PHIL 3180: Biomedical Ethics

██████   ████████████   ████████

Andrew Buskell (abuskell@gatech.edu) (He|Him)

████████████████████████

Course Description

This course is a topic-centered introduction to issues in contemporary biomedical ethics. These topics include classic issues in biomedical ethics ("Should there be a market for organs?", "Is there a *duty* to die?") and philosophy of medicine ("What does it mean to be 'diseased'? 'Healthy'?"), alongside critical reflection on recent national public health policy (e.g. lockdowns, vaccines).

The course is topic-centered because biomedical ethics is both huge and interdisciplinary. Biomedical ethics encompasses ethical issues related to the medical and life-sciences. This is a big brief. It is also one that is deeply interdisciplinary. Even narrowing down to these select topics, the course will touch on fields and methods from anthropology, disability studies, Indigenous studies, law, medicine, nursing, philosophy, political science, psychology, public health, and plausibly more beyond that.

While this course embraces these many disciplines, the primary focus will be on philosophical methods and perspectives. The course will involve analysis and engagement primarily with philosophical texts—but will draw on popular articles, blogposts, graphic novels, podcasts, and the occasional video. By engaging with these sources, the course will work to develop tools, strategies, and skills for doing philosophy well.

Texts

All readings will be made available on Perusall. These will include chapters from books, articles from the popular press, and academic journal articles.

Nonetheless, you may be interested in other books on biomedical ethics that might complement these readings. I recommend several such volumes below. However, be cautious: bio- and medical- ethics textbooks tend to be idiosyncratic, focusing on whatever cases most interest their authors. This course is no different, picking up and examining some issues in biomedical ethics and not others. While the books dive into interesting and compelling case studies, don't expect this class to chart the same course through the issues.

> Donna Dickenson, Richard Huxtable, and Michael Parker. 2010. *The Cambridge medical ethics workbook.* Cambridge University Press ([library link](#))

> Tony Hope. 2004. *Medical Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. ([library link](#))

> Bonnie Steinbock (ed.). 2009. *The Oxford handbook of bioethics*. Oxford University Press ([library link](#))

The closest volume to the course is probably the *The Oxford handbook of bioethics*, edited by Steinbock.

Learning Objectives

There are two central aims of this course. The first is to introduce a range of issues in biomedical ethics. The second is to foster skills of critical thinking that will aid you in confronting these issues in your life outside the classroom.

This class will pursue these aims via the following learning objectives, which are linked to your assessment and evaluation:

L1. To gain knowledge and facility in select topics of biomedical ethics, using this knowledge to describe, analyze, and explain current biomedical realities and identify possible avenues for change.

L2. To develop skills of argument analysis: learning to identify arguments, concepts, and distinctions in both scholarly and non-scholarly texts. Such skills are evident in useful and insightful comments and questions made both online and in-class.

L3. To foster skills of critical writing that engages with philosophical ideas. Such skills are demonstrated in writing that critically evaluates principles, concepts, and distinctions, and which employs reasons and inferences to support its claims and arguments.

L4. To develop verbal communication skills that support critical discussion by providing substantive contributions both online and in-class, by "stepping-forward and stepping-back" in classroom discussions, and by effectively guiding the class through readings.

The course also deals with difficult subjects—not least abortion and end-of-life decisions. There may also be readings and conversations that put forward values and ideas contrary to your own. The course invites a hard look at all positions—but does not aim to demean, silence, or parody. Thus, this class also aims to pursue one further learning objective:

L5. To support development of moral character and improve the content of the course by charitably engaging with sources and other students; "calling-in" (rather than "calling-out") ideas, arguments, and language that are in need of updating, and; supplying readings, content, and vocabulary when readings or classroom discussions are insufficient.

Course Format

This course will be run as a seminar. This means that, aside from the first session, I will not be lecturing. Classroom discussions—either all-together or in small groups—will be the main activity.

Every session will have at least one reading associated with. You are expected to come to class having completed the reading(s) and to be ready to discuss it.

