

Philosophy 105

Bioethics

Professor: Bryce Huebner
Office: 234 New North
Office hours: M 12:00-13:30, and by appointment

Course meets:
Monday & Wednesday 14:00 - 15:15
Walsh 496

This course is a case-centered introduction to some of the most important issues in contemporary bioethics. Bioethics is a big field, and it would be impossible to address all of the important issues in bioethics one class. It is also a massively interdisciplinary field, making use of research and methodologies from fields such as anthropology, disability studies, law, literature, medicine, nursing, philosophy, political science, psychology, public health, religious studies, and more. While we will engage with many of these disciplines, our primary focus will be on philosophical methods and perspectives. We will work to develop tools and techniques for doing philosophy well. We will work together to find strategies for answering difficult bioethical questions, and we will try to develop good habits for responding to the arguments that are provided by others. We will also improve our abilities to understand and critically analyze difficult arguments. This process should help you to develop and defend your own positions on these issues. But along the way, it will also provide you with resources to address theoretical issues that arise across other academic disciplines as well.

Required Texts: Gregory Pence, *Medical Ethics: Accounts of Groundbreaking Cases*, 7th Edition, McGraw Hill (Make sure that you have the right edition!); additional reading will be linked from this syllabus.

Assignments: Over the course of this semester, your performance in the class will be assessed in the following ways:

- 60 points** You must write four short reports on current bioethical issues in the media. These must be no more than 750 words; and each report will be worth a maximum of **15 points** (Due 1/30, 2/27, 3/27, and 5/4).
- 30 points** There will be four, short, unannounced in-class quizzes over the course of the semester; each will be worth a maximum of **10 points**; and only your best *three* quizzes will count toward your final grade.
- 10 points** You must display evidence that you are engaging critically with class material (as revealed by things like in-class participation, contributed discussion questions, or discussions with me outside of class).

Your short papers must be submitted anonymously through Blackboard, with no identifying information other than your GUID#. If additional identifying information is included, the assignment will not be graded. Psychological research suggests that subtle prejudices can influence our evaluations. Anonymous grading strategies help to guarantee that all grading is carried out in a way that is fair and reasonable. Since your names will never appear, every assignment will be graded exclusively on the basis of the words on the page, focusing on the clarity and accuracy of the presentation, and the strength of the evidence you present for your claims.

Grading Criteria: In general, a 'B+' paper 1) will clearly articulate the claims being defended, 2) will be well organized, 3) will rely on clear evidence and arguments in support of these claims, and 4) will be stylistically clear. A 'B' grade will be weaker in one of these areas—but still satisfactory—and an 'A-' will excel in one of these areas. A 'C' grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in one or two of these categories; a 'D' grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in 3 or 4 categories or omits one altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for the truth of that thesis). An 'A' grade will only be awarded where a paper excels in each category, exhibiting a clear capacity for doing philosophy.

Late paper and make-up policy: The deadlines for assignments are firm. Extensions will only be given where evidence of illness or a family emergency is submitted prior to the due date. Unless an extension is granted, assignments will automatically be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

Appealing a grade: You may appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent your work. Appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, and they must provide a compelling argument for re-evaluation. I will do my best to

return exams promptly; out of fairness, you will do your best to make appeals for re-evaluation in a timely manner (appeals must be made *no sooner than 24 hours* after an assignment is returned, and *no later than one week* after it is returned). A decision to reevaluate is not a guarantee of a better grade, it can: 1) raise the grade; 2) lower the grade; or, 3) yield no change.

Use of external resources: To succeed in this course, you must learn how to read and reason carefully, and you must learn how to recover arguments from difficult texts. You will not have to read anything beyond what is assigned for the course; and the best way to develop the skills required to do well in this course may depend on discussing the things we read with others. Beyond trying to clarify your thoughts by thinking out-loud in class, you may also want to get together in small groups to think through the issues we discuss; alternatively, you might *tweet* your philosophical thoughts, argue about the texts that you have been reading on Facebook, or start a *Tumblr* about other kinds of minds (who knows, you might even have other ideas about to work through your philosophical thoughts). This is all acceptable, and it may help you to understanding the issues we will be discussing. People have very different styles of thinking and learning; and you should use whatever resources suit you best to develop the skills that you need for succeeding in this class. But if you have cool ideas, please share them!

Academic honesty: When it comes time to write your papers, you must use the skills you have developed by thinking through the relevant issues on your own. You have all signed the Georgetown University Honor pledge and have agreed to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with both the letter and the spirit of the pledge, and I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty. The Honor Code applies to all relevant aspects of this course and it is the responsibility of each student to inform herself or himself of the relevant principles, and to abide by them throughout the semester. Of course, the key to avoiding dire consequences is to think for yourself, and do your own work on your papers. If you have any questions about what the Honor Pledge requires, please do not hesitate to ask me.

The writing center: The writing center provides one-on-one assistance at various stages of the writing process. All writers, even the most accomplished, can benefit from their assistance on issues as diverse as topic development, organization, and strategies for revising. To make an appointment, see: <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu>.

Accommodations and diversity: There is a great deal of diversity in the teaching and learning styles that one finds in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a particular course. But fortunately, there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to accommodate the multitude of different learning styles that people have to the best of my abilities. So please, stop by and talk to me in office hours, or make an appointment. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students who are on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please stop by my office and let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of the services provided by the university. Finally, if you find over the course of the semester that additional accommodations are necessary, please let me know.

Cell Phones and Computers: Be sure to turn off the ringers on your phones when you come to class. You should also note that computer use has a detrimental effect on the retention and integration of information. In every psychological investigation that I am aware of, people who use a pen and paper to take notes outperform those who use computers. You may use your computer for note-taking and for other purposes that are consistent with the content of the course (e.g., looking up quotes from the reading); but I would appreciate it if you would have the maturity to refrain from using your computer for non-academic purposes while in the class. Also, please remember that your computer use can be distracting to others, and it can create an environment in which it is difficult for them to learn; so, please be respectful.

Mind your manners: Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions we will be discussing may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we

are sure to find among the members of this class. But I will only be able to do this if each of you helps to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

Tentative course schedule:

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| 1/7 | Intro (No reading) |
| Reproduction | |
| 1/12-1/14 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 6 (Assisted Reproduction) |
| 1/21 | Erik Parens & Adrienne Asch, "The Disability Rights Critique of Prenatal Testing" |
| 1/26 | (Optional) Amrita Pande, "Not an 'angel', not a 'whore'" |
| 1/28 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 5 (Abortion) |
| 2/2 | Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" ; Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" |
| Death and the End of Life | |
| 2/4 | Dax's Case (film) |
| 2/9 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 2 (Requests to die: non-terminal patients) |
| 2/11 | Ron Amundson & Gayle Taira, "Our Lives and Ideologies" |
| 2/18 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 3 (Requests to die: Terminal patients) |
| 2/23-2/25 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 4 (Comas) |
| Issues of Justice | |
| 3/2-3/4 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 12 (Just distribution of organs) |
| 3/16-3/18 | Susan Sherwin, "Gender, race, and class in the delivery of healthcare" |
| 3/23 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 15 (Involuntary Psychiatric Commitment) |
| 3/25 | (Optional) David Rosenhan, "On being sane in insane places" |
| Medical Experiments and Research Ethics | |
| 3/30-4/1 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 7 (Embryos, stem cells & cloning) |
| 4/8-4/13 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 10 (Medical research on vulnerable human subjects) |
| 4/15 | How to Survive a Plague (film) |
| 4/20 | Gregory Pence, Chapter 9 (Medical research on animals) |
| 4/22 | Lori Gruen, "Should animals have rights?" |