

Biomedical Ethics

Course Description

Living well is difficult: it involves making difficult decisions for ourselves, for people we care deeply about, and for people in our care, and it requires navigating complicated relationships. Clinical medicine and public health are contexts where the stakes for these tasks are especially high, where we often disagree about what to do, and where reaching any decision at all is philosophically and emotionally laborious. This course is designed to help you do this work, by offering philosophical frameworks to analyze ethical issues that arise in the context of contemporary medical practice and research. Topics to be covered include concepts of disease, health, and well being; reproductive issues; genetics; termination of treatment; euthanasia; global justice and healthcare. We will establish and follow community norms for discussing these topics, many of which may be sensitive or deeply personal. The course is of particular interest to pre-medical and pre-health care students, and to members of the health care profession, ethicists, policy makers, and the general public as health care consumers.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to demonstrate basic argumentation skills (including identifying the conclusion in a philosophical or popular text, extracting reasons and evidence offered in support of the conclusion, and critically evaluating the reasons and evidence, and their relation to the conclusion); identify and analyze different philosophical approaches to selected issues in medical ethics; have gained insight into how to read and critically interpret philosophical arguments; argue for or against a position in debates about a particular bioethical case study; charitably but critically evaluate multiple viewpoints on a bioethical case study; and have developed skills that will enable them to think clearly about ethical questions as future or current health care providers, policy makers, and consumers.

Requirement and Assessment (example)

3. Argument Visualization

To help you learn how to extract arguments from readings, we will use a technique called *argument visualization*. As the name suggests, argument visualizations visualize the logic of arguments. They help organize and navigate complex information; they encourage clearly articulated reasoning; and they promote quick and effective communication. For more information and instructions on argument visualization, please check: <https://maps.simoncullen.org/basics>; for more advanced hints: <https://maps.simoncullen.org/hints>. You need to submit one exercise of argument visualization. It will count 3 points. I encourage you to do more exercises on your own.

Schedule

1. Introduction to the Course

Steinbock, Arras, and London, “Moral Reasoning in the Medical Context” in *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, p. 1-5.

Supplementary Reading: David W. Concepción, “How to Read Philosophy” (p. 358-367).

2. A Toolbox for Reasoning

Hope, *Medical Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, Chapter 5, p. 58-64 & p. 67-73.

Pence, “Mistakes in ethical reasoning” in *Medical Ethics: Accounts of Ground-Breaking Cases*, p. 4-8.

3. Introduction to Moral Theories

Steinbock, Arras, and London, “Moral Reasoning in the Medical Context” in *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, p. 8-17 & p. 31-35 (“Virtue Ethics”).

Singer (2011), “About Ethics”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 8-15.

Video: “Utilitarianism”, [youtube.com/watch?v=-a739VjqdSI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-a739VjqdSI).

Supplementary Video: “Kant & Categorical Imperatives”, [youtube.com/watch?v=8bIys6JoEDw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bIys6JoEDw).

Supplementary Video: “Aristotle & Virtue Theory”, [youtube.com/watch?v=PrvtOWEXDIQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrvtOWEXDIQ).

4. What is Ethics?

Introduction: Metaethics (Canvas).

Singer, “About Ethics”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 1-8.

Steinbock, Arras, and London, “Moral Reasoning in the Medical Context” in *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, p. 6-8 & p. 35-41 (*Optional*: p. 20-23).

Supplementary Video: “Metaethics”, [youtube.com/watch?v=FOoffXFpAlU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOoffXFpAlU).

Supplementary Reading: Harman (1975), “Moral Relativism Defended”, in *The Philosophical Review*, p. 3-22.

5. Introduction to Social Theories

Steinbock, Arras, and London, “Moral Reasoning in the Medical Context” in *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, p. 17-20 & p. 23-31.

Audio: “John Rawls’ Theory of Justice”, [youtube.com/watch?v=zhVByiXBxi4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhVByiXBxi4).

6. Introduction to Ethical Issues of Abortion

Singer (2011), “Taking Life: The Embryo and Fetus”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 123-131 & p. 134-141.

Manne (2018), *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, p. 91-101.

