

Philosophy 309 – Bioethics

Fall 2017

The Basics:

Instructor: Tom Wilk
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 Office Location: TBD

Meeting Location: Nguyen 1110
 Meeting Times: TR 12:00-1:15 PM
 Office Hours: TR 1:30-2:30 PM
 Website: Blackboard

What's this class about?

In the course of a human life a great many moral issues arise out of our confrontation with our biology. We face decisions about bringing new human life into the world, shaping our future children, altering our own bodies, the provision of healthcare and the conduct of medical research, planning for old age and incompetency, and, of course, death. This class explores the moral dimension of these decisions.

What we'll be reading:

Steinbock, et al. *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*. 8th ed. (McGraw-Hill) ISBN: 9780073535869
 Dworkin, Ronald. *Life's Dominion*. (Knopf) ISBN: 9780307787910
 Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal*. (Picador) ISBN: 9781250081247
 Any additional readings will be posted to Blackboard or otherwise available online.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the course, successful students will:

- 1) demonstrate familiarity with prominent issues, concepts, and principles in bioethics;
- 2) summarize moral arguments in their own words;
- 3) evaluate and challenge moral arguments in writing and discussion;
- 4) deploy bioethical concepts and principles in arguments defending their own positions; and
- 5) build confidence in their ability to publicly discuss moral and public policy issues.

Evaluation

Participation	10 %	Daily
Argument Summaries (400-600 words) (x3)	20 %	Up to you
Reading Reflections (300-500 words) (x4)	20 %	Up to you
Final Paper Proposal	10 %	October 3
Final Paper Outline	10 %	October 31
Paper Presentation	10 %	Final two weeks of class
Final Paper (5-7 pages)	20 %	December 14, 1:14 PM

Argument Summaries and Reading Reflections

You will complete **three (3)** Argument Summaries and **four (4)** Reading Reflections throughout the semester. These assignments must be submitted via Blackboard *before the beginning of the class session in which we are discussing the reading assignment on which you are writing*.

Assignment specs for the Summaries and Reflections can be found in *Appendix A*. These assignments will be graded Pass/Fail, and it will be up to you to ensure that you have *successfully* completed the required number of assignments by the end of the semester. **PLEASE PLAN ACCORDINGLY.**

Final Paper Project

The Proposal, Outline, Presentation, and Final paper are components of a single project that you will carry out over the course of the semester. Details are in *Appendix B*.

Course Policies:

Reading and Preparedness: You're required to come to class having read the assignment for the day *in its entirety*, preferably twice. This is a discussion based seminar and you will be expected to carry your weight.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments: Reading assignments will be posted on Blackboard. Please check the online reading list on a regular basis to be sure that you're reading at the right pace. The assignment schedule is subject to amendment to reflect the natural pace of the course.

Discussion: Do your best to **be part of the discussion**. I know it's not always easy and it's not everyone's forte. Sometimes you might not have much to say and sometimes you might feel that the discussion has moved on before you've had time to fully formulate your thought. These are some hurdles we need to try to overcome this semester. Not every thought expressed is going to be groundbreaking, well-formed, and timely. That's OK; the important thing is that you say something in an effort to contribute to the discussion. **My job** is to draw out the relevancy of what you've said and connect it to the thoughts we're discussing. I'm here to help the discussion, not judge your contributions.

That being said, be prepared to **defend what you say**. Philosophy is sometimes thought of as combative. I think that's a bit strong, but it certainly requires debate and thoughtful discussion. Toward this end, I (and your colleagues) will often ask you to explain what you've said in greater detail, to clarify your position or your understanding of the position expressed in the reading, or to offer reasons in defense of a claim you've made. You should not take offense to being asked to defend your views. *I only ask you to do so because I think you're capable of doing so; it's a sign of respect and the heart of all reasonable discussion and debate.*

Finally, **be kind and courteous** to your colleagues. We're striving to create a *community of inquiry* in our classroom, in which everyone feels comfortable expressing his or her views and questioning those of others. We'll be discussing some sensitive topics on which some folks will have very strong opinions. A successful discussion will often require that we flirt with the borders of propriety in our discussions. The only way we can have discussions of this nature in a productive way is if we always strive to be courteous to each other. We will not cut each other off. Everyone will be heard, and we will *listen carefully* to the views of others and interpret them charitably.