Each session will begin with a presentation by you or one of your peers. This presentation will outline the aims of the paper and suggest a few questions to begin discussion.

In **week 9**, we will be exchanging essay drafts. That session will be dedicated to discussing your drafts in small groups.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Date	Topic	Required Reading
1	Aug 21	Orientation	Pence, Gregory. "Good and Bad Reasoning: Moral Theories and Principles"
	Aug 23	Between Life and Death	Pence, Gregory. "Comas: Karen Quinlan, Nancy Cruzan, and Terri Schaivo" *Required for Presenters*: Flynn, Jennifer. "Theory and Bioethics." [Online]
2	Aug 28	Birth (Stem Cells)	Stein, Agata and Peter Singer. "The Moral Status of Stem Cells." (link) *Required for Presenters:* McMahan, Jeff. "Killing Embryos for Stem Cell Research." (link)
	Aug 30	Birth (Pregnancy)	Lyerly, Anne Drapkin, Lisa M Mitchell, Elizabeth Mitchell Armstrong, Lisa H Harris, Rebecca Kukla, Miriam Kuppermann, Margaret Olivia Little. "Risk and the Pregnant Body." (link) *Required for Presenters:* Kukle, Rebecca, Miriam Kuppermann, Margaret Little, Anne Drapkin Lyerly, Lisa M Mitchell, Elizabeth M Armstrong, and Lisa Harris. "Finding Autonomy in Birth." (link)
3	Sept 4	*(spans Topic and Reading)*	**Official School Holiday - No Class**
	Sept 6	Birth (Abortion)	Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "A Defense of Abortion." (link) Hendricks, Perry. "My Body, Not My Choice: The Complicated Ethics of Abortion." (link) *Recommended:* "What Should Philosophers Do in Response to Dobbs? A Conversation With Ethicists." APA Blog (link) Hayes, Leah. "Not Funny Ha-ha" (only available in hardcopy)
4	Sept 11	Children (Adoption)	Larissa MacFarquhar "The Fog" (link) *Required for Presenters*: Anita Allen. "Methods of adoption : eliminating genetic privilege" *Recommended:* Drucilla Cornell. "Open adoption is not for everyone"
	Sept 13	Children (Human Nature)	Sandel, Michael. "The case against perfection." (link) Lewens, Tim. "Enhancement and human nature: the case of Sandel." (link) **First Essay Assignment Due Sunday Sept 17th, end of day**
5	Sept 18	Human Nature & The Posthuman	Kass, Leon R. "Ageless bodies, happy souls: biotechnology and the pursuit of perfection." (link) *Required for Presenters:* Bostrom, Nick. "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity." (link) *Recommended*: Bostrom, Nick, and Roache R. "Ethical issues in human enhancement." (**only available in hardcopy** – link)
	Sept 20	Disability	Barnes, Elizabeth. "Constructing Disability" (pp. 10–21) Anstey, K.W. "Are attempts to have impaired children justifiable?" (link)

