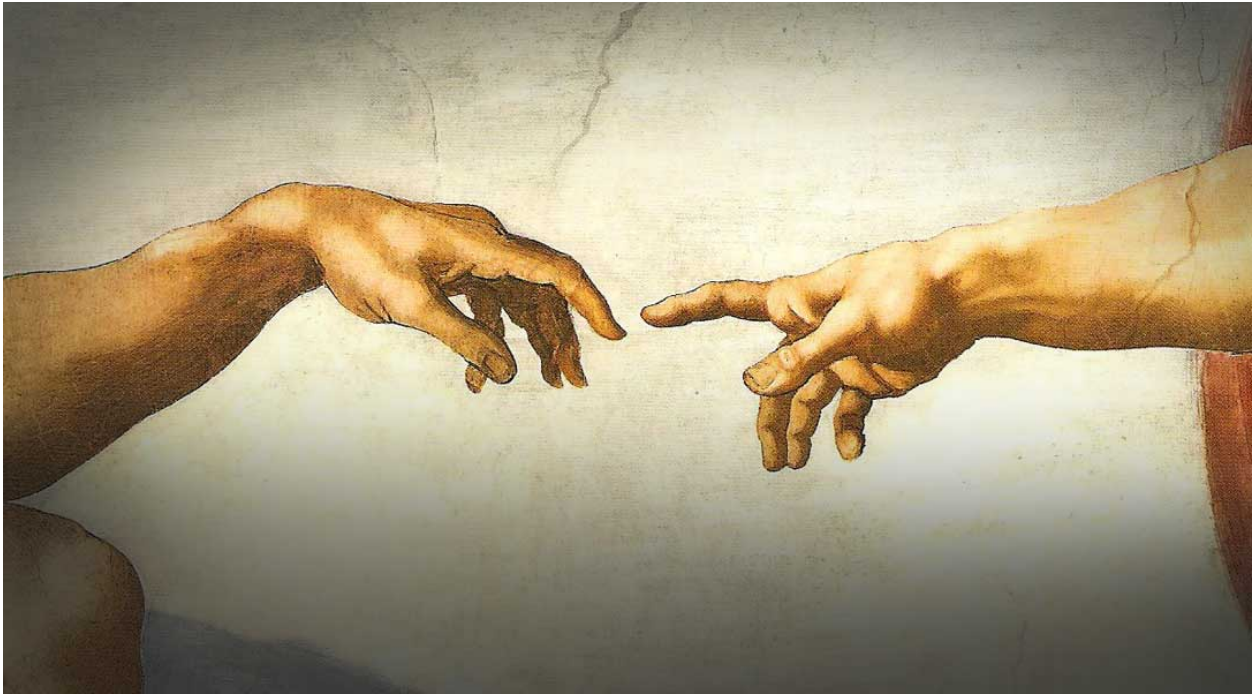


**Phil 309: Bioethics**  
**George Mason University**  
**Spring 2018**



**Instructor:** James Olsen

**Email:** [jolsen9@gmu.edu](mailto:jolsen9@gmu.edu)

**Office Hours:** TBA

**Time Location:** 5:55-7:10 in Robinson B106 and 7:20-8:35 in Krug 242

**Course Description:**

You live at a unique point in history, when our scientific prowess—our ability to interfere with and manipulate the forces of nature—have far outstripped our moral dialogue concerning what we *should* or *should not* do or how we *ought* to go about doing it. In fact, our ability to change and even design the conditions of our own and others' lives have progressed so rapidly that it's not clear how (or perhaps even if) our traditional moral theories—developed under very different circumstances—straightforwardly apply. Morally speaking, the human conversation is playing catch-up to the technological one. And the stakes are very high. Humans have initiated the sixth (and most dramatic) great extinction, even as we foster medical miracles and toy with de-extinction. We've wreaked ecological destruction on a scale that threatens the entire biosphere, at the same time that we're changing conditions to allow life to flourish in new ways and locations, and even as we realistically contemplate the biological colonization of other planets. Among ourselves, we've long since left behind the pressures of natural selection and now we wrestle over new ways of reproducing, enhancing, and killing ourselves in an era of not only designer babies but of designer selves. This course is about wrestling with the deeply moral issues of creation, death, and personal agency in an era of hyper-technological change.

### Learning Objectives:

Philosophy, the parent of all other academic disciplines, is fundamentally about wonder, love, and the rigorous use of rational argumentation in order to pursue both truth and wisdom. My goal is to create a context wherein your natural wonder at and love of life can flourish both alongside and through a rigorous, argumentative grappling with some of the toughest issues that we face today. I'm personally committed to the belief that you are a rational being—that reason and intellectual development play central roles in your life—unavoidably—and also that reason does not operate independent of affect. Your whole self matters to this class and matters to me. I am mindful of these things and they inform my design and how I will conduct this class.