Late Work Policy: Reflections and Summaries **will not** be accepted after the beginning of class on the day they are due. Final paper proposals, outlines, and final papers not submitted on time will be assessed a **1/3 letter grade penalty** for every day they are late. ***Of course, on occasion, life happens.*** If a circumstance arises that might interfere with the timely completion of your assignments, please notify me immediately and we will discuss options for amending the timetable. **DO NOT** wait until the night before the assignment is due to contact me. I understand that we all

face many time and resource constraints, and I aim to be as reasonable as possible in this regard. I ask that you do the same.

Additional (but IMPOPTANT) Course Policies:

- Please **turn off your phone, laptop, and tablet** in class. If you feel that you must use a laptop or tablet for note taking, you need to talk to me about it in office hours before you will be permitted to do so.
- Please do not send **text messages, emails, tweets, Facebook messages, etc.**, during class.
- If you feel the need to **appeal the grade** you have earned on an assignment, you must submit your appeal to me *in writing* within two days of the grade being posted. The written appeal must explain in detail why you believe the grade on your assignment is in error and must present evidence to support your argument.
- **CITATIONS:** Sloppy or inconsistent citation of sources (including your textbook) is a form of plagiarism. I will expect that **all of your assignments**, including your response papers, will properly cite the materials used in writing them. Any citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago) will suffice; just be consistent. **If you have questions about proper citation practices, ask me at the beginning of the semester.** Resources explaining various citation styles and practices are available online from JHU Libraries: <http://guides.library.jhu.edu/citing>. I'd also encourage you to check out the Purdue OWL site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>. Finally, there are some browser plug-ins available that will manage citations and bibliographies for you. These are great little time-saving tools, and I strongly encourage you to download one. **Zotero** is my favorite tool for maintaining a database of everything I've read and might cite and for managing in-text citations and bibliographies. It's available free to anyone at: <http://www.zotero.org>.
- **Disabilities Support Services:** Students who may be in need of support services should contact Homewood Student Affairs to establish eligibility and to arrange appropriate accommodations: <http://ds.gmu.edu/>
- **Counseling Services:** Should you need counseling services or just need someone to listen, please know that the Counseling and Psychological Services office is here to provide emotional support and assistance for your mental health needs as you make your way through your time at Mason. Call: (703) 993-2380 or visit <https://caps.gmu.edu/>
- **Security:** In the event of an emergency, shelter in place unless our location is effected, in which case follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter.
- ***This syllabus can be amended at any time by the instructor.*** Amendments will be posted to the course website.

Appendix A

- 1) **Reading Reflections:** A successful reading reflection focuses on an *interesting* passage of the text, reflects on the author's intent in the passage, and relates the author's view to one's own views on the topic under discussion. It should answer the following questions:
- What is the author saying in the passage?
 - Why is the author saying this?
 - What is your initial but thoughtful reaction to the claim the author is making? How does it relate to your own views?

In order to be successful, a reading reflection *must*:

- Include a copy of the passage on which you are reflecting (This should be no more than a paragraph long and is not included in the word count.).
- Be 300-500 words. (INCLUDE a word count in document you submit.)
- Be on one of the readings assigned for the day it is submitted.
- Be *free* (or nearly so) of grammatical, spelling, and syntactical errors.
- Be clear and easily readable.
- Include appropriate citations for *all quoted material* including the selected passage.
- Be *interesting*.

- 2) **Argument Summaries:** A successful argument summary summarizes the *main argument* of the text in the student's own words, in paragraph (not bullet) form focusing on the most central parts of the argument. You should indicate the conclusion (i.e., the thesis of the essay), the main premises of the argument, and the support the author provides for those premises. If the author of the text is responding to another author, it also briefly summarizes that author's position. Because of the restricted length, you will not be able to include every possibly relevant detail; you need to make tactical decisions about which information is necessary to making the author's point clear. It should answer the following questions:

- What is the thesis of the essay (what is the conclusion of the argument)?
- What are the main premises supporting the thesis?
- What evidence supports those premises? (One need not spell out this evidence in detail; it is sufficient to *tell us* how the author supports her argument rather than to reconstruct the argument in full.)

In order to be successful, a reading reflection *must*:

- Be 400-600 words.
- Be on one of the readings assigned for the day it is submitted.
- Be *free* (or nearly so) of grammatical, spelling, and syntactical errors.
- Be clear, concise, and easily readable.
- Include appropriate citations for *all quoted material* including the selected passage.
- Clearly reconstruct the argument presented in assigned reading.

Grade Scale: Successful completion of three (3) summaries and four (4) reflections earns an 'A'. For each Summary or Reflection fewer than that, your grade for the relevant segment of the course is reduced by one letter grade, i.e., if you turn in only two summaries, your grade for the Argument Summaries will be a 'B' and similarly for reflections.