			Savulescu, Julian. "Deaf lesbians, 'designer disability,' and the future of medicine." ([link](#))
			Recommended:
			McBryde Johnson, Harriet. "Unspeakable Conversations" ([link](#))
6	Sept 25	Disability	Barnes, Elizabeth. "Constructing Disability" (pp. 21–53)
			Recommended:
			[Graphic Novel] Brunton, Tessa. "Notes from a Sickbed" ([link](#))
	Sept 27	Disease and Health (Part I)	Boorse, C. Selections from "Health as a Theoretical Concept" ([link](#))
			Kingma, Elselijn. "What is It To Be Healthy?" ([link](#))
7	Oct 2	Disease and Health (Part II)	Cooper, Rachel. "Disease" ([link](#))
			Required for Presenter:
			Ereshefsky, Marc. "Defining 'Health' and 'Disease'" ([link](#))
	Oct 4	Health Care	Gutman, Amy. "For and Against Equal Access to Health Care." ([link](#))
			Recommended:
			Buchanan, Allen E. "The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care." ([link](#))
8	Oct 9		**Fall Break - No Class**
	Oct 11th	Markets (Organs)	Erin, Charles A and John Harris. "An ethical market in human organs." ([link](#))
			Rippon, Simon. "Imposing options on people in poverty: the harm of a live donor organ market." ([link](#))
			Recommended:
			"Dirty Pretty Things" (available in DVD - [link](#))
9	Oct 16	Markets (Surrogacy)	Anderson, Elizabeth. "Is Women's Labor a Commodity?" ([link](#))
			Required for Presenters:
			Brennan, Jason and Peter Jaworski. "If You May Do It For Free, You May Do It for Money" (**only available in hardcopy** - [link](#))
			Recommended:
			[Podcast] Beautiful Anonymous. "I'm a surrogate" ([link](#))
	Oct 18		**Second Essay Discussion Session**
10	Oct 23	Public Health	John, Stephen. "Why 'Health' is not a Central Category for Public Health Policy." ([link](#))
			Recommended:
			Valles: "A brief history of the social concept of health and its role in population health science"
	Oct 25	Public Health	Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò. "What's Next: Why Reparations Require Climate Justice"
			Second essay due October 29th, end of Day
11	Oct 30	Vaccines	Flanigan, Jessica. "A Defense of Compulsory Vaccination." ([link](#))
			Recommended:
			Brennan, Jason. "A libertarian case for mandatory vaccination"(link)
	Nov 1	Lockdowns	Winsberg, Eric, Jason Brenne, and Chris W Surprenant. "How Government Leaders Violated Their Epistemic Duties During the Sars-CoV-2 Crisis." ([link](#))

			Recommended:
			White, Lucie, Phillippe van Basshuysen, and Mathias Frisch. "When Is Lockdown Justified?" ([link](#))
			[Graphic Novel] "COVID chronicles: a comics anthology" (link)
12	Nov 6	Insurance (Part I)	Horne, L. Chad. "What Makes Health Care Special?: An Argument for Health Care Insurance." ([link](#))
			Recommended:
			Krugman, Paul. "Health Care Economics 101" ([link](#))
			Custer, William S., Charles N Kahn III, and Thomas F Wildsmith IV. "Why We Should Keep the Employment-Based Health Insurance System." ([link](#))
	Nov 8	Insurance (Part II)	O'Neill, Martin. "Genetic Information, Life Insurance, and Social Justice." ([link](#))
			Recommended:
			Malpas, P J. "Is genetic information relevantly different from other kinds of non-genetic information in the life insurance context?*"* ([link](#))
13	Nov 13	Death	Hardwig, Jonathan. "Is There a Duty to Die?" ([link](#))
			Recommended
			Cholbi, Michael. "The Duty to Die and the Burdensomeness of Living." ([link](#))
	Nov 15	Death (End of Life)	Rachels, James. "Active and Passive Euthanasia." ([link](#))
			Amundson, Ron and Gayle Taira. "Our Lives and Ideologies." ([link](#))
			Recommended
			Callahan, Daniel. "When Self-Determination Runs Amok." ([link](#))
			Lee, Daniel E. "Physician-Assisted Suicide: A Conservative Critique of Intervention." ([link](#))
14	Nov 20	Death (Ancestral Remains)	Balter, Michael. "The Ethical Battle Over Ancient DNA." ([link](#))
			Scarre, Geoffrey. "The Repatriation of Human Remains." (available in hardcopy only - [link](#))
			Recommended:
			Holm, Søren. "The Privacy of Tutankhamen – Utilising the Genetic Information in Stored Tissue Samples." ([link](#))
	Nov 22	**Student Recess**	
15	Nov 27		**Project Presentations**
	Nov 29		
16	Dec 4		

Assessment

The assessment of this course is meant to reward *participation and engagement with the course.* This because the skills crucial for philosophical work are critical thinking, charitable interpretation, and reflecting on (partial) successes and failures. Your knowledge of the course material is important— but less important than your attempts at developing these skills.

