

BIOETHICS
PHILOSOPHY 309
Fall 2017

Course Description: This course is an introduction to contemporary issues in bioethics. For most topics, we will consider moral arguments for and against various practices, and students will be encouraged to draw their own conclusions regarding the moral permissibility of these practices. In addition, we will study utilitarianism and Kantian ethics—two highly influential moral theories—with the aim of understanding how they can give us guidance when it comes to framing a moral issue, and how to think about the different issues in bioethics, in particular. No previous experience in philosophy or life-science is required.

Course Objectives: The objectives of the course are the following: a) to familiarize students with some of the current debates in bioethics, b) to develop analytical skills important for evaluating moral arguments, and c) to build confidence in participating in public discussions about moral and public policy issues.

Instructor: Derek Boyd
Office: 443 Robinson B
Hours: TR. 1:00 – 2:00 PM (and by appointment).
dboyd5@gmu.edu

Texts: ***All texts and reading materials are available on Blackboard***
-James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (McGraw Hill: 2003).
-Allen Buchanan, *Better Than Human* (Oxford University Press: 2011).
-Articles, handouts, videos, and podcasts available on Blackboard
(<http://mymason.gmu.edu>).

Grading:	Exam 1 (9/19)	15%
	Exam 2 (10/12)	15%
	Exam 3 (11/7)	15%
	Exam 4 (11/21)	15%
	Exam 5 (12/19)	15%
	In-class activities	10%
	Group presentation (TBA)	10%
	EITHER	
	First Short Paper (10/24) + Second Short Paper (12/5)	15%
	OR	
	Long Paper (12/5)	15%
	Participation/Attendance	5%

Percentages: The lowest exam is dropped. If you miss an exam—for any reason—the missed exam will be dropped. **There are no makeup exams.** So, if you miss two exams, only one of them will be dropped and the other will be recorded as “0.”

Exams: Exams consist of 16 multiple-choice questions (5 points each) and two essay questions (10 points each). Exams are not cumulative, so students will be held responsible only for the material covered since the previous exam. The material for which you are responsible includes all assigned readings, podcasts, videos, class handouts, lectures, and collaborate sessions. The exams will test your grasp or understanding of the material. I won't ask for your opinion on an ethical issue.

Study Guides: Study guides will be available at least one week before each exam. Study guides are intended to focus your attention and preparation on the fundamental aspects of the assigned readings, lectures, and other course material for which you are responsible. Exam questions will not be identical to the study guide questions (as a general rule, anyway). However, having a solid grasp of the material pointed to in the study guides should indicate that you are in good shape for the upcoming exam.

Papers: Students are required to write two 2-3 page essays OR one 4-5 page essay on a topic chosen from a list of topics. Papers are to be submitted to SafeAssign on Blackboard. Paper guidelines and topics will be made available later in the term.

Late Papers: Late papers will be penalized one letter-grade for each lecture-day they are late.

Makeup Exams: There are no makeup exams. If you miss an exam, the missed exam will count as your dropped exam. If you miss two exams, only one exam will be dropped and the other missed exam will be recorded as "0."

Group Presentations: Students are required to give a group presentation on a date to be determined sometime in the second half of the semester. Groups and Presentation Guidelines will be determined later in the semester and made available on Blackboard.

Missed Presentations: The schedule does not permit for rescheduling presentations, so students who miss their group presentation will receive a "0" for the assignment.

Participation and Attendance: Students are expected to attend every class and participate in class discussions. Your success or failure on this front will be reflected in your course grade. It is crucially important that you do all of the readings before class and do so with a critical eye. In addition, students should also watch any of the lectures on Blackboard that correspond to the day's reading prior to class.

Participation grades are out of 10 points, which are awarded based on my impression of your contribution to class discussions over the semester, including your participation in group assignments. In addition to these 10 points, your course grade may sway in your favor if you have made a positive impression on me through regular attendance and participation.

Your attendance-grade is calculated as follows: 0, 1, or 2 recorded absences = 15 points, 3 recorded absence = 10 points, 4 recorded absences = 0 points, 5 recorded absences = -30 points, 6 recorded absences = -60 points, and 7 or more recorded absences = a failing grade for the course. A recorded-absence is an absence—for any reason at all—on a day on which I record

absences. This includes absences due to illness, job-interviews, and family-emergencies. As such, it is not necessary for you to provide me with an explanation for why you missed class on a particular day—email, written, or otherwise.

Course-Grades: Course-grades will be determined according to the standard formula below. The numbers reflect the percentage of total points a student may earn by the end of the semester. There are a total of 500 possible points.

