contexts? What are good reasons for answers to that question and others like it? What kinds of things should we take into consideration when making difficult moral decisions about these topics? What role should rights play? What about overall happiness? Are there certain rules of moral conduct that should never be broken?

The Weston book is an accessible overview of ethics as something to be integrated into your thinking and applied in your life. It includes material on ethical tools like identifying, weighing, and integrating values; critical thinking; and creativity. Using this text and the introductory ethics material in the Beauchamp & Walters text, we will first learn about, discuss, and work on applying ethical tools in general, and then we will turn to specific applications in biomedical ethics. The selections in the Beauchamp & Walters text are mostly academic philosophical articles, along with some legal decisions and policy papers. For our in-class discussions and readings, we will focus on three main topics: justice and access (especially on the right to health care and issues of AIDS and public policy), eugenics and human genetics (including genetic testing, gene transfer research, and genetic enhancement), and end-of-life decision-making (including the right to die and assisted suicide). In addition, you and a classmate will explore an additional biomedical ethical issue (chosen from among the other issues in the Beauchamp & Walters book) in the form of a presentation.

Throughout this course, you will be learning how to think for yourself – open-mindedly but critically – about the application of ethical values and thinking. To do this, you will learn about specific strategies, theories, concepts, and methods that are the special emphasis of philosophy and ethics. You may not have come to final conclusions about ethics or particular issues by the end of this course, or by the end of your life, for that matter. But you will almost certainly have made progress in thinking well about ethics and its applications.

Those applications will include both decisions about right and wrong actions and decisions about policy or law. We might think it’s wrong to smoke cigarettes if you’re pregnant, but not think there should be a law against it – rather, we might think about constructive ways to encourage right behavior short of enforcement. The important thing for purposes of this course is that you become adept at looking at as many relevant aspects of moral issues as clear-headedly and constructively as possible; and that you learn to present your views and the reasons for them in the form of logically-constructed arguments.

What you can learn about and gain from this course

Unless you have plans to become a professional philosopher, which I expect few of you do, the most important things you will gain from this course will not be detailed retention of specific philosophical positions. Rather, you should hope and strive to gain abilities in three main areas:

Theoretical learning:  
- appreciation of applied ethics issues and their importance, and the ability to recognize ethical problems and considerations in
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Critical thinking and problem solving
- the ability to recall, articulate and apply various approaches to moral problems, particularly in biomedical contexts, and to appraise for yourself the routes for dealing with important moral issues

Practical learning:
- the ability to reproduce and compare various approaches to solving common human problems that have ethical dimensions (particularly those in biomedical contexts).
- applying ethical thinking to the “real world” – to everyday living, to specific problems and puzzles, to social issues, to challenges in your career, and so forth.
- constructing a personal methodology based on discoveries made during this class.

Philosophical methodology: These skills fall into three main sub-areas:

Critical thinking and problem solving
- extracting the main points from difficult material, following and reconstructing arguments, and thinking questions through.
- learning to analyze and solve problems, considering them from many points of view and assessing the pros and cons of different proposals.

Communication
- learning to express yourself clearly and persuasively.
- skills in making decisions and then justifying your position in a clear, logical, and compelling way.

Creativity, research, and investigation
- proficiency at conducting investigations - learning to ask the right questions, and to develop and assess methods and standards for answering those questions.
- solving problems using careful but innovative techniques and basing your conclusions on reliable evidence.

What I expect you to achieve

As the course goes on, I will expect different things out of you in terms of mastery and achievement. At first, assignments will be designed to help you gain skills in understanding basic ethical concepts and their significance. You will learn about various ethical theories, principles, and tools, and learn how to apply all those things for yourself on cases and issues. I will expect you to be able to identify morally relevant factual, linguistic, and inferential aspects of problems and situations. I will guide you to being able to deploy specific tools for exploring issues, getting unstuck, making a case, and deciding for yourself on moral issues.