Assignment	% of total grade	Assessment	Grade Scale
Essay 1	5	Complete (5) | Insufficient (3) | Incomplete (0)	A: 90–100
Essay 2 Draft	5	Complete (5) | Insufficient (3) | Incomplete (0)	B: 80–89.5
Essay 2	15	Essay Rubric (link)	C: 70–79.5
Project Draft	5	Complete (5) | Insufficient (3) | Incomplete (0)	D: 60–69.5
Final Project	25	Essay Rubric (link) | Jointly Agreed Rubric	F: 0–59.5
Peer Reviews	5 (2.5 x 2)	Complete (2.5) | Insufficient (1) | Incomplete (0)	
Readings	12 (0.5 x 24)	Complete (0.5) | Incomplete (0)	
Reading Presentation	10	Complete (10) | Insufficient (7) | Incomplete (0)	
Project Presentation	10	Complete (10) | Insufficient (7) | Incomplete (0)	
Participation	8	As below	

For those who take the class **pass/fail**: to receive a grade of "satisfactory," you must receive a grade of 70% or higher, and you must complete both presentations, essays, and the final project.

Attendance and Missed Classes:

Showing up is required and expected. Though there is no penalty for missing a single session—there are repercussions for missing multiple classes. If you miss **6 or more classes**, the highest grade you can achieve is a "B", 8 or more a "C", and 10 or more a "D".

You can think of this another way. You have 5 "freebies"—5 absences to use to go to career fairs, grad school appointments, or if you're just not feeling the reading for that week.

Only serious circumstances of serious medical illness, bereavement, or other emergencies will be "excused" absences. Documentation will be required for excused absences.

Essays (L1, L3)_:_

Over the semester, you are expected to write **at least two essays.**

The first essay must be between **1500–2000 words** and must address one of the questions specified on the assignment page. This purpose of this essay is to introduce you to philosophical essays, how they are evaluated, and the style of feedback I provide. Think of it as a warm-up exercise. It is due at the end of **week 4**, and is marked either "complete", "insufficient", or "incomplete".

Your second essay must be between **2500-3000 words**. This essay will respond to discussion questions that you raise in class, and which have been raised in previous versions of this class. I will maintain and update the list of such questions on canvas (link). You are also encouraged to suggest additional questions to write on, but any such questions must be vetted by me in advance.

For your second essay, you must complete a draft in advance.

Your **essay draft** will be marked "complete", "insufficient", or "incomplete". Drafts don't need to be perfect and entirely written out, but there needs to be a good-faith effort to provide an outline, argument, and analysis. Essays that lack this will be marked "insufficient". Only missing drafts, or ones that do not represent a serious attempt will be marked "incomplete".

The final version of your essays will be evaluated according to the essay rubric ([link](#)).

Final Project (L2, L3, L4, L5)

Your final project can take one of three forms:

1. An essay of **3000–4000 words**.
2. A creative project.
3. A group project.

Option (1) will be evaluated as per your second essay. Like the second essay it must respond to discussion questions on Canvas or to a vetted question of your choosing.

More detail on options (2) and (3) will be made available on Canvas.

Class Participation (L1, L2, L4, L5):

Class participation is not just mere attendance. It is expected that you will have completed the reading for the day's session and have come to class ready to discuss it.

Your class participation grade reflects your engagement with these readings, your contributions to class discussions and activities, and your commitment to fostering a positive and respectful learning environment.