100 = A+ > 97, 97 > A > 93, 93 > A- > 90, 90 > B+ > 87, 87 > B > 83, 83 > B- > 80, 80 > C+ > 77, 77 > C > 73, 73 > C- > 70, 70 > D+ > 67, 67 > D > 63, 63 > D- > 60, 60 > F.

Classroom Etiquette: *Cell-phone use (except for purposes of polling) and eating (if heard) are not allowed during class time. Coffee is encouraged.*

Email: I strongly prefer to speak with students in person about everything relating to the course. So please limit your emails to the setting and cancellation of appointments. It is not necessary to email me if you will be, or have been, absent on a day. I assume that you have a good reason.

Important Dates:

Last Day to Add (Full-Semester Course): September 5.

Last Day to Drop (Full-Semester Course): September 29.

Selective Withdrawal Period (Full-Semester Course): October 2 – 27.

Office of Disability Services: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

Academic Integrity: Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

Mason Email Accounts: Students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

Writing Center: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>

TENTATIVE READING SCHEDULE

*****Instructor reserves the right to modify the reading schedule and assignments.**

WEEK 1 Introductory Matters

(8/29) “Should College Football Be Banned” (in “Documents and Multimedia” on Blackboard).

-Debate on college football: <http://video.pbs.org/video/2365004001/>.

(8/31) -“Evaluating Arguments.”

-Chapter 1 of James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (McGraw Hill: 2003).

WEEK 2 Abortion

(9/5) -Judith Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Vol. 1, No. 1, 1971).

(9/7) -Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” *Journal of Philosophy* (Vol. 86, No. 4, 1989).

WEEK 3 Killing and Letting Die

(9/12-9/14) -Chapter 7 of James Rachels, *The End of Life* (Oxford University Press: 1986).

-In-class exercises.

WEEK 4 The Challenge of Cultural Relativism

(9/19) **EXAM 1**

(9/21) -Chapters 2 & 7 of James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (McGraw Hill: 2003).

WEEK 5 Utilitarianism

(9/26) -Chapters 7 (continued) & 8 of James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (McGraw Hill: 2003).

(9/28) -Peter Singer, “Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Vol. 9, No. 4, 1980).

WEEK 6 Deontology

(10/3) -Chapter 9 of James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (McGraw Hill: 2003).

(10/5) -Chapter 10 of James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (McGraw Hill: 2003).

WEEK 7 Exam 2

(10/10) Columbus Day.

(10/12) **EXAM 2**

- WEEK 8 Organ Procurement**
 (10/17-19) -Kishore D. Phadke & Urmila Annadh, "Ethics of Paid Organ Donation" in *Pediatr Nephrol* (17, 2002: 309-311).
 -Janet Radcliffe-Richards, et. al., "The Case for Allowing Kidney Sales" in *The Lancet* (Vol. 531, no. 9120, 1998)
- WEEK 9 Biomedical Enhancement**
 (10/24) **1st Short Paper Due**
 (10/24) -Chapters 1 & 2 of Allen Buchanan, *Better Than Human* (Oxford University Press: 2011).
 (10/26) -Chapter 3 of Allen Buchanan, *Better Than Human* (Oxford University Press: 2011).
- WEEK 10 Biomedical Enhancement**
 (10/31) -Chapter 4 of Allen Buchanan, *Better Than Human* (Oxford University Press: 2011).
 (11/2) -Chapter 5 of Allen Buchanan, *Better Than Human* (Oxford University Press: 2011).
- WEEK 11 Biomedical Enhancement**
 (11/7) **EXAM 3**
 (11/9) -Chapter 6 of Allen Buchanan, *Better Than Human* (Oxford University Press: 2011).
- WEEK 12 Human Cloning**
 (11/14-11/16) -Michael Tooley, "Moral Status of Cloning Humans," from *Human Cloning* edited by James M. Humber and Robert F. Almeder (Totowa, NJ: Humanities Press, 1998), pp. 77-100.
- WEEK 13 Patient Autonomy and Informed Consent**
 (11/21) **EXAM 4**
 (11/23) Thanksgiving recess.
- WEEK 14 Patient Autonomy and Informed Consent**
 (11/28-11/30) -Onora O'Neill, "Paternalism and Partial Autonomy," *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 10, no. 4, 1996 (173-178).

WEEK 15 Climate Change and Hope

(12/5) **Longer Paper Due**

(12/5) **2nd Short Paper Due**

(12/5) -Stephen M. Gardiner, “The Perfect Moral Storm” in *Environmental Values* (Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 397-413, 2006).

(12/7) -Henry Shue, “Climate Hope: Implementing the Exit Strategy” in *Chicago Journal of International Law* (Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 381-402, 2013).

(12/19) **EXAM 5 (10:30 - 1:15 PM)**