As we move into studying the specific biomedical issues, I will expect you not just to understand the tools, but to see how ethical thinking plays out in rigorous argumentation on particular issues of importance. I will assess your achievements in grasping the issues the philosophers are trying to resolve, and comprehending the differences between approaches and the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches. By the end of the course, I will expect you to be pulling everything together – in particular, using the tools to become enabled to participate in ethical debates and decision-making processes. You will be able to evaluate others’ positions and arguments, assess their strengths, and select a reasoned response, whether that involves formulating an original position, reaching compromise, or reaching a deeper understanding. You will be able to distinguish different legitimate stances on the topics we’ll cover, compare and contrast the arguments and principles underlying them, and be prepared to defend your choice of the most reasonable positions and views.

By the end of this course, I will expect you to locate yourself in the world of biomedical ethical concerns, becoming a participant, assessor and defender rather than a passive regurgitator. In other words, the assignments and my assessment criteria in this course will incrementally guide you to become not a student of ethics but a practitioner.

Structure of class
Classes will consist of a mixture of lecture, discussion, and in-class work, either individual or in groups. You will learn what others have said on these issues as well as developing your own views.

It will be expected that you have done the reading, thoroughly, before class. I will also expect you to have looked over any study guides I might have given you, when that occurs. Class time will not be spent merely repeating in lecture format what the readings have already said. Of course it’s to be expected that there will be aspects of the readings that you will need guidance with after the fact; for that reason, it’s best to read the material carefully so that you know what to ask for more explanation about. Lectures, discussion, groupwork, and in-class work will be conducted on a first-come, first-served basis, and by appointment, with appointments taking precedence. You should feel absolutely free to come to them and discuss the course, the material, the assignments, or philosophy.

I request that each of you take a few minutes to visit me during my office hours sometime in the first week or two of classes. It will be an opportunity for us to chat one-on-one for the first time, and to get to know each other a bit more.

Interaction outside of class
Office hours: My office hours are posted above. They will be conducted on a first-come, first-served basis, and by appointment, with appointments taking precedence. You should feel absolutely free to come to them and discuss the course, the material, the assignments, or philosophy.

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Assignments
(for policies on all assignments and on specific assignments, see “Policies” section below)

Exam on the general ethical material (weeks 1 – 3): 15%
First short paper (4-6 pages on justice and access): 15%

Creativity, research, and investigation
- proficiency at conducting investigations - learning to ask the right questions, and to develop and assess methods and standards for answering those questions.
- solving problems using careful but innovative techniques and basing your conclusions on reliable evidence.

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Assignments
(for policies on all assignments and on specific assignments, see “Policies” section below)

Exam on the general ethical material (weeks 1 – 3): 15%
First short paper (4-6 pages on justice and access): 15%
Second short paper (4-6 pages on eugenics and human genetics): 20%
Third, longer paper (7-9 pages on end-of-life decision-making): 30%
Pair presentation: 10%
Participation and conduct: 10%

Exam: 15%
In class, Monday of 4th week (4/17)
This exam will cover the material in the Weston text, Beauchamp & Walters Ch. 1, and associated readings. The purpose is to demonstrate your understanding of the components and underlying framework of the ethical concepts and tools, your grasp of the significance of these things, and your ability to apply the tools and concepts for yourself. Without a proficiency in these areas, you wouldn’t be able to go on to gain the skills and abilities this course ultimately aims to give you, since you would lack the necessary framework, recognition of motivations, and basic ethical decision-making skills.

The exam will be a combination of types of questions (true/false, multiple choice, identification, mapping, short answer, and so on). I will give you a study guide ahead of time, and conduct a study session outside of class. I will be grading this exam primarily on the basis of whether you have accurately, clearly, and thoroughly performed tasks such as recognition, classification, illustration, and application of terms, concepts, and tools studied.

