

PHIL 309 Bio-Ethics

Spring 2024

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Course Description

This course provides in-depth discussions of the philosophical, medical, scientific, social, and legal aspects of controversial bioethical issues. Students will study this material with a varied collection of thought-provoking readings covering a basic introduction to ethics, bioethics, moral principles, critical thinking, and moral reasoning. Students will also be introduced to influential moral theories, including criteria and guidelines for evaluating them. Students will then take up detailed examinations of the classic cases that have helped shape debate in major issues in bioethics through current, news-making cases for evaluation.

Office hours

My job is to help you learn. So if you have a question, concern, comment or criticism about the text or the class, that's why I'm here; never hesitate to reach out. You're not bugging me and I tend to be quick at responding to emails. But philosophy is always best done through conversation, not email. So, I am available for a meeting during my online office hours: **MW 10am-12pm ET.**

Course "Meetings"

This course is asynchronous, meaning it has no regularly scheduled class meetings. Each Monday, I will post two lectures and two accompanying (graded, low-stakes) writing prompts on our course Blackboard site. These prompts (described below) should be fairly easy, and are due the following Monday at 9am EST.

Course Materials

You must acquire a copy of the textbook for the course.

Bioethics: Principles, Issues, and Cases – 5th Edition.

By: Lewis Vaughn. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780197609026

Good secondary Sources

The internet is full of bad philosophical advice. Should you really trust what “Investopedia” has to say about ethics? To save you the headache, here's a few sources you can: [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) and the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). These sources better than Wikipedia because they are written by philosophers for philosophers. But this is also what makes them worse: philosophers typically struggle to communicate with the real world, so approach these sources with caution, too. Since one of the goals of this course is learning to think for ourselves, you will not be required to consult any secondary sources.

Course Goals

This course has four main goals.

1. To learn, practice and master a method for evaluating our own beliefs, and developing the courage to change them when necessary. This method is called critical thinking, and the primary tool is argument.
2. To practice seeing the world from other people's point of view, which requires first understanding that view with clarity, depth, and compassion.
3. To become familiar with some major philosophical problems in ethics and explore the ways in which they relate to the fields of biology, medicine and clinical work. What is the best kind of relationship between a healthcare worker and their patient? What do we mean by "best"? How should we prioritize care when faced with difficult choices? How should we cope with loss, grief, burnout?
4. To develop your ability to articulate your reasoned arguments clearly in writing and in action. How can we use philosophy to be better caretakers, nurses and doctors? Human beings?

As a Synthesis course in the Mason Core program, this course also has the following objectives:

1. Communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, applying appropriate rhetorical standards (e.g., audience adaptation, language, argument, organization, evidence, etc.).
2. Connect issues in a given field to wider intellectual, community, or societal concerns using perspectives from two or more disciplines.
3. Apply critical thinking skills to evaluate the quality, credibility and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources.

Assignments and Grading System

Mid-term Paper	25%
Final Paper	25%
Low-stakes writing assignments	50%

Low-Stakes Writing Assignments

Every week, **you will write two ~300 words on a prompt I provide on Blackboard**. Each assignment will be graded as a completion grade, provided you answer the prompt carefully. If you fail to earn a completion grade, you will receive feedback and have one week to redo the assignment for full credit. Prompts will be posted on Mondays, and are due the following Monday at 9am EST.

Each assignment asks you to practice one of the skills necessary to write and defend a good philosophical argument. These skills include reconstructing others', showing where those arguments are strong, where they are weak (don't fit the evidence we have), making new claims yourself that are backed by good evidence, showing examples that illustrate your claims, drawing valid conclusions from your reasons, and raising and answering potential objections to your own claims.

Midterm and Final Paper

You will write two 1000-1500-word argumentative essay on a prompt I provide. Throughout the semester, we will practice the skills necessary to write and defend a convincing argument. This is where you demonstrate those skills. We will have plenty of time to try, fail and improve. **Your midterm prompts will be due on March 15th at 11:59pm. The final paper will be due on May 1st at 11:59pm.** Instructions for this paper, including a writing guide, sample essay, grading rubric and a lecture devoted to philosophical writing tips, can be found under "assignments" on our course Blackboard site.

