
PHIL 3180: BIOMEDICAL ETHICS

CULC 262

Monday & Wednesday

12:30PM–1345PM

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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, 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. This collects chapters written by leading philosophers that overlaps considerably with this course—indeed, I will often link to this volume in the supplementary readings each week.

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 it. You are expected to come to class having completed the reading(s) and to be ready to discuss it. Recommended texts are optional but you are encouraged to read them.

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 **weeks 7 and 14**, we will be exchanging essay drafts. One session in each of those weeks will be part-dedicated to discussing your drafts in small groups.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Date	Topic	Required Reading
1	Jan 9 th	Orientation	
	Jan 11 th	Orientation	Jennifer Flynn. 2020. Theory and Bioethics. In Ed Zalta (ed.) Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2020 Edition) [Online] Elliot, Carl. 2022. The Ethics of Bioethics. <i>London Review of Books</i> , 28 (November): 36–37.
2	Jan 16 th	No Class – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	
	Jan 18 th	Human Nature	Sandel, Michael. 2004. The case against perfection. <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i> 293:51–62. Lewens, Tim. 2009. Enhancement and human nature: the case of Sandel. <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 35: 354–356.
3	Jan 23 rd	Disease and Health (Part I)	Boorse, C., 1975. "On The Distinction Between Disease and Illness," <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> , 5: 49–68. Kingma, E., 2007. "What is It To Be Healthy?" <i>Analysis</i> , 67: 128–133.
	Jan 25 th	Disease and Health (Part II)	Cooper, R., 2002. "Disease," <i>Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biology & the Biomedical Sciences</i> , 33: 263–282. <i>Recommended:</i> Ereshefsky, M., 2009. "Defining 'Health' and 'Disease'," <i>Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biology and Biomedical Sciences</i> , 40: 221–227.
4	Jan 30 th	Human Enhancement (Posthuman)	Bostrom, Nick. 2005. In Defense of Posthuman Dignity. <i>Bioethics</i> , 19(3): 202–204. Kass, Leon R. 2003. Ageless bodies, happy souls: biotechnology and the pursuit of perfection. <i>The New Atlantis</i> , Spring 2003, pp. 9–28. <i>Recommended:</i> Bostrom, Nick, and Roache R. 2008. Ethical issues in human enhancement. In Ryberg J, Petersen T, and Wolf C (eds.) <i>New Waves in Applied Ethics</i> , pp. 120–152.
	Feb 1 st	Human Enhancement (Sport)	Schermer, M. 2007. On the argument that enhancement is "cheating". <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 34: 85–88. Tamburrini, Claudio M. 2000. What's wrong with doping? In Torbjörn Tännsjö and Claudio Tamburrini (eds.) <i>Values in Sport: Elitism, nationalism, gender equality and the scientific manufacture of winners</i> . E & FN Spon, pp. 200–216.
5	Feb 6 th	Disability	Swain, John and Sally French, 2000, "Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability", <i>Disability & Society</i> , 15(4): 569–582 Spriggs, M. 2002. Lesbian couple create a child who is deaf like them. <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 28: 283. Anstey, K.W. 2002. Are attempts to have impaired children justifiable? <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 28: 286–288. Levy, N. 2002. Deafness, culture, and choice. <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 28: 284–285. Savulescu, Julian. 2002. Deaf lesbians, 'designer disability,' and the future of medicine. <i>British Medical Journal</i> , 771-773.
	Feb 8 th	Public Health (Part I)	Valles, Sean. 2018. Philosophy of Public Health: Philosophy for a New Public Health Era. Routledge, pp. 31–56 (Ch. 2 – "A brief history of the social concept of health and its role in population health science")