Papers: 15%, 20%, and 30%
You will be writing two relatively short (4-6 page) papers for this course, and one somewhat longer (7-9 page) paper. They will be on topics relating to the main biomedical topics (justice & access; eugenics & human genetics; and end-of-life decision-making). These papers will be on topics you will construct and submit yourselves, although I will be open to providing a topic for you if you prefer that.

The point of each of these papers is to construct and present a philosophical argument for an ethical thesis regarding a particular biomedical issue. One goal is to apply for yourself the principles of reasoning, insight, philosophical writing, and argumentation modeled and taught in this class. The other goal is to craft a carefully considered position on an issue, grappling with fundamental problems in your own way.

Sharat and I will be able to look at rough drafts, either turned in or during office hours; I will let you know details as the time gets nearer. I also encourage you to run rough drafts by each other or your peers at the Writing Center, even if I do not require you to do so. Whether I look at them or not, rough drafts and outlines of each of your papers will be due along with the final drafts.

I will grade these papers based on several main areas of assessment. The most important thing is that they perform the goals they’re meant to perform adequately, but there are various aspects of a paper that make that happen. These include organization, accuracy, thoroughness, clarity, accessibility, depth of interpretation, success of illustration by example, and strength of reasons presented.

Your topic proposals will be due the class after the material for that paper has been completed (6th week, 8th week, and 10th week) and your final drafts due a week after the proposals are submitted (7th week, 9th week, and exam week).
Pair presentation: 10%

In weeks 6, 8, and 10, time will be set aside for presentations by pairs of students on sets of topics from the Beauchamp & Walters text other than those we’ll be studying as a class. You will choose your topic from a sign-up sheet that I will bring to class. In the presentation, your pair will present the major issue and concern of your chosen topic and find a way to help the rest of the class apply their ethical thinking to the topic (you’ll design your presentation in consultation with me and/or Sharat). These sessions will last 15-20 minutes each (depending on the number of groups). Each group will read, in advance, one extra chapter or chapter section that will not be read by the rest of the class.

These presentations will function to help you explore a biomedical issue more independently. Presenting your thoughts to the class will let you have the experience of constructing a thought process that is coherent and engaging, and them have the experience of learning more about a topic they otherwise would not be studying. Your ideas on the issue should be designed to be truly helpful to both yourselves and your classmates.

Team members will evaluate their own and each other’s performance on the following dimensions: organization, acceptance of responsibility, initiative/motivation, creativity, task completion, attendance, collaboration, participation, attitude, independence, communication, and responsiveness. I will evaluate the presentations based on the following dimensions: appropriate incorporation of reading material or outside information (if warranted), presentation of values, principles, or case studies (if warranted), breadth (didn’t try to do too much or too little), accuracy of representation of others’ views, clarity, quality of presentation of arguments, helpfulness of examples or illustrations (if any), overall mastery of the subject, depth of discussion, cooperation among team members, engagingness of presentation, success in getting the “audience” on board, organization, effectiveness, thoroughness, (appropriate) creativity or imagination, choice of most important aspects to focus on, incorporation of appropriate ethical tools, handling of discussion, division of labor.

Participation and conduct: 10%

Participation is expected. In a philosophy class of this kind, discussion is absolutely essential, and may be the way you learn most about the material. I know that participation is difficult for some people, but you can consider this a safe place to practice contributing to a group discussion, which you will surely need to do throughout your life. The rules for classroom civility and discourse (see below) will help make this an inviting place to contribute your voice.

I will keep general track of your contributions in class. Keep in mind that contributions can take various forms, including asking for clarification, participation in group work, and giving helpful examples. Keep in mind also that more does not necessarily mean better: those who excessively dominate discussions, speak disrespectfully, or otherwise use their voices in a negative way may be penalized for doing so. If you are in doubt, or if you are interested in advice about how to participate more effectively or more easily, ask me.

Your conduct in this class includes improvement and effort. It also includes issues of respectful behavior, such as tardiness, distracting behavior, or disrespectful behavior towards members of the class. See the “policies” section below for more information.