Grading Scale

90 - 100 = A. 80 - 89 = B. 70 - 79 = C. 60 - 69 = D. 50 - 59 = F

Late Assignments

Late assignments will be docked one half letter grade per day that they are late, unless otherwise specified by me. Please don't hesitate to ask if you need help. Extensions will be granted in case of serious emergencies, only after consulting with me. Hangovers don't count,

Blackboard Login Instructions

Access to [MyMason](#) and GMU email are required to participate successfully in this course. Please make sure to update your computer and prepare yourself to begin using the online format BEFORE the first day of class. Check the IT Support Center website. Navigate to the Student Support page for help and information about Blackboard. In the menu bar to the left you will find all the tools you need to become familiar with for this course. Take time to learn each. Make sure you run a system check a few days before class. Become familiar with the attributes of Blackboard and online learning.

Technical Help

If you have difficulty with accessing Blackboard, please contact the ITU Support Center at 703.993.8870 or support@gmu.edu

If you have trouble with using the features in Blackboard, email courses@gmu.edu

MasonLive/Email

Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. [See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu/>].

Responsible Use of Computing

Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].

Writing Center

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>]. You can now sign up for an Online Writing Lab (OWL) session just like you sign up for a face-to-face session in the Writing Center, which means YOU set the date and time of the appointment! Learn more about the Online Writing Lab (OWL). See (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>)

tutoring/email- -tutoring)

Counseling and Psychological Services

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu>].

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See <http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy>].

Diversity/Religious Holidays

If there are any issues related to religious holidays, please inform me the first week of class. See also <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=5&navoid=104>

Diversity/Inclusion Statement

GMU strives to promote and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment for individuals of all races, economic statuses, gender expressions and identities, sex, sexual orientations, ethnicities, national origins, first languages, religions, age, and ability status.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Non-Confidential Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-993-3686 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

Anti-Racism Statement

As a member of the George Mason University community, I will work to create an educational environment that is committed to anti-racism and inclusive excellence. An anti-racist approach to higher education acknowledges the ways that individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural manifestations of racism against Black individuals, indigenous people, and other people of color contribute to inequality and injustice in our classrooms, on our campuses, and in our communities. Anti-racist work strives to provide our community members with resources to interrupt cycles of racism so as to cultivate a more equitable, inclusive, and just environment for all of our students, staff, faculty, alumni, and friends, regardless of racial background. I believe that the work of anti-racism starts with each individual; together students and faculty in this course will build knowledge and take actions rooted in principles of equity, inclusion, and justice that we will carry with us throughout our lives.

Academic Integrity

Students must be responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. The tenet must be a foundation of our university culture. [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/>].

Honor Code

Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <https://oai.gmu.edu/full-honor-code-document/>]. Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

How to know when you need to cite?

If you use more than three words in a row of another person's writing without quotation marks, that is plagiarism. Additionally, you should cite the source of any ideas use in your papers that are not your own even if you are not directly quoting the work. The point of most of the assignments is to elicit your ideas and interaction with the arguments and readings, not to sound like an expert who has studied the topic for years. Becoming a better thinker and writer is the goal, not getting it done.

Accommodations

Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process.

The instructor reserves the right to revise this syllabus as required.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

WEEK 1: The Tools of Philosophical Thinking

Syllabus
3-19

WEEK 2: The Tools of Philosophical Thinking (continued)

19-35

WEEK 3: Moral Theories: What Are They Good For?

38-55
59-78; 86-94

WEEK 4: Autonomy and Paternalism

97-110
111-126, 131-146

WEEK 5: Truth-telling and Confidentiality

170-180
183-199

WEEK 6: Informed Consent

200-237

WEEK 7: Human Research

238-258
265-280

WEEK 8: Human research (continued)

281-293

Listen: [Tuskegee Syphilis Study Part 1](#), [Tuskegee Syphilis Study Part 2](#)

WEEK 9: Abortion

305-346

364-378

WEEK 10: Reproductive Technology

391-411

WEEK 11: Reproductive Technology (continued)

415-445

WEEK 12: Genetic Choices

466-508

WEEK 13: Genetic Choices (continued)

518-523; 529-538

WEEK 14: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide

551-589

WEEK 15: Dividing up Healthcare Resources

631-670

WEEK 16: COVID-19 and Racial Bias in Healthcare

➤ 697-714

➤ 725-748

NO READING, FINAL PAPER DUE, 5PM