Your class participation grade will be based on the following criteria:

➢ **Quality of contributions:** "Quality" here is measured in terms of the extent it helps the class as a group come to understand the structure and content of the readings. Helpful contributions can come in any number of forms: well-supported guesses about puzzling passages, relating elements of argument to one another, spelling out a difficult concept, offering a using example, or simply asking a question and explaining why such a question is an important one to address.
➢ **Regularity of contributions:** Regularity does not mean asking the same question ("Well what does *this* mean?") every five minutes every class. Regularity instead is measured in terms of the frequent occurrence—across class sessions—of helpful contributions.
➢ **Respect for others:** Your behavior in class should facilitate a positive learning environment for all class participants. Experiences of others', when offered, should be treated with respect. Arguments, reasons, and evidence should be treated charitably—interpreted so as to bring out the most helpful contributions to class discussions and activities. Being disrespectful about others' experiences, uncivil or rude in response to others' contributions, or being deliberately uncharitable are discouraged.
➢ **Commitment to the learning environment:** Your behavior should support the learning objectives. Such behavior means participating and being attentive, considerate, and punctual. Doing homework for other courses, noodling about on your phone, being late, or falling asleep in class detracts from such a learning environment and is discouraged.

To anchor your expectations: if you merely show up but don't participate in classroom discussions, you'll receive a "D" (or 5/8).

Readings (L1, L2):

The readings for the course will be access through the third-party Perusall platform. You must use this platform to complete the readings. Perusall is both a community space—you'll be leaving comments which can be seen by your peers—and a means for me to track your engagement with the reading.

Some warnings and guidance: you *must* be connected to the internet while you access the Perusall platform. Moreover, Perusall does not perform well on phones or tablets, and struggles with having multiple sessions open. I encourage you to complete these readings using a laptop or desktop computer in an area with a strong internet connection. If this presents a problem, do get in touch.

Your completion grade for each reading is determined by three metrics: (1) completing the reading, (2) time spent engaging with the reading, and (3) the comments that you leave. For each reading, you are required to make at least **three** substantive comments.

Note: just leaving comments will not be sufficient to get the grade for each sessions reading. You need to read the reading too.

I encourage you to use the platform as a place to express your uncertainties, questions, and confusions. I read through these comments and often contribute to discussions in preparation for each session.

Perusall employs AI to evaluate your comments. Sometimes it doesn't do a good job, however, determining what is a good comment. Examples of what I take to be substantive comments include those that:

 a. Outline the argument of the section/paragraph and relates it to the goals of the paper;
 b. Point to a technical concept or distinction, and provides some clarification of what it means in context;
 c. Raise a question about an argument, concept, distinction, or piece of evidence and articulates why this question is important (for instance, if you are confused about what something means, explain what you are confused about);
 d. Provide a useful explanation of a difficult stretch of text;
 e. Relate concepts, topics, or themes to other elements of the course in an interesting and illuminating way;

 f. Connect the reading to outside sources or materials in a useful and illuminating way.

You must complete the reading **two hours before class**—after this point, the system will continue to track your activity, but it will not count towards your grade.

Reading Presentation (L1, L2, L4)*:*

During the first week, you will be required to sign-up for a date when you will lead the classroom discussion. This presentation **should be no more than 15 minutes**. It should summarize the paper, articulate its main arguments and positions, and suggest some questions/activities for discussion. **Some weeks will have additional readings that you are required to summarize for the class**. These will be made clear on Canvas and this syllabus document.

This sign-up sheet, with further instructions, is available on canvas (link).

This presentation is marked as "complete", "incomplete", or "insufficient". Presentations that accurately summarize the reading and set the group up for discussion will be marked as "complete". Presentations that do adequately summarize the reading or set up questions for the group will be marked "insufficient". Only presentations that don't represent a good faith attempt to set up the reading and provide guidance for one's classmates will be marked "incomplete".

I will present material for the first two full sessions (Aug 23rd, Aug 28th) to give you a sense of my expectations.

Project Presentation (L1, L2, L4):

During the final two weeks, individuals and groups will present their final projects to the group. Depending on the size of the class, and the number of group projects, these presentations may be anywhere from **15-20 minutes**.

This presentation is marked as "complete", "incomplete", or "insufficient". These presentations should outline the question you are addressing, summarize the material you have researched, and articulate the main argument and position of your project. If you are presenting on a creative project, you should also make clear how the creative format addresses the philosophical issues at stake.