Appendix B

RESEARCH PROJECT

You will explore and critically analyze an ethical issue related to one or more of the topics of this course or a current issue in bioethics that you encounter outside of class. The issues you are considering in this course are matters of great debate among citizens, philosophers, policy makers and medical professionals. Your aim is to join this ongoing conversation bringing to bear your own perspective informed by our course work and your own research. Your task is to do research and contribute to society's ongoing moral debate. Your contribution should be original – as it should be informed by your own perspective – but it also needs to join the conversation by engaging with the current literature. I encourage you to seek me out during office hours to discuss possible topics before submitting your proposal.

PROPOSAL: ABSTRACT

(10 points; Due October 3)

Your **proposal** consists of an abstract in which you describe your project. How you go about this will depend on your chosen topic. You may focus on an ethical concept or principle, for example, examining how it should be understood and how it might guide future health care or health policy or practice. For example, how might the concept of dignity guide public health policy? How might it guide thinking about ethical end-of-life care? You may also examine a particular policy or practice in the life sciences, patient care, health care policy, public health practice or policy, or global health practice or policy, and identify and analyze specific ethical concerns. For example, what are the ethical considerations surrounding pre-natal genetic diagnosis? Or, what are the ethical implications of restrictions on abortion, specifically for fetuses diagnosed with Downs Syndrome? Or, do policy makers, health care institutions and professionals have obligations to patients' family members? What kinds and why? Do well-off countries have obligations to provide health services for migrants and/or refugees? Why or why not? Your options are wide open.

Having chosen a topic, you need to decide on an approach to that topic. What's your angle? What do you hope to convince your reader of? Do you think that it would be morally wrong for governments to intervene to try to curb population growth? Why? What sort of evidence do you hope to present to support your position?

Your **ABSTRACT** should explain:

- 1) whether your topic falls within research ethics, patient care ethics, public or global health ethics, or perhaps some combination;
- 2) why there has been (if there has been) and should be ethical attention given to these questions or concerns;
- 3) your specific questions or concerns; and
- 4) your early ideas for the position you want to take and the argument you want to make.

Recommended length: One or two paragraphs. Definitely no more than a single spaced page.

ABSTRACT EVALUATION

1. topic area (2)
2. why ethically significant according to others (2)
3. your ethical questions or concerns (2)
4. your position and argument sketch (3)
5. syntax, diction, spelling, punctuation (1)

OUTLINE WITH SELECTED REFERENCES**(20 points; Due October 31)**

Your **OUTLINE** should present the basic structure for your research paper and presentation (they'll be about the same). Not all the elements required for the paper are included in your outline. This is just the initial presentation of your topic. In most cases it should follow this basic structure:

Introduction

1. Identify & "motivate" the problem: What issue do you intend to discuss? Why is it morally pressing?
2. Introduce your thesis. What are you trying to convince your reader of? What's your position?

Ethical concerns and arguments identified in the literature

1. (They say...) Present what others have said about the issue in the literature you have reviewed: What are their positions? What reasons do they give for them?

Capture the richness of the debate and specific lines of ethical argument you find in the literature. This will include the philosophy and bioethics literature, and depending on your topic, also literature in medicine, nursing, public health, etc. Do not focus on just one line of argument. Instead, present the different positions that are represented in the literature. But do this strategically; the point is to set up your own position. Give particular focus to the position you're going to either defend (and extend) or argue against (your foil, as it were).

Your tentative argument

1. (I say...) Present your view and defend it with strong reasons. What is the evidence or what are the reasons in support of your thesis? This is where you're going to present your argument for the first time and, of course, somewhat tentatively at this early stage.

Objections

1. (One might object...) Identify at least one possible objection to your view.
2. (I reply...) Respond to these tentatively, explaining why the position you defend is the better one.

Implications

1. What do you think are the possible implications of your view? How should policy, practice, or research be different in light of your argument? This is not a policy class, so we are not looking for major detail here. Offer some general recommendations given what you know about the status quo and the possibilities for reform.

Be explicit in your use of appropriate ethical concepts and theories throughout!!!!

Recommended length: 2 pages, with subheadings and brief sentences for each element, not bullet points.

References: at least **four** references from the scholarly ethics literature when possible, annotated, with complete citations. You should also include references from relevant academic and professional journals (including global health, public health, medical, nursing, health policy journals as appropriate, and philosophy journals), along with philosophy and bioethics books related to your topic.