6	Feb 13 th	Public Health (Part II)	John, Stephen. 2009. Why 'Health' is not a Central Category for Public Health Policy. <i>Journal of Applied Philosophy</i> , 26(2): 129–143. Verweij, Marcel and Angus Dawson. 2007. The Meaning of 'Public' in 'Public Health'. In Angus Dawson and Marcel Verweij (eds.) <i>Ethics, Prevention, and Public Health</i> . Clarendon Press, pp. 13–29. Essay Drafts Due
	Feb 15 th	Vaccines	Flanigan, Jessica. 2014. A Defense of Compulsory Vaccination. <i>HEC Forum</i> , 26: 5–25. Dawson, Angus. 2007. Herd Protection as a Public Good: Vaccination and our Obligations to Others. In Angus Dawson and Marcel Verweij (eds.) <i>Ethics, Prevention, and Public Health</i> . Clarendon Press, pp. 160–178.
7	Feb 20 th	Essay	Discussion session
	Feb 22 nd	Lockdowns	John, Stephen. 2020. The Ethics of Lockdown: Communication, Consequences, and the Separateness of Persons. <i>Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal</i> , 30(3–4): 265–289. <i>Recommended:</i> White, Lucie, Phillippe van Basshuysen, and Mathias Frisch. 2022. When Is Lockdown Justified? <i>Philosophy of Medicine</i> , 3(1): 1–22.
8	Feb 27 th	Insurance (Part I)	Horne, L. Chad. 2017. What Makes Health Care Special?: An Argument for Health Care Insurance. <i>Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal</i> , 27(4): 561–587. Krugman, Paul. 2005. Health Care Economics 101. <i>New York Times</i> [Online] Custer, William S., Charles N Kahn III, and Thomas F Wildsmith IV. 1999. Why We Should Keep the Employment-Based Health Insurance System. <i>Health Affairs</i> , 18(6): 115–123 Essays Due
	March 1 st	Insurance (Part II)	O'Neill, Martin. 2006. Genetic Information, Life Insurance, and Social Justice. <i>The Monist</i> , 89(4): 567–592 Malpas, P J. 2007. Is genetic information relevantly different from other kinds of non-genetic information in the life insurance context? <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 34: 548–551
9	March 6 th	Markets (Adoption)	Anderson, Elizabeth. 1990. Is Women's Labor a Commodity? <i>Philosophy & Public Affairs</i> . 19(1): 71–92. Brennan, Jason and Peter Jaworski. 2022. <i>Markets Without Limits</i> . 2 nd Ed. Routledge, pp. 11–24. (Ch. 2. "If You May Do It For Free, You May Do It for Money")
	March 8 th	Markets (Organs)	Pence, Gregory. 2017. <i>Medical Ethics: Accounts of Ground-Breaking Cases</i> . 8 th ed. Mc-Graw Hill. pp. 243–263 (Ch. 11 – "The God Committee") Erin, Charles A and John Harris. 2003. An ethical market in human organs. <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 29: 137–138. Rippon, Simon. 2014. Imposing options on people in poverty: the harm of a live donor organ market. <i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i> , 40: 145–150.
10	March 13 th	Health Care (Part I)	Buchanan, Allen E. 1984. The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care. <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> , 13(1): 55–78. <i>Recommended:</i> Gutman, Amy. 1983. For and Against Equal Access to Health Care. In Ronald Bayer and Arthur L Caplan (eds.) <i>In Search of Equity: Health Needs and the Health Care System</i> . Plenum Press.