Overall, my goal is a class that deeply interests and engages you at the same time that it improves your ability to responsibly and competently contribute to the human dialogue mentioned above. Whether I am successful will be a function not only of my design and implementation, but also of your personal engagement with the material and with one another. On my part, I'm pedagogically committed to ensuring that before you leave this class you will:

1. Improve your ability to recognize and evaluate moral arguments, particularly as they relate to the diverse field of bioethics; that is, you will be able to:
  - a. Spot both implicit and explicit arguments;
  - b. Concisely express these arguments in argument form; and
  - c. Fill in any holes or implicit claims needed to make the arguments work;
2. Analyze the complex moral variables involved in real world scenarios; that is,
  - a. Become familiar with many of the major issues involved in bioethics, in a way that allows you to
  - b. Rationally dissect concrete bioethical situations,
  - c. Teasing out what's relevant with regard to what we ought to do;
3. Create original moral arguments that both
  - a. Take into account the complex moral variables of concrete situations, and also
  - b. Utilize the work of other ethicists.

Given George Mason's commitment to student well-being and happiness, you will also

4. Reflect deeply on the ways in which a rigorous intellectual approach to the moral difficulties involved in bioethics is itself a means of coping with a difficult world, and a way of increasing both our individual and collective flourishing.

Additionally, please note that **this is a synthesis course**. The purpose of the synthesis course is to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize the knowledge, skills and values gained from the Mason Core curriculum. Synthesis courses strive to expand students' ability to master new content, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills across the disciplines. We will strive to achieve these goals through the learning objectives mentioned above.

### Required Texts:

- Vaughn, Lewis. *Bioethics: Principles, Issues, and Cases*. Third Edition. New York:

Oxford University Press (2017).

- Savulescu, Julian and Bostrom, Nick. *Human Enhancement*. Oxford University Press (2009).
- Doyle & Zakrajsek: *The New Science of Learning: How to Learn in Harmony with Your Brain*. Stylus Publishing (2013).

All other texts will be hyperlinked below, located on Blackboard, or emailed. If the cost of the books is genuinely prohibitive, please let me know.

### **Assignments:**

#### 19% Reflection Papers

- How do I make moral decisions? 5pts
- This is relevant to my life 5pts
- Movie reflections (x3) 9 pts

#### 21% Case study analyses

- Original contribution (x3) 15 pts
- Peer feedback (x6) 6 pts

#### 24% Argument Analysis (x4) 24 pts

#### 36% Final Paper

- Select topic 1 pt
- Outline 2 pts
- Main argument sketch 3 pts
- Paper 30pts

*Reflection Papers:* Evidence shows that reflection and meta-cognition (reflections on your own cognitions, such as thinking about your own learning experience and processes) greatly enhance understanding, retention, and students' ability to grasp the relevance of the material. It's also a foundational aspect of philosophy and—I think—a part of the good life. Consequently, you'll write short (2 page) reflections. Additionally, you will watch and reflect on the film *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* as well as two additional bioethics focused films or documentaries of your choice. Additional instructions are available on Blackboard.

*Case Study Analysis:* As our second course goal makes clear, this class is largely about equipping and providing you with opportunities to analyze what's going on in the world here and now. To help you do this—and to enhance our in class discussions—you will find and analyze your own bioethical case studies and post at least three of these on our course blog on Blackboard (in Feb, Mar, and April). Additionally, you will read and respond to at least six of your peer's analyses (two in Feb, two in Mar, two in April). Additional instructions are available on Blackboard.

*Argument Analyses:* Four times over the course of the semester you are required to locate a specific argument in one of the course texts, extract and then concisely reproduce that argument. We will practice doing so in class prior to your writing your own analyses. Additional instructions are available on Blackboard.

*Final Paper:* All other assignments are meant as stepping-stones in preparing you to write a final, 1600-2000 word philosophical argument paper. You are not only able, but it is expected that you will use material from your case study and argument analyses. You will select and hand in a topic prior to returning from Spring Break, followed by an outline and finally a sketch of the main argument. The paper itself is due at the time of the registrar's scheduled final. Detailed instructions for this paper are available on Blackboard.

*Grade scale:*

94.0-100 A  
90.0-93.9 A-  
86.7-89.9 B+  
83.3-86.6 B  
80.0-83.2 B-  
76.7-79.9 C+  
73.3-76.6 C  
70.0-73.2 C-  
66.7-69.9 D+  
63.3-66.6 D  
60.0-63.2 D-  
Below 60.0 F

I welcome conversations about my grading policies and their justification. Please do not hesitate to talk with me. Note, however, that a 93.9 = A- and not an A; I do not round.

