PHIL 305: Biomedical Ethics  
Spring 2008  
Syllabus

MWF 11:50-1:05  
UL 306

Instructor: Dr. Ashley McDowell  
Office: Humphrey House 202  
Office phone: 337-7077  
Cell phone: 303-6321 (for urgent circumstances only, please – and before 9 pm)  
email: mcdowell@kzoo.edu or ashley.mcdowell@gmail.com  
Office hours: MWF 1:15-2:15; Tues 2:00-3:00 and by appointment, except on Thursdays (unless there is an emergency)

Note on Moodle: you must log on to this website, and you'll probably be visiting it frequently – go to https://moodle.kzoo.edu/ and find our course.

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.

Texts:  
Tom Beauchamp et. al., Contemporary Issues in Bioethics, 7th ed. (“Beauchamp”)  
Anthony Weston, A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox, 2nd ed. (“Weston”)

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, 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. We'll go through the Weston text quickly, then come back to focus on particular chapters in conjunction with sections on the biomedical issues.

The selections in the Beauchamp 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 health (especially on the right to health care and issues of social justice and public policy); biotechnology and bioscience (in particular, genetic enhancement and bioscience issues); death and dying (including the right to die and physician-assisted death); and eugenics and human genetics (including genetics and society and genetics and behavior). In addition, you will do a small group presentation and project in which you will explore an additional biomedical ethical issue (chosen from among the other issues in the Beauchamp text).

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 clearly 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 I expect you to achieve:**

I want you to learn how to do philosophy, and applied ethics in particular; to gain appreciation for biomedical ethics and its issues and arguments; and to learn the views and arguments of the specific academic philosophers we'll study. You will learn about various ethical tools, and learn how to apply all those things for yourself on cases and 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 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. You will also submit various work, as well as comments and discussion contributions, on the Moodle site outside of class.

It will be expected that you will 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 done under the assumption that everyone has made a sincere effort to understand the reading, so doing so will make these activities much more fruitful for you and your classmates.

You must bring with you to class whatever text we are working on for that day.

**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.

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

Reflections Essays: 40% (5% each)

Every week from Week 2 to Week 9, you’ll turn in reflections essays on the material we’ve been covering. These are essays that engage with the material in a sophisticated way that shows genuine effort and comprehension, but in a format that is informal and involves a lot of self-directed reflection. These are not journal entries, nor should they be turned in unless they have been carefully crafted and revised. I’ll provide a series of questions to focus you and launch your reflection, but there will be a good amount of flexibility in what your reflections essays focus on.

Your personal experiences are a crucial part of your reflections, but these experiences must be subject to your analysis and should make comparisons and connections to our readings. Be ready to devote meaningful time to writing these essays. I do not expect polished papers, with things like thesis statements and conclusions. Rather, I’m looking for good quality, thorough reflections that include consideration of deeper implications as well as appropriate and effective references to the readings. I’m also looking for genuine engagement and effort to make connections – think about whether your writing reveals the risks that lead to striking insights.

Group project – presentation and associated materials: 15%

In Week 10, you’ll do group presentations on sets of topics from the Beauchamp 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 group 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). These sessions will last around 20 minutes each (depending on the number of groups). Each group will read, in advance, an 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.

You will also construct a web page or web-postable document that complements your presentation, and you’ll each write a reflection on the topic and the experience.

Team members will evaluate their own and each other’s performance on dimensions such as acceptance of responsibility, initiative/motivation, creativity, and communication. I will evaluate the presentations and associated materials based on dimensions such as incorporation of course material, clarity, effectiveness, and originality or creativity.

Final essay: 15%

You will be writing one final essay for the course, due during exam week, on a course topic of your choosing (in consultation with me). The format and length of this essay are flexible, and will again be determined by your choice of a project. Weston has some nice things to say on p. 447 about different styles of writing that might be legitimate in an ethics context, and you might look at the essays he lists there to start getting some ideas. Some possibilities include a traditional thesis argument paper, a personal reflection, a piece of reporting, or a paper that has as its aim one of those Weston presents, such as “getting unstuck” or “taking a stand.”

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.

Final oral exam: 10%

During finals week, I will conduct individual oral exams with each of you in order to assess the depth of your comprehension and abilities in biomedical ethics. You’ll get a chance to specify ahead of time a couple of the main topics on which we’ll focus. The idea behind this exam is not to check and see what you’ve memorized, or how well you can recall details “on the fly.” The concept is a simple one: if you have carefully read the material, paid attention in class, participated in discussion, and thought about what we’ve been studying, you ought to be able to talk about what you’ve studied and what you think about it in an intelligent and informed way.

