

Bioethics
PHIL 3520-001 Spring 2022
Mo-We-Fr 10:45–11:35
BU C 301

INSTRUCTOR

TJ Perkins
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OFFICE HOURS

Mondays 12:00-1:00 and by appointment.
Room CTIHB 405 (Philosophy Department)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to key moral questions in medical contexts. Students will examine topics such as informed consent, reproductive ethics, genetic technologies, and end-of-life decision-making, grounding discussion in major ethical frameworks. The course aims to develop students' ability to analyze complex moral problems, consider diverse perspectives, and apply ethical reasoning to real-world biomedical problem spaces. By the end, students will be equipped with both conceptual tools and practical insight to engage thoughtfully with contemporary bioethical debates.

OUTCOMES

Students in this course can expect to develop their own, rigorous answers to the above questions. They can also expect to:

1. Develop and extend pre-existing skills in general scholarship—including reading, writing, discussion, and debate.
2. Recognize and assess some historical, sociological, and philosophical methods.
3. Argumentatively parse and defend not just descriptive but also normative claims.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Do the reading. Come to class, take good notes, and contribute to group discussion. Get engaged, design a project, and write an insightful research paper on a topic that intrigues you. **Don't plagiarize (see the academic misconduct policy below).** Take one open-note, take-home final. Don't cheat. Think for yourself throughout.

COURSE MATERIALS

You don't have to buy any books for this course—all readings are available as PDFs on Canvas.

ASSESSMENT

- Class attendance—25%
- Discussion Group Participation—10%
- Discussion Boards Contributions—35%
- Paper Outline Draft—5%
- Major Research Project—35%
- Take-Home Final Exam—25%

Simply attending on most Mondays and Wednesdays will earn you a substantial portion of your grade. Fridays are for discussion group, where participation will earn you further points. Weekly discussion boards will make up a significant portion of the grade. Just by meeting with the instructor to discuss a paper outline and / or review a rough draft, you will earn another piece of your grade. The most important assignment is the completed version of your major research paper. There will also be an take-home final.

Grades will be earned 1 point at a time, with 100 points available overall in the course. Each point corresponds to 1 percent. Grades will never be discussed over email. Grade changes can be requested in person, though the grade may decrease rather than increase upon re-evaluation by the instructor.

IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT CATEGORIES

Class Attendance

Coming to class on Monday and Wednesday, on-time and for the duration, earns 1 point per day. A maximum of 25 points can be earned in this category—so, you can skip up to 2 days of Monday or Wednesday class with absolutely no penalty. Absences can be excused with proper documentation and make-up work.

Discussion Group Participation

Fridays are for discussion group. Near the end of class on Wednesday, we will identify a key question relating to either the prior or the upcoming readings. Your task on Friday will be to come to the discussion group with a proposed answer to, or at least a reflection on, the question.

As long as you show up to Friday discussions on time, stay for the duration, and have a response to the chosen question prepared to share with the group when called upon, you will earn 1 point per contribution. There will be 11 discussion group meetings, and a maximum of 10 points can be earned in this category—so, you can choose to skip, or attend without contributing, 1 Friday meeting with absolutely no penalty. Absences can be excused with proper documentation and make-up work.

Discussion Board Contribution

Students are required to make two contributions to a weekly discussion board based upon the readings for that week. One contribution is an original reading reaction with some substance

about some element of the readings. You may comment on one of the readings or both in your original response. For substance, I recommend an argument analysis or posing a question and attempting an answer. Responses should be more than merely, “I liked this reading,” but should be more constructive and/or critical with some reasoning fleshed out.

For your second contribution, simply respond to one of your classmates original response. This may come in the form of helping them with a question they have posed and attempted to answer, or a critique of an argument analysis. Be creative and engage thoughtfully. Remember: be charitable and be considerate.

There will be 11 opportunities to contribute to the discussion boards in the remainder of the semester, of which you are required to do 10. That is, you get one week to opt out of contributing for whatever reason with no justification to me.

Paper Outline or Draft

Your primary assignment in this class will be to complete a major research paper, one inspired by something that you find especially intriguing within the course content. In order to ensure that these papers go as well as can be, you need to meet with the instructor in office hours/by appointment by Friday, March 4 (Week 8). As long as you come to see the instructor, and you have either a proposed paper outline or a rough draft to review and discuss at that point, you will earn all 5 points in this category.

