

Matters of Life and Death: An Introduction to Bioethics

Winter 20??

Instructor: Gerard Rothfus
Classroom: ???
Day/Time: ???
Office Hours: ??? or by appointment
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Description

This course surveys (some of) the rich field of contemporary bioethics, with an emphasis on examining controversies in modern medicine surrounding the making and taking of human life. Students will wrestle with classical philosophical questions like when and why is killing wrong?, what are the extent and limits of bodily autonomy?, what duties do parents owe their offspring?, etc. and then consider how different answers to these questions bear upon topics as significant and contested as the ethics of abortion, euthanasia, assisted reproductive technologies, and public healthcare policy.

Learning Objectives

This course will equip students to think critically and thoughtfully about the nature and demands of human morality as they pertain to questions involving the making and taking of human life. Students will finish the course with a broad appreciation of the motivation and structure of the central moral perspectives prominent in contemporary bioethics. They will also gain a good sense of the relevance of these perspectives to prominent controversies in modern medicine (e.g. regarding abortion, euthanasia, etc.) as well as the dialectical state of academic debate on these topics. Finally, students who complete the course will have advanced in the skill of writing clear, lucid, and charitable argumentative papers.

Course Materials

There is no required text for the course as all readings will be made available online via

Course Structure

The course will be organized around a weekly lecture/discussion period, where various topics in bioethics will be explored and discussed in person. You are strongly urged to do the suggested readings before each lecture in order to be better prepared to engage, ask questions, make suggestions in discussion, etc. Periodically, I may also release short, pre-recorded videos to the class site (as well as YouTube), summarizing different ideas covered in the course. You may view these videos to help with understanding particular readings or just to get a better grip on key ideas in the course.

I will also hold office hours on ... after class until Feel free to come to office hours and ask any questions you may have about the course! If you are unable to make this time any week and would like to discuss the course, you are very much encouraged to set up an appointment for another time. In these office hours, I am happy to go over past readings or discuss questions about upcoming assignments, new material, writing strategies, etc. Whether in or out of office hours, please feel free to reach out to me any time!

Course Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be determined by (i) a short midterm paper (25%), (ii) a rough draft of a longer paper (25%), (iii) a final version of the longer paper (35%), and (iv) class attendance/participation (15%).

Midterm Paper

Your short midterm paper will require you to write a philosophical response to one of the authors we read during the first part of the course. You will select one of the readings and write a 1,000 to 2,000 word response to the reading that summarizes and explains a view held or an argument made by the author and then either (a) criticizes the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting an argument against it or raising and defending an objection to the argument) or (b) defends the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting a new argument for the view or supplying new support for the argument's premises). Every student will have the option of rewriting their midterm paper in light of my feedback to improve their grade.

I will make use of this general rubric in grading both the midterm and final papers: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/grades.html>

Final Paper

Your final paper will require you to write a philosophical essay arguing for or against a significant position in contemporary bioethics. You may write concerning one of the topics discussed in class (e.g. abortion or euthanasia) or may find an alternative topic if you clear it (and the sources you will use) with me first. Your paper should be 1,500 to 2,500 words in length and will be assessed according to the general rubric linked above. We will discuss good philosophical writing practices and tips for handling the final paper as the course goes on.

Attendance and Participation

Participation credit can be earned by (i) attending lectures, (ii) thoughtfully participating in class discussions, and (iii) attending office hours. Students are expected to attend lectures, though two classes may be missed without penalty to a student's participation score. Students are encouraged to participate actively in course discussions by asking questions, raising objections, or presenting their own ideas. It is very natural to feel apprehensive or intimidated about speaking during class. (I often felt this way in my philosophy classes!) If you have any concerns about classroom participation, please feel free to come talk with me about it during office hours, both because this is an additional way to earn participation credit outside the classroom and because maybe we can find ways to make classroom discussion seem less formidable.

Every voice is welcome in our classroom and students should feel free to raise any questions or thoughts they may have regarding course material during our class discussions. However, every student is expected to respect the bounds of kindness and respect for their peers during these discussions. (Avoid interrupting, rude language, etc.) Conducting oneself with honesty and compassion is essential to good participation in the discussion and debate of controversial moral topics.

Grade Scale

A: 90-100	B: 80-89	C: 70-79	D: 60-69	F: < 60
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If you have any questions about your grade at any point in the course, please don't hesitate to ask!

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Though collaboration among students is encouraged, any work a student turns in must ultimately be their own.

Students who have any questions or uncertainty about this policy are responsible for meeting with the instructor to discuss the policy.

Disabilities

Please notify me in advance of the need for accommodation of a University verified disability. I will gladly provide the required accommodations. If you have any questions or concerns about disability accommodations, please don't hesitate to speak with me; I am happy to help out.

Course Outline

Week:	Topic:
Week 1	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Philosophical method and writing, Logic
Week 2	Euthanasia I <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is euthanasia morally licit? The case for the affirmative
Week 3	Euthanasia II <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is euthanasia morally licit? The case for the negative
Week 4	Euthanasia III <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is euthanasia morally licit? Further considerations and summary
Week 5	Abortion I <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is abortion morally licit? Considerations of life and personhood
Week 6	Abortion II <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is abortion morally licit? Considerations of bodily autonomy
Week 7	Abortion III <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is abortion morally licit? Further considerations and summary

Week:	Topic:
Week 8	<p>Procreation and the Non-Identity Problem I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the paradox <p>Midterm Paper Due</p>
Week 9	<p>Procreation and the Non-Identity Problem II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed solutions to the paradox
Week 10	<p>Assisted Reproductive Technology I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is artificial reproduction morally licit? The case for the affirmative
Week 11	<p>Assisted Reproductive Technology II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is artificial reproduction morally licit? The case for the negative
Week 12	<p>Genetic Engineering I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genetic enhancement: arguments in favor
Week 13	<p>Genetic Engineering II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genetic enhancement: arguments against
Week 14	<p>Distributive Justice in Healthcare I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should scarce healthcare resources be allocated?
Week 15	<p>Distributive Justice in Healthcare II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should scarce healthcare resources be allocated? cont.
Week 16	<p>End of Semester</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for taking the class! <p>Final Paper Due</p>