	March 15 th	Health Care (Part II)	Daniels, Norman. 1983. Justice between Age Groups: Am I My Parents' Keeper? <i>The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly. Health and Society</i> , 61(3): 489–522.
11	March 20 th	No class – spring break	
	March 23 rd		
12	March 27 th	Birth (Pregnancy)	Lyerly, Anne Drapkin, Lisa M Mitchell, Elizabeth Mitchell Armstrong, Lisa H Harris, Rebecca Kukla, Miriam Kuppermann, Margaret Olivia Little. 2009. Risk and the Pregnant Body. <i>The Hastings Center Report</i> , 39(6): 34–42. Kukle, Rebecca, Miriam Kuppermann, Margaret Little, Anne Drapkin Lyerly, Lisa M Mitchell, Elizabeth M Armstrong, and Lisa Harris. 2009. Finding Autonomy in Birth. <i>Bioethics</i> 23(1): 1–8.
	March 29 th	Birth (Stem Cells)	Stein, Agata and Peter Singer. 2007. The Moral Status of Stem Cells. <i>Metaphilosophy</i> , 38(2–3): 264–284. <i>Recommended:</i> McMahan, Jeff. 2007. Killing Embryos for Stem Cell Research. <i>Metaphilosophy</i> , 38(2–3): 170–189.
13	April 3 rd	Birth (Abortion)	Thomson, Judith Jarvis. 1971 A Defense of Abortion. <i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i> , 1(1): 47–66. <i>Recommended</i> “What Should Philosophers Do in Response to Dobbs? A Conversation With Ethicists.” APA Blog (link) Essay Draft Due
	April 5 th		Marquis, Don. 1989. Why Abortion is Immoral. <i>The Journal of Philosophy</i> , 86(4): 183–202.
14	April 10 th	Essays	Discussion session
	April 12 th	Death	Hardwig, Jonathan. 1997. Is There a Duty to Die? <i>Hastings Center Report</i> , 27(2): 34–42. Cholbi, Michael. 2010. The Duty to Die and the Burdensomeness of Living. <i>Bioethics</i> , 24(8): 412–420.
15	April 17 th	Death (End of Life)	Rachels, James. 1975. Active and Passive Euthanasia. <i>New England Journal of Medicine</i> , 292: 78–80. Callahan, Daniel. 1992. When Self-Determination Runs Amok. <i>The Hastings Center Report</i> , 22(2): 52–55, Amundson, Ron and Gayle Taira. 2005. Our Lives and Ideologies. <i>Journal of Disability Studies</i> , 16(1): 53–57. Lee, Daniel E. 2003. Physician-Assisted Suicide: A Conservative Critique of Intervention. <i>The Hastings Center Report</i> 33(1): 17–19.
	April 19 th	Death (Ancestral Remains)	Balter, Michael. 2017. The Ethical Battle Over Ancient DNA. <i>SAPIENS</i> [Online]. (link) Holm, Søren. 2001. The Privacy of Tutankhamen – Utilising the Genetic Information in Stored Tissue Samples. <i>Theoretical Medicine</i> 22: 437–449. Scarre, Geoffrey. 2009. The Repatriation of Human Remains. In James O Young and Conrad G Brunk (eds.) <i>The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation</i> , pp. 72–92.
16	April 24 th	Discussion	Essays Due

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
Essay 1 Draft	10	Complete (10) Insufficient (5) Incomplete (0)
Essay 1	20	Essay Rubric (link)
Essay 2 Draft	10	Complete (10) Insufficient (5) Incomplete (0)
Essay 2	20	Essay Rubric (link)
Participation	10	As below
Readings	23	Complete (1) Incomplete (0) (each session)
Presentation	7	Complete (7) Insufficient (3) Incomplete (0)

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 classes, your final grade is docked by 20 percentage points, 8 classes 30 points, and 10 classes 40 points.

Essays (L1, L3):

Over the semester, you are expected to write **two essays of 2500-3000 words**. These essays will respond to discussion questions that are raised and formulated in class. I will maintain and update the list of such questions on canvas—you are welcome and encouraged to suggest further questions to be added to this document ([link](#)).

Prior to submitting your essay, you will be expected to write a draft and circulate it among small peer groups of 3-4 (these will be randomly drawn sometime prior to the draft deadline). We will spend a class in these small groups going through the feedback—and if it is helpful, talking about writing philosophy papers more generally.

Your essay **drafts** 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 due a week after these feedback sessions. They are evaluated according to the essay rubric ([link](#)).

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.

Readings (L1, L2):

The readings for the course will be uploaded to Perusall. In order to receive marks for completing the reading you must **complete** the reading **at least two hours before class**. In addition, you are required to make at least **three** substantive comments per reading—though I encourage you to use the platform as a place to express your uncertainties, questions, and confusions. I read through these comments in preparation for each session.

Perusall employs an AI-based system to track your completion of the assignment. For better or worse, this means that you must be connected to the internet while you complete these readings. If this presents a problem, please do let me know.

Perusall also employs its AI to evaluate your comments. When determining your grade, however, I won’t rely solely on this system and will exercise my own judgment. Examples of what I take a substantive contribution to 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; or
- e. Relate concepts, topics, or themes to other elements of the course in an interesting and illuminating way.

As noted above, you must complete the reading **two hours before class**—after this point, the system will not count your participation or comments.

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 involve summarizing the paper, articulating its main arguments

and positions, and suggesting some questions for discussion. 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 are inaccurate, confusing, or unhelpful 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".

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 discussion responses, summative essays, and reflective exercises 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.

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:

To produce a positive teaching and learning environment, instructors and students must partner with one another in and out of the classroom. Mutual respect is at the heart of such a partnership and 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. As a Georgia Tech faculty member, I am committed to such respect and I invite you to join me in working towards the best possible learning environment, so that all can meet their highest ambitions. Please explore Tech's policies on this for more information: <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/>

As part of this, I am committed to students from all 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.