Policies

Attendance policy: Attendance is expected. Although it does not carry any formal weight in the grade, it will make a difference to your participation and conduct grade if you are absent excessively (more than a couple of times during the quarter). Absences will be excused for required sports activities or practices or for a dire personal circumstance.

Assignment responsibilities:
- It is your responsibility to retain copies of all assignments you turn in, in a reliable format.
- You must turn in your papers in class, with your name on the back, written legibly. This is so no biases of mine interfere with my grading of your work.
- If you turn in a paper late, by email (this is only possible with my permission), or in any other way that makes it differently turned in from those of the rest of the class members, you should not expect to get it back at the same time as everyone else.
- When you turn in your papers, you must turn in a copy of a rough draft and an outline of the paper (with your name written on the back of each). I cannot recommend outlining and revising philosophy papers enough, and so I want to make absolutely sure you’re doing both. An outline also sometimes helps me understand the intentions of your paper better.

Late assignment policy: An assignment that is between one hour and 24 hours late will receive a ½ grade reduction. An assignment that is between one day and two weeks late will receive a full grade reduction. Assignments will not be accepted more than two weeks late.

Changing grades: if you feel you have been assigned a grade unfairly or inaccurately, you should by all means talk to me about it. My only requirement is that you prepare an argument (a set of reasons and facts) before you do so.

Rules of civility and discourse

In this course, you will be expected to behave like what I’m sure you are – a civil person interested in entering into an atmosphere that is maintained to be courteous and respectful. Just so that my expectations are clear, let me express some specific guidelines. In order to create a smooth and harmonious learning community,

- take care not to disrupt class; please
- wait until class is over to pack up
- turn off cell phones
- do not look at any material other than class material
- stay awake during class
- arrive on time

- to allow everyone to stay focused on the class lecture or discussion,
  - only one person at a time in the class should be speaking. Side conversations are distracting for surrounding students and for me.

- to ensure the best possible environment for discussion, please
  - no “hogging the floor”
  - no blaming or shaming
  - no personal attacks
  - always respect the confidentiality of the classroom
  - keep your contributions aimed at our common goals: discovery, progress, and learning, not winning, making the “other side” look bad, or getting attention.

  § If you violate one of these discussion rules, I will likely point it out to you in class or afterwards.
  § If you think someone else is violating one of these discussion rules, I encourage you to raise the issue (without blaming, shaming, or personal attack!)

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**Academic Integrity**

“It is always important to think of the intellectual world as a community of mutual dependence, mutual helpfulness, mutual protectiveness, and common delight. We take ideas from others and we give them to others. We are indebted to others, and others are indebted to us. In sharing and acknowledging the community, we define ourselves more certainly as individuals. The ability to describe our sources is also an ability to define our originality and our own selves. All communities depend on generosity, trust, definition, and the proper use of sources is part of the mortar that holds the community of the mind together.”

- Richard Marius, Expository Writing Program, Harvard University

In this class, as in all classes at Kalamazoo College, we will be operating under the Honor System. It is important that you familiarize yourself with that system. You should also familiarize yourself with proper procedures for collaborating, doing research, and citing sources. I expect each of you to visit my webpage and read the essay there called “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It” (http://kzoo.edu/~mcdowell/Academic_integrity_and_plagiarism.htm). Should you have any questions about citations, plagiarism, or honor system issues, please visit or contact me.

Any assignment you turn in that I find to violate academic integrity, either through dishonesty, plagiarism, lack of appropriate citations, or unauthorized collaboration, will receive a grade of 0. Any further instance of a violation of academic integrity will be punished by a failing grade in the class as a minimum sanction.[1]

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**A note on criticism and respect**

In this class, we will be discussing issues that most people find important, and on which many people have strong opinions. We will not be merely exchanging opinions, but will be seeking the truth. In that spirit, everyone’s contributions will be both respected and open to thoughtful criticism. We will be approaching other views – and our own – with an open-minded but critical eye. The focus will be on providing and assessing arguments for positions, to try to come to the most thoughtful position possible on these questions. Be careful not to take it personally if a view that you put forward is criticized; this is helpful if what we’re after is really solving the problems.