**Note on participation:**

There is no "in-class" participation component of your grade. Nevertheless, studies show that participation is critical both to your ability to do well in the class and also to enjoy our time together. Much of our time in class will be discussion and activity based. Frequently you will be called on to answer questions or to discuss topics with your peers. Also, it is possible that your work (without identifying markers) will appear before the class for general review. Additionally, we may conduct live polling throughout the class via PollEverywhere, so please have a device with which you can text or connect to the internet.

Please note: because this is a philosophy course, we will debate topics that are controversial and concerning which passions run high—some of these topics might be central to your own or your peers' sense of identity. Some of these will be on sensitive and difficult topics. Consequently, I will work hard to establish a culture that allows us to do this productively. It is critical that you in turn work to always engage others with genuine respect and charity. I consider this to be a moral obligation—but it is also necessary for constructive, rational dialogue.

Beyond the pedagogical importance of drawing you into frequent, high-level discussion on course topics, philosophy simply can't be done without lively discussion and debate. Consequently, I encourage you to always attend and consider it my responsibility to provide informative, engaging, and pedagogically sound class sessions. You are responsible

to yourself and your peers to attend and actively participate. That said, I'm well aware that life carries on outside of class—midterms in other classes nearly kill you, your true love decides to reciprocate or dump you, illness strikes, you secure or blow a job interview, you need a mental health day, you're simply sick of the class, or the day's just too dog-gone beautiful to sit inside a building. On the other hand, given the sheer busyness of college life, without rules students can feel obligated to skip class. Because I respect your outside life and your agency to make responsible choices about how to go about things, **you're allowed 3 absences for any reason whatsoever. Not only do you not need to inform me in advance or tell me where you were, I would prefer that you not do so!** I'll also grant an additional absence for a dean excused reason. Only thereafter will penalties apply (one grade level per absence).

### **Additional Course Policies:**

1. **All papers are due at 11:59pm** on the listed date. Late papers are automatically reduced to a B. Note: because submissions are electronic, I can tell if your submission is even 1 minute late. It is wise to set your personal deadline earlier than 11:59.
2. While I believe in the need to be tech-savvy, this course is designed to respect the need for face-to-face, unconnected discussion. Consequently, **ALL ELECTRONICS ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED IN CLASS**, unless I call for them. This includes using your laptop to take notes. **THIS ALSO INCLUDES USING YOUR SMART PHONE UNDER THE TABLE.**
3. In the happy event of a campus closure (e.g., on account of snow) or other cancellation, I will make a case-by-case decision on what we will do to maintain instructional continuity. It is likely that during such events I will put a Lecture Capture up on Canvas, which you can view at your own convenience and then submit feedback.
4. Email is my preferred way of being contacted. That said, I usually receive over 200 emails each day, half of which require a response. **DO NOT ASK QUESTIONS THAT ARE ANSWERED IN THIS SYLLABUS.** More than courtesy, this is an issue of logistical feasibility. I work hard to respond to inquiries within 48 hrs. If it's been 72 hrs, please email me again.

### *Academic Integrity*

I care a great deal about increasing your intellectual capacities and general knowledge base and am concerned overall with helping you to flourish as a human being. That means I also care very much about your academic integrity and very little about how the grade you receive in this one class impacts your future. Because I care about you and your flourishing (and the flourishing of society to which you contribute), I won't hesitate to fail students caught plagiarizing on their papers and will not tolerate dishonesty in any form. I highly encourage students to review GMU's Honor System policies (found at <http://www.gmu.edu/academics/catalog/9798/honorcod.html> and want you to note that plagiarism can be unintentional. We will discuss this more in class. If you have any questions please visit with me or the Writing Center (A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>).

### *Mental Health*

Mental illness is common—something that all of us as mortals struggle with at one time or

another. Recent research suggests that the difficulties of college life can make college students particularly vulnerable. Please be aware that George Mason offers resources for counseling (CAPS (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>), disabilities (Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>), and sexual assault and harassment (Student Support and Advocacy Center <http://ssac.gmu.edu>). Contact the Office of Disability Services, Counseling and Psychological Services, or Student Health Services for information. While I am not a counselor, my “door” is always open, and I can try to help point you in the right direction.