OUTLINE EVALUATION

1. Introduction (2)
2. Presentation of a range of ethical perspectives on issue (4)
3. Presentation of your tentative position and moral reasons (4)
4. Objections and clarification of why the moral reasons you offer are more persuasive (2)
5. Discussion of implications for policy & practice (1)
6. Integration of ethical theories and concepts (2)
7. Organization of the argument (2)
8. Syntax, diction, punctuation, paragraphing (1)
9. References (2)

RESEARCH PAPER

(25 points. Due December 14, 1:15 PM)

Your **RESEARCH PAPER** is the full presentation of your research and ethical argument. It should follow the structure of your Outline, but it will expand upon the basic information and arguments you provided there.

Introduction

1. Identify & “motivate” the problem: What issue do you intend to discuss? Why is it morally pressing?
2. Introduce your thesis. What are you trying to convince your reader of? What’s your position?
3. Give a concise summary of how the paper will be organized – a roadmap – to get to your conclusion.

Background information

1. Present any relevant background information (case law, statistics, existing or developing law, policy) to help orient the reader to the issue, its scope and significance. If this is related to a current news story, tell us what it is.

Ethical arguments identified in the literature

1. (They say...) Present what others have said about the issue in the literature you have reviewed: What are their positions? What reasons do they give for them? As in the outline, your focus should be on developing the arguments most relevant to what you are going to go on to say.

Your ethical argument

1. (I say...) Present your view and defend it with strong reasons. Begin by explaining the position you want to defend in detail. Then provide the strongest reasons you can for others to accept this position. This may include arguing against one of the positions presented in the last section or further developing one of those positions to fit a new kind of case. It will definitely involve engaging with that literature *in some way*.

Objections

1. (One might object...) Identify at least one and ideally, two or three possible objections to your view.
2. (I reply...) Respond to these, explaining why the position you defend is the better one.

Implications

1. Explain the implications of your view for our understanding of and approach to the issue. How should policy, practice, or research be different in light of your argument?

Be explicit in your use of appropriate ethical concepts and theories!!!!!!!!!!

Recommended length: 5-7 pages (12-point font, Times New Roman, 1.25" margins max, double space, no funny business with formatting).

References: Your final paper must contain a minimum of **four** references from the scholarly ethics literature (this may include pieces we read for class). It should also contain references from relevant academic and professional journals (including global health, public health, medical, nursing, health policy journals as appropriate, and philosophy journals), along with philosophy and bioethics books related to your topic. See *Appendix C*. Your citations should be consistent in either APA, MLA, or Chicago format.

RESEARCH PAPER EVALUATION

1. Introduction: statement of issue, why it's morally pressing, thesis (2)
2. Presentation of a range of ethical perspectives on issue (4)
3. Presentation of your position and support with strong moral reasons (4)
4. Integration of ethical theories and concepts (3)
5. Clarification of why your moral reasons are more persuasive than those given by others (2)
6. Discussion of implications for policy & practice (2)
7. Organization of the argument (3)
8. Syntax, diction, punctuation, paragraphing (3)
10. Referencing (2)

PRESENTATION EVALUATION

Your presentation will be based on your outline. You will be presenting your work in progress to the class in order to get feedback on how best to go on developing your arguments. You will have 10 minutes for your presentation.

1. Introduction: statement of issue, why it's morally pressing (1)
2. Presentation of others' arguments (2)
3. Presentation of your tentative position and moral reasons (2)
4. Objections and response (1)
5. Discussion of possible implications for policy & practice (2)
6. Integration of ethical theories and concepts (2)

Appendix C**RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH PROJECT**

The following bioethics and public health ethics journals include articles that count as scholarly ethics literature:

Bioethics
Developing World Bioethics
Hastings Center Report
International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics
Journal of Bioethical Inquiry
Journal of Clinical Ethics
Journal of Health Policy, Politics and Law
Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics
Journal of Medical Ethics
Journal of Medicine and Philosophy
Journal of Public Health Ethics
Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal

These journals - some philosophy and some health sciences - also contain useful scholarly articles. Articles that focus explicitly on ethics count as scholarly ethics literature:

American Journal of Public Health
British Medical Journal
Bulletin of the World Health Organization
Ethics
Globalization and Health
Health Affairs
Journal of the American Medical Association
The Lancet
New England Journal of Medicine
Nursing Ethics
Philosophy and Public Affairs
Science
Social Science and Medicine

Other excellent resources that can count as scholarly ethics literature:

- **Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, 4th edition (available online through the GMU library)
- **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (available online)
- *Publications and reports of governmental or non-governmental organizations and agencies engaged in research and policy work in global health and/or ethics. For example: Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, Nuffield Council on Bioethics.