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**Special needs**

If you have any special needs that I can accommodate, please let me know as soon as possible.

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**Schedule of Readings**

This schedule is tentative. Any changes will be announced in class and by email and/or on the Moodle site. The reading assignments listed for each day must be completed before that class. Readings are found in your textbooks as indicated.

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**WEEK ONE**

M 3/27  Introduction to Class, Ethics, Philosophy, and Biomedical Ethics

W 3/29  Weston Ch. 1, B&W Ch. 1 pgs. 1-7
F 3/31  Weston Ch. 2, B&W Ch. 1 pgs. 7-12, Pojman, “Who’s To Judge? Ethical Relativism” (on reserve)

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**WEEK TWO**

M 4/3  B&W Ch. 1 pgs 12-21
W 4/5  B&W Ch. 1 pgs. 21-33
F 4/7  Weston Chs. 3 & 4

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**WEEK THREE**

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PART TWO: JUSTICE AND HEALTH CARE

W 4/19
Introduction: B&W pgs. 39 – 46
Just health care and the right to health care:
Daniels, “Is There a Right to Health Care and, If So, What Does It Encompass?” (B&W 46)
Veatch, “Justice, the Basic Social Contract, and Health Care” (B&W 53)
Buchanan, “The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care” (B&W 59)

F 4/21
Engelhardt, “Rights to Health Care, Social Justice, and Fairness in Health Care Allocations” (B&W 64)

PART THREE: EUGENICS AND HUMAN GENETICS

W 5/3
Introduction: B&W pgs. 451-456
Eugenics Programs in the Twentieth Century:
Kevles, “Eugenics and Human Rights” (B&W 457)
U.S. Supreme Court, Buck v. Bell (B&W 460)
Gould, “Carrie Buck’s Daughter” (B&W 462)
Glover, “Eugenics: Some Lessons from the Nazi Experience” (B&W 467)

F 5/5
The Human Genome Project:
Collins and McKusick, “Implications of the Human Genome Project for Medical Science” (B&W 473)
Watson, “Genes and Politics” (B&W 479)
Buchanan, et. al., “From Chance to Choice: Genetics and Justice” (B&W 485)
Paabo, “The Human Genome and Our View of Ourselves” (B&W 496)

WEEK EIGHT
M 5/15
PRESENTATIONS 2
Paper 1 topic proposals due
NEW SPECIALLY PROPOSED TOPIC:

Kass, “Is There a Right to Die?” (B&W 191)

WEEK NINE

M 5/22  Kass, “Is There a Right to Die?” (B&W 191)

W 5/24  The moral foundations of public policy on physician-assisted death:

        Brock, “Voluntary Active Euthanasia” (B&W 216)

        Arras, “Physician-Assisted Suicide: A Tragic View” (B&W 225)

F 5/26  Public policy in the Netherlands on physician-assisted death:

        Jochemsen and Keown, “Voluntary Euthanasia under Control? Further Empirical Evidence from the Netherlands” (B&W 235)

        Van Delden, “Slippery Slopes in Flat Countries – A Response” (B&W 241)

WEEK TEN

M 5/29  [Memorial Day holiday]

W 5/31  Palliation and other alternatives to physician-assisted death:

        Gert, Culver, and Clouser, “An Alternative to Physician-Assisted Suicide” (B&W 244)

        Palliative options of last resort:

        Quill, Lo, and Brock, “A Comparison of Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking, Terminal Sedation, Physician, Assisted Suicide, and Voluntary Active Euthanasia” (B&W 252)

F 6/2  PRESENTATIONS 3

Paper 3 topic proposals due

[1] I owe some of the phrasing in this statement to Prof. Vaughn Maatman