Peer Feedback (L2, L3, L4, L5)*:*

Second Essay Feedback: Prior to submitting your second essay, you will be expected to write a draft and circulate it among small peer groups of 3-4 (these will be randomly assigned shortly after the deadline).

You are responsible for providing constructive feedback on your peers' work via Canvas. This feedback should highlight strong qualities of the work and point out areas of improvement—asking questions where appropriate. You are encouraged to reference the essay rubric when making these comments. There will then be a class dedicated to small group discussions among your peer group to go over the feedback.

Project Presentation Feedback: Prior to the final two weeks of class, when there are project presentations, you will be expected to circulate a draft of your project among small peer groups of 3-4 (which will also be randomly assigned shortly after the deadline). As with the second essay, you will be responsible for providing constructive feedback on your peers' work. You may be evaluating a draft of a creative project, if so, your peer will provide you with a relevant set of criteria by which to evaluate the draft.

CIOS Incentive:

If 75% of the class completes the CIOS survey, then I will forgive **one** incomplete reading. If 85% of the class completes the CIOS survey, I will forgive **two** incomplete readings.

The Terms and Conditions

Academic Integrity and Collaboration:

Honesty and transparency are important features of good scholarship. On the flip side, plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses with serious consequences. If you are discovered engaging in either behavior in this course, you will earn a failing grade on the assignment in question, and further disciplinary action may be taken.

Your work should be crafted and written on your own. You may talk with others about your ideas—you may even use the ideas discussed in class seminars—but these ideas must be made your own. That means working by yourself to develop your own ideas, providing your own reasons, and explaining things in your own words.

In this class, the use of chat GPT or any other AI text-generating software will be seen as a violation of academic integrity. The class will use Turnitin to check for both plagiarism and AI-generated text.

You are required to cite all sources you use in your submitted work. This includes both direct quotations and cases where you use someone else's ideas. "Sources" include papers, journals, conversations, anything found on the internet, and so on. Basically, if the thought did not originate with you, you should provide an in-text citation and a reference list. For a clear description of what

counts as plagiarism, cheating, and/or the use of unauthorized sources, please see the Student Code of Conduct: http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/19.

If you have questions about my integration of the university's honor code into this course, please do not hesitate to ask: my aim is to foster an environment where you can learn and grow, while ensuring that the work we all do is honest and fair.

For more information about Georgia Tech's standards with respect to academic integrity, you can also check out the following link: http://honor.gatech.edu/

Accommodations for Students:

If you wish to request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please inform me and contact Disability Services as soon as possible. They can be reached at dsinfo@gatech.edu or 404-894-2563 (voice)/ 404-894-1664 (TDD).

I encourage you to discuss with me what you need to succeed—if you need direction, assistance or accommodation, please get in touch with me as soon as possible. I also encourage you to make use of the academic and pastoral resources at https://success.gatech.edu

Extensions, Late Assignments:

Time management is important. Late submissions and extensions will not generally be permitted, but if you think you are subject to an exceptional circumstance, please discuss it with me outside of class (and as soon as possible). In general, only circumstances covered by an ODS letter, or situations of medical, family, or technological emergency will warrant an extension.

Student-Faculty Expectations and statement on inclusion:

I believe that mutual respect is at the heart of the student-teacher relationship. In general, this is characterized by respectful language and imagery, punctuality and care for others' time, clear and thorough communication, access to resources, and an openness to dialogue and debate. I am committed to such mutual respect and encourage everyone in the class to work towards the best possible learning environment so that all can meet their highest ambitions. Please explore Tech's policies on for more information: https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/

As part of my commitment to mutual respect, I encourage and value students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. I see such diversity is a resource, strength, and benefit and will endeavor to present materials and activities in class that respect and support this diversity, including (but not limited to): gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture.

I encourage and appreciate suggestions for ways that the classroom can better support learning, inclusion, and the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom:

Unless by prior arrangement—for instance, your computer has died—I do not allow mobile phones. Keep them in your bags and on silent.

While you may take notes on your laptop, I request that you turn the sound off so that you do not disrupt other students' learning.