Supplementary Reading: “Abortion Diary Entry 162: Christina F., 35 (Birmingham, AL 2013)”, <https://www.theabortiondiary.com/podcast/abortion-i-wish-mothers-told-daughters>.

(The Abortion Diary collects testimonies from people who have undergone an abortion. Warning: these are heavy.)

7. For Abortion

Thomson (1971), “A Defense of Abortion”, in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, p. 47-66 (Reprint: p. 153-168. *Possible option for Argument Visualization*)

Supplementary Reading: Singer (2011), “Taking Life: The Embryo and Fetus”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 132-134.

8. Against Abortion

Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” in *Journal of Philosophy*, p. 183-202.

Supplementary Reading: Singer (2011), “Taking Life: The Embryo and Fetus”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 141-144.

Supplementary Reading: Singer (2011), “What’s Wrong with Killing”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 71-93.

9. Writing Workshop

Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper”, <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.

Supplementary Reading: Pinker, *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person’s Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*.

10. Genetic Therapy and CRISPR

Brokowski and Adli (2018), “CRISPR Ethics: Moral Considerations for Applications of a Powerful Tool” in *Journal Molecular Biology*, p. 88–101.

Kolata & Belluck (2018), “Why Are Scientists So Upset About the First CRISPR Babies”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/05/health/crispr-gene-editing-embryos.html>

Supplementary Reading: Zimmer (2019), “Genetically Modified People are Walking Among Us”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/01/sunday-review/crispr-china-babies-gene-editing.html>.

Supplementary Reading: Ledford (2015), “CRISPR the Disruptor”, <https://www.nature.com/news/crispr-the-disruptor-1.17673>.

Supplementary Reading: Cheng (2019), “Brave new world with Chinese characteristics”, <https://thebulletin.org/2019/01/brave-new-world-with-chinese-characteristics/>.

11. Genetic Enhancement and Eugenics

Pence, “The eugenics movement” in *Medical Ethics: Accounts of Ground-Breaking Cases*, p. 328-329.

Glover (2006), *Choosing Children: Genes, Disability, and Design*, p. 75-85 & p. 97-99 (*Optional*: the rest of Chapter 3).

Supplementary Reading: Hope, *Medical Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, Chapter 4.

Supplementary Reading: Sandel (2004), “The Case Against Perfection,” in *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/04/the-case-against-perfection/302927/>.

Supplementary Reading: Altmann and Van Norden (2020), “Was This Ancient Taoist the First Philosopher of Disability?” in *The New York Times*.

End of Life

12. Death

Stegenga (2018), *Care and Cure: An Introduction to Philosophy of Medicine*, Chapter 3 (p. 36-47).

Pence, “Background: perspectives on dying well” in *Medical Ethics: Accounts of Ground-Breaking Cases*, p. 27-30.

Supplementary Reading: Singer (2011), “Taking Life: Humans”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 71-85.

13. Introduction to Euthanasia

Introduction: Euthanasia and suicide (Canvas).

Singer (2011), “Taking Life: Humans”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 169-178 (*Optional*: p. 155-159).

14. Writing Group Session

Read and comment on 2 paper drafts of your group members.

Video: “How to Die in Oregon”, <https://www.kanopy.com/product/how-die-oregon>.

15. Active and Passive Euthanasia

Rachels (1975), “Active and Passive Euthanasia” in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, p. 78-80. (*Possible option for Argument Visualization*)

Singer (2011), “Taking Life: Humans”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 186-190 (*Optional*: p. 178-186).

16. Non-treatment Decisions for Incompetent Patients and Advanced Directives

Dresser and Robertson (1989), “Quality of Life and Non-treatment Decisions for Incompetent Patients: A Critique of the Orthodox Approach” in *Law, Medicine & Health Care*, p. 234-244.

Supplementary Reading: Singer (2011), “Justifying Infanticide and Nonvoluntary Euthanasia” & “Other Nonvoluntary Life and Death Decisions”, in *Practical Ethics*, p. 159-169.

Justice, Inequality, and Health

17. Concepts of Disease, Health, and Well Being

Stegenga (2018), *Care and Cure: An Introduction to Philosophy of Medicine*, Chapter 1-2 (p. 7-35).