### Course Schedule:

Philosophy, Ethics, and Learning		
Date	Topic & Reading	Assignments & Notes
Jan 23	Welcome and introductions	Talk to a friend or family about 1. What’s an argument; 2. What is philosophy? and 3. What is ethics?
25	Plato: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allegory of the cave</li> <li>The Apology of Socrates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring a current event relevant to medical ethics to class</li> <li><b>1<sup>st</sup> Reflection “How do I make moral decisions?” due Sat 11:59pm</b></li> </ul>
30	Vaughn Chapter 1: Moral Reasoning in Bioethics 3-33	
Feb 1	Relativism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rachels: The Challenge of Cultural Relativism (BB)</li> <li>Macklin: “Ethical Relativism in a Multicultural Society” (Vaughn 180-190)</li> <li>Optional: Benedict: In Defense of Ethical Relativism (BB)</li> </ul>	
6	Vaughn Chapter 2: Bioethics and Moral Theories pgs 34-64	
8	Doyle & Zakrajsek <i>The New Science of Learning</i> (all of it)	<b>1<sup>st</sup> autonomous movie reflection due Sat 11:59pm</b>

Patient Relations		
Date	Topic & Reading	Assignments & Notes
13	Paternalism and Autonomy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vaughn 81-93</li> <li>Vaughn 123-128</li> </ul>	
15	Goldman “The Refutation of Medical	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Case Study Analysis</b>



	Paternalism” in Vaughn 104-110 • Ackerman “Why Doctors Should Intervene” in Vaughn 110-115	<b>due Sat 11:59pm</b>
20	• Newton “In Defense of the Traditional Nurse” in Vaughn 128-136 • Kuhse “Advocacy or Subservience for the Sake of Patients?” in Vaughn 136-142	<b>1<sup>st</sup> &amp; 2<sup>nd</sup> peer feedback on Case Study Analysis due 11:59pm</b>
22	Truth Telling & Confidentiality: • Vaughn 144-152 • Thomasma “Telling the Truth to Patients” in Vaughn 155-159 • Cullen & Klein “164-172	
27	Informed consent • Vaughn 196-205 • Faden & Beauchamp “The Concept of Informed Consent” in Vaughn 208-213 • Brody “Transparency” in Vaughn 223-229	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Argument Analysis due 11:59pm</b>

<b>Research</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic &amp; Reading</b>	<b>Assignments &amp; Notes</b>
Mar 1	Human Research: • Vaughn 239-253 • Freedman “A Response to Purported Ethical Difficulty with Randomized Clinical Trials” in Vaughn 278-281 • Marquis “How to Resolve an Ethical Dilemma Concerning Randomized Clinical Trials” in Vaughn 282-284	
6	• Brandt “Racism and Research” in Vaughn 285-294 • Angell “The Ethics of Clinical Research in the Third World” in Vaughn 297-300 • Brody “Ethical Issues in Clinical Trials in Developing Countries” in Vaughn 301-305	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Case Study Analysis due 11:59pm</b>
8	Watch film: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks	• <b>Movie response due prior to class</b> • <b>3<sup>rd</sup> &amp; 4<sup>th</sup> peer feedback on Case Study Analysis due Sat 11:59pm</b>
13	Animal Ethics and Research • Singer “All Animals Are Equal” (BB) • Rachels “Vegetarianism” (BB)	
15	• LaFollete “Animal Experimentation in Biomedical Research” (BB)	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Argument Analysis due 11:59pm</b>

Justice and Health Care		
Date	Topic & Reading	Assignments & Notes
20 - 22	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK	<b>Final paper topic paragraph due April 1 11:59pm</b>
Apr 3	Justice and Health Care • Vaughn 719-732	
5	• Daniels "Is There a Right to Health Care?" in Vaughn 736-743 • Buchanan "The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care" in Vaughn 743-749	
10	• Rescher "The Allocation of Exotic Medical Lifesaving Therapy" in Vaughn 765-773 • Harris "QUALYfying the Value of Life" in Vaughn 774-782	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Argument Analysis due 11:59pm</b>

Human Genetic Modification		
Date	Topic & Reading	Assignments & Notes
12	Kitcher <a href="#"><u>"Future Frankensteins"</u></a>	<b>Final paper outline due Sat 11:59pm</b>
17	Sandel "The Case Against Perfection" in HE	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Case Study Analysis due 11:59pm</b>
19	Kamm "What Is and Is Not Wrong with Enhancement?" in HE	<b>5<sup>th</sup> &amp; 6<sup>th</sup> peer feedback on Case Study Analysis due 11:59pm</b>
24	Savulescu "The Human Prejudice and the Moral Status of Enhanced Beings" in HE	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Argument Analysis due 11:59pm</b>
26	Overall "Life Enhancement Technologies" in HE	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection "This is relevant to my life" due Sat at 11:59pm</b>
May 1	Parens "Toward a More Fruitful Debate About Enhancement" in HE	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> autonomous movie reflection due</b>
3	Bostrom & Sandberg "The Wisdom of Nature" in HE	