This exam will take the form of a conversation on the material in which I ask you questions designed to let you show me how much you have understood and considered. For instance, I might ask you which approach to one of the issues you preferred, and why; or to explain to me in general terms the difference between those approaches. I might ask you to tell me what you think is the most troubling aspect of the issue, or whether you think it will be resolved in the near
future. One model to think of in connection with the oral exam is a medical school interview, in which the interviewers want to get a feel for how well you’ve thought about certain issues, and how well you could think about others.

I will give you more information about this as the time gets nearer.

**Participation and demonstrated preparedness: 20%**

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.

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, posting on the Moodle site, 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.

Demonstrated preparedness includes evidence of your having read the assignments carefully, thought about and tried to answer any study questions or tasks I’ve given, prepared questions or comments in advance of class, and kept up with ongoing work such as your group presentation and your final essay.

If you want to know how you’re doing on this, or want to talk about how to do this well, get in touch with me.

**Policies**

**Attendance policy:**

Attendance is expected. Although it does not carry any formal weight in the grade, it will make a significant 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:**

All assignments must be turned in as hard (paper) copies – no emailed assignments will be accepted except by special permission. It is your responsibility to retain copies of all assignments you turn in, in a reliable format.

Late assignments for which you do not have a strong, documented excuse will be assessed a penalty of at least a 10% reduction in grade, and more if significantly late. Let me know right away if you’re turning something in late or missing class, and we’ll work out the details.

*A note on 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.

**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 own 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. 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. [2]

**Special needs**
If you have any special needs that I can accommodate, please let me know as soon as possible.
Schedule of Readings

Any changes to this schedule 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 or on Moodle as indicated.

In the Weston text, “parts” are the roman-numeral-designated sections including multiple chapters. For instance, the reading for Wednesday of Week 1 is Weston Part I – this means you should read Chapters 1-5. In the Beauchamp text, “parts” of chapters are sections of readings with all-caps headings. For instance, the reading for Wednesday of Week 3 is Ch. 5 part 2: “The problem of justifying abortion.” This means you should read the articles under that heading – in this case, Marquis, Thomson, Brody, and Warren. If you will be reading only some readings from a part of a chapter, those readings will be specified. The Weston readings that accompany the Beauchamp readings are meant to be reviewed for special application to the day’s readings and topic.

**WEEK ONE**
M    Introduction to Class, Ethics, Philosophy, and Biomedical Ethics

**PART ONE:**
INTRODUCTION TO THE ETHICAL TOOLBOX

W    Weston Part I, “Getting Started”
     Handout: “Morality Play”
F    Weston Part II, “Moral Values,” Chs. 6-8
     Handout: “Are You Officially Ethical?”

**WEEK TWO**
M    Weston Part II, “Moral Values,” Chs. 9-10
W    Weston Part III, “Ethical Practice”
F    Weston Part IV, “Making a Difference”
     Cummins, “Minds in Groups” (on Moodle)

**WEEK THREE**
M    Beauchamp Ch. 1
W    Beauchamp Ch. 5 part 2: “The Problem of Justifying Abortion”
F    Presentation groups – first meeting – you must have read your group’s readings by today

**PART TWO:**
JUSTICE AND HEALTH CARE

**WEEK FOUR**
M    Beauchamp Ch. 8 part 1 – first half: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Daniels
     Weston Chs. 5, 19
W    Beauchamp Ch. 8 part 1 – second half: Pogge, Powers & Faden
     Weston Ch. 20
F    Beauchamp Ch. 8 part 2 – first half: Veatch, Buchanan
     Weston Ch. 17

**WEEK FIVE**
M    Beauchamp Ch. 8 part 2 – second half: Engelhardt
     Weston Chs. 7, 13
W    Beauchamp Ch. 8 part 3 – first half: Ubel, Brock
     Weston Ch. 2

**PART THREE:**
BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOSCIENCE
PART FOUR:
DEATH AND DYING

F  Beauchamp Ch. 6 parts 1 and 2

WEEK SEVEN
M  Beauchamp Ch. 6 parts 1 and 2 continued (review)
   Weston Ch. 4
W  Beauchamp Ch. 6 part 3
   Weston Ch. 6
F  Beauchamp Ch. 6 part 4

PART FIVE:
EUGENICS AND HUMAN GENETICS

WEEK EIGHT
M  Beauchamp Ch. 4 part 2
   Weston Ch. 16
W  floating day for DOGL
F  Beauchamp Ch. 4 part 5
   Weston Chs. 10, 15

WEEK NINE
M  No class – Memorial Day holiday
W  Final project preparation day
   Weston Chs. 9, 18
F  Presentation preparation day

WEEK TEN
M  PRESENTATIONS
W  PRESENTATIONS
F  PRESENTATIONS

EXAM WEEK

Oral exam
Final essay due

[1] This assignment type is indebted to work I have seen by Amelia Katanski, Kim Cummings, and Bruce Mills.
[2] I owe some of the phrasing in this statement to Vaughn Maatman