Supplementary Reading: Boorse (1977), “Health as a Theoretical Concept” in *Philosophy of Science*, p. 542-573.

18. Public Health Ethics

Stegenga (2018), *Care and Cure: An Introduction to Philosophy of Medicine*, Chapter 14 (p. 222-233).

19. Health Care and Distributive Justice

Daniels (1988), “Equal Opportunity and Health Care”, p. 182-185. (*Possible option for Argument Visualization*)

Gutman (1981), “For and Against Equal Access” in *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly. Health and Society*, p. 542-560 (Reprint: p. 367-380). Required: p. 367-368 & p. 372-380 (*Optional*: p. 369-371).

Podcast: “Frame Canada”, <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/19/925354134/frame-canada>.

Supplementary Reading: Battin (1987), “Age rationing and the Just Distribution of Health Care: Is there a Duty to Die?” in *Ethics*, p. 317-340.

Supplementary Reading: Hope, “Chapter 3: Why undervaluing ‘statistical’ people costs lives” in *Medical Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 26-41.

20. Resource Distribution and Organ Market

Background: The God Committee (Canvas).

Satz (2008), “The Moral Limits of Markets: The Case of Human Kidneys” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, p. 269-288. (*Possible option for Argument Visualization*)

Podcast: “How Do You Decide Who Gets Lungs?”, <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2015/04/29/403114496/episode-372-how-do-you-decide-who-gets-lungs>.

Supplementary Reading: “Organ Transplantation: Gifts versus Markets” in *Ethical Issues in Modern Medicine*, p. 277-286.

Supplementary Reading: Persad, Wertheimer, and Emanuel (2009), “Principles for allocation of scarce medical interventions” in *The Lancet*.

21. Race and Medicine

Case Study: BiDil (Canvas).

Root (2003), “The Use of Race in Medicine as a Proxy for Genetic Differences” in *Philosophy of Science*, p. 1173–1183.

Podcast: “Race in medicine”, <https://jonathanfuller.ca/podcast/2020/7/5/sean-valles-race-in-epidemiology-and-medicine>.

Supplementary Reading: Roberts (2012), “Debating the Cause of Health Disparities: Implication for Bioethics and Racial Equality” in *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, p. 332–341.

Supplementary Reading: Pence, “The Tuskegee Study” in *Medical Ethics: Accounts of Ground-Breaking Cases*, p. 200-209.

Supplementary Reading: Chotiner (2020), “How Racism Is Shaping the Coronavirus Pandemic” in *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/how-racism-is-shaping-the-coronavirus-pandemic>.

Supplementary Video: “Is Race Real?”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwGuF9umTo>.

22. Global Health Justice

Ruger (2009), “Global Health Justice”, in *Public Health Ethics*, p. 263-265.

Pogge (2005), “Responsibilities for Poverty-Related Ill Health”, in *Ethics & International Affairs* 19, no 1, p. 9-18 (Reprint: p. 289-193).

Singer (1972), “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, p. 229-233 (*Optional*: p. 234-243).

Supplementary Reading: Lencucha (2013), “Cosmopolitanism and Foreign Policy for Health: Ethics for and beyond the State”, in *BMC International Health and Human Rights*.

Supplementary Reading: Hope, “Chapter 8: Is medical research the new imperialism?” in *Medical Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 99-112.

23. Pandemic

Background: The Global Spread of Infectious Diseases (Canvas).

Emanuel, et al. (2020), “Fair Allocation of Medical Resources in the Time of Covid-19” in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, p. 1-6.

Meinhof (2020), “Othering the Virus”, <https://discoversociety.org/2020/03/21/othering-the-virus/>.

Supplementary Reading: Valles (2020), “The Predictable Inequities of COVID-19 in the US: Fundamental Causes and Broken Institutions” in *KIEJ Special Issue on Ethics, Pandemics, and COVID-19*, <https://kiej.georgetown.edu/predictable-inequities-covid-19-special-issue/>.

Supplementary Reading: Cherry (2020), “Solidarity Care: How to Take Care of Each Other in Times of Struggle” in *Public Philosophy Journal*, p. 1-11.

Supplementary Reading: Sontag (1988), *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, p. 37-46.