Major Research Paper

In Weeks 1–10 of the course, we will be examining at least one fundamental yet intriguing topic per week. In almost all cases, we will look at each issue from both a traditional and an alternative ethical perspective. Often, we’ll get introduced to a bioethical dilemma on Monday, and consider resolutions on Wednesday.

Once you’ve identified what topic you’d like to write your major research paper on, and met with the instructor about your outline or draft, you should focus on producing a really excellent final version. Week 11 of the course has been set aside just for this purpose: Monday is for workshopping your arguments; Wednesday is for generating and responding to counter-arguments; and Friday is the last day to submit your paper via Canvas.

Final versions of these papers should be at least 2,000 words long. Although you are encouraged to get as much help as you need on this paper from the instructor or other reputable sources, you must write this paper yourself. Without appropriate documentation, late papers submitted will be graded on half the normal scale, and no credit will be given for any papers submitted more than a week after the original due date. After grading, you can ask for a re-grade—but remember that the instructor may either increase or decrease the number of points awarded, upon reassessment. You can earn up to 35 points on this paper.

Take-Home Final

At the end of the course there will be a take-home, open-note final exam. The exam will be only somewhat comprehensive. The test will consist of a selection of several short essay questions that you will be given two weeks to complete. You will need to compose answers to most but not all of the questions. Your answers must be your own. You can earn up to 25 points on this exam.

GRADES

The **overall grade scale** for the course is as follows:

100–94% = A (4.0), 93–90% = A- (3.7), 89–87% = B+ (3.3), 86–84% = B (3.0),
83–80% = B- (2.7), 79–77% = C+ (2.3), 76–74% = C (2.0), 73–70% = C- (1.7)
69–67% = D+ (1.3), 66–64% = D (1.0), 63–60% = D- (0.7), 59–0% = E (0.0)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS/TOPICS

<u>Week</u>	<u>Monday</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u>Friday</u>
1. Jan 10, 12, 14	Course Intro & Syllabus	Beauchamp & Childress (2001) on 10 Cases in Bioethics	Gillon (1995) on Principlism
2. Jan 17, 19, 21	Labor Day (No Classes)	Rachels & Rachels (2012) on Cultural Relativism	Discussion
3. Jan 24, 26, 28	Robertson, Kahn, & Wagner (2002) on Conception	Davis (1995) on Problems with Principlism	Discussion
4. Jan 31, Feb 2, 4	Collins & Pinch (2005) on Vaccines & Parental Rights	Nussbaum (1988) on Virtue Ethics	Discussion
5. Feb 7, 9, 11	Gould (1984) on Forced Sterilization	Kant (1785) on Deontology	Discussion
6. Feb 14, 16, 18	Harris (1975) on the Survival Lottery	Mill (1861) on Utilitarianism	Discussion
7. Feb 21, 23, 25	Siegler (1982) on Confidentiality	Andorno & Laurie (2004) on the Right Not to Know	Discussion
8. Feb 28, Mar 2, 4	Lippert et al. (2017) on Genome Identification	Pence (2015) on Health Care	Discussion* Last Day to Discuss Paper Drafts/Outlines
9. Mar 7, 9, 11	Spring	Break	(No Classes)
10. Mar 14, 16, 18	Szasz (1960) on the Myth of Mental Illness	Oliver (2006) on the Myth of Thomas Szasz	Discussion
11. Mar 21, 23, 25	Paper Workshop Day on Arguments	Paper Workshop Day on Counter-Arguments	Personal Study Day Research Paper Due

12. Mar 28, 30, Apr 1	ACMG (2013) on Fetal Screening	Foot (1967) on the Doctrine of Double Effect	Discussion
13. Apr 4, 6, 8	HMS (1968) on Definitions of Death	Rachels (1975) on the Doctrine of Doing and Allowing	Discussion
14. Apr 11, 13, 15	Thomson (1971) on Abortion	Parfit (1983) on Future Generations	Discussion Take-Home Final Exam Assigned
15. Apr 18, 20, 22	Exam Preparation Day	Exam Preparation Day	Personal Study Day
16. Apr 25, 27, 29	Personal Study Day (April 26: Last day of Spring classes)		Take